

Article

The Integration of Experience, Awareness, & Consciousness into the Relational-Matrix Model II: Consciousness and the Awareness of Experience

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ABSTRACT

We have demonstrated how seemingly separate experiential realities can come to exist within the context of an ultimately indivisible, singular existence, but not why there exists an awareness of experience itself. That is, although we have demonstrated how existence can impactively interact with itself to create the form of any experience, we have yet to explain why there exists an awareness of that experiential form—in other words, why the differentiated area of reality that exists as the experiencer is aware of the form of its impactive-interactive relationship with the surrounding reality. In the following sections, we will explain why an awareness of the experiential boundary exists. In understanding why awareness exists, the nature of consciousness will become apparent.

Consciousness is unlimited, borderless, and undefined, whereas awareness is limited, bordered, and defined. When awareness becomes caught up in experiential reality, mistaking experiential reality for an independently existent reality, it literally becomes un-consciousness, or the opposite of consciousness. Since, for awareness, reality is whatever it experiences it to be, although awareness always remains what it is (i.e., consciousness), what awareness can experience itself to be is another matter entirely. For this reason, awareness can become unaware, can become unconscious of what it is, can become experientially cut off or separated from the consciousness that lies both within and beyond the screen of experience.

Key Words: experience, awareness, consciousness, integration, unified model of reality, relational-matrix model.

Section 1 The Nature of Awareness

1.1 *Awareness as intrinsic to physical reality*

As we have shown, there exists nothing we can call a physical reality in the absence of an experience of that reality. We can also state that there exists nothing we can call an experience in the absence of an awareness of that experience. The last statement is self-evident, for I would challenge anyone to name or describe an experience of which they're unaware.

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Therefore, since there exists no physical reality in the absence of experience, and no experience in the absence of awareness, we can state that there exists no physical reality in the absence of an awareness of that physical reality. Therefore, awareness is intrinsic to the existence of what we experience as physical reality. Furthermore, physical reality, as we experience it to exist—which is the only way it does exist—can't itself be the source or cause of awareness, because the experiential existence of physical reality is dependent upon a coexistent awareness.

It's commonly thought and assumed that the brain or central nervous system in some way produces what we call awareness and, mistakenly, also call consciousness. However, the brain is a physical experiential reality, and as a defined reality, it exists as such only within the context of experience, just as experience exists as such only within the context of a coexistent awareness. That is, the brain can't exist as we experience it to exist—i.e., as brain, as a defined physical reality—without at least a coexistent awareness that can experience it as such. How, then, can the brain, as we experience it to exist as a physical reality, be the source of its own objective existence? It can't. The brain, as an experiential reality, can't be the source of the awareness necessary for its own experiential existence.

The notion that the brain is some type of machine or machination which, in some unknown way, churns out the product consciousness-awareness has no basis within the context of an understanding of physical reality as a relative or experiential reality. How can a machinelike brain produce consciousness and awareness when its supposed product is intrinsic to the existence of the machine itself? It can't. We can't construct a machine to produce something when the machine itself first needs its own product in order to exist as a machine.

Let's say we've found some type of mechanism, and wherever we see that mechanism, there exists in its vicinity a certain alloy. The only place we see this alloy is near this mechanism. We then come to the conclusion that this mechanism must be the producer of this alloy and that this alloy is produced only by this machine. But what happens to that theory when we find out, as we study the mechanism, that the alloy itself is intrinsic to the mechanism? We can pretend that it doesn't matter, and go on insisting that the mechanism is the producer of the alloy; or we can come to the inevitable conclusion that the alloy must come from somewhere besides the mechanism, since there must have already been some alloy in existence before the mechanism's construction, since the alloy is part of the mechanism itself.

In our experience, awareness is associated with brain function. This observation has led us to the assumption that the brain is in some way the producer of awareness. However, as we have just demonstrated, awareness is intrinsic to physical reality, and so awareness is itself necessary for the brain to exist as we experience it to exist, which is as some type of machine or machination. At this point, either we can go on insisting on the validity of our assumption that the brain, as a physical reality, produces awareness, or we can look for a source of awareness that lies beyond what we experience as brain. By now, you probably know which way we'll go. Since we can't look to physical reality as the source of awareness, we must look elsewhere.

1.2 *The localization of existence into awareness*

If the brain isn't the actual source of awareness, then where does awareness come from? As we will show, awareness doesn't come "from" anywhere; rather, awareness is what exists relatively somewhere when what exists absolutely everywhere becomes localized to a particular somewhere by existing in relation to itself.

In order for there to be experience, differentiated existence must impact itself, forming an experiencer/experienced duality. The formation of the experiencer/experienced duality defines a relative somewhere within what exists absolutely everywhere. It's this localization of existence to a relative somewhere that makes what exists literally a-where—i.e., aware. The modifier "ness" denotes "a condition, quality, or state of being." So, awareness is the state of being aware—i.e., the state of being relatively somewhere, rather than being absolutely everywhere or nowhere,¹ as depicted in **figure 75**.

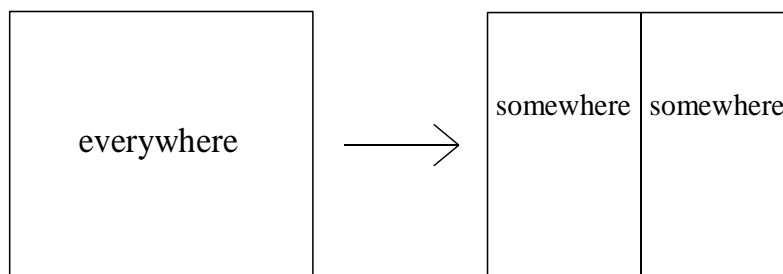


Figure 75 When what exists everywhere comes to exist in relation to itself, what is created are relative somewheres.

To understand how what exists everywhere can exist in relation to itself to form awareness, let's use the following example. Let's say that our existence fills a room. That existence filling the room we will call our everywhere existence. Now, let's drop a curtain in the middle of that room. Our existence still fills the entire room, but now our existence also has another level of existence. There's still our existence everywhere, but now there's also existence on one side of the curtain and existence on the other side of the curtain—i.e., there's now a relational level of existence existing within the context of our everywhere existence.

These existences on either side of the curtain are only relative. Neither exists as such except in relation to the other; what exists on one side of the curtain exists as such only in relation to the complementary existence on the other side of the curtain. These two relative existences are thus inseparable, one not existing without the other. These two relative existences are analogous to the experiencer/experienced duality.

¹ Everywhere and nowhere are conceptually equivalent. Everywhere isn't somewhere, for somewhere is a specific place within everywhere and implies the coexistence of somewhere else. Therefore, if everywhere isn't somewhere, we can say that what doesn't exist somewhere is nowhere, which is the same as everywhere. Nowhere shouldn't be confused with nonexistence or no-existence; nowhere simply means that there's no localization of existence to any relative somewhere, i.e., either here or there.

There are now two levels of existence that exist simultaneously. There's the absolute level of existence, which is the everywhere existence that fills the room. This existence is absolute because its existence isn't dependent upon any other existence; it is what it is. There's also a relational level of existence, consisting of the complementary somewhere/somewhere-else existences on either side of the curtain. The relational level of existence can be said to extend from or exist within the absolute level of existence. The relational level of existence isn't other than the absolute level of existence, and each relational pole of that relational level of existence (i.e., somewhere and somewhere else) isn't other than absolute existence. Yet, as they exist, as relative realities, as somewhere and somewhere else, those relational poles are conditional and constrained because, as relative realities, the existence of each relational pole depends on the existence of the other, complementary pole.

The existence that fills the room is existence every-where. The relative existences on either side of the curtain-boundary are each existence some-where.

Existence that's everywhere we can call every-where-ness, i.e., the state of being everywhere.

Existence that's localized to a relative somewhere we can call some-where-ness, i.e., the state of being somewhere. Existence that's somewhere is existence that's a-where, or existing in a state of awareness.

1.3 *The coexistence of awareness and experience*

In order for existence everywhere to become existence somewhere and existence somewhere else, a boundary or dividing line needs to be imposed within existence everywhere, creating the relative existences somewhere and somewhere else. Existence that's relatively somewhere thus has something extra, something additional, that isn't present in existence everywhere. That "something extra" intrinsic to the relative existence of some-where-ness (i.e., awareness) is the boundary that defines it as relative existence.

Thus, existence that's relatively somewhere consists of existence on one side of the boundary, and the boundary itself that differentiates existence somewhere from existence somewhere else. The boundary is what defines that existence somewhere, for the boundary is what defines somewhere in relation to somewhere else. The boundary that defines the somewhereness (i.e., awareness) is what we have described as the experiential boundary, and this boundary is also, then, what the awareness defined by that boundary experiences as reality.

The boundary that defines existence somewhere is intrinsic to that existence somewhere, and so it's inseparable from that existence somewhere. Each existence somewhere thus consists of a defined area of existence and the boundary which defines that area as somewhere, i.e., as a-where or aware. There's no somewhere without a somewhere else, and there's neither somewhere nor somewhere else without a boundary that defines their relationship. A room consists of the a defined area of space and the walls which define that area. Likewise, relative

existence, at the level where differentiated existence impacts itself, consists of a defined area of existence (awareness) and the boundary which defines that area (experience).

Absolute existence everywhere doesn't need a boundary to exist; it exists independent of any boundary. However, the relative existences somewhere and somewhere else depend on a boundary for their existence as relative realities. Thus, there's no existence somewhere, no somewhereness, without experience, and there's no experience without absolute existence becoming localized to a relative somewhere, i.e., into a state of awareness.

Each relative existence, then, has two complementary aspects. One aspect is the existence somewhere, which we can call the relative-existence content, or the *whereness content*. The other aspect is the boundary which defines that existence somewhere, which we can call the relative-existence construct, or the *whereness construct*. The whereness content is equivalent to awareness; the whereness construct is equivalent to the experience itself, i.e., the experiential reality or object, as depicted in **figure 76**.

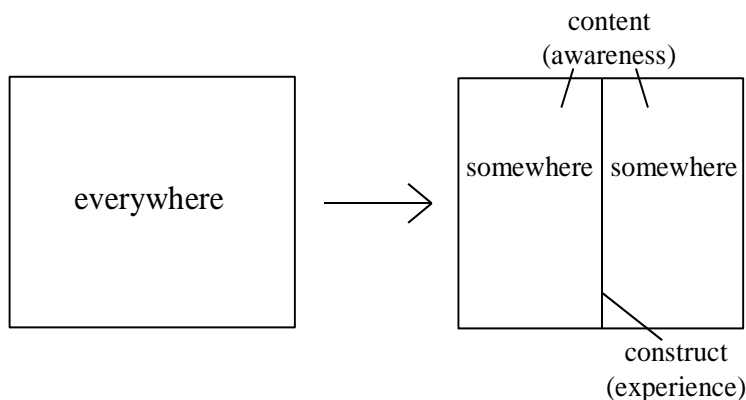


Figure 76 When existence everywhere becomes defined in relation to itself, what exists at that relational level of existence are two somewheres, as well as the boundary that defines those somewheres in relation to each other. Thus, each somewhere consists of the differentiated area of existence where it is (whereness content), and the boundary that defines it as being there (whereness construct). The content of each somewhere is awareness, and the boundary or construct that defines each somewhere is experience, i.e., the experiential reality.

What exists directly where we are at each moment? Our awareness, the content of our relational being. What surrounds that awareness? Experience, the construct that defines our awareness. Awareness and experience are dual aspects of relational being, the complementary aspects of existence that's existing in relation to itself by having become defined in relation to itself.

So, why does an awareness of experience exist? Because where differentiated existence impacts itself and thereby becomes defined in relation to itself, existence is existing somewhere in relation to somewhere else, and there also exists a construct which defines that relationship and thus is inseparable from that existence somewhere. In other words, whenever existence

everywhere is localized into existence somewhere, i.e., into a state of awareness, there must coexist with that awareness a boundary which defines the awareness as such, and that boundary is what existence somewhere, defined as awareness, is aware of as its experience of reality.

