

Mel May
Mel Interview 6

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the November 20 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/DCTasUgG98M>. In brown are conversations about the Descriptive Experience Sampling process that took place during the interview. In green are Russ's comments, and in blue are Julian's comments about and explanations of the Descriptive Experience Sampling process inserted after the interview. If you have corrections, suggestions, or questions, please post them as YouTube comments.

RTH = Russ Hurlburt

JBK = Julian Bass-Krueger

Mel = Mel May

0:00 JBK: All right.

0:01 Mel: Um, so...

0:02 JBK: Let's get to beep number 1.

SAMPLE 6.1 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

0:04 Mel: So this is our first Australian edition, um, which is exciting. So I did this yesterday, like last night obviously, cuz it's AM now. So I did this like, um, just before dinner yesterday. So first beep went off at 4:37, and I've written down, "I was looking at a photo on my phone of my friends and I in Melbourne the other day. Um, and that my inner experience was just soaking that photo in. There was no thought *per se*, I was just looking at the screen."

0:38 JBK: Okay. Um... so you're looking at a photo of your friends in Melbourne, you and your friends in Melbourne?

0:46 Mel: Yeah, all of us in Melbourne the other day when I came back.

0:50 JBK: Okay. So you're looking at this photo. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, is this looking at the photo, soaking it in, is that just, is that the action that's happening now? Like your eyes happen to be pointed at it? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Or is it also experiential?

0:50 Russ comments: I think this question is problematic in that it is or at least might seem to be a question about nothing vs. meta-awareness. The target of this paragraph is "this looking at the photo," and the choices JBK offers are "eyes happen to be pointed at" (that's the *nothing* branch) or "is it also experiential" (the *also* makes this, or at least suggests that this is a *meta-awareness* branch—the looking at the photo is *also* meta-experiential).

Perhaps JBK did not intend meta-experience; perhaps, for example, he may have a hard time accepting that it is possible to take something in without there being some accompanying experience (whether meta or not). But either way, he did not allow for the direct soaking-in of the scene.

So the question has two branches, neither of which reflects Mel's experience, which is of soaking in the scene. We will see if they can straighten that out.

Julian comments: We've covered meta stuff a lot by now so I won't go too in-depth. But no I didn't mean anything meta. But Mel did understand it as such. I meant for the options to be *eyes-pointing-but-little-or-no-experience* and *before-the-footlights-looking-and-taking-in*.

I think I went wrong in how I presented the question. I start by reaffirming Mel's description—looking and soaking the photo in. Then I backtrack to try to figure out if that's just the action occurring, the eyes-pointing-fact-of-the-universe. But I don't make it clear that in my head I haven't yet established the looking and soaking in. So it sounds as if my first option is between the looking-and-soaking and the second option becomes something that Mel takes as meta.

The mixed message comes from simultaneously wanting to be skeptical but also not wanting to ruffle feathers and appear skeptical. I reaffirm that Mel was looking and soaking it in. But I also want to question this. But I've already reaffirmed it.

Russ comments: RE "simultaneously wanting to be skeptical but also not wanting to ruffle feathers and appear skeptical."

First, to want something and simultaneously to want not to appear to want something is the definition of being manipulative rather than genuine.

Second, "not wanting to ruffle feathers" probably translates as not wanting to get caught being manipulative.

Third, and most importantly, to the extent that you genuinely want to grasp Mel's experience, and to the extent that your skepticism is genuine, your skepticism will not be manipulative and will not ruffle feathers. To the extent that your interest is not genuinely in Mel's experience (and is therefore about some theoretical perspective, or about some presuppositional predilection, etc.) your skepticism *will* be manipulative and *will* ruffle feathers.

So I recommend that you *do* be alert to your worries (as about ruffling feathers) but turn them inward, as if the actual aim of the worry was not at Mel (and her feathers) but at Julian (and his manipulation/theory/presuppositions): what is it *about Julian* that makes it difficult/impossible for him to hear what Mel is saying. Genuine skepticism is about *Julian's inadequacy* to grasp Mel's experience. Genuine skepticism will elicit Mel's alliance and support, not defensiveness.

I'm no mind reader, but I suspect that the issues are in the neighborhood of your theories of consciousness, of nothingness, of meta. But that is for you to sort out, work at, abrade away (if you want to be able to hear Mel with fidelity).

- 1:14 Mel: Yeah, I think that this was like a, uh, a nothingness moment rather than like super experiential. Like as in I was... yeah... that was the act that I was caught in of looking at the screen and like soaking that in. So I was like, think like how the other day when we were talking about conversations and like when I'm listening and you're just like soaking in the information, it sort of felt like that, like I was taking in the visual thing

that I was looking at. But like, that was... it was really that simple. There wasn't, um, there wasn't a vibe or a, you know, or any of that sort of stuff present. I was just...yeah... it was kinda, pretty empty. But taking that in, if that isn't a oxymoron.

1:14

Russ comments: Here's how I understand this turn:

The first sentence says: *You asked me to choose between meta-awareness ("super experiential") and nothingness. I have to choose nothingness, because it's not meta-awareness.*

The rest of this turn except the last two sentences says: *I'm soaking it in, and it's that simple. There's nothing beyond that.*

The second to last sentence says: *But you asked between nothing and meta-awareness, and in that spirit, it's empty.*

The last sentence says: *But really I'm taking it in.*

2:03

JBK:

Okay. So it was pretty empty. Um, but there, there may have been something there or it was like, I, I don't know. Um, let me think. Hmm. [pause] [dog barks] Were you, uh, I'm kind of blanking.

2:03

Russ comments: Mel's 1:14 turn says, to my ear: *I'm soaking it in, and it's that simple. There's nothing beyond that.* To try to characterize the *nothing beyond that*, she uses the word *empty*, but she literally chokes on the word when she says it, and subjunctifies it about as strongly as is possible, with a grimace and a recognition that it is empty only along with the oxymoronic taking it in. That is, she says, very clearly, that there is a sense that one could use the word empty, but that is a very problematic sense.

So I think JBK's "Okay. So it was pretty empty" is a substantial misrepresentation, even with its subsequent qualifications.

The good news, I speculate (because I'm not a mind reader), is that JBK's blanking is evidence of his battle with whatever presuppositional organization (that there *must be* some meta-awareness, or there must be some experience along with the soaking in, or whatever): he heard himself say "It was pretty empty" but at some level knows that there *is no evidence* of meta-awareness or other presupposition). He is left with nothing. Good! It is a battle to the death.

Julian comments: Again, no such presupposition. But I am confused here, resulting from the original misunderstanding and not making myself clear. Mel calling this a "nothingness moment" threw me off.

Russ comments: I think Mel called this a "nothingness moment" because you invited her to do so by asking (1:14): "is this looking at the photo, soaking it in, is that just, is that the action that's happening now? Like your eyes happen to be pointed at it?" That was an unwarranted question, in my view, because there was nothing in Mel's original presentation that suggested the possibility of merely eyes pointed at. So I think the confusion arises from Julian, not from Mel, and not recognizing his own interests /presuppositions.

RE: "Again, no such presupposition. But I am confused"

In the I'm-not-a-mind-reader department: I take that as pretty strong evidence that there is a presupposition here. Presuppositions are delusions, so the claim that there is no delusion is not rational. The most that can be rationally said is *It doesn't seem like a presupposition to me, but I might be blind to that, so (to the extent that I trust my interlocutor) I will have to be extra careful to examine the evidence. I accept that that evidence will not be straightforward—that's the nature of delusion.*

Confusion is one kind of evidence that *might* appear in the vicinity of a presupposition. When the presupposition is at its strongest, there will be no confusion—there will be dogmatic opinion: I don't care about this stuff; Russ is stupid; my way is perfect. But when the presupposition weakens, so does dogma; the presupposition's next line of defense is confusion. In short: if Mel says something that is by its nature clear, and Julian has no presuppositions, Julian will hear Mel clearly (no confusion). If Mel says something that is by its nature ambiguous, and Julian has no presuppositions, Julian will hear Mel's ambiguity and try to help her sort it out (no confusion). If Mel says something and Julian is confused, then there is likely a presupposition that interferes with Julian's understanding. (There may be other things that lead to confusion as well, so I am not being dogmatic.)

My recommendation: if you recognize yourself as being confused, rewind the tape to just before the confusion arose, and then interpret yourself in the worst possible light that you can imagine. (That is, do *not* try to explain it away or give a benign attribution.) Recognize that the presupposition will seem impossible—*that couldn't possibly be a characteristic of me!* Accept that your bad-me explanation will be off the mark—remember that your presupposition is highly skilled (it is the smartest part of you) at misleading you about the truth. Your bad-me explanation probably will not be right, but it can make the actual reason for your confusion seem less threatening, which iteratively can help the process of abrading away the presupposition.

2:28 Mel: I know.

2:30 JBK: Um, like how...[Mel: yeah]. So between nothing, like how confident are you even of this of sample? Like do you think it was probably a nothing or maybe a bit of something or...?

2:30 Russ comments: A frequent ploy of a presupposition is to blame the other. The presupposition says, *it couldn't possibly be a distortion on my part, so it must be Mel's problem. I'll go after her confidence.* I think Mel has been quite clear and confident, except when she encounters JBK's presuppositions.

Julian comments: No presupposition, but still tangled in the original misunderstanding.

Russ comments: The being tangled, in my view, is likely the result of presupposition.

2:41 Mel: No, I don't feel like there was a, I don't feel like there was a, a lot of something. [dog barks] Um, I, I feel like this was pretty nothing that sort of like, um, zen empty sort of state that we've sort of discussed before. Like, I wouldn't really [dog barks] describe this as autopilot because I was like sort of mulling over the photo. Like there was

something, like I was registering that, but it wasn't, um, wasn't creating so much in me that there's something... Like I wasn't, [dog barks] you know, stewing over a particular thought or a particular element of it, or it wasn't conjuring up some sort of feeling or anything in me. It wasn't any of those, [dog barks] but I wouldn't describe it as like autopilot. But maybe that's where we're finding that these are the challenging ones where I feel like maybe autopilot is when I'm really, or what I've been describing as autopilot is when I'm really clearly doing a task. And whereas this task that I was, you know, interrupted doing was not really a task. You know, it's kind of like looking at my phone and stuff, so I know what you mean.