We can't become defined as existence somewhere without a boundary which defines that somewhere, and while our existence is defined as being there, that boundary is then inseparable from our being there—in other words, inseparable from our awareness. For this reason, wherever there's awareness, there's experience; and wherever there's experience, there's awareness. So, an awareness of experience exists because awareness and experience are two sides of the same coin, two aspects of the same relative existence, as depicted in **figure 77**.

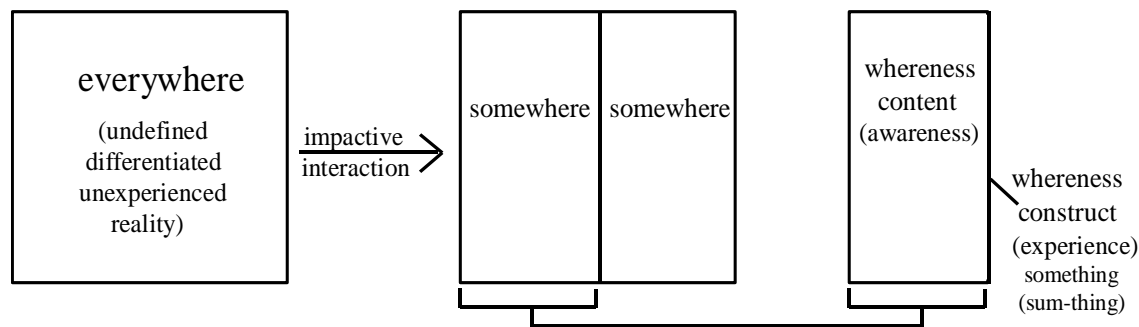


Figure 77 Where existence becomes defined in relation to itself through an impactive interaction, existence is being somewhere, and that existence somewhere is awareness. Furthermore, the boundary which defines that awareness is experience. That boundary we will also call the whereness construct, because the form of that boundary is the way awareness is structured. Undefined unexperienced differentiated existence is what it is. Existence that has become defined in relation to itself is what it is (awareness), and it's also the boundary that defines its relationship with itself (experience).

Before we go on to discuss the source of the experiencer/experienced duality, we will first discuss the role played by what we experience as brain in the formation of our particular experiencer/experienced duality.

1.4 *The function of the defined physical reality we experience as brain*

The basis of the localization of existence into awareness and the simultaneous creation of experience is the differentiation of existence, which allows existence to impactively interact with itself, thereby forming a somewhere/somewhere-else duality. The experiencer/experienced duality is simply the somewhere/somewhere-else duality where one existence somewhere has become defined as here (i.e., as the experiencer) and the other existence somewhere has become defined as there (i.e., as the experienced reality). Actually, no existence somewhere is separable from existence anywhere else. However, as differentiated existence impacts itself, impactive boundaries come to exist, as when the finger touches the nose. Within the context of the

impactive-interactive relationship, differentiated existence becomes defined in relation to itself. The impactive boundary exists as experience, and one of the existences somewhere which is defined by that boundary exists as awareness.

What exists where we experience our bodies to be are primary distortion processes that are interacting to form compound distortion processes, which themselves are interacting to form higher order and more differentiated compound processes, none of which is actually separable from the rest of existence. As the differentiated area of reality that exists where our bodies are is impacted by the surrounding reality, those impactive interactions define an experiential relationship between what exists where are bodies are and what exists around our bodies. Within the context of those impactive interactions, and only within that context, what we experience as our bodies then becomes defined as somewhere in relation to the surrounding reality as somewhere else; and in becoming so defined, existence where our bodies are exists in relation to the surrounding reality as an experiencer/experienced duality.

The brain is a differentiated area of reality that has evolved to be impacted by, and to respond to impacts by, certain other types of differentiated existence. Here, we're concerned only with the ability of the differentiated area of reality we experience as brain to be impacted by the surrounding reality and so become defined in relation to that surrounding reality. How the brain responds to those impacts—i.e., how it responds to external stimuli—isn't currently relevant.

The function of the differentiated area of reality that we experience as brain is to act as a highly reactive and selective impactive-interactive interface. By acting as the means by which differentiated existence impacts itself and thus becomes defined in relation to itself, the differentiated area of reality we experience as brain allows the creation of a somewhere/somewhere-else duality and, thus, an experiencer/experienced duality.

Organic physical sensors are selectively impacted by a certain type of differentiated existence, e.g., the photoreceptor cells in the retina of the eye are stimulated by primary distortion processes (i.e., what we experience as light).^{*} This impact then results in the sensory nerve associated with those cells—i.e., the optic nerve—being stimulated and thereby sending a signal and impacting certain areas of the brain, e.g., the visual cortex. In this way, the brain receives stimuli or impacts from all over the body by way of the different organic physical sensors and associated sensory nerves.

While the organic physical sensors are the first to be impacted by the surrounding reality, the brain is the central area where all of these different impacts converge. The organic physical sensors and associated sensory nerves are merely the means by which the differentiated area of reality we experience as brain is impacted by the surrounding reality. The brain is, for us, the primary means by which our existence becomes localized into awareness as an experiencer/experienced duality, because where the brain is experienced to be is the differentiated area of reality that's ultimately impacted by the surrounding reality.

^{*} It should be kept in mind that the defined experiential reality we call light doesn't exist as such until it's experienced as a physical reality.

If a sensory nerve is cut, the brain doesn't receive a signal through the sensory nerve from an impact upon the organic physical sensor, and so there's then no awareness of the impact as a physical reality. For instance, if the optic nerve is cut, or isn't working for any reason, light can still impact the photoreceptor cells in the retina of the eye, but those impacts don't then become an awareness of the physical experience of light or color. Conversely, during brain surgery, vivid experiences of light and color can be created by direct stimulation of the visual cortex. These examples provide evidence that the impacts upon the differentiated area of reality we experience as brain are what define existence where we are as an experiencer/experienced duality.

However, the foregoing discussion of the brain as the means by which existence impacts itself, becomes defined in relation to itself, and so becomes localized into awareness as an experiencer/experienced duality, shouldn't be construed as a statement that the brain is itself the source of that awareness. The brain isn't the ultimate source of awareness any more than a faucet is the ultimate source of water. The brain functions to localize what exists everywhere to a certain somewhere, just as the faucet functions to deliver water, which exists everywhere, to a certain somewhere.

If you'd never been out of your house, and never looked out a window when it was raining, you'd know of water only in relation to the faucet. In such a case, it might seem as if faucets were the cause and source of the existence of water, when in reality the faucet is only a means or mechanism for the delivery of water. In the same way, our awareness or experience of reality exists in relation to brain function, and so we have assumed that the brain is the cause and source of awareness, when in actuality the brain is simply a means or mechanism by which what exists everywhere becomes localized to a particular somewhere. Although the two are related, the means or mechanism of delivery shouldn't be mistaken for the ultimate source of what's being delivered.

The existence of awareness itself is a function of relational matrix (whereness) content, which is ultimately the same everywhere, since all relational matrix content consists of the same existence existing in relation to itself. What any awareness experiences is a function of the whereness construct which defines that awareness. So, while all relative existence can be awareness and all awareness has the same ultimate source, all awareness doesn't have the same experience, since ultimately inseparable and undefined whereness content coexists with different defining whereness constructs.

The type and size of the brain are related to states of awareness, or the quality of awareness as a function of what an awareness experiences as reality, but the brain isn't responsible for the existence of awareness itself. The source of awareness is absolute existence, or reality as it is. The bigger the faucet, forming a larger conduit, the more water that can come out; and the bigger the brain, forming a larger impactive interface, the more numerous and varied can the impactive interactions be, and so the more defined will be the awareness which exists in the differentiated area of reality so defined by those impactive interactions.

The brain is fundamentally an impactive interface, and the evolution of the brain represents an expansion of that impactive interface. As the impactive interface has expanded, the ability of

differentiated existence to impactively interact with itself has increased, resulting a wider range of experiences (and responses) and a correspondingly more defined awareness.

Any differentiated area of reality can be aware if that area is capable of being impacted by other differentiated areas of reality. The brain is simply a differentiated area of reality that has evolved to perform this function particularly well. It doesn't take a brain to be aware, but, having a brain or central nervous system certainly must create a different experiencer/experienced duality and, thus, a different state of awareness, from what would exist in some other differentiated area of reality that wasn't as receptive to being impacted.

A brain and a rock are both compound processes, and both are inseparable parts of existence. Ultimately, the whereness content of the area where the brain exists and the whereness content of the area where the rock exists aren't different, for any differentiated area of reality is always the same existence existing in relation to itself. However, each area has a different pattern of organization. These different patterns of organization create different impactive-interactive abilities for each compound process. The differentiated area of reality that exists where we experience a rock to be would have a rock awareness, dictated by whatever impactive interactions define that differentiated area of reality as somewhere in relation to somewhere-else. Our awareness is probably much more defined, and our experiences probably much more numerous, because the differentiated area of reality we experience as brain would seem to be more impactable, more reactive, than the area we call a rock.

Although it may seem quite strange to many readers to discuss the awareness of a rock, the fact is that there's no basis for assuming that any differentiated area of reality is unaware. We exist, and we're aware. So, why do we assume that other aspects of existence are unaware? Because we can't carry on a conversation with those existences? Because they can't say to us, in our language, "I'm aware"?

Conversely, we could argue that we have no reason to assume that any differentiated area of reality is aware. However, the preceding arguments regarding the nature of awareness refute that position and, instead, point to the conclusion that awareness and experience are attributes of the relative localization of existence, as existence comes to exist in relation to itself, regardless of the means of that localization. The source of awareness is existence itself, which is everywhere. All it takes to be aware of experience is for existence to become defined in relation to itself through impactive interactions. What is a rock aware of? What does a rock experience? Who knows? I certainly don't, because I'm not a rock! However, what I do know is that if the differentiated area of reality which exists where I am is aware of experience, then there's no reason not to think that differentiated areas of reality elsewhere are also aware of experience, since outside the divisive context of experience, there's no real separation, and very little real difference, between what exists here, as my awareness, and what "I" experience to exist over there, as "it."

So, although the brain may contribute to our particular state of awareness and be responsible for what we are aware of as our particular experiences of reality, the brain isn't the source of our awareness, for the source of awareness lies in existence itself. That having been said, let's now turn our attention and discussion to the ultimate source of awareness and experience.

Section 2 Consciousness as Absolute Existence

In the preceding section, we described awareness as a relative localization of existence. On the basis of that description, we can say that awareness doesn't actually come "from" anywhere. Rather, awareness is simply existence coming to exist in relation to itself and, thus, being relatively somewhere rather than being absolutely everywhere.

If awareness is existence being relatively somewhere, then what could we call existence being absolutely everywhere? Consciousness! Consciousness is what exists absolutely everywhere, and awareness is consciousness localized to a relative somewhere. So, we don't actually experience consciousness; what we experience is consciousness polarized or dualized into a relative state of awareness.

Since any localized area of existence somewhere has the quality of a-where-ness, then nonlocalized existence everywhere would have the quality of every-where-ness or no-where-ness. This unbordered everywhere-ness is consciousness. Thus, consciousness could also be called everywhere-ness, or nowhere-ness, i.e., existence being absolutely everywhere and, thus, nowhere.

Within the context of the unified model of reality, consciousness is what exists absolutely.² *Sat-chit-ananda*: Existence-consciousness-bliss.³ Consciousness is what it is and also what we are. We can't experience consciousness as such, because experience requires an experiencer/experienced duality. Therefore, being in the relative state of awareness necessary to be aware of any experience precludes our being, in that instant, in the nonrelative state of absolute consciousness.

We mistakenly call our awareness our consciousness because our awareness is the child of consciousness, but awareness as such isn't consciousness. That is, although awareness is a relative extension of consciousness and has consciousness as its foundation, awareness is not absolute existence, but relative existence. Consciousness is unconstrained, undefined, borderless existence. Awareness is constrained, defined, bordered existence, which must coexist with the boundary which defines that existence, which boundary is experience itself.

Thus, awareness of experience and consciousness actually are mutually exclusive states of being, since one involves an existent duality and the other exists in the absence of any duality. Awareness is a state of consciousness, but consciousness is more than awareness. Any attempt to define consciousness can be made only from a position of awareness, and so what's defined as consciousness can't be consciousness as it exists directly.

² Furthermore, we should understand that "consciousness" (the word) isn't what exists directly; rather "consciousness" is what we call what exists directly. "Consciousness" is a sign pointing to a reality that's ultimately nameless and borderless. "Consciousness" is our way of conceptually packaging that which defies packaging. Thus, when we say that what exists is consciousness, what we're really saying is that "consciousness" is what we call that which exists, which can't be named, because naming is defining, and in defining it, it's not that.

³ *Sat-chit-ananda* is translated as "existence-consciousness-bliss." In ancient Hindu texts, this is considered the triple state of absolute being.

Ultimately, we're not other than absolute existence, not other than consciousness itself. However, as we've come to exist now, as differentiated areas of reality impactively interacting with the surrounding reality (from which we are ultimately inseparable), we exist in a relative state of awareness of experience. For this reason, our existence, which ultimately is borderless and unconfined consciousness, becomes, at this relational level of existence, bordered and confined awareness of experience.

For those of us who would like to get beyond the duality and relativity of existence intrinsic to experience, the situation seems hopeless until we realize that we're inseparable from whatever it is that exists. Owing to this existential inseparability, we have direct access to whatever it is that exists by virtue of the inescapable fact that we *are* that. We can't go here or there to see it, or look at ourselves and see it; we can only *be* it. For as long as we're conceiving and perceiving what we are, we're precluded from directly being what we are.

Consciousness is absolute existence, existence that's not confined or limited to a relative somewhere. Consciousness is existence that's not experiencing itself but just being itself, being what it is. However, consciousness is also relative existence, existence that's confined or limited to a relative somewhere, experiencing itself as it exists in a relative state of awareness.

As previously pointed out, the evolution of each new relational level of existence doesn't eliminate the level of existence from which that new level extends. Therefore, the relative existence of awareness doesn't preclude the continued absolute existence of consciousness. The experiencer/experienced duality is an overlay upon undivided consciousness-existence.

Without the foundation of absolute existence, there can be no relative existence. Without the foundation of consciousness, there can be no awareness. Without the foundation of unexperienced reality, there can be no experiential reality. Without the foundation of universal being, there can exist no individual being.⁴

2.1 *Before the beginning (of the universe) there was..... consciousness*

This work began with the proposition that absolute existence successively dualizes to form the relational matrix—i.e., the relational structure upon which, and out of which, differentiated existence extends and evolves. We said that absolute existence could be considered an existent nothingness, since it exists without the boundaries or dividing lines that define a thing. We described absolute existence as being nothing and nowhere, because it's everything and everywhere. Therefore, absolute existence is conceptually equivalent to consciousness, which we have also described as being everywhere and, thus, nowhere.

⁴ Although we tend to think of the word "individual" as implying an independently existent person, the word has as its roots the two words "indivisible" and "dual." The word "individual" therefore denotes an indivisible duality, which is another way of saying a relational state of being.

We described the evolution of existence as absolute existence existing repetitively and progressively in relation to itself, thereby becoming differentiated, and then, finally, interacting with itself as differentiated existence to create experiential reality and an awareness of experience. If the term “consciousness” is substituted for “absolute existence,” we can then say that consciousness evolves into the awareness of experience by existing repetitively and progressively in relation to itself. Awareness is simply what exists where we are, as a relative aspect of the consciousness that exists everywhere.

Absolute existence is consciousness, and all relative reality is formed through consciousness-existence coming to exist in relation to itself. We are that consciousness, we are that absolute existence coming to exist in relation to itself, impactively interacting with itself, and thus existing as consciousness in a relative state of awareness of experience. Thus, we’re consciously aware beings, or, literally, consciousness existing (i.e., being) in a relative state of awareness.

There’s really nothing else other than the no-thing of consciousness. The universe of experiential some-things arises as the underlying unexperienced no-thing of consciousness exists in relation to itself. None of these experiential somethings has an independent existence, for all somethings actually are relationally existent extensions of the underlying no-thing of consciousness.

Therefore, physical reality is a product of consciousness; consciousness isn’t a product of physical reality. Physical reality doesn’t interact with itself in some unknown fashion to cause consciousness to come into existence. Rather, consciousness, through a process of repetitive and progressive self-relation, becomes an awareness of experience and thus creates what we experience as physical reality.

Section 3 Experiential Mechanics II

What we experience we consider to be reality. As previously explained, all experience requires a coexistent awareness. We can be aware of three fundamental types of experience: physical, mental, and emotional. Our total experience of reality consists of these three intertwined experiential realities.

So far we’ve described the experiential process only in terms of physical experience. Using the experiential model developed to explain the existence of physical experience, in this section we will describe how consciousness, by existing in relation to itself as a differentiated relational matrix, also creates mental experience. Once we have described the nature of physical and mental experiences, we will examine the nature of emotional experience.

We’re aware of both physical and mental experiences in each moment. On the one hand, through our five physical senses, we’re constantly experiencing the universe as composed of separate physical, observable, or in some way tangible or definable components. On the other hand, we also find ourselves perpetually experiencing the mental components of thought and concept. Our physical experiences seem to occur within the realm we call space, and our mental experiences seem to occur within the realm we call mind.

Physical and mental experiences can incite emotional experiences, and emotional experiences can incite physical and mental experiences. All three types of experience are different, yet they are all related. In the discussion to follow, we will show how physical, mental, and emotional experiences all arise as extensions of consciousness existing in relation to itself.

3.1 *The framework of experiential reality*

For experience to exist, differentiated existence must impactively interact with itself, thereby creating a somewhere/somewhere-else duality, as well as an impactive or experiential boundary defining each relative somewhere. Previously, the experiential relationship was depicted in figures 66 and 73 as two differentiated extensions of existence coming into contact. We will now modify the experiential relationship as depicted in those figures (and on the left in figure 78) to create a diagram that will assist us in understanding the nature of, and the relationships between, physical, mental, and emotional experiences.

We, as differentiated areas of reality, are capable of being impacted by the surrounding reality. Since we can be impacted by existence from all sides, the cumulative effect of these impactive interactions is to define where we are as a focal somewhere in relation to a surrounding somewhere else, as depicted in **figure 78**.

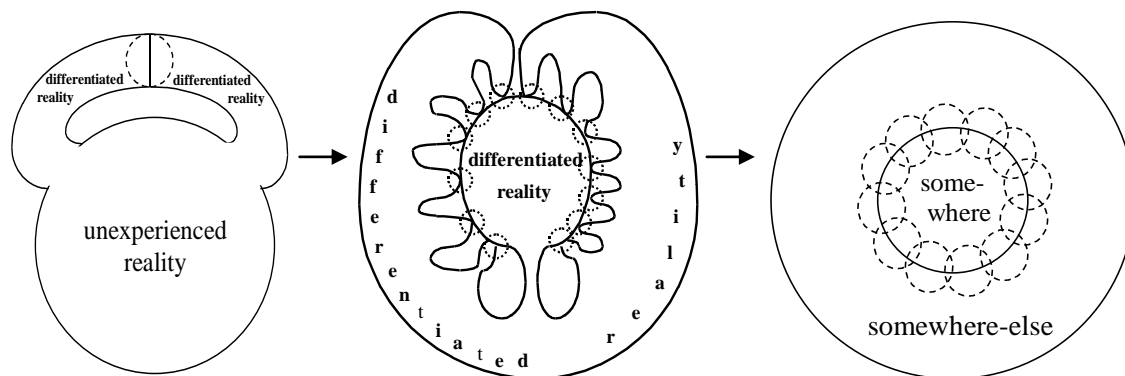


Figure 78 (Left) The basic experiential relationship that differentiated existence forms with itself to create the somewhere/somewhere-else duality. (Middle) A differentiated reality being impacted on all sides by other differentiated areas of reality. Each different experiential relationship is denoted by a small dashed circle. (Right) As these impactive interactions converge around a single differentiated area of reality, the multiple experiential relationships combine to form a single experiential construct, defining a focal somewhere in relation to a surrounding somewhere else.

This relationship between a focal somewhere and a surrounding somewhere-else forms the framework that underlies what we experience as physical, mental, and emotional reality. How this experiential framework relates to consciousness, awareness, and the experiential construct is depicted in **figure 79**.

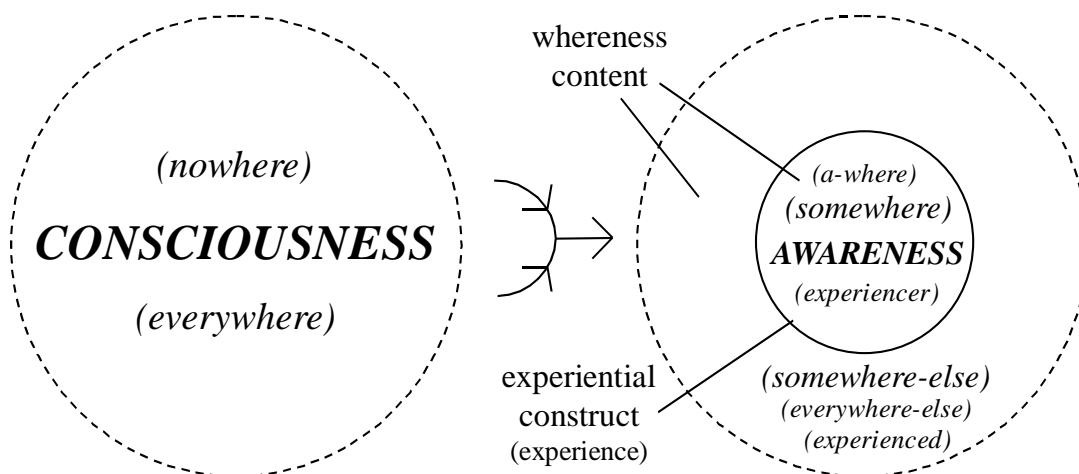


Figure 79 The fundamental relationship that absolute existence as consciousness forms with itself to create what functions as our basic framework of experience. The entire relational matrix or whereness content is consciousness, but that whereness content is dualized into a focal somewhere and a surrounding somewhere or everywhere else. The somewhere/somewhere-else duality is analogous to experiencer/experienced duality. Consciousness localized to a focal somewhere functions as awareness. The experiential construct, which is the boundary or dividing line between somewhere and everywhere else, is what awareness experiences as reality.

Any focal somewhere exists in a relative state of being, where it is directly. That relative state of being has two aspects: what exists within the experiential boundary, and the experiential boundary itself. What exists within the experiential boundary is the whereness content, i.e., the awareness: the experiential boundary itself is the whereness or experiential construct, i.e., the experience.

Whereness content isn't experienced; it's the experiencer, the direct being, existence where it is directly, the awareness. That direct being is consciousness, but it's consciousness existing in relation to itself. Consciousness existing in relation to itself always remains directly consciousness, for it can't be other than what it is. However, consciousness existing in relation to itself, while still being consciousness, is constrained or limited consciousness, limited by the boundary that defines it as awareness. *In this way, consciousness becomes its own experiential object through its existence as awareness of the experiential construct.*

The focal somewhere—i.e., the awareness—is aware of experience, of the experiential construct, because the experiential construct is inseparable from awareness' relative existence. What exists absolutely can't be other than what it is. So, while consciousness exists relatively somewhere, part of that existence somewhere is the boundary which defines that somewhere. Thus, if consciousness is going to exist relatively somewhere rather than absolutely everywhere, part of that existence somewhere is awareness, and another part of that existence somewhere is the boundary which defines that somewhere. Thus, wherever there exists awareness, there also exists experience. We say that we're aware of experience, as if there were a linear relationship between

our awareness and our experience, but this isn't actually the case. Rather, awareness and experience are the mutually coexistent aspects of consciousness existing in relation to itself.

Having developed an experiential framework, we will now focus our discussion upon the experiential construct and how it comes to exist as our awareness of physical and mental experiences.

3.2 The experiential construct

The experiential construct has been referred to variously as the whereness construct, the experiential boundary, and the impactive boundary.⁵ All of these terms refer to the boundary or dividing line that's created when differentiated existence impacts itself and becomes defined in relation to itself, thereby creating the somewhere/somewhere-else or experiencer/experienced duality.