2:41 Julian comments: Interesting that she says "I know what you mean" because I have no idea what I mean.

Russ comments: I recommend noticing that *no-idea-what* sensation, however it presents itself to you, and coming to value it as a sign that presuppositions are in the vicinity. Mel is trying to give you what you want, and because she is probably more sensitive / perceptive than you are in the vicinity of your presuppositions, she is likely to hear what your presuppositions want more than you yourself are able to admit. So if she rambles (as I think she did at 2:41), it's likely because your presuppositions are exposing themselves to her more than you think.

By the way, I think it is not possible to recognize your own presuppositions (because they are delusions), so the aim of all or my talk about presuppositions is *not* to encourage you to figure out what your presuppositions are. (Nor to claim that I know what your presuppositions are.) The aim is to encourage you to become more sensitive to signs that presuppositions are in the vicinity (signs such as confusion, either yours or Mel's; misunderstanding; Mel's answering a question you don't think you asked; etc.) and (first) accept that this is likely Julian's issue; (second) accept that it will *seem* like anything but Julian's issue; (third) work at not blaming Mel; (fourth) later, at your leisure, work at trying to figure out in which ballpark your presupposition might be, accepting that that will be, at best, only partially true (because presuppositions are delusions); (fifth) work at that relentlessly across all your interactions; (sixth) for as long as it takes, which is probably measured in years or decades; and (seventh) with no guarantee of success.

4:00 JBK: Because, um... yeah... in one sense I think it could be helpful to have, you know, terms that you call it. Like this is a kind of autopilot thing and we can call it that. And this one's more of a nothing. [Mel: Yeah.] But I think in, in another sense, we have to treat like each moment as its own thing. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So I guess in that sense, it doesn't matter so much if we call it autopilot or not so long as we understand it. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

Um, but you, you, you did compare it to the conversation one [Mel: Mm-hmm.] [dog barks] the other day. Sorry, this my, my dog is barking. I'm gonna go see if I can placate him, maybe open the door or something. [pause; JBK leaves for a moment] Poor little guy. Um, so. Hmm, where was I? Yeah, so I guess in comparison to the conversation one, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] um, but it seemed that that one was more experiential. So...

5:11 RTH: So I, I, my sense is that, that we might be going down the wrong track here, because it seems to me that we have *said* that this is nothing or empty or something like that, but I don't think we actually *mean* that it's nothing or empty. What I *think* we mean by that, and I'm ask (this is a question), what, what it seems like we mean, like is, as I'm taking in this picture, it's not like I'm turned off. And so I'm taking in this picture, but I'm not doing anything *more than that*. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So it's, it's nothing *on top of*, or nothing *beyond* the taking in of the picture.

Julian comments; A necessary interjection. Since I take things too literally sometimes—like “nothing” or “the same as.” The idea that Mel could sometimes mean nothing as “nothing *beyond X*” is very useful to me, and helpful for later sampling days.

5:48 Mel: Mm. Mm-hmm.

5:49 RTH: So, *wouldn't* be fair, it seems to me to say *this is nothing*, because it, it's possible for my eyeballs to be aimed at something and I'm just not seeing it, I'm not, I'm not doing *anything* about it. My, my eyeballs are aimed at it, but it's not registering at all. That's *not* what we're saying. I'm, *I'm* gathering.

6:04 Mel: Yeah. Hundred percent.

6:07 RTH: And so it seems to me that this is sort of like I'm looking at the picture, and I'm *taking in* the picture.

6:12 Mel: Yeah.

6:13 RTH: And, but there's nothing *beyond that*.

6:18 Mel: [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Yeah. Like I wasn't... cuz I tried to think about this at the time, like was I, you know, particularly fixated on a bit like, oh, my hair looks funny, or that person looks particularly happy, or anything like that. It wasn't even that. It was just like I was looking at the picture and taking in the whole thing, but yeah, it wasn't then emanating some larger thought or emotion or anything. But I was definitely consuming the thing I was looking at.... Yeah.

6:44 JBK: Okay. Um, so I guess...yeah, but I still don't want to discount the, the possibility of a nothing, I guess. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So I, I guess between those two possibilities, what Russ just said and kind of what maybe we together got at earlier, like between, between those, which do you think is more accurate?

6:44 Russ comments: I think this is a question that arises from a presupposition. One way a presupposition defends itself is by asking questions that are not clear, such as (in my opinion) this one. The judgment about whether a question is a good question is by its fruits: if Mel describes her experience at the moment of the beep, it was a good question. If not, not.

7:10 Mel: Well, I think what Russ has just described is sort of maybe sometimes what I struggle to define better than like a version of a nothing. Do you know what I mean? Like maybe that, what he's describing there is sort of my base layer that I find hard to articulate where it's like, it's sort of a nothing. I think that what he's just described is what I'm trying to describe when I say that, like, that it's not like fully autopilot, like coming back to those layers again that I seem to always go back to. But like, I think that... that base level, I don't know whatever I want to call that, but like that is almost like my, this sample is almost like my...now I'm going too wide, but like, sort of my norm where it's like that sort of level of, of nothing but something, but really nothing, you know?

7:10 Russ comments:
Exercise for the reader (1). (My answer and Julian's answer are both at the end of this transcript; no fair peeking until you commit yourself to your own answer.)

As a way of investigating whether JBK 6:44 is a good question, compare Mel 7:10 to Mel 6:16 (her previous utterance). Do they differ on whether they are attempting to describe experience at the moment of the beep?

8:07 JBK: Okay. Nothing, something, nothing.

8:09 Mel: I know that doesn't help you Julian [laughs].

8:13 JBK: But it might be that nothing beyond absorbing...the photo.

8:16 Mel: Yeah.

8:19 JBK: Um, but this absor... Yeah, I was, so, I was curious. I was, I was asking about comparison to the conversation [Mel: Yeah.] um, before, and maybe that's a misguided question, but let, let's see, I guess. So...

8:33 Mel: No, I don't necessarily think so because I think, um, it's all sort of relevant in that (and even like I said there), like I reckon my normal state is very, um, and so in conversation and in that one, it's sort of like the inner experience is really observational. And in that it means like taking in whatever information is in front of me. So whether that is looking at a photo on my phone, whether that is listening in conversation, that sort of all feels the same to me, I think. Like, I think they *are* comparable, but, you know, you maybe Russ would challenge me on that, but I think that sort of observational state of being is de- definitely one that I can... Yes, that feels right. And that is when I'm, yeah, taking in information, but there's no next layer of, oh, that's really eliciting a certain response in me, or that's, you know, or I'm really shooing over this particular thought or whatever. I think there is some relevance between linking those two things.

9:38 JBK: And that's a focus just on this one with, with the photo. Um, is, is there any content present about the photo? What's in the photo, or no?

9:38 Julian comments: Mel already answered this at 6:18. "was I, you know, particularly fixated on a bit like, oh, my hair looks funny, or that person looks particularly happy,

or anything like that. It wasn't even that, it was just like I was looking at the picture and taking in the whole thing."

9:49 Mel: Uh, how do you mean?

9:52 JBK: Um... I mean, well, I don't want to tell you exactly what it is, [laughs] because if it's not there, it's, it's not there. But like, um, so something about something that's in the photo is, is that at all present in your experience?

10:10 Mel: As in like... yeah. No, I don't think so. Um, like, so I can tell you the picture was, um, a photo of my friends and I sitting in like a garden. So like, yeah, there were roses and we had drinks in our hands and there were like four of us girls or whatever. But I wasn't particularly aware of any of those individual elements of the photo or whatever. Like, I would've found it quite helpful in articulating my inner experience to be like, I was looking at this photo and I was really noticing that my hair looked nice or something, but there wasn't anything specific about the photo. It was just that I was looking at that photo and that was it really. And taking it in, like certainly absorbing it, as Russ said before, like not just looking at it, and my, that's where my eyes were. Like there was absorption happening. But beyond that, anything specific? I would say No.

10:59 JBK: And I guess, I guess we, like for now, like retain the possibility that some absorption could happen that's, that's not experienced. Like if, um, I don't know, maybe just the process that's happening in, in the background, but experientially not really there.

10:59 Russ comments: I can't see anywhere in what Mel has said that provides a warrant for "retain[ing] the possibility that some absorption could happen that's, that's not experienced." Mel has said repeatedly and clearly that she is absorbed in the photo. She has not said anything about absorption that is not experienced. So I suspect that there is some presupposition operating here.

Julian comments: Really dumb phrasing again on this one. I'm kind of cringing at this interview to be honest. Not my finest moment. I think I wanted to ask another skepticism question but didn't say it head on. So just said "we like for now, like retain the possibility." I should have just asked the question.

But the idea was (and no, it was not a presupposition, but an idea that came to me) that just like how visual processing can sometimes happen and be out-of-the-footlights, possibly some kind of absorption could happen and be out-of-the-footlights.

And maybe, but Mel has been clear here that her experience was nothing *beyond* looking.

I was still just too hung up on the original nothing categorization that came from that first misunderstood question.

Russ comments: RE "and no, it was not a presupposition"

"An idea that came to me" without warrant is basically the definition of the operation of a presupposition. Denial of a presupposition is usually the result of the operation of a presupposition. The appearance of "really dumb phrasing" is usually the result of the operation of a presupposition. Being hung up on the original

categorization is usually the result of the operation of a presupposition. The asking of a question that has already been asked and answered (see comment at 9:38) is usually the result of the operation of a presupposition. Blaming the other (assuming that “misunderstood,” in “original nothing categorization that came from that first misunderstood question, implies that Mel misunderstood your question) is usually the result of the operation of a presupposition.

I don’t care whether we call it a presupposition, but it seems to me that there is something within Julian that distorts what Mel says. And if he wants to become good at hearing Mel with fidelity, he is going to have to figure out how to bracket that (whatever it is) or, better, abrade it away.

11:20 Mel: No, not for this one.

11:22 JBK: So, so not for, wait, what do you mean? Not for this one? You mean not that it’s not there? O that it is there? Or that it isn’t there?

11:30 Mel: Oh. Um... I’m... when you said experientially, I, this is probably just different, um, terminologies, but like, I, I linked that to like, oh, so experiential that like, there was more than what I’ve described in this one. Whereas like this felt more just like absorbing and like, you know?

11:30 Julian comments: Another opportunity to recalibrate what we’re talking about. By ‘experientially’ Mel understands something more high-level than I do. Some kind of thought or focus. I just mean anything in direct experience. But I didn’t fully figure out we were talking about different things. I think I just dropped that line of questioning.

11:52 JBK: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Is, is there more ways for you to describe this absorbing kind of quality, this absorbing, soaking, whatever? Like, could you describe that in more depth? If, if it’s there?

11:52 Russ comments: This is a question about meta-awareness. Mel has said that all that is present to her is the Australian scene. You are asking her to describe how that scene is present to her, which is pure meta-awareness.

When Mel looks in a mirror, she sees Mel. When Julian looks in the same mirror, he sees Julian. To ask about the reflection is a meta-question (about the mirror); which may be relevant in some cases (e.g., if the mirror is dirty or cracked). But in most cases the mirror itself it is not experientially relevant: even if the mirror is dirty or cracked, Mel sees Mel (not the dirt or cracks) and Julian sees Julian (not the dirt or cracks).

12:06 Mel: No, I don’t think so, because it’s really hard to describe. Cuz it just, like, that’s the challenge that I’m having when we get these moments that it’s just like, it doesn’t feel like there’s anything tangible to hold onto. Um, like I know that I’m taking in, I know that I’m looking at this and I’m registering it. Um, so in that sense it’s not *nothing* but [JBK: Mm-hmm.] I’m not... I don’t know. It’s not cuz because the challenge is like, if it, if it conjured up like, oh, that’s making me *feel* this, or I *remember* the way that that did, or someone *said* this or whatever, then that’s like much easier for me to describe. But none of those things are present.

12:48 JBK: Mm-hmm.

12:49 Mel: So I don't really know.

12:52 JBK: Okay. Yeah, I get that, it's tricky for sure. Um, tricky for me too. Yeah. I'm curious, Russ, if you have other questions.

13:01 RTH: Well, I don't know that I have other questions. I, I, I might have a very different version of this than you do; I'm not exactly sure about that. But so my, my understanding of this sample is that Mel said, coming out of the, coming out of the chute, that she was looking at her phone, she was soaking it in, she was taking in the screen, she was taking it in; and was quite confident about that, for my way of being.

And then she said something about, *and there's nothing beyond that. And it was empty beyond that.* And then we went down that alley as if we were talking about *nothing*. But I thought that the nothing was not... I, I, I thought that was, that was sort of a red herring, that... So if I had been asking the questions, I think, I would've asked her, well, *when, when you mean nothing beyond that? What do you mean?* And she would've said what she said, *I'm not looking at my hair, I'm not looking at my friend's dress* or whatever it is that she said. And I would've accepted that and the party would've been over from my point of view. We would've established that she was looking at her picture, taking it in. It was not *nothing* because she was *seeing* it. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] But it wasn't any, anything particularized beyond that. And that would've been the end of the...

14:14 JBK: Yeah, I think there was something in the original description, and I don't know verbatim, but there was something that made me think, oh, this sounds like it might not be experiential. It sounds like it might be a description of like, what's happening at the time or, or processes that might be happening behind the scenes.

14:14 Russ comments: The original descriptive turn is at 0:04, and I think there is nothing in that turn that can be reasonably taken as suggesting that Mel's sample might not be experiential. That is, I think this is a distortion by JBK, which, as I have said, I take to be the operation of some sort of presupposition, maybe something like *there must be meta-awareness, and if there is not meta-awareness there must be nothing*.

Presuppositions are delusions, and delusions can never (well, maybe rarely) be eliminated by some general statement such as I have just given, even if that statement is 100% true (which it likely is not).

I would be happy to watch 0:04 with JBK to see if I have missed something (my presuppositions operating) or he has seen something that doesn't exist (his presuppositions operating). I think that is as effective a way as there is to work at reducing the grip of delusion. Such opportunities are rare.

Julian comments: I don't have presuppositions/delusions here. But yes, I went down the wrong track. Mel described soaking the photo in and the last line of her description was "I was just looking at the screen." I think this led me to try to find out if this was an eye-ball-pointing-fact of the universe or in direct experience. I don't think this is a wrong impulse. We've asked this kind of question frequently and it can

go both ways. I wasn't prepared or favoring for it to go more one way or the other. However, I didn't realize that I didn't ask the question clearly and I wasn't prepared to adapt to the answer.

Mel starts out answering that this is a "nothingness moment rather than like super experiential." That clouded my view and judgment for the rest of the interview. I couldn't fully adapt to dispel the "nothingness." I also overlooked Mel's original hedging— "rather than like super experiential." I originally wasn't trying to ask about the *super* experiential, just the little-bit-at-all experiential.

Russ comments: RE "the last line of her description was 'I was just looking at the screen'. I think this led me to try to find out if this was an eye-ball-pointing-fact of the universe or in direct experience. I don't think this is a wrong impulse."

I happily accept that the impulse was okay. What makes it likely presuppositional / delusional is (a) the unclarity of the question and (b) the inability to adapt to the answer. There is something within Julian that makes of the nothingness issue more than it deserves. Whether that should be called a "presupposition" is of little interest to me.

And (c) if you were attending to Mel's "I was just looking at the screen," there were lots of more important questions to be asked, in the arena of: were you attending to the screen? To the photo displayed on the screen? To the scene that the photo depicts?

A thing (perhaps the fundamental thing) that makes DES different from nearly all human endeavors (especially from nearly all psychological methods) is that there is a pretty-darn-right answer to questions such as *Was there something in Mel's 0:04 turn that can be reasonably taken as suggesting that Mel's sample might not be experiential?* and *Was there nothing in Mel's experience at 4:37 PM yesterday?* Those are itty bitty questions about itty bitty but directly apprehended experiences. Presuppositions (aka delusions) can be abraded by being repeatedly bashed against such bits of reality, but it takes time, effort, and courage. By the way, it is *not* a matter of whether Russ is right about these things; it is *not* about bashing what Julian thinks against what Russ thinks. It is about Julian confronting within himself little bits of things that he himself sees.

RE "Mel starts out answering that this is a "nothingness moment rather than like super experiential." That clouded my view and judgment."

I do offer (have offered, I think) the following advice, based on my own painful experience: When you discover a bit of discrepancy, conceptualize it in the most negative possible way *about yourself*. Don't blame Mel. Don't let yourself off the hook. Conceptualize it something like *Wow! I am really screwed up about nothingness! What's that about!?! That conceptualization will be somewhat off the mark (as are all conceptualizations), but (if you can stand it) it may be more useful to get in the habit of erring on the low side than on the high side.*

14:34 RTH: So I remember you're asking that question, and I, at that time thought I didn't hear anything that would would've led me to ask that question.

14:42 JBK: So you thought...

- 14:42 Mel: Do you want me to say what I wrote again? I wrote, um, "I was looking a photo on my phone of my friends and I in Melbourne the other day. Um, my inner experience was just sort of soaking that photo in. There were no thoughts *per se*. I was just looking at the screen."
- 14:59 JBK: I think it was, um, I think it was the sentence "I was just looking at the screen." [Mel: Yeah.] That for me was like, um, well maybe this is more just about the action. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, but I mean, it's true, maybe I, my line of questioning kind of, uh, made us focus more on the nothing. I think I wanted to be safe and say, oh, before we delve into what, what is there, like, let's rule out, you know, this possibility. So I think that's why I asked it. Um...
- 15:36 RTH: I, I do think all that, uh, that is a challenge. And, and I'm not, you know, I don't, I don't, I don't know that there's a rule that says this is how you do it, but...
- 15:48 JBK: Should we try... I mean, my, my final impression is that I'm, I'm not sure about the sample. I guess that's the best I can say. [Mel: Yeah.] But, um, should we try number 2?
- 15:59 RTH: And, and I, and I wouldn't ev even after you're saying that, I would say, "I'm pretty confident about it." I'm looking at my phone, seeing my phone...
- 16:06 Mel: Really?
- 16:08 RTH: I don't have anything, anything beyond that.
- 16:11 Mel: I think Julian, I mean, not to speculate, but I think that you just find it really hard because we obviously have really different ways of experiencing the world. So... cuz I've had this so many times in conversation with friends lately about talking about this sort of thing, that if, like, trying to articulate *that*, which seems to be so different from perhaps what the way *you* experience things or, so sometimes like that just is really challenging. Like, am I putting words into your mouth? Or like, you are like, well, I don't really trust the sample cuz I feel like it was sort of nothing and then it's not, and then you're not giving me like the right language or whatever. But like, I'm really at a brick wall here [repeatedly pounds her fist against her open hand] with how to describe it any more accurately. [laughs].
- 16:52 JBK: But, um, I feel...yeah, of course it is challenging. Your experience is different from mine. Um, well, lots of people, like everybody I do this has different experiences from mine. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, if you feel frustrated with how to explain it... You don't, you don't need to placate me, is what I'm saying. If I ask a question, because I think towards the beginning, you, you did say like, you kind of entertained my, this concept that it was more of a nothing. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And if it wasn't a nothing, don't entertain me. Be like, no, there was something there, there was some absorbing quality. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So [laughs] like, you don't, you don't need to placate me at all or [Mel: Mm-hmm.] tell me what, what you think I wanna hear.

Russ comments: To my ear, that is a blame-Mel instruction, as if *this conversation would have been better if Mel hadn't tried to entertain me*. That may well be true, but it emphasizes north when the problem is more south. The conversation would have been better if JBK hadn't pushed Mel into entertaining him.