No matter what we call this boundary, what's important to understand is that the shape or form of this boundary is what we're aware of as experience. Since we're aware of three fundamental types of experience (i.e., physical, mental, and emotional), these different types of experience must all represent an awareness of some form of the experiential construct which defines that awareness.

In the following sections, we will distinguish between these three fundamentally different types of experience. All three types of experience represent an awareness of an experiential construct, which is what makes them all experiential realities. However, because all three types of experience also are fundamentally different experiential realities, each must represent an awareness of an experiential construct that's in some fundamental way different from the other experiential constructs. Therefore, in order to explain the basis of physical, mental, and emotional experiences, we must describe those differences, so that each particular type of experience can be related to a different experiential construct.

First, we will discuss physical and mental experiences and their associated experiential constructs. In the case of physical and mental experiences, there seem to be two functioning experiential constructs responsible for creating the difference between physical and mental experiences. However, before we can relate physical and mental experiences to an awareness of these experiential constructs, we must first explain the difference between, as well as the reason for the existence of, these two experiential constructs.

3.21 Two experiential constructs, external and internal

⁵ Our ability to think about things is to a great degree limited by the names we attach to those things. To avoid this limitation as much as possible, we have had to assign multiple names to what is here referred to as the experiential construct.

The differentiation of existence allows existence to impact itself and thus to become defined in relation to itself. Awareness is a differentiated area of consciousness-existence that has become defined as a focal somewhere in relation to a surrounding somewhere or everywhere else. Awareness is defined and bounded externally by an experiential construct, as we've already discussed.

However, this awareness, once defined externally, can also be defined internally if another impactive interface exists within this differentiated structure, allowing for an internal level of impactive interaction and, thereby, the creation of another experiential construct situated internal to the first. In this way, an awareness can become sandwiched between external and internal experiential constructs, as depicted in **figure 80**.

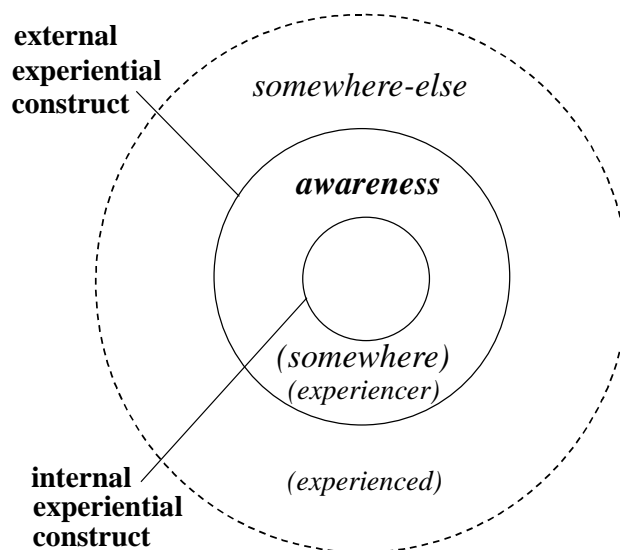


Figure 80 Awareness defined by external and internal experiential constructs. In this situation, consciousness is localized to a relative somewhere, i.e., into awareness, by both external and internal boundaries. Thus, intrinsic to the existence of this relative somewhere would be an awareness of experiences derived from both the external and internal experiential constructs.

3.211 *Relating the experiential constructs to brain structure*

Before we discuss the experiential implications of this sandwiching of awareness, we must first explain the basis for the existence of external and internal experiential constructs. Throughout this work, we have related structure to function. In Articles 2 and 3 of this work, we related the structure of reality to the way physical reality is observed to function. Here, we will relate the structure of the brain to the existence and functioning of external and internal experiential constructs.

In terms of the relational-matrix model, what we experience as the brain⁶ is a compound process, a stable association of distortion processes, that's capable of being impacted by certain stimuli while retaining its overall organizational integrity. This ability of the differentiated area of reality we experience as brain to undergo continuous fluctuations in process interaction at one level, while retaining its overall structure, is what gives the differentiated area of reality experienced as brain the ability to form an ongoing impactive-interactive relationship with the surrounding reality. This ongoing impactive-interactive relationship exists as an experiencer/experienced duality, which persists as long as the differentiated relational structure we experience as brain continues to function as an impactive interface, i.e., until we die.

Although the brain isn't the ultimate source of awareness, because awareness is just the relative localization of what already exists as consciousness, what we experience as the brain is, in our case, the impactive interface that provides for the ongoing localization of our awareness and the simultaneous creation of what we experience as reality. In other words, what we experience as the brain is the differentiated relational structure that, in our case, allows existence to become defined in relation to itself and thereby to experience itself. What exists where we experience the brain to be is, then, in our case, the means or mechanism by which consciousness becomes localized into awareness.

The overall structural continuity of the brain creates a corresponding continuity of awareness, while the variable aspects of brain structure—i.e., the different ways it can be stimulated—provide that awareness with a variable experiential boundary, which exists as variable experiences of reality.

Again, just as the faucet brings water to the house, so the brain localizes consciousness into a particular awareness. Just as the faucet isn't the ultimate source of water, so the brain isn't the ultimate source of awareness or consciousness. Both the faucet and the brain are means or mechanisms for the localization of a ubiquitous existence. On Earth, water is everywhere, and faucets bring that water to a particular somewhere. In the Universe, consciousness-existence is everywhere, and the differentiated area of reality we experience as brain serves to localize that consciousness into a particular awareness. Therefore, the perceived structure and function of the brain should somehow be related to any experiential construct.⁷

In terms of physical reality, the brain consists primarily of a certain organization of cells called neurons. Neurons consist of a cell body, many dendrites, and generally a single axon. Neurons communicate with each other through their axonal and dendritic extensions, as depicted in **figure 81**.

⁶ We say "what we experience as the brain" to point out that the brain is only what we experience to exist in that differentiated area of reality. What exists there directly isn't a defined physical reality. Although this usage is more cumbersome, it points out that the brain as a defined reality doesn't exist as such in the absence of experience.

⁷ Here, we are relating a physical structure to an experiential function. Although physical reality isn't what's there directly, a relationship exists between what's there directly and what's physically experienced; therefore, physical structure can be related to an experiential function.

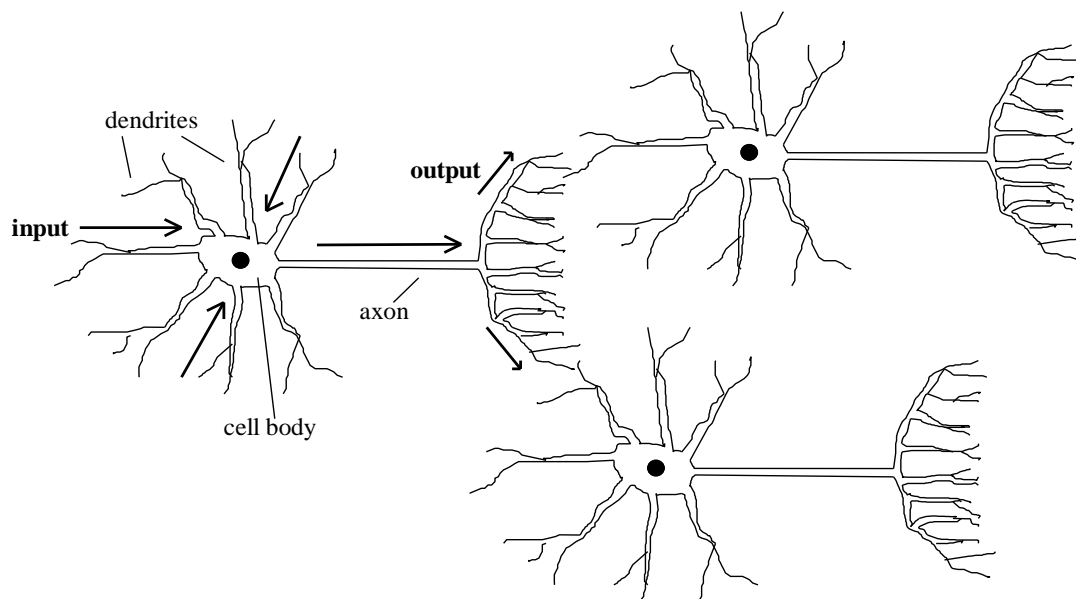


Figure 81 Three neurons, each composed of a cell body, many dendrites, and a single axon. The arrows near the neuron on the left show the direction of propagation of a nervous impulse. The human brain contains approximately 10 billion of these neurons, organized and interconnected through their axonal and dendritic extensions. Through these axon-to-dendrite connections, neurons stimulate nervous impulses, as well as inhibit the stimulation of nervous impulses, in each other. These neuronal communications aren't always constant. Axon-to-dendrite connections between some neurons can increase or decrease in activity, depending on the degree to which those connections are used. These changes in axon-to-dendrite connections alter the ability of the neurons to communicate with and thus stimulate each other, and so allow for some variability in the pathways nervous impulses take as they propagate through the brain.

Neurons are essentially highly reactive, i.e., impactable, cells that are capable of generating and transmitting electrochemical impulses to other cells. If the proper amount of stimulation is received by the dendrites of one neuron, an *action potential* can be generated, resulting in an electrochemical nervous impulse being transmitted along the axon to the dendrites of other neurons, which may or may not themselves be caused to generate their own action potentials as a result of this stimulation.

Stimulation of the brain means the creation of patterns of *neuronal stimulation* within the overall brain structure. These patterns of neuronal stimulation are temporary fluctuations within the brain structure that represent alterations of both the external and internal experiential constructs. In other words, the patterns of neuronal stimulation occurring within what we experience as the brain represent the impactful interactions that define our existence as awareness. These patterns of neuronal stimulation then function as the two experiential constructs, defining the surrounding reality in relation to us, and also determining the form of the experiences we're aware of.

Since the two experiential constructs are related to patterns of neuronal stimulation, the different experiential constructs—i.e., external and internal—must somehow represent different levels of neuronal organization. These two different levels of neuronal organization then result in two fundamentally different sets of neural pathways and, thereby, two different experiential constructs within the impactive interface that's the brain.

In the next section, we will describe these two different levels of neuronal organization and, within that context, show how they correspond to the external and internal experiential constructs. Then, we will explain how the external and internal experiential constructs form the basis of physical and mental experiences, respectively.

3.212 Two levels of neuronal organization, invariant and variable

For our purposes, we will consider neuronal organization as an attribute of how the neurons in the brain are interconnected through their communicating extensions, i.e., through their axons and dendrites. These neuronal communications determine the overall structural continuity of the brain in terms of neural pathways and patterns of neuronal stimulation. For this reason, discussing two different levels of neuronal organization means discussing two different types of neuronal connections.

The patterns of neuronal stimulation within the brain are determined by which area(s) of the brain is (are) impacted (i.e., stimulated), as well as by the relationships within the brain of the neurons to one another through their axon-to-dendrite connections. The area(s) of the brain that is (are) stimulated or impacted is (are) determined by which sensory peripheral nerves are stimulated, and by the consistent connections of these nerves to certain areas of the brain. The relationships within the brain of the neurons to one another are a combination of invariant, or unchanging, structural relationships or connections, and variable, or changing structural relationships or connections.

The brain receives stimuli from both outside and inside the body through the sensory nerves. The connections of the sensory nerves to the brain are relatively unchanging. These connections are essentially hardwired into the physical structure of the nervous system, providing for a consistent pattern of neuronal stimulation and, thus, a consistency of physical experience.

For instance, primary distortion processes impact photoreceptor cells in the retina of the eye, stimulating the optic nerve, which then sends a nervous impulse to a certain group of cells in the visual cortex of the brain, creating a certain pattern of neuronal stimulation within those cells, and thereby forming a visual experience of light. The connections between the photoreceptor cells, the optic nerve, and the neurons of the visual cortex are relatively unchanging under normal conditions.

These unchanging neuronal communications are an invariant aspect of brain structure, representing one level of neuronal organization and, thus, one type of experiential construct.

Since this invariant aspect of brain structure is primarily impacted by the surrounding reality, we will relate this level of neuronal organization to the external experiential construct.