I have no problem whatsoever with JBK's, at the outset, hearing Mel say something like "I was just looking at the screen" (as JBK points out at 14:59) and wondering whether that suggests that there was nothing in experience. But he has to figure out a way to inquire about such things without putting Mel in a position where she feels like she has to entertain him. It is totally possible to do so, for example, by saying something like "I've got two different ways of understanding what you said, and I want to get it right. It could be that your eyes are aimed at the picture and there is absolutely nothing going on experientially; or it could be that your eyes are aimed at the picture and you're experientially absorbed in it, even though you're not especially focused on one or another specific detail." It's not about the words—there are hundreds of similarly even-handed locutions.

In the *I'm no mind reader but I've been around the block a few times* mode, I suggest the presuppositional likelihood: JBK didn't produce an even-handed query because his presupposition prevents him from being even-handed. For whatever presuppositional reason, he more wanted the conversation to ratify his presupposition than to help Mel apprehend and describe her experience as it occurred.

I don't know whether that is true or half true or not at all true—I doubtless have my own set of delusions. But I also know that to the extent that what I said *is* true, *JBK must believe that it is not true*—that is the nature of delusion. If I'm wrong, JBK would think I'm wrong, and if I'm right, JBK would think I'm wrong. So there is no gain to be had by JBK's defending or RTH's explaining.

It's up to JBK to consider whether and if so how he went wrong in the questioning here. My suggestion, based on my own experience, is that the most fruitful way to approach such incidents is to presume the worst of the possible motivations. It is also up to RTH to consider whether he has blind spots or over-reactions regarding Julian's questions. The most fruitful approach, I think, is jointly to watch specific videos. It is not generally good enough to watch the videos on one's own—presuppositions are far too wily for that to be effective.

Julian comments: I don't have these meta presuppositions. You're 'if JBK denies it, that's because of his delusions' kind of puts me in a bind because damned if I do, damned if I don't. But I hope we've discussed this issue enough elsewhere for you to believe me.

But yes my questioning and reaction to Mel's answers was off. In my post-mortem I said the issue was with me reaffirming the soaking-it-in while simultaneously trying to put forth the possibility of it just being an eyes-pointed-fact-of-the-universe. I should've been more careful untangling those two. Another mistake was assuming we had some shared meaning for what we meant by 'experiential'. I see that we can't assume any shared such terminology and have to remake the case fresh every sampling day for what we mean.

I also see it more as a misunderstanding issue than a Mel-trying-to-placate-me issue.

As to the question of if I had some kind of intrinsic preference that pushed me in one way, I don't think so. With DES sampling I've done with others, I've had plenty of samples of looking. Only a few with nothing. In my own experience, from my casual self-observation, from DES I've been interviewee for, and from extensive autobiographic experience reporting (which led me to DES), I've observed lots of visual/perception experience. And no nothing. So it can't be that comparison to my own experience leads me to want to favor this in Mel.

Some nothing samples from Mel's first days undoubtedly did attune me to the possibility of this for Mel. But with my original question I was ready for it to go either way.

That being said I have been frustrated with how long it took these meta questions to resolve. Maybe that comes from your "if he denies it, that's the presuppositions talking" approach. I did have to deny it quite a number of times. I feel like when I drew out the boxes with the arrows that was helpful. I get where you're coming from that if I did have such presuppositions, I would deny them in a similar way. But sometimes I wondered if all this conversation wasn't tilting things and exacerbating them. If you keep saying I'm asking meta questions then Mel thinks I'm looking for meta stuff and then interprets my questions as meta. This may be displacing blame; at least I'm aware of that.

Still, it was frustrating to me. I kept wanting to say gosh, I'm not *that dumb*. I'm not *that bad at DES*. I am capable of observing perceptual or sensory awareness without a meta component. If Russ thinks I can't do that, he must really think I'm dumb.

But how to get out of that double bind? That if someone says *that's not my presupposition* it's impossible to believe it? I guess we spilled a lot of words and came to some agreement in the end. And it helped me iron out some problems in my terminology. All of it owed to the fact that there is no shared terminology when talking about experience. It's like trying to shake hands when we're both shifting in quicksand. That's where this interview went off the rails, and it's a good lesson for the untangling we have to do when there are mismatches in how we talk about experience.

Russ comments: I don't think Julian is dumb. I do think he has presuppositions that interfere with his ability to hear Mel with fidelity and speak about Mel's experience with ease and precision. I have been, I think, careful to say that I may well be mistaken about that—it is not really my job to judge Julian on any front. I am not a mind reader nor omniscient.

I *have* repeatedly said "I heard Mel say X, and I heard Julian say Y about X, and those things don't mesh, and here's why." That is, I think I have never said anything about a presupposition without saying explicitly what I observed. That is, I have tried, bit after bit, to explain myself. It is indeed a dilemma for me. I have 50ish years of experience at this and I would like to be helpful to Julian.

RE "You're 'if JBK denies it, that's because of his delusions' kind of puts me in a bind because damned if I do, damned if I don't."

If you are an omniscient being, then you have the right to say "I don't have that presupposition / delusion." If you are an ignorant mortal (as I am) then the best you can say is "It seems to me that I don't have that presupposition / delusion, but,

delusions being what they are, I would be the last person to know for sure. And to the extent that I think Russ is observant and knowledgeable, I should probably pay attention to what he says, not because he is Right (because he, too, is an ignorant mortal) but because he seems to be trying to tell me something that might be in the ballpark of constructive.” So yes, I do take saying “I do not have that presupposition” as a bit of evidence that something is amiss. It is the smallest bit (after mishearing, misstating, inflexibility, etc.).

I happily accept that I am not the ultimate judge about what is or isn’t Mel’s experience, or how best to arrive at Mel’s experience, or what is or isn’t Julian’s characterization or mischaracterization about it, or what I should or shouldn’t say about Julian’s talk. I do believe, rightly or wrongly, that I’m pretty good at these things, and that that belief is based on some pretty careful (some would say heroic), principled examinations, including the adventure we are currently engaged in. What to do about that is the dilemma, which I am taking seriously, which is to say, imperfectly.

17:37 Mel: Yeah. [JBK: Umm]...yeah, that’s... no, but, and that’s a good note for me, too, because that distinction between, because when there’s that absorbing quality, like that just feels like my, my base level for me. So I guess in some ways I get in this habit of kind of describing that as nothing, cuz that’s sort of like my, like base starting point. Do you know what I mean? So I’ve gotta get better at being like, actually there was an observational characteristic there. And that is different to like fully not taking in your surroundings. Like there, there’s an important distinction there that sometimes I’m describing as way as maybe too similar because they feel not that different, even though they are, if that makes sense.

18:26 JBK: It’s, it’s interesting. I would still be careful of saying “my base level” [Mel: Mm-hmm.] because like, like every sample we should treat as its own thing. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, but yeah, I, I guess, I guess we’ll see is all, all that I can say.

18:26 Russ comments: Yes, it would be good if Mel were not talking about her base level. But she is talking about her base level because (as it seems to me) JBK has not heard with fidelity Mel’s description of her experience: she is responding about base level because JBK has been asking about absorbing quality. So I say again: *Don’t blame Mel. Don’t instruct Mel.* If you feel the urge to blame or instruct arising in you, take that urge seriously but turn it inside out. Ask: What is it about what *I have said* that has led Mel to say what she says. It is *not* Mel’s fault.

Note I am not being particularly critical of JBK here: it is a general rule (with some exceptions) that if the DES interviewee’s talk is unsatisfactory, it is probably the result of the DES interviewer’s problematic questions.

Julian comments: I don’t think instruction or redirection is always bad. There are quite a few times when you say something along the lines of *let’s stick to this beep right here rather than generalizing*. But I agree in this case my instructions were off the mark, missed the issue, and I was better off improving my own questioning.

Russ comments: “Let’s stick to this beep right here rather than generalizing” is a commentary about the present; “I would still be careful of saying ‘my base level’” is instruction for the future. They are as different as north is from down.

18:47 RTH: Onward?

SAMPLE 6.2 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

18:48 Mel: [JBK: Onwards, yeah.] Okay. Next one happened at 4:57. I was, um, I was speaking with my sister and I was just fully engaged in the conversation. Um, right before the beep went off, she was speaking, and I was just listening and looking at her.

19:10 RTH: And “listening and looking”: by that, are you just saying that I am... [pause] Well... I’m, I’m, I, I guess I’m trying to figure out whether, whether I’m seeing something *in particular* about her or whether I’m just seeing her as she speaks to me...

19:31 Mel: Yeah. The, the latter, like I was, my eyes were focused at her and like, you know, I was aware of her, but it was nothing in particular. Um... I...this is like that conversation sample the other week, I think of like, there was active listening present and like absorption. Um, but that’s sort of it.

19:53 RTH: Okay. But it’s not like I’m noticing her hair or her blouse or the tone of her voice or, or the, [Mel shakes her head negatively] I’m haven’t gone into some ancillary thing about the what it is that she’s telling me. I’m just, I’m taking it in and, and that’s it? [Mel: Yeah.] And then is, is this in some ways the same or different from the previous beep where I’m looking at a picture and taking that in?

20:20 Mel: Yeah. I would say it’s [inaudible] similar.

20:24 RTH: And by “similar,” do you mean *sort of similar* or do you mean *it seems like pretty much exactly the same thing* except in different, different genre?

20:32 Mel: I think the same thing, because I wasn’t listening to my sister and then like, thinking about what I was gonna say back, or...yeah. I wasn’t noticing any particular thing or there was no like, super vibe present. It was observational and taking it in. So I would say it really feel, felt the same.

20:32 Julian comments: We’ve also talked a lot about what Mel means by “the same,” so this is interesting. Above, Russ, you say “the same thing except in different, different genre?” I wonder if this is what Mel has in mind implicitly when she says “the same.” This may have tripped me up on other days when I took “the same” to be more literal. Another example where we can’t assume shared terminology.

Russ comments: I’m not asking (a) what Mel means by “the same.” I’m asking (b) about the degree of similarity between samples 6.2 and 6.1. Question (a) is about the words. Question (b) is about the experience. I don’t care a whit about (a) how she used “the same” in some other sample. I want to know (b) about the similarity of taking in the (6.2) conversation and taking in the (6.1) photo scene.

So I think your comment mischaracterizes the conversation, making it seem like it was about the words “the same,” when our exchange had very little to do with those words. At 19:53 I ask “is this in some ways the same or different from the previous beep”; *in some ways the same or different* is an explicit denial of the specific meaning of any word. Mel responds (20:20) “I would say similar,” which is a very ambiguous reply. So I ask for clarification (20:24) “And by ‘similar’, do you mean *sort of similar* or do you mean it *seems like pretty much exactly the same thing*?” One doesn’t need a shared definition of “same” to understand that question—I am contrasting *sort of similar* with *pretty much exactly*. Then (20:32) Mel uses “the same” in a way that we have just now defined about this particular pair of samples without regard to any other samples; and for good measure, she defines it again about these two samples. That conversation was about Mel’s experience, *not* about the words she or I used.

- 20:51 RTH: So I’m taking it in. It’s not nothing, but it’s nothing beyond taking it in.
- 20:57 Mel: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Definitely.
- 21:00 RTH: Then I’m good.
- 21:04 JBK: Um, [pause, looks pensive] should we go to, to number 3?
- 21:11 Mel: Yep.
- 21:11 RTH: Fine with me. Unless you got questions about that.
- 21:14 JBK: Well, okay. I am, I think I, I would’ve... yeah, I would’ve been... um, I’m, I’m still a little bit skeptical. I don’t know, um,..
- 21:25 RTH: About, about...about what? Go for it. Um...
- 21:30 JBK: About, hmm. Still the possibility of, of nothingness. But... but maybe I’m too skeptical, so I don’t know.
- 21:46 RTH: And what, what now that we can re- recall pretty much exactly what she said, what is it about that that leads you to think that there was nothing... or the possibility of nothing?
- 22:00 JBK: Hmm... [pause] I feel like some things aren’t defined like *abs- absorption* and *taking it in*. I feel like, um, there’s a lot of different ways somebody could take something in or absorb something. And I’m still not quite sure what, what your way is like, Mel. And I, I just know what it’s not, like it’s not specific content. It’s not specific...um, but I feel like... I’m, I’m still mm...
- 22:51 Mel: That you can’t imagine what that experience is, cuz I haven’t been able to describe the experience of absorbing. Is that what you mean?

- 23:00 JBK: Um, or just that... Yeah. Because you say it is hard for you to give more details on, on what it is like, and that it is similar to nothing, I think you've said before. Um, so that's... yeah. Those are my thoughts about it.
- 23:20 RTH: So it seemed to me that, that you were saying it, it wasn't that you were so much worried that it was *nothing*, but that you were worried that it was *something* that was beyond what has yet been described.
- 23:30 Mel: Hmm.
- 23:32 JBK: Um, yes. I mean, because I talked about it before and, and Russ thought, I, I thought it was something meta. Like you had to be, you know, aware of your own processes. And I, I, I don't think it's something meta, um, but I do, I, I, [laughs] I would like more detail. I, I guess there's some more...yeah, to understand it better. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um...yeah.

23:32 Russ comments: RTH thinks Mel is taking it in. It's not nothing, but it's nothing beyond taking it in. JBK (a) would like more detail; and (b) that this wanting-more-detail is not meta.

First, if JBK can point to where Mel has indicated that there is more detail to be had than RTH has understood—that is, that RTH has missed something—RTH would like to know about that.

But second, if this there-is-more-detail-to-be-had does *not* come from Mel, then it is an intrusion of JBK. RTH has used the term *meta-experience* in this ballpark: one particular kind of there-is-more-detail-to-be-had is a frank meta-experience—noticing at the moment of the beep the ongoing features of experience. At issue now seems to be somewhat broader than meta: whether there must be ongoing features of experience regardless of whether they are or are not thematized at the moment of the beep (that is, are not truly meta). Whether we call it meta or some broader category, if it comes from JBK rather than from Mel, it is what RTH would call a presupposition and is problematic for DES.

Certainly RTH is in no position to say *it's not my presuppositional overlooking, it's your presupposition requiring additional details*—he is as blind to his presuppositions as JBK is to his. But that does not in any way suggest that the probability of the one is the same as the probability of the other. It suggests that when such situations arise, we should very carefully, together, examine that the video, and see if we can find some evidence on one side or the other. Do that every time, often enough, and then one might have warrant for suggesting or noticing a presupposition.

Julian comments: I'm honestly surprised looking back at the video and reading the transcript. There was nothing in Mel's description to indicate nothingness here. I was fully on board within convo with her sister listening and looking.

I think the issue here is not the meta thing but the content-free debate of ours. Another long-running installment. I find it hard to imagine Mel absorbed in talking to her sister but without some general scope of the conversation to color her experience. I may also be taking her too literally when she says that it's *the same* as the previous

beep. I may be overlooking your original characterization of *the same except in a different genre*.

But yes, I do think there is some kind of presupposition here. And I think I've worked through it somewhat in that watching the video back, I felt more involved in Mel's experience and surprised by my skepticism of it.

Russ comments:

RE "I find it hard to imagine Mel absorbed in talking to her sister but without some general scope of the conversation to color her experience."

See my comment about the mirror at 11:52. In the Buddhist tradition, the mirror is a clear lake: the goal is to become a clear lake, reflecting the surroundings as they are without distorting them.

And at the risk of repetition, "I find it hard to imagine..." is precisely the operation of a presupposition. The object (as with the Buddhists' clear lake) is to easily imagine (reflect) Mel's experience as it is, equally easily if the general scope of the conversation colors her experience or doesn't color it.

24:03 Mel: Yeah. I, I completely get that. But I don't... like because it doesn't feel like anything, it's hard to describe it, cuz it just happens. Like I *know* that I'm taking in the content of a conversation, and I *know* I'm looking at that photo and taking it in. But beyond that, like I don't, I can't, I, I can't describe that, that process or, or, yeah, that like that experience because I, I, I don't have the language for that. Cuz it's not, it just *is*. I don't...

24:48 JBK: Yeah.

24:49 Mel: It's like coming back to that the other week when I said like a *knowing*, like... yeah. I think if I keep talking I'm gonna confuse it more, but I know what you're saying.

25:01 JBK: [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Maybe Russ is less confused than me. But should we try beep number 3?

SAMPLE 6.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

25:06 Mel: Yeah. Um...yeah, these are interesting to reread now after these conversations. Um, so the next one went off at 5:21 and I've written "Autopilot. Putting clothes away, and I was just doing that. I wasn't particularly aware of the noises in the background or the feeling of the clothes. I was just going through the motions and my brain was kind of empty."

25:34 JBK: Uh, so brain kind of empty, putting away clothes, but it's not like you're feeling the texture of these clothes. Um, do you think there's, there's any, anything experiential at this moment? Or is it just more this action that you're doing?

25:34 Russ comments:

Exercise for the reader (2). (My answer and Julian's answer are both at the end of this transcript; no fair peeking until you commit yourself to your own answer.)

Which question is better, if it matters, and why? Hint: It is not about the words.

- (A) Do you think there's anything experiential at this moment?
- (B) Is there anything experiential at this moment?
- (C) Do you experience anything at this moment?

25:50 Mel: Yeah, no, just the action. I, I sort of think, I think... yeah.

25:56 JBK: And do you think, would you say this one is emptier than the previous one?

25:56 RTH comments: That is not a fair question because it implies that both were empty, at least to some degree, and that is not true. The previous beep was not at all empty: she was fully absorbed in the conversation.

One could also evaluate the quality of the question by its fruits: this is what it elicits (see pic):

That is Mel in extremis—she has to contort herself substantially to answer that question.



26:02 Mel: Um, what was the previous one? Um...

26:05 JBK: Listening to sister?

26:18 Mel: [sighs, pauses] It's hard to say because like, I wanna say that this was emptier because as we've said, like I, I was for a fact taking in what she was saying and like actively listening to her. But like experientially, I think they kind of feel, felt the same, which I know again, that's like at odds probably with what we've described. But like, if I'm being honest, I feel like the, that state it feels the same even though in one I'm like actively absorbing something. And then in this one I'm saying I wasn't actively absorbing anything. But... yeah.

26:55 RTH: So, so let me have a little metaconversation here about that, about, about your question, Julian. You asked it is, "is this emptier?" or something like that. If you had asked, and, and, and she's, and, and she got into some kind of a...I would say a, a hybridization about the word empty, because she wanted to, she wants to say, *oh yeah, it's, it's empty*. And if you had asked a less leading question, which would've been something like, how's this similar or different from the last beep?...

27:29 JBK: That *is* a better question.

27:29 RTH: ...then she wouldn't have had to have struggled with whether *empty* is the right word. And the problem here is that *empty* is more your word than it is her word....

27:42 JBK: That's not really true.

27:42 RTH: ...and she's a nice guy. That's very, so she would like to be, she would like to be friendly with you. And, and so she wants to agree with what you say, but that mud, muddies the water for her.

27:50 JBK: Yeah. No, I do think that's a better question. It it's not quite, I mean, Mel, you did use, uh, the word or like...yeah, but I mean, I guess that's not the crucial thing. I don't have

to hang in every word. Mm. It it, it is a better question. [laughs]. I'm curious if, uh, we could go back and, uh... okay, what if we did like a, a thought experiment? You don't have to placate me at all. You can completely contradict what you just told me.

27:50 Russ comments: She did use the word *empty*, by which I think she mostly meant *not empty*. See the comments at 1:14 and at 2:03.

28:19 Mel: Mm-hmm.

28:21 JBK: Would, how, how would you answer that question? Like, how would you compare this beep to the, the previous beep?

28:21 Russ comments: This question, in the turns at 27:50 and 28:21, asks Mel to pretend, and then give an answer as if it were a DES question. There is absolutely no pretense in DES, and therefore absolutely nothing to be gained (and much to be lost) by asking such a pretending question. In the land of pretend, Mel will pretend to give a description, but what she says cannot possibly be a description because there is nothing to describe; anything she says will be a hypothetical characterization. That is likely to be highly confusing to Mel, because we have been conveying to Mel all along that we are not interested in speculation.

When a DES interviewer hears himself heavily subjunctify his own question (as at 28:21: *would, how, how would, like, how would*), he should be alerted to the possibility that he is heading into the realm of contrary to fact, that is, in the wrong direction.