However, the brain is more than just a reactive punching bag waiting to be pummeled by impacts from certain stimuli. As the brain is impacted by certain stimuli, creating physical experience, neuronal communications within the brain can change, through alterations of axon-to-dendrite connections, creating different associations of neurons and different neural pathways and patterns of neuronal stimulation upon subsequent stimulation.

These changeable neuronal communications are a variable aspect of brain structure, representing another level of neuronal organization and, thus, another type of experiential construct. Since this variable aspect of brain structure is secondarily impacted by the surrounding reality through the invariant level of neuronal organization (i.e., the external experiential construct), we will relate this variable level of neuronal organization to the internal experiential construct, as depicted in **figure 82**.

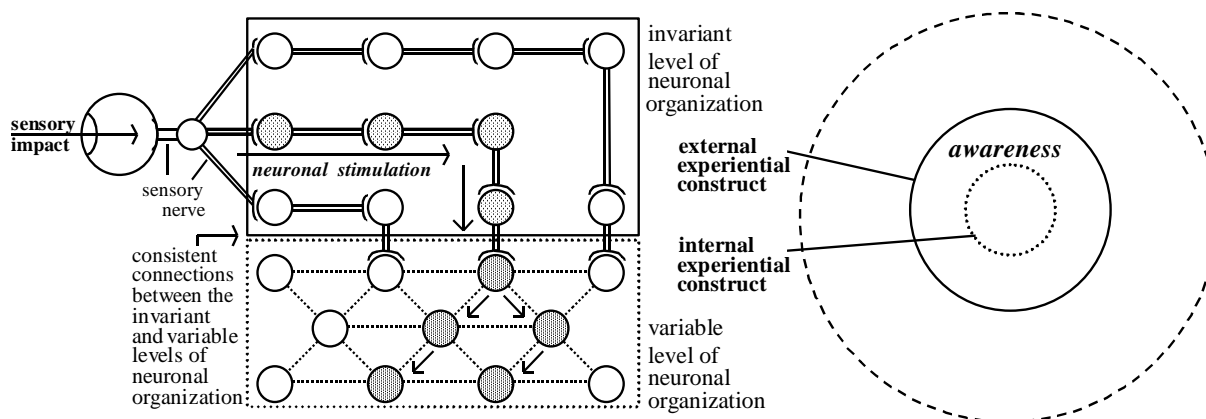


Figure 82 A diagrammatic representation of unchanging and changing neuronal communications in the brain, creating two levels of neuronal organization (left), corresponding to two different experiential constructs (right). When a sensory receptor is impacted, a nervous impulse is first transmitted along invariant neural pathways (upper boxed area), as a result of invariant neuronal connections. A sensory impact upon a specific sensory area creates a neuronal stimulation along a specific neural pathway within the invariant level of neuronal organization (stippled neurons). The organizational structure represented by these invariant neural pathways functions as the external experiential construct, or the boundary that defines awareness in relation to the surrounding reality. Neuronal stimulation (i.e., the generation and transmission of an electrochemical nervous impulse) represents an impact upon the external experiential construct.

Through the invariant neural pathways, a second level of neuronal organization is stimulated (lower boxed area). At this second level of neuronal organization, the neuronal connections are variable (dashed lines between neurons), resulting in the transmission of nervous impulses through the brain in variable patterns of neuronal stimulation through variable neural pathways.

Neuronal stimulation of a specific variable area creates neuronal stimulation along a variable neural pathway within the variable level of neuronal organization (stippled neurons). The organizational structure represented by these variable neural pathways functions as an internal experiential construct. Neuronal stimulation of these variable neural pathways represents an impact upon the internal experiential construct.

Note that consistent connections exist between the invariant and variable levels of neuronal organization, so that stimulation of a specific invariant neural pathway results in the stimulation of a specific variable area. The changeability of the variable level of neuronal organization lies within that level itself, not in its connection to the invariant level of neuronal organization. The importance of this consistency of connection between these two levels of neuronal organization is discussed below.

3.22 Relationships between the external and internal experiential constructs

Although the invariant and variable levels of neuronal organization represent different aspects of brain structure, they are, of course, related and interconnected. The relationship between the external and internal experiential constructs is consistent, as was depicted in figure 82. The variability of organizational structure that forms the internal experiential construct exists as a variability *within* the internal experiential construct itself, not as a variability *between* the external and internal experiential constructs, as depicted in **figure 83**.

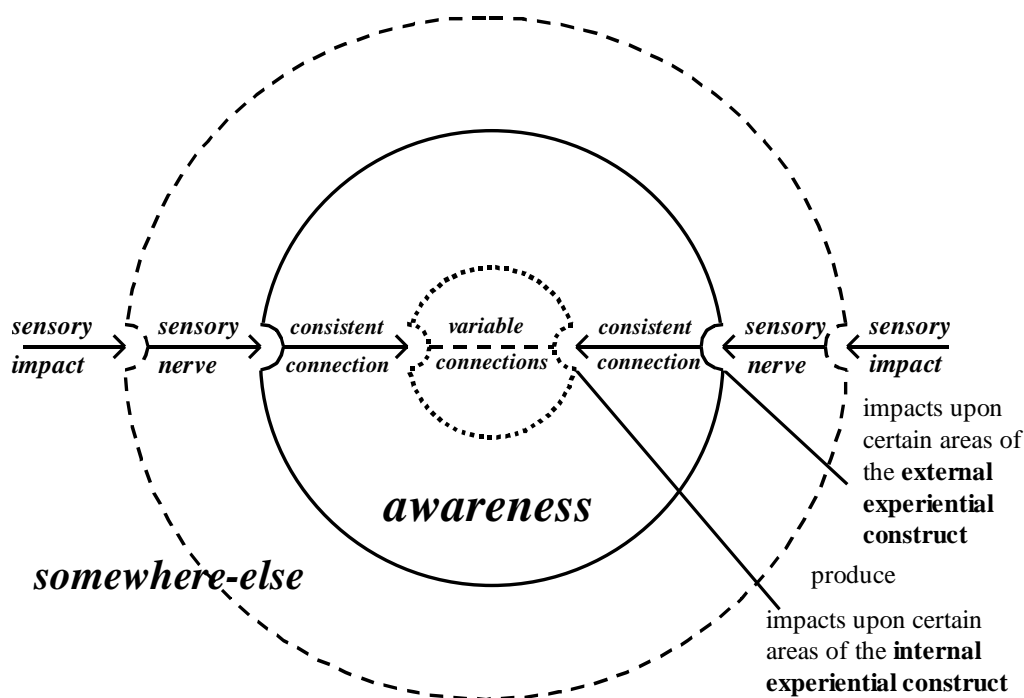


Figure 83 The consistency of the relationship of the external experiential construct to the internal experiential construct. Impacts upon the external experiential construct

through the sensory nerves also impact the internal experiential construct in consistent areas, through consistent connections between the neurons forming the external and internal experiential constructs, as depicted in figure 82. The variability of the internal experiential construct involves variable connections between the neurons that make up the internal experiential construct itself, not a variability between the neurons that connect the external to the internal experiential construct. We can think of the internal experiential construct as being at one level a mirror image of the external experiential construct, wherein areas of the internal experiential construct correspond to areas of the external experiential construct, so that an impact upon a certain area of the external experiential construct results in an impact upon the corresponding area of the internal experiential construct.

Although the variable neural pathways are unstable, at any point in time they form a stable structure, an existent level of neuronal organization. The variability of the internal experiential construct depends on its ability to change its organizational structure according to the pattern of neuronal stimulation by which it's impacted through the external experiential construct. How impacts upon the external experiential construct affect the organizational structure of the internal experiential construct is depicted in **figure 84**.

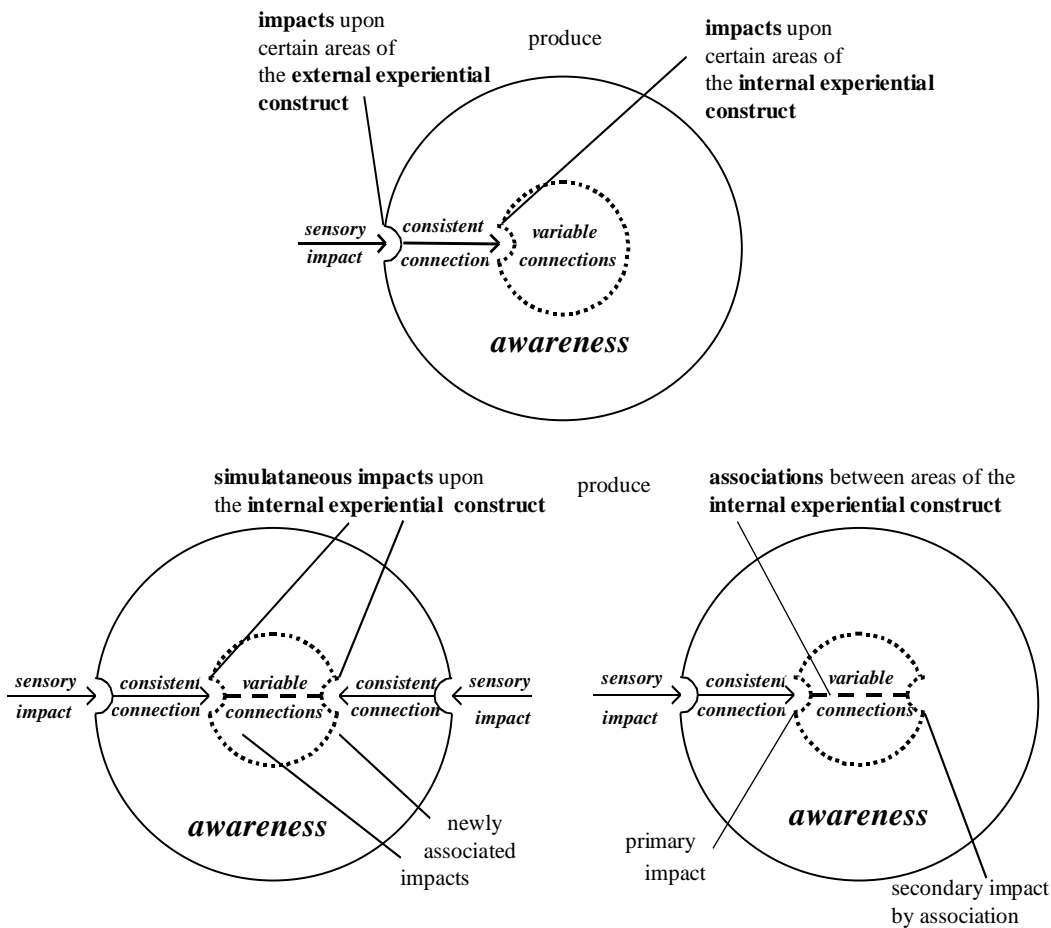


Figure 84 How simultaneous or contemporaneous impacts upon the internal experiential construct create new associations between different areas of the internal experiential construct, thereby altering the organizational structure of the internal experiential construct.

(Top) Impacts upon the external and internal experiential constructs represent different patterns of neuronal stimulation. Impacts upon the external experiential construct come through the sensory nerves. Then, through the invariant neural pathways of the external experiential construct, the variable neural pathways of the internal experiential construct are impacted. Before any external stimulation, the internal experiential construct is a mirror image or duplicate of the external experiential construct. The external experiential construct is impacted in one area, and this impact forms a corresponding impact upon the internal experiential construct in a corresponding area. In this case, there has been no alteration of the organizational structure of the internal experiential construct, as the internal experiential construct simply mirrors the impact upon the external experiential construct.

(Left) Now, the external experiential construct is impacted in two areas simultaneously, forming, then, two simultaneous impacts upon the corresponding areas of the internal experiential construct. The occurrence of these two simultaneous or contemporaneous impacts upon the internal experiential construct induces a new communication between these two areas of the internal experiential construct (dashed line), thereby changing the organizational structure of the internal experiential construct. In terms of patterns of neuronal stimulation, the simultaneous or contemporaneous stimulation of these two neural pathways within the variable level of neuronal organization essentially creates a new neural pathway (i.e., a new way the internal experiential construct can be impacted).

(Right) Now, the external experiential construct is impacted in only one of those two areas, causing only one impact upon the corresponding area of the internal experiential construct. However, because an association was previously created between this area and another area of the internal experiential construct, the associated area of the internal experiential construct can be secondarily impacted through this association, even though there has been no impact upon the corresponding area of the external experiential construct. In terms of patterns of neuronal stimulation, the stimulation of one area of the variable level of neuronal organization can, through previously established neural pathways, stimulate other areas of the variable level of neuronal organization, thereby re-creating a previous pattern of neuronal stimulation.

Essentially, stimulation of one invariant neuronal area, which then excites one variable neuronal area, can secondarily induce stimulation of another variable neuronal area (right, figure 84) if associative pathways were formed between these variable neuronal areas during a previous episode of neuronal stimulation (left, figure 84).

This change in the organizational structure of the internal experiential construct depicted in figure 84 represents a new communication between two areas of the internal experiential construct, creating an association between areas that were not previously associated. In other words, simultaneous stimulation of different neuronal areas induces a change in neuronal communications, altering the overall organizational structure of the brain, altering neural pathways within the brain, and thereby allowing new patterns of neuronal stimulation to be formed.

This ability to form new neuronal communications and new neural pathways is what makes this level of neuronal organization variable. Furthermore, this variability of neuronal communication is what distinguishes this variable level of neuronal organization from the invariant level of neuronal organization, where neuronal communications are unchanging. Although the brain probably has many different levels of organization, this difference in overall organizational structure is what creates two functioning experiential constructs, i.e., two different relational levels where existence impacts itself and so becomes defined in relation to itself. In this way, consciousness-existence can become sandwiched as awareness between both externally and internally defining whereness constructs, and so become bounded externally and internally by different experiences of reality. With that said, we will now relate impacts upon the external and internal experiential constructs to our awareness of physical and mental experiences.

3.3 Relating the two experiential constructs to experiential functions

In the previous subsection, an invariant level of neuronal organization within the brain was related to an external experiential construct, and a variable level of neuronal organization within the brain was related to an internal experiential construct. Stimulation of these two different levels of neuronal organization was described as representing impacts upon the two different experiential constructs those two levels of organization represent.

Remembering that an impact upon an experiential construct exists as an experience for the awareness localized and defined by that experiential construct, we have now laid the groundwork for relating impacts upon the external experiential construct to physical experience, and for relating impacts upon the internal experiential construct to mental experience.

Different structures generally exist to perform different functions. Thus, the invariant and variable aspects of brain structure exist to perform somewhat different functions. Although the function of both aspects of brain structure is to create an experiential reality, the type of experience each is designed to create is different.

The invariant level of neuronal organization is designed to perform a certain function: to provide an impactful interface that creates *consistent experiences* when our awareness is impacted by the same general types of stimuli. Those consistent experiences, formed by impacts upon the external experiential construct, are what we're aware of as physical experience.

The variable neural pathways, which compose a different level of neuronal organization, have evolved to perform a different experiential function: to provide an impactful interface that creates *an association between experiences* according to the patterns by which our awareness is impacted by the same general types of stimuli. Impacts upon the internal experiential construct are what we're aware of as mental experience. The associations between experiences provided for by the variable neural pathways that compose the internal experiential construct are the foundation of the mental functions of memory, thought, and learning. These variable neural pathways also provide a variability of response to stimuli.⁸

What we know of physical or sensory experience is that it's relatively consistent. Hot remains hot, red remains red, sharp remains sharp. That is, under normal conditions, every time we touch a flame, it will be hot: every time we see a red ball, it will look red: and every time we're poked with a needle, it will feel sharp. The consistency of physical experience is due to an invariant level of neuronal organization that forms an invariant, externally defining experiential construct.

What we know of mental experience is that it's changeable. What we think we've learned one day we can learn differently on another. What we know one day we've forgotten the next. With each experience, our mental conception of reality can be altered or reinforced. The changeability of mental experience is due to a variable level of neuronal organization that forms a variable, internally defining experiential construct.

The variable level of neuronal organization is what allows us to learn, to incorporate new experiences, and to organize and associate those experiences with previous experiences. Learning is fundamentally a process of experiential association and is, then, primarily a function of the variable aspect of brain structure, i.e., a function of the internal experiential construct.

For instance, if I touch my hand to an object and it feels hot, my brain structure, as reflected in its neuronal communications, is capable of changing in such a way that I will remember that this object is hot and so perhaps avoid touching it again. The first experience of the hotness of the object altered my variable neural pathways and, thus, my internal experiential construct in such a way that an association was created between the areas of the internal experiential construct corresponding to the visual experience of the object and the physical experience of hotness.

Now, if the object is visually experienced again, the stimulation of the same area of the internal experiential construct in the same way, through the external experiential construct, can result in the area of the internal experiential construct corresponding to the visual experience neuronally communicating with and impacting the area of the internal experiential construct corresponding to the physical experience of hotness, thereby recalling a memory (i.e., a mental experience) of hotness associated with the object, in the absence of actually touching the object again. Putting

⁸ Although we're here concerned with how experience is formed, not with the organism's response to experience, it's helpful to note that the variable level of neuronal organization also provides an important variability of response to stimuli. The variable neuronal pathways are evolutionarily advantageous, for they allow the organism to fine-tune its responses to stimuli on the basis of previous stimulus/response situations. Without the variability in mental experience and response that the internal experiential construct provides, we would always respond in the same way to the same stimulus or, more importantly, the same sets of stimuli, regardless of the previous outcome of such a response.

these two experiences together later, when the object is only visually experienced, is called remembering—i.e., literally, putting back together—the simultaneous experiences of object and hotness. (This basic mechanism of experiential association was diagrammed in figure 84.) Being able to remember that this object can be hot also means that I've learned something.

In terms of patterns of neuronal stimulation, if a certain pattern of neuronal stimulation occurs, that primary pattern of neuronal stimulation can, through variable neuronal communications, induce a previously associated pattern of neuronal stimulation, thereby inducing a secondary pattern of neuronal stimulation within the variable level of neuronal organization in the absence of the direct sensory input that would normally evoke such a pattern of neuronal stimulation. For example, the experience of hotness can be remembered even when we're not touching something hot, i.e., even when the invariant neural pathways (i.e., external experiential construct) aren't being impacted in a way that we'd be aware of as the physical experience of hotness.

Individual physical or sensory experiences can occur in different patterns, creating different patterns of neuronal stimulation within the internal experiential construct through its consistent connections to the external experiential construct. The external experiential construct is unaffected by these patterns of neuronal stimulation, since the neural pathways that form the external experiential construct are invariant. However, the structure of the internal experiential construct forms in accord with these patterns of neuronal stimulation, since the internal experiential construct represents the variable neuronal communications and neural pathways formed in response to associated stimuli. Again, these variable neural pathways functioning as the internal experiential construct are the basis of the mental phenomenon we call memory, i.e., the ability to recall and reconstruct (i.e., re-member) experiences through previous association with other experiences.

Thought is a mental phenomenon related to memory. Memory is an attempt to recall the order of what has already been experienced. Thought involves associating experiences that may not have been previously associated. What happened? I'm trying to remember. What are you going to do? I'm thinking. Both mental processes involve associating past experiences. One mental process involves trying to reassemble past experiences into the order in which they were experienced, and the other involves putting past experiences together to create new experiential associations between physical experiences that need not have been previously associated. In this way, thought is an evolutionary extension of the memory or re-membering function of the internal experiential construct.

As discussed previously, the process of experience by nature fragments or divides what we experience as reality into separate experiential components.⁹ Since each experience must be formed by a discrete impact upon an experiential construct, experiences are by nature separate. This experiential separation first occurs at the level of the external experiential construct, where the experience of physical reality is formed. If we touch a hot object, that experience is fragmented by the external experiential construct into an impact that's the visual experience of the object, and an experience of its temperature or hotness, as well as an experience of its hardness or softness. The function of the internal experiential construct is to reassemble (i.e., re-

⁹ See Article 4, subsection 5.311.

member), as much as possible, the experiences of reality fragmented by the functioning of the external experiential construct. Again, this re-remembering function of the internal experiential construct is performed through the creation of associations and new communications between areas of the internal experiential construct that are impacted simultaneously, contemporaneously, or in some other pattern.

Note that impacts upon the internal experiential construct also occur as discrete events. However, the ability of the internal experiential construct to associate and overlap discrete experiences allows a functional reunification of experience. Note also that this reassembly isn't always accurate and can never recreate what exists directly at the level of reality beyond experience.

By way of analogy, we can consider what exists before experience as an uncut puzzle, a kind of picture of what-is. In this analogy, the functioning of the external experiential construct (i.e., sensory experience) is what allows us to experience the picture of what-is, but in order to do so, it must cut up what-is into pieces and so create a puzzle. Thus, in a way, physical experience involves the dis-memberment of existence. The internal experiential construct (i.e., the mind) then functions to re-member existence, to put the pieces back together in their proper order, or into what is conceived to be their proper order.

Two things must be remembered in this analogy. First, the pieces don't actually exist as such except as they're created by the experiential process. This is why, when physicists are examining the smallest parts of physical reality, it begins to behave like a rainbow, i.e., as a relative reality.¹⁰ Second, owing to the relational nature of the pieces, any mental reassembly of the pieces into even the most accurate representation or conceptualization must still fall short of presenting us with an experience of what-is as it exists directly, i.e., as an undivided whole. Experience simply cannot do this. To get there, we must move into the reality beyond experience and simply be that.¹¹

3.31 *The character of mental and physical experiences*

Fundamentally, our awareness is consciousness-existence that has become localized to a relative somewhere, with that somewhere defined by external and internal experiential constructs. Those externally and internally defining experiential constructs then exist as the basis of the respective

¹⁰ As long as the mind takes at face value the existence of physical reality in the defined, separate form in which it's presented, experience at the quantum level, where reality behaves as if it's undefined and nonseparate, remains incomprehensible to the mind, for the sensory experience of part-ness cannot be reconciled with the quantum experience of non-part-ness. Once the mind realizes that the apparent definability and separability of the parts is an artifact of experience, a necessary product of the way reality is presented to it, the mind can let go of its attachment to an ultimately defined reality. Within this context the mind can then begin to conceive of the more fundamental underlying unity that is the basis of the perceived and conceived part-ness of physical reality. To learn it's often necessary to let go. To understand a new concept, more often than not, an old concept must be discarded or, at least, modified. We can't learn that $2+2=4$ if we're convinced that $2+2=3$. Likewise, we can't learn that nothing in relation to itself gives us the experience of something ($0 + 0 = 1$) unless we can get past the idea that $0 + 0 = 0$.

¹¹ Experience must always present the whole in terms of its parts, even when the parts are described as being inseparable. This work is an example of this. In order to present the unified model of reality, that model had to be discussed, described, dissected, and pictured in terms of its parts, i.e., the reality cells. We can infer and point out the underlying wholeness, but what we still have are defined parts assembled into an interconnected whole. What actually exists is a whole with no real parts. Parts as separable and definable entities exist only within the context of the experiential process. Any description of reality is, in this way, limited.

physical and mental experiences associated with our awareness. In other words, we are aware of physical and mental experiences as the boundaries that define where consciousness exists.

What other evidence is there that physical experience is our awareness of an impact upon the external experiential construct, and that mental experience is our awareness of an impact upon the internal experiential construct? The evidence exists in the very nature and character of our mental and physical experiences.

All around us, we're aware of physical experience, while within we're aware of mental experience. Bordering our awareness externally is the experience of physical reality, while bordering our awareness internally is the experience of mental reality. There's a reason we're aware of physical reality as being "out there" or outside, and of mental reality as being "in here" or inside. The reason we're aware of physical experience as "out there" is that the external experiential construct, the form of which exists as physical experience, is the boundary or dividing line which externally defines where we are, i.e., which externally defines our awareness. The reason we're aware of mental experience as "in here" is that the internal experiential construct, the form of which exists as mental experience, is the boundary or dividing line which internally defines where we are, i.e., which internally defines our awareness.