None of this is about the words JBK uses: JBK subjunctifies because his grammar producer knows that he is heading into the land of pretend. It doesn't matter whether we call this a thought experiment or whatever. DES asks the interviewer to be interested in Mel's actual experience and nothing else. If JBK were fully on board with that distinction, it wouldn't occur to him to ask a pretend-experiential question.

This, btw, is part of the diamonds vs. glass series. JBK's question asks for a comparison of diamonds and glass, which is glass.

And I would note that I am not being especially critical of JBK. Thought experiments are a staple of philosophy, and they are just as problematic there, if the object is to describe pristine experience.

28:30 Mel: Um...

28:33 JBK: It might not be possible [laughs], but...

28:35 Mel: No, no, I'm just like really familiarizing myself. So that one I was listening to and that one I was putting clothes away. Um, so if I forget everything we've just discussed, how would I compare them? Like, I would say that they've felt similar. Um, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] [pause] ...apart... Yeah, apart from the fact that, um...yeah, in the conversation I'm like, uh, like I'm, I'm listening to what she's telling me. Whereas in the other one, I'm sort of in this glazed over state and not like, not like antenna up, ready to respond to anything particular in that scenario or whatever. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Um, but, but if I go like really specifically, like, you know, at the, when the, at the time, just before the

beep went off, in both those situations, I think, I think that sort of state of being and inner experience really, really feels similar... Somehow. [JBK: Mm-hmm.]

28:35 Russ comments: I would recommend to anyone trying to understand DES to play Mel's 28:35 turn over and over, without worrying too hard about her particular her words, but simply hearing Mel, receiving Mel, because, to my ear, this is the sound of Mel that one should never want to hear. This is Mel squeezed into a corner, saying stuff that she doesn't really believe or understand. There are lots of lines of evidence: her facial expression, her hand gestures, the pace of her speaking, the ungrounded sound of her voice, the number of subjunctifiers, and so on. She doesn't believe what she is saying, and neither should we.

29:55 JBK: Do you have follow-up questions, Russ?

30:02 RTH: I, I guess I would say you didn't have to ask it as a thought experiment, because that's not possible. When you go, if, if you go into the realm of a thought experiment, then you're no longer in the descriptive mode, which is what descriptive experience sampling is like. You're saying, *let's, let's pretend*. And in the, in the world of pretend there's nothing, there's nothing that's description, it seems to me. There's...

30:29 JBK: I don't think I really meant thought experiment, but just giving you a very difficult task, like [Mel: Mm-hmm.] asking you a question after I already asked a worse question. [laughs].

30:29 Russ comments: It is not a *difficult* task. The pretend instruction makes it an *impossible* task.

30:39 RTH: Right. And so what I, what I would say is that there's, you can't undo it. It's [Mel: Mm-hmm.], we've already had, we've *had* that conversation. You could say, "I am interested in whatever you can say about what it would be, how this experience was different from the last one." [JBK: Yeah.] But that's as good as you can do, I think. I can't, you can't ask her to erase something, because if you do that, then you, then you don't know what you got after that. And another way of saying that is that descriptive experience sampling tries to live *not* in the hypothetical, but in the *descriptive*, [JBK: Yeah.] as best it can, which is short of perfect. But as best you can.

31:26 JBK: Should we try number 4?

31:28 Mel: Mm-hm.

31:28 RTH: Number 4.

SAMPLE 6.4 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

31:31 Mel: Um, 1, 2, 3, 4. Um...hmm...Interesting. This went off at 5:50. And I've written, "I was looking at Instagram on my phone. I wasn't speaking. Again, I was just looking at the screen and taking in the photo, but there was no distinct thought beyond that."

31:54 RTH: So you're looking at an Instagram screen?

31:57 Mel: Yeah. Looking at like Instagram on my phone. So a picture on Instagram.

32:03 RTH: And is there anything similar to or different from the previous time you were looking at a picture on your phone?

32:10 Mel: No, I would say this, it feels almost exactly the same.

32:14 RTH: Okay.

32:16 Mel: Yeah.

32:18 RTH: And...

32:20 Mel: Oh, actually no I'm gonna, I'm gonna, I'm gonna disagree with that. Actually. I feel like *maybe* this, this one felt more, um, like when we say my eyes are pointed in a direction, but there wasn't much absorption. Cuz the other one I was definitely mulling over that photo and like taking that in. I remember when this went off actually, like it was really incidental and I actually wasn't really taking in the content that I was looking at, to be honest...Yeah.

32:51 RTH: So I'm, in this one, am I taking it in *at all*? Or am I taking it in just *less than* in the first one?

32:59 Mel: I think taking it in to *some* degree, but like *way less*, like very like, you know... Yeah. *Very lightly*.

33:15 RTH: Okay. And, and do you actually know what picture you were looking at?

33:22 Mel: No. I didn't, I didn't write that down. And I remember at the time thinking that it felt inconsequential.

33:30 RTH: So in the *first* beep you said, "I was looking at a picture of my friends in Melbourne."

33:37 Mel: Yep.

33:37 RTH: And in *this* picture, in *this* beep, you'd say, I was looking at Instagram, but I don't actually even know what I'm looking at.

33:46 Mel: Yep. Yeah. Cuz I would...this was different in the sense that yeah... that first one I was definitely taking in that particular image and, and... yeah, absorbing that. But then this one that wasn't that level of absorption.

34:01 RTH: Okay. And so does this feel, does this feel like my eyeballs are aimed and there's *nothing* in experience? Or does this feel like my eyeballs are aimed and there's *some minor little thing* in experience? Or maybe it's in the weeds and I can't be sure?

- 34:17 Mel: No, I think like minor little thing. It's not fully *nothing*, like them, definitely my eyeballs are pointed at and the taking in *something*, but like, at a *far less* level than the other.
- 34:29 RTH: Okay. And is there anything to say about *what it is* that you're taking in? Any, any experiential aspect?
- 34:37 Mel: Um... no.
- 34:45 RTH: Then I'm good.
- 34:49 JBK: I'm, I'm good, too.
- 34:51 RTH: And I would, and I would say that that for me has clarified a little bit about the distinction between *nothing* and *very slightly nothing*. That the first beep was *not* nothing.
- 35:03 Mel: Mm-hmm.
- 35:05 JBK: Yeah. That, that was interesting. Especially the pause where Mel at first you said they're similar or the same, and then, then you were like, actually...
- 35:17 Mel: They weren't. Yeah. Um...
- 35:18 JBK: ...this is the difference and yeah. So I see, Russ, what you mean about needing the question to be not leading. Because I think if it was a more leading question, then you wouldn't have had the chance, Mel, for that, *you know, well, actually, now that I think about it...*
- 35:35 Mel: Yeah. Um, okay.
- 35:38 RTH: Number 5?

SAMPLE 6.5 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 35:40 Mel: This went off at 6:28. Um, and I wrote, "I was midway through typing a message to someone. There wasn't much thought, the words were just quickly coming out of my fingers." But [laughs] this is interesting. This never happened before. I've written, "I was aware of some pain in my body at this point though," (I'd done Pilates in the morning, um, for the first time in a while), "and my glutes were sore," and I was consciously aware of it when this moment happened.
- 36:08 JBK: So you, you *were* aware of the glutes being sore?
- 36:11 Mel: Yeah.
- 36:12 JBK: Um, like...

- 36:13 Mel: That was it, I could feel that pain. And that was definitely in my present experience in the moment before the beep went off.
- 36:21 JBK: Uh, let's look at the message part for now. You're typing and words are coming. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] is, is that at all experienced or is that not the thing at this moment.
- 36:21 Julian comments: Looking back, I would get to the glutes part first, going for the (probably most present part of experience first).
- 36:30 Mel: That feels like autopilot-y? So like, it was in my awareness to some degree, but, but beyond that level of, you know, um, there wasn't like a whole lot of thought associated with it or whatever. That felt really like A to B, um, doing an action and not requiring much more than that. Um...Yeah.
- 36:57 JBK: And... Okay. And, and now for the, for the glutes part, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] uh, how would you, how would you describe that? Uh...
- 37:09 Mel: Ooh, good question. Um, like a, just like a, like a [laughs] throbbing, I guess. Um, so like I was standing up and I could just, that there was an awareness of (like *pain* feels like too strong a word), but like, you know, there was a... I I was just aware of that area of my body. And when I say aware... I mean... like a, like a, a tingle...you know?
- 37:48 JBK: A tingle, a tingle in the glutes?
- 37:51 Mel: A tingle or a throb or whatever.
- 37:53 JBK: Is that a right glute or a left glute? Or-
- 37:58 Mel: Both.
- 37:59 JBK: Both. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And by awareness, do you mean some kind of like, noticing like, *oh, my glutes hurt*? Or is it more just the sensation itself?
- 37:59 Russ comments: This is, to my ear, an even-handed question. At 35:40, Mel said "I was consciously aware of it," which could be understood as a hint of meta-awareness. At 36:08, JBK asked an ambiguous meta-awareness question ("So you, you were aware of the glutes being sore?"), and at 36:13 I thought Mel came down on the not-meta-awareness side ("That was it, I could feel that pain."). But regardless of how I understood it, I think there is warrant for following up on the meta-experience possibility.
- JBK's question, I think, gives equal personal and social desirability to the meta option and the sensory-awareness options, which means that Mel should be able to answer it without being squeezed into a corner. But, as usual, it is not my opinion of the question quality that matters—it is the characteristics of Mel's response. If she gives an answer that appears considered, uncoerced, and about the specific experience, then it was a good question. (I think she gives such an answer, but readers can judge for themselves.)