If both mental and physical experiences represent our awareness of impacts upon an experiential construct, why are they different? The difference is found in the orientation of our awareness to each experiential construct and, thereby, in the relationship between our awareness and the impact upon the experiential construct that is the experience. Essentially, a penetration of the external experiential construct extends *toward* our awareness, while a penetration of the internal experiential construct extends *away from* our awareness. This difference in orientation creates an awareness of complementary impactive forms or, in other words, an awareness of complementary experiential forms. These complementary experiential forms exist as our awareness of physical and mental experiences, as depicted in **figure 85**.

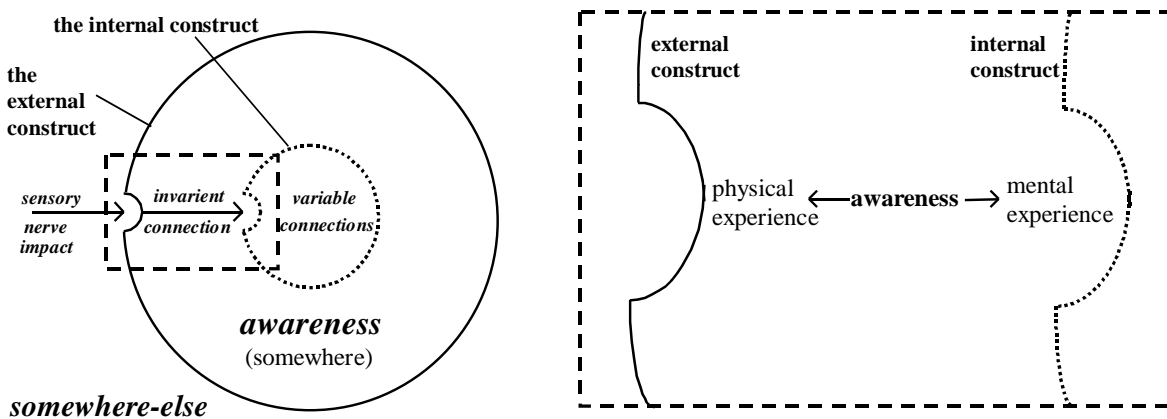


Figure 85 Physical and mental experiences represent the awareness of impacts upon the external and internal experiential constructs, respectively. Through impactive interactions, consciousness becomes defined in relation to itself as a somewhere/somewhere-else duality. (Left) Consciousness that has the quality of being

somewhere or a-where is awareness. The relative existence of consciousness as awareness includes the boundaries which define that awareness. The impacts upon those boundaries exist as what the awareness so defined experiences as reality. Therefore, an awareness that has two different boundaries, being defined by both external and internal experiential constructs, will be aware of two fundamentally different types of experience, owing to the difference in orientation of the awareness to the impacts upon each of these boundaries (right). Whereas impacts upon the external experiential construct penetrate *into* the awareness, creating a physical experience, impacts upon the internal experiential construct penetrate *out of* the awareness, creating a mental experience. (It's no coincidence that the word "mind," which we use to represent the realm of mental experience, sounds like the word "mined," which refers to an inward penetration, as in "That mountain has been mined for gold.")

What do we consider as physical experience, and what do we consider as mental experience? The description of physical experience is fairly straightforward: What we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch are all physical experiences. Mental experience is somewhat more nebulous than physical experience because mental experiences, by nature, are less tangible or sensible than physical experiences. Basically, memory, thought, and learning compose mental experiences. In general, we call physical experiences the forms of *perception*, and mental experiences the forms of *conception*. This difference between the tangibility of physical experiences and the intangibility of mental experiences correlates with the complementary impactive forms depicted in figure 85.

Mental and physical experiences both have form. Physical reality has form and is tangible, whereas memory and thought also have form but are intangible. So, we may consider physical experiences as *tangible forms*, and mental experiences as *intangible forms*. Physical and mental experiences, in this way, represent complementary types of form, i.e., tangible and intangible, respectively.

Whereas impacts upon each experiential construct represent a penetration of that construct, with respect to the orientation of the awareness to those impacts, those impacts are complementary, being opposite in form relative to the awareness. That complementarity of impactive form, relative to an awareness defined by those experiential constructs, is what gives physical and mental experiences their complementarity of form, i.e., tangible and intangible, respectively.

The complementary forms of physical and mental experiences resulting from an awareness of these complementary alterations of the experiential constructs are analogous to the way in which complementary impactive interactions create the complementary wave and particle experiences. As previously described, in physical experience, impacts that penetrate into the experiencer-awareness exist as a particle experience, while impacts that penetrate out of the experiencer-awareness exist as a wave experience. Particles seem to have a graspable, tangible form, while waves have an ungraspable, intangible form.

Physical reality, as the experience of tangible form, and because it seems to extend toward us, toward our awareness, correlates with an impact upon the external experiential construct that

penetrates into our awareness. Mental reality, as the experience of intangible form, and because it seems to extend away from us, away from our awareness, correlates with an impact upon the internal experiential construct that penetrates out of our awareness.

Physical and mental experiences represent an even more fundamental penetrating/penetrated complementarity than that which creates wave/particle duality, for waves and particles are both physical experiences. Physical reality, in general, is analogous to particle-like physical experience, existing as a penetration into the observer-awareness, creating a relatively tangible form, a form surrounded by the awareness, a form the awareness can grasp or “get hold of.” Mental reality, in general, is analogous to wavelike physical experience, existing as a penetration out of the observer-awareness, creating a relatively intangible form, a form surrounding the awareness, a form the awareness can’t grasp or “get hold of.”

3.32 The experiential theater

We look outward, and there we find physical reality. We look inward, and here we find mental reality. However, by now it may be becoming clear that what we’re aware of as these experiences of reality aren’t what exists directly where our particular experience seems to be. For instance, when we see or touch a rock, our experience of the rock isn’t what exists directly where the rock seems to be. Rather, what we experience as the rock is a relationship between what’s there directly and what we are here directly. In the absence of that relationship, the rock, as it’s experienced to exist, simply doesn’t.

Experiential reality comes into existence through the formation of a relationship between a differentiated area of reality and the surrounding reality. Certainly, there’s some correlation between what we experience as physical reality and what’s there directly where our physical experience seems to be, but they’re by no means the same thing. For instance, it’s common knowledge that when we look up at the stars at night, we’re seeing light that left the stars millions or perhaps billions of years ago. So, the pattern of stars we see in the sky actually has very little to do with the current distribution of stars out in space.

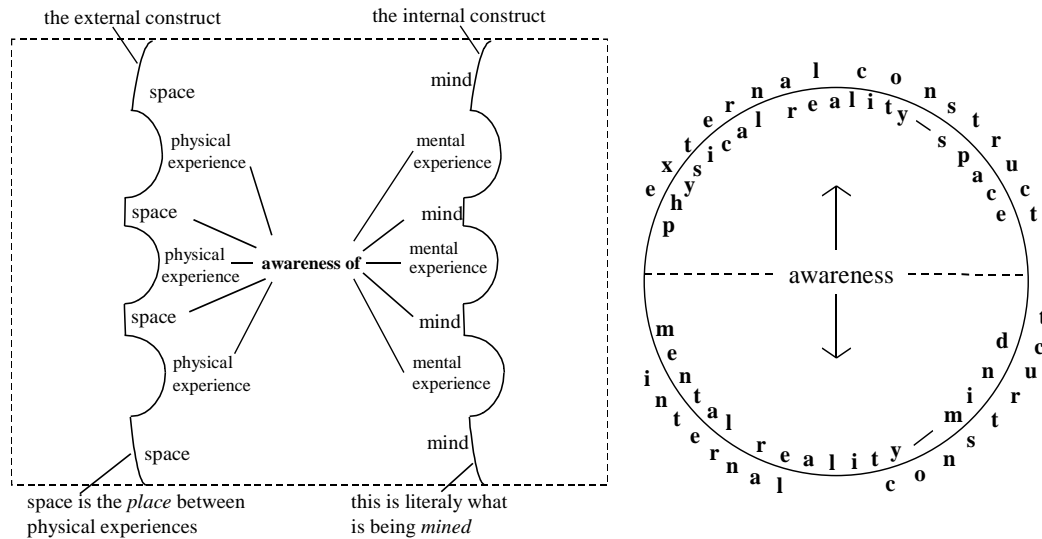
So, if what we’re seeing as the pattern of stars in the night sky isn’t what’s there directly where the stars seem to be, then where is this pattern happening, where does this pattern exist? In the differentiated area of reality we call our brain, as a pattern of neuronal stimulation that we’re then aware of as our experience of stars in the sky.

Let’s extend this line of reasoning to other visual experiences. It takes light from the Sun approximately 8 minutes to reach the Earth. So, where we see the Sun is where it was 8 minutes ago. Again, we’re not seeing what’s there directly; we’re seeing a pattern of neuronal stimulation created by light from out there impacting our awareness in here. The same is true regarding your experience of the work you’re now reading, or of any other seemingly stationary object. What you’re seeing as this work and reading as the words on the page aren’t what exists directly where they seem to be. What you’re experiencing are patterns of neuronal stimulation that you’re then aware of as the words on the page of this work.

The words that you're reading may seem to be out there, the world you experience may seem to be out there, but they're really not. They exist and are happening within the differentiated area of reality we call the brain. We're aware of these experiences because the brain, through its neuronal activity, functions as an impactive interface, allowing the localization of consciousness into awareness. Experience is what our awareness is aware of as the neuronal activity that defines it as awareness. *Essentially, what we're aware of as experience is neuronal activity occurring within the brain.*¹²

The same holds true for all of our organic physical senses. What we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch are all basically patterns of neuronal stimulation that somehow correlate with what's out there, but still aren't really that.

Stimulation of the level of neuronal organization within the brain that forms the external experiential construct exists as the experience of physical reality. Stimulation of the level of neuronal organization within the brain that forms the internal experiential construct exists as the experience of mental reality. *Physical reality seems to exist in the area we call space, and mental reality seems to exist in the area we call mind.* However, even space and mind are themselves both experiential realities, not "places" that actually exist as such, independent of our experience of them. These areas that we call space and mind are actually *arenas* (an arena being a defined area), and these arenas themselves aren't other than our experience of the external and internal experiential constructs functioning as a type of *experiential theater*, as illustrated in **figure 86**.



¹² More accurately, what we're aware of as experience is impacts upon the structure of the differentiated area of reality we experience as brain. We could also say that what we're aware of as experience are alterations or fluctuations in the distortion field associated with the compound distortion process we experience as brain. However, since these descriptions are rather cumbersome, we will simply refer to experience as neuronal activity, understanding that neuronal activity is itself our experience and description of what's happening in the brain, and therefore isn't what's happening directly. Neuronal stimulation really means an impact upon differentiated existence, and since differentiated existence consists of areas of compound distortion processes, an impact upon a compound distortion process implies some alteration in the configuration of that compound distortion process, with a corresponding alteration in the distortion field associated with that compound process. That alteration in the distortion field corresponds to neuronal stimulation, and that alteration is the experience itself.

Figure 86 The external and internal experiential constructs function as an experiential theater by providing variable surfaces for the extension of experiential reality toward or away from our awareness. In this way, our awareness becomes surrounded by physical and mental experiences that seem to be taking place within the arenas of space and mind. However, space and mind are themselves just as much experiential realities as are the physical and mental experiential realities for which they seem to provide an arena. That is, neither space nor mind exists as such, independent of an awareness of those experiential realities.

Physical experience is a penetration of the external experiential construct into awareness, and space is the complementary experience of the external experiential construct where it doesn't penetrate into awareness. That is, in relation to the penetration of the external experiential construct into awareness that is physical-object experience, the areas of the external experiential construct between these inward penetrations exist as relative invaginations of the external experiential construct, or as not-object experiences. Thus, we're aware of the complementary experiences of physical objects ("things") and the physical area (or space) those things seem to exist within. Space isn't no-experience, or the lack of experience; space is the experience of no-object in relation to object-experience.