- 38:11 Mel: Yeah, like a, the, the sensation was present at the time. So like, in reflecting on my inner experience at the time that that presence was part of it. It wasn't a meta thing of like, oh, I'm noticing my glutes hurt, but it was like the glutes hurting was part of the inner experience.
- 38:30 JBK: Okay. It wasn't meta. It wasn't like, *oh, my glutes hurt*, but it was, the glutes were hurting.
- 38:38 Mel: The sensation was felt.
- 38:40 JBK: Um, tingling. Could you put an intensity to it, or does that not make sense?
- 38:40 Russ comments: No, it doesn't make sense. (This is part of the diamonds/glass series.) This asks for a comparison of a pristine experience to some unspecified unspecifiable chimera. Intensity by comparison to Mel's previous glute experiences? To her previous bodily experiences of any kind? To her sense of whether she has a typical pain tolerance by comparison to other people? Those are all unanswerable questions. If she gives an answer, it reflects a confusion between diamonds and glass...
- Julian comments: Hmm, I'm not sure of my thoughts here. I do agree that intensity questions can often be impossible to answer and the pain scales you answer at the doctor's are damn near impossible. A 7 out of 10 compared to what?? That being said, I do think there's an experiential difference between a mild sore toe and excruciating pain of, say, passing a kidney stone. That being said, I don't think that's so straightforward either—if the sore toe occupies the sole focus of experience at a certain moment, that may very well make the case for it being "intense." If the kidney stone pain slips from direct experience for a certain moment, even if physical nerve transmission is still present, at a certain moment it's not breaching direct consciousness. Well, then, at that moment it's not so intense. So I see your point of pain being impossible to compare and pin down and am open to it.
- 38:47 Mel: Well, I...yeah, no, it kind of makes sense. There was, it was intense enough that it was like within my awareness, um, but it wasn't like stopping me from doing my life. So I don't know, like, uh, I don't know. I feel like I'm really bad at these things when I go to the hospital and stuff.
- 39:09 JBK: You don't need to put a number to it or anything but...
- 39:12 Mel: Yeah, like, it was, it was, it was enough that it was definitely part of my awareness.
- 39:19 JBK: So part of it. But it wasn't like...
- 39:21 Mel: It wasn't overwhelming. No. It...
- 39:22 JBK: It wasn't overwhelming?
- 39:24 Mel: Yeah. No, it was, it was a, it was a background part of everyth— but then in saying that like me typing the message wasn't partic-, I wasn't particularly aware of that

either. So like in that sense, maybe, maybe you could argue like, this is when we are getting, you know, at the, the end of my ability to describe it. But, um, part of me wonders whether the experience of the pain in my glutes was actually more present than like, the message I was typing.

40:01 JBK: So more, more about the glutes with the possibility that the message was maybe just what was *happening* at this moment, but it wasn't really the thing that was...

40:11 Mel: Yeah. In terms of inner experience... Yeah, I think that's, I think that's true.

40:11 Russ comments: (continuing 38:40) But now we have a comparison between a pristine experience and another pristine experience, diamond to diamond (what I call an ipsative comparison). That *is* the kind of comparison that Mel can actually make, and she does so with confidence.

40:17 JBK: Okay. And about the sensation: were you standing up and this action, was the, was a pain associated with some action? Or was it just?...

40:31 Mel: No, I was standing up, but I hadn't just stood up or anything, no. Um, so it was just a constant...

40:41 JBK: And tingling. Is there a way you could further describe that? Like tingling, like little pricks, tingling, like burning? I, I don't know. Like, or is it just [Mel: Mm-hmm.] ... Or you don't need to stick to tingling. You could use, I don't know, is there another...

41:01 RTH: Um, the first word was *throbbing*, I think. [JBK: Throbbing.]

41:04 Mel: Yeah. I would say like throbbing and tingling to the point of like, where it's not, um, it's like a, a sensation that you're aware of rather than like, oh, I can like, you know, physically feel in like this. No, that's not a helpful description. Just like a, an, an awareness of a throb within that area, but it's not like... yeah, these words aren't helping get clarity. Sorry. No...

41:36 JBK: It's like a, a muscle thing or like a, a skin thing or?...

41:39 Mel: No! Not a skin thing. Yeah, no. Um, more... yeah, more like muscle, more like what I'm trying to say is like, it's, um, a deep feeling like within the, within the depths of my body so that like throb and tingle is like within the depths of my body, but it's not, yeah. Like, not like... do you know what I'm trying to say?

42:03 JBK: Um...

42:05 Mel: No. [laughs]

42:05 JBK: I think enough. I think I... Enough. Um, I don't know. Russ, do you have other questions? I, I think I'm good with questions for this one.

- 42:14 RTH: I have a couple. So, so there's sort of two strands of your whatever at, in this particular sample, it seems to me. There's the typing of the message, and there's the glute throb, tingle whatever. [Mel: (laughs) Mm-hmm.] And between those, which one is more prominent?
- 42:38 Mel: Yeah. Well, I'm initially probably...
- 42:41 RTH: As far as your experience, as far as your experience is concerned.
- 42:43 Mel: Yeah. I think it actually is the glute thing.
- 42:47 RTH: 60/40? 90/10? 99/1? 51/49? As far as your experience is concerned.
- 42:54 Mel: Um, I think like, in terms of experience, like, I think like 70/30 maybe, because the, the, even though I was really like mid action with the message and that sort of thing, there were, there was no, that was really automatic. Whereas the glute thing was a, like really distinct sensation that was part of my awareness. So I'd... yeah, I think that was like more significant than the other.
- 43:24 RTH: Okay. And I'm happy and I'm, I, I'm gonna make a meta comment here, comment here. So the, so there were two comparisons in this conversation. One is, how, how would you rate this pain? Like you were in the medical doctor's office. And the other is how, how would you compare the glute to the, to the typing? And from my point of view, those are two entirely different questions. One of them is worse than worthless, and the other is informative. Because the question about how would you rate this pain on some scale took Mel as (and she did a great job of articulating that), to some abstract not defined, in the doctor's office, you know, I'm going about my everyday life, whatever the hell that means. So it took, it takes her into a realm where she doesn't know what she's talking about, but she's trying to give an answer because he has asked the question. The alternative question is, how does the strength of *this* experience compare to the strength of *that* experience? That's a, within-Mel [Mel: Mm-hmm.] at the moment of this beep. There's no abstraction or very little abstraction there. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] And *that* question takes Mel to thinking about her *experience* of in the glute and her *experience* in the... in the typing.
- 44:48 JBK: Yeah.
- 44:49 RTH: And, and my guess, having, having heard the answer, my guess is when she said 70/30, I think what she really means is 90/10 [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And, and she's saying 70/30, because I don't, I don't know what, that's what she expected me to be asking or something. I don't, I don't actually, I don't actually know. But her, the definition [by "definition," Russ means the clarity, sharpness, distinctness of her locution] of her answer about the glute is way more defined. She knows, she knows...the, the experience of the glute is a clearly defined thing for her, it seems to me. But, I'm not, I'm not a mind reader, I'm just listening to how she talks about what she talks about. That's very clearly defined. And what's coming out of her fingers is not at all clearly defined. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

45:36 RTH: So my *guess* is that it's more, her experience was more about the glute thing. But, but I don't really *know* that, and I would, I'm engaging in this conversation cuz it's a sort of a complicated world that we're existing in here. But, uh, but I might say something like that. I, I might, I might in a, if it was, if I was just interested in Mel's experience, I would, I *might* say something like, *you know, you're a lot clearer when you talk about your glute thing than you were about your finger thing.* [Mel: Mmm.] *And let's see whether we can figure what that's about.*

46:09 Mel: Mmm.

46:11 JBK: Yeah. I mean...yeah 'bout the, the, the typing versus glute experience, I, it's, it's good that you asked about it again, Russ, because I think my impression, um, at some point was that this experience was *all* about the glutes, because Mel, when you kind of revised it and being like, actually I, I think the glute thing is, is more the thing [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um...yeah. I kind of mentally revised it to be like, oh, the typing was just autopilot, automatic. Um, so because I...yeah, I gotta say I was skeptical to it when you first reported it. I wanted... but now, now I don't know like how skeptical really to be about such things or when it, when it is pushing too much. Um, but...hmm.

47:14 Mel: This...Yeah. You go.

47:17 JBK: Go ahead, Russ.

47:18 Mel: Russ.

47:19 RTH: I, I I was gonna say, I don't know that we have too many sensory-awareness samples with Mel.

47:25 Mel: That's exactly what I was about to say. That this really stood out as like, this was a really different, we haven't *had* this sort of sample.

47:34 RTH: And, and I would, and I would say that as a general rule, or not a general rule, but *very often* people are a little shy about reporting sensory awarenesses as if they didn't count. And so they discount them. And, and now we're starting at in the glute area, [laughs] which might raise that shyness a tad, or whatever. And, uh, so, so the, so the, the, the bottom, the, the bottom line is that it's all about the iterative procedure. [Mel: Hmm.] We don't, we're, we are *not* gonna be able to say this is entirely glute-focused, which I think Mel, I think Julian, you, you *probably* are right about that, or *might very well* be right about that. And, but, but we *just can't tell* about this beep. But *now* I think we have had some practice with talking about Mel's glutes and uh, then the next time when, if or when that occurs, then, then we can go more directly in, in that direction and...

48:35 Mel: Hmm.

48:36 JBK: Yeah.

48:37 Mel: Yeah. I think this was a helpful one.

- 48:39 JBK: Yeah. It's also easier for *me* because I feel like there's more I can latch onto than these samples that are, you know, between a nothing and a something. And, and, and those are harder to, to entangle for me.
- 48:39 Julian comments: Or samples of absorbing / getting carried along by / taking in etc. that don't have clearly noted differentiated content but are *something*,
- 48:55 Mel: Yeah.
- 48:57 JBK: So...But I, I do like the challenge of those [laughs].
- 48:59 Mel: But, and you and me both. Like, as I said, I'm like week one, like it's sometimes it's really frustrating for me to be like, *Ugh! this is so wish washy!* But like that's, cuz that's sort of what that version of those experiences *is*. Whereas like, you know, this one, oh, this is good, we can latch onto like a tangible sensory thing. Or like, when there's a real distinct clarity of thought, like that's it, it's easier for *you* and it's also easier for *me*. It's when we get these nothingness ones, like I am equally as frustrated [laughs].
- 49:31 JBK: That's actually, I wanted to say last session before I froze, and then [Mel: Mm-hmm.] we were just talking about how I was frozen. But I was saying kind of a, a concern I had was that you didn't want there to be nothing. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And that you were maybe even a bit embarrassed about it or, and, and happy when there *was* something. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And...yeah, kind of something I, a concern of mine was that you would, I don't know, really want there to be something. So that's why I kind of lead by presenting this option of nothingness again. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, but it may also be that I'm too stuck on a presupposition. We had some nothing samples and maybe, you know, I'm, I'm trying to force that onto other samples. So...
- 50:30 Mel: No, I don't think you are. I think you're right. If anything is true, I'm like often searching for more, when, you know, if that's as good as we get on the nothingnesses. And that's my experience. And that is that!
- 50:45 RTH: Well, I have a, I have a little bit of a different take on it than that, I think, the, because I think Mel has been doing a pretty differentiated job of describing nothingness. There's the first photo, which is *I'm absorbed, but nothing beyond that*. And then there's the Instagram photo, which is *almost there was nothing even in, in the beginning of that*. It's, it's not like, it's not like this was totally glazed over. So, so, so I, I think she's doing a pretty good job of discriminating in the, in the nothing realm. And, and, or maybe I should say *we're* doing a pretty good job. It's, it's not...
- 51:29 Mel: Yeah.
- 51:30 RTH: It's a first-person-plural effort, I think.
- 51:35 Mel: Yeah. [Inaudible]

51:36 JBK: I guess what I'm trying to get into is *absorption*. Um, it, it could be something that just happens, like, as like looking at your phone screen is a thing. Absorption could be a, a thing that's happening but isn't like, you know, so- something experienced. So I guess I wanna hold onto that possibility when we talk about absorption and then if it is experienced, get into what it's, what it's like. But I guess, yeah, to still present the possibility that absorption could be something that's happening, something you're doing something. Um, but that's not something that's before the foot, footlights of consciousness, or foothills [laughs].

51:36 Russ comments: Here you have nounified a verb; Mel has said she is absorbed (a verb) in the phone pic, which you have changed into absorption (a noun), as if she applies this absorption thing to the pic. One of the problems with nounification is that it invites meta-awareness questions: What are the characteristics of this absorption thing? Nounification is (or at least can be) a huge distortion. If Mel is truly absorbed (a verb) in the pic, then the *only* thing she experiences is the pic—that's what it means to be absorbed. But if absorption is a thing, then when Mel is truly absorbed there are *two* experienced things: the pic and the absorption. To my ear, Mel has not given any substantial hints that there is a separation between the pic and the absorption, so JBK will have to be careful not to covertly insist on its existence.

52:28 RTH: So I, so I, I think it's great that you wanna push on that, Julian. That.. And the, the challenge, the challenge is to push on it in such a way that Mel does not feel pushed upon. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And that is, that is indeed a challenge. And, but that is, I, I think that is a human challenge. I think that's the how do, how do we, how do we ask the series of questions without indicating to Mel that there's a right answer and a wrong answer to this question? [Mel: Mm.] And that's the... the art of the whole thing.

52:28 Russ comments: RTH 52:28 is not a very well-crafted turn. If I had it to do over, I would say something like:

RTH: [substitute version] So I think it's great, Julian, that you wanna hold onto the possibility that when we talk about being absorbed, there might be some characteristics of the being absorbed. The challenge is to hold onto that possibility without pushing on Mel. The easiest way to do that is for Julian to be completely indifferent, so that it doesn't matter a whit to Julian whether there are or are not such characteristics. If Julian is truly indifferent, then Mel will not feel pushed upon. That indifference is indeed a challenge, but is, I think, the basic human challenge: How do we ask the series of questions without indicating to Mel that Julian knows the right answer and the wrong answer to this question? And that's the... the art of the whole thing.

53:02 Mel: Alright, last beep?

53:04 RTH: Last beep. And I, and I, I guess I would say we, we are at an hour.

53:09 Mel: Oh, do you want it or not? Wait, let me say if it's interesting. It's not really interesting.

53:15 RTH: I, I don't, you, you shouldn't be the judge of that! I think we should do it on the basis of time and *we'll* decide whether it's interesting. [Mel and Russ laugh]

53:23 JBK: Our recording time is 53 minutes, so [RTH: Let's do it.] I'd say let's give it a shot? Yeah.

SAMPLE 6.6 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

53:28 Mel: Okay. [RTH: Let's, let's go for it.] Um, 6:51, this went off and I've written, uh, "I was cooking and very much on autopilot. There was no overwhelming emotion or vibe. Um, I wasn't really thinking, I was just doing."

53:48 RTH: And, and anything in particular about the cooking? Was it I'm cooking *soup* or I'm cooking *whatever*, or does that doesn't even matter.

53:57 Mel: I was about to turn the fry pan on and put some greens in there. I remember that much. But, um... no, there wasn't, in terms of experiential, not a lot happening here.

54:13 RTH: So my body is engaged in a task which I can describe as being cooking.

54:18 Mel: Yep.

54:19 RTH: And that no doubt involves my hands and arms and whole body carrying this and my eyes balls, and probably my ears and the rest of my senses, and to some degree to engage skillfully in this task.

54:32 Mel: Yeah.

54:33 RTH: But with no experience *at all*? As far as before the footlights of my consciousness? It's just these actions are coming out of me?

54:42 Mel: Yeah. I'd say actions are coming out of me.

54:51 RTH: [pause] Then I think I'm good.

54:53 Mel: I know. [laughs]

54:54 RTH: Give Julian a chance to...

54:56 JBK: I'm, I'm good on that. Um, I'm curious... mmm, if you could say, if it, how it's the same... n- nevermind. I I was gonna try to ask one of these same or different questions to, to try to get at earlier beeps. I don't think that's a good idea because I think the point's to figure out this beep, not retroactively try to figure out other beeps. [Mel: Yeah.]

55:27 RTH: My, my reaction to that as, as a matter of method, is that as if the other beep is clearly available, then there's, then there is often a good reason to compare it. So com-, So talking about beeps from *today*, I would say, *good*. If I...I think at the beginning of this conversation, we talked about some conversation beeps and it wasn't clear to me

exactly which conversation beeps we were having. We had several conversation beeps. *That*, to my aesthetic, is problematic [Mel: Mm-hmm.] because then we put the generalization on.... But if we want to compare the conversation that was in beep 2 *today* to the cooking beep, then I think that's more-or-less fair game.

56:16 Mel: Mm-hmm.

56:16 RTH: But I don't, I'm not suggesting that we do that. I'm, that's just a general purpose technical...kind of a thing.

56:29 JBK: Well, I guess we could try with beep 2 and, but Mel, feel free to say that's, I, I can't make that comparison, or you don't know. Beep 2 was listening to your, your sister.

56:46 Mel: Yeah.

56:48 RTH: Or the other alternative, what might be even closer would be beep 3 where you're putting clothes away.

56:48 Russ comments: If I had this to do over again, I would not switch the focus away sample 2. JBK should have had the right to ask the question he wanted to ask.

56:53 Mel: Yeah... Yeah. This feels closer to beep 3. So my hesitation around the beep 2 one was that it is a different, very slight, but very different inner experience because I am engaged in active listening. Um, and so like really absorbing whatever she was saying at the time. Whereas in the cooking, I don't necessarily feel like that was an overwhelming...that, that wasn't super present. Like I, that was more that autopilot thing. So I think there is a distinction there. So, um,[coughing] comparing it to putting the cloths away, it feels really similar, though. Where like you're doing things and whatever, but you're not, there's not like a particular sensory awareness or a vibe-y or a thought-y—just doing things, and beyond that it's pretty... nothing. They feel similar.

57:57 JBK: All right. I'm good on questions.

58:01 RTH: Me too. [JBK: I...] should we do this again? Oh, what, what, what did we think of the time, time of day?

58:07 Mel: This is fine for me. Are you okay with this, Julian?

ANSWERS TO EXERCISES FOR THE READER

7:10

Exercise for the reader (1):

As a way of investigating whether JBK 6:44 is a good question, compare Mel 7:10 to Mel 6:16 (her previous utterance). Do they differ on whether they are attempting to describe experience at the moment of the beep?

RTH's answer: Mel's 7:10 answer is hugely subjunctified and not at all about any particular beep. Mel's 6:16 answer is at first a bit subjunctified but then a straightforward declarative description of her particular sample. There is doubtless a kernel of truth somewhere in Mel's 7:10 answer, but exactly where and how much is hard to say. If one is to be good at DES, one has to develop a discrimination for the difference between those two answers and a preference for the 6:16-kind of answer. (This is, of course, another in the diamonds vs. glass series.)

JBK's answer: JBK 6:44 is a bad question.

25:34

Exercise for the reader (2):

Which question is better, if any, and why? Hint: It is not about the words.

- (A) Do you think there's anything experiential at this moment?
- (B) Is there anything experiential at this moment?
- (C) Do you experience anything at this moment?

RTH's answer:

Question (A) asks for a speculation, not a description. It is of the same form as "Do you think there's a war in Ukraine at this moment?" That no doubt requires some analysis of the definition of "war," the credibility of sources, and so on. It does not ask for a description of a phenomenon; it asks for a conclusion based on analysis. I don't care what words you use, but I do care whether you are encouraging Mel, as directly as you can, to describe her experience, not to analyze it. It is not about the words, because if you clearly, facile-ly, skillfully differentiate between analysis and description, it will not occur to you to ask about analysis, by whatever words.

Question (B) is problematic because "experiential" refers to a general or a potential—something that *might be* experienced. For example, one might contrast experiential knowledge from book learning. DES is not about the potential for experience. It is about what is actually experienced. It is not about the words, because if you clearly, facile-ly, skillfully differentiate between potential and actuality, it will not occur to you to ask about potential, by whatever words.

So I think the best question is (C). It asks directly about what we are directly interested in—Mel's experience.

Julian's answer:

(C) is the best. "There is" puts a remove before we get to experiential. I don't imagine anything meta but now it makes even more sense how it comes across as meta. I think it has to do with the frame of reference issue that I drew the boxes for. "There is" takes a frame of reference outside of Mel to then try to understand her experience. When she makes sense of it, she's doing it within her experiential frame of reference, so then 'experiential' becomes a smaller subcategory of this. Now it makes so much more sense why she interpreted this as meta!