Likewise, mental experience is a penetration of the internal experiential construct out of awareness, and mind is the complementary experience of the internal experiential construct where it doesn't penetrate away out of awareness. That is, in relation to the penetration of the internal experiential construct out of the awareness that is thought-experience, the areas of the internal experiential construct between these outward penetrations exist as relative invasions of the internal experiential construct, or as not-thought experiences. Thus, we're aware of the complementary experiences of mental objects ("thoughts") and the mental area (or mind) those thoughts seem to exist within. Mind isn't no-experience, or the lack of experience; mind is the experience of no-thought in relation to thought experience.

Now, we could ask, why isn't mind, as an experiential reality, a physical experience if it represents a relative penetration into awareness; and why isn't space, as an experiential reality, a mental experience if it represents a relative penetration out of awareness, as depicted in figure 86? Because space exists as such only in relation to complementary physical-object experiences ("things"), and likewise mind exists as such only in relation to complementary mental-object experiences ("thoughts").

However, although space as an awareness of the external experiential construct is a physical reality, and mind as an awareness of the internal experiential construct is a mental reality, space as a relative penetration out of awareness has an intangible quality, and mind as a relative penetration into awareness has a tangible quality. Doesn't mind exist as a tangible experience, as something we can grasp, something we can to some degree manipulate as we do tangible physical objects in order to form thoughts and recall memories? And doesn't space exist as an intangible experience, as something we can't grasp, as something we can't manipulate as we do tangible physical objects? Thus, although space is a physical experiential reality, in that it exists

as an awareness of the external experiential construct, it has an intangible quality because it's a relative penetration out of awareness. Likewise, although mind is a mental experiential reality, in that it exists as an awareness of the internal experiential construct, it has a tangible quality because it's a relative penetration into awareness.

What exists is a relational matrix, absolute existence existing in relation to itself. As the relational matrix differentiates and impacts itself, then and only then do physical and mental experiences come into existence, along with the associated awareness of space and mind, together forming our experience of physical and mental reality. Without an awareness to experience space, there's no space; there's then only what-is as it is. Without an awareness to experience mind, there's no mind; there's then only what-is as it is.

Most of us go through life assuming that what we see "out there" as physical reality is what's really there, whether we're "here" to experience it or not. Yet the fact is, whatever we're seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching must all be taking place within our head, within the differentiated area of reality we call the brain. It's not happening as we experience it to exist, out there, beyond our body. What we experience as physical reality is our awareness of how our brain is being neuronally stimulated. Look all around you. What you're seeing is all taking place within the confines of your personal experiential theater.

This same type of analysis applies to our experiences of mental reality; however, such an analysis is more difficult, owing to the intangible nature of mental reality. For this reason, the rest of this discussion will focus primarily upon physical experience and physical reality, with the understanding that what we say about the nature of physical reality applies also to mental reality.

If what we experience as physical reality isn't really what's out there but is actually occurring within our head, within our brain, then why does it seem to be "out there"? In order to understand more clearly how patterns of neuronal stimulation within the brain come to exist as physical experiences "out there," we need to understand what experience is most fundamentally.

When we're aware of experience, what we're aware of is fundamentally something in relation to nothing, or more precisely, the some-thing of experiential reality superimposed on the no-thing of unexperienced existence. As explained previously, when differentiated, yet undefined, areas of reality impact each other, they can become defined in relation to each other, and in this way something (i.e., sum-thing) arises between the two inseparable nothings. Existence has no real boundaries, no ultimately real way of being separated from itself; yet, through a process of repetitive and progressive self-relation, the indefinable creates definition, and the inseparable creates separation.

As depicted in various ways in figures 73 and 77 through 80, where differentiated existence impacts itself there is something, and that something defines awareness and is also what the awareness experiences as reality. That something is the experiential construct. Different forms of the experiential construct yield the awareness of different experiences, different somethings. Therefore, all experience is really nothing more than the awareness of something against a

background of nothing, as depicted in figure 73. Visual experience consists of shades of light against a background of darkness—something in relation to nothing. Auditory experience consists of variations of sound against a background of silence—again, something in relation to nothing. This relationship between something and nothing is the basis of all experience.

With regard to human existence, where neuronal activity occurs, there exists an experiential construct; where neuronal activity doesn't occur, there exists no experiential construct. Where an experiential construct exists, there's something; where an experiential construct doesn't exist, there's nothing. Where something exists, there's experience; where something doesn't exist, there's no experience. Essentially, the pattern of neuronal stimulation within the brain is the something-in-relation-to-nothing that exists as experience.

The neuronal activity of the brain functions in relation to awareness somewhat like a movie playing on a screen in relation to the audience. In this way, the brain functions as an experiential theater, providing the variable surface upon which experience occurs, while simultaneously defining an area of consciousness-existence as awareness, i.e., as the "audience," as depicted in figure 87.

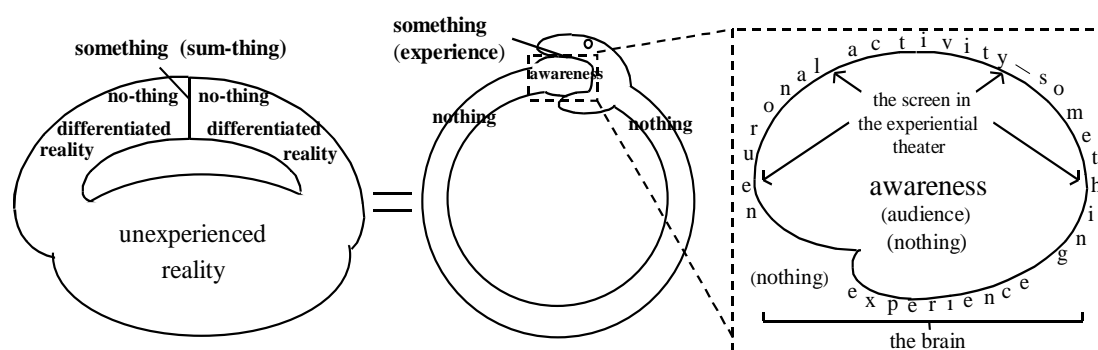


Figure 87 How the brain functions as an experiential theater. (Left) The experiential process. Where nothing meets nothing and becomes defined in relation to itself, the something of experience comes to exist. (Middle) The experiential process represented by the Ouroboros symbol, wherein a snake consumes itself (see middle, figure 78). The experiential process, whereby existence impacts itself, can also be considered existence consuming itself. As existence consumes itself—i.e., impacts itself on all sides—it exists in relation to itself as somewhere (i.e., a whereness or awareness) in relation to somewhere else. (Right) For us, the brain functions as the impactful interface that allows existence to become defined in relation to itself, thereby creating something out of nothing. Impacts upon the brain exist in the form of neuronal activity. Neuronal activity is the something-in-relation-to-nothing that the awareness is aware of as experience. That is, the awareness defined by that neuronal activity experiences that neuronal activity as reality. Our awareness is surrounded by physical experiences that seem to be “out there” because our awareness is actually defined, bordered, and so surrounded by the something-in-relation-to-nothing that these experiences represent. In this way, awareness becomes surrounded by experience. So, in relation to our

awareness, the neuronal activity that exists as physical experience seems to be “out there,” allowing what we call the brain to function as an experiential theater.

In a theater, different aspects of the movie experience come through different components within the theater. There’s the screen upon which the visual component is played, and there are the speakers from which comes the auditory component. The experiential theater that is the brain also consists of different components, each responsible for presenting us with a different experiential modality. In the brain, these different components are represented by the differentiation of the brain into different anatomical areas, each responsible for receiving, integrating, and neuronally reacting to different types of sensory input. In this way, the brain presents different types of physical experience to the awareness that’s defined by its neuronal activity.

The evolution of the brain can be thought of as the expansion of an impactful interface. Within the context of this discussion, the evolutionary expansion of the cranial area of the neural tube into what we call the brain can also be said to represent an ongoing remodeling of the experiential theater, wherein new experiential modalities are added and already-existent experiential modalities are expanded and refined. The addition of new experiential modalities is analogous to adding sound to movies, or to adding a sound card and speakers to a computer system. The expansion and refinement of already-existent experiential modalities is analogous to building a larger screen, or getting a bigger TV or computer monitor, so that whatever movie is being shown on the screen is composed of more pixels, or, in the case of the brain, more neurons, resulting in higher resolution and more detail available in the experience.

Each different type of physical experience represents something in relation to nothing. Why does the something of visual experience have a different form from the something of auditory experience, or of olfactory experience, if they’re all fundamentally just patterns of neuronal stimulation? How does the brain, through its neuronal activity, present awareness with apparently different somethings, with different types of physical experience? The answer lies in the question.

The different types of physical experience represent different forms of something in relation to nothing. In terms of the something of physical experience, we’re talking about patterns of neuronal stimulation. Therefore, different somethings, different physical experiences, must somehow represent different patterns of neuronal stimulation occurring within the different areas of the brain responsible for presenting awareness with each of the different components of physical experience.

Our experience of the three primary colors (red, yellow, and green) is caused by our optical sensors being impacted by three different frequencies of electromagnetic radiation. Let’s use this as an analogy and say then that the different types of physical experience (sight, sound, etc.) could each represent different frequencies of neuronal activity, thereby presenting awareness with different experiential forms, as different forms of something in relation to nothing,¹³ as depicted in **figure 88**.

¹³ Whether or not the frequency of neuronal activity is actually the differentiating factor between physical experiences may or may not be the case. Nonetheless, it’s useful in terms of explaining the general concept regarding how different

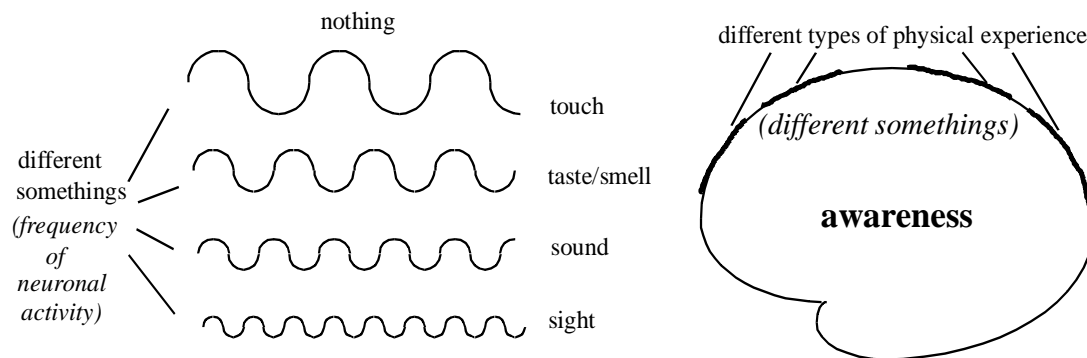


Figure 88 How the different forms of something-in-relation-to-nothing created as differentiated existence impacts itself can account for the different types of physical experience. Different areas of the brain may have evolved to produce different patterns of neuronal stimulation, different forms of something-in-relation-to-nothing, and in that way present awareness with different experiential forms. Patterns of neuronal stimulation in the brain exist as experience. Yet some patterns of neuronal stimulation yield the experience of light, others the experience of sound, etc. Since it's all patterns of neuronal stimulation, the difference must be in the pattern itself. Since neuronal activity represents something in relation to nothing, different patterns of neuronal stimulation (e.g., different frequencies of neuronal activity, as shown on the left) represent different somethings, and so these differences may be responsible for awareness being presented with the different types of physical experience.

Having explained in the most general terms how neuronal activity exists as the form of physical experience, we can now examine another aspect of the architecture of the brain in terms of how it functions as an experiential theater.

Each different area of the brain responsible for a different type of physical experience is comparable to a different wall or screen in the whole room of experience. These experiential walls or screens are only two-dimensional—i.e., they're essentially flat, as a movie or TV screen is a flat, two-dimensional surface. Yet we are presented with physical experiences in three dimensions; for instance, we are able to localize visual and auditory stimuli in three dimensions.

How does the relatively flat surface of the experiential theater present us with these three-dimensional experiences, i.e., experiences that have depth? This three-dimensionality exists because the brain is, for the most part, bilaterally symmetrical, consisting of communicating halves. Essentially, the neuronal activity of the brain occurs in stereo. What this means is that, for most sensory input, two slightly different patterns of neuronal stimulation are created in the

experiential forms can be presented to awareness within the context of the same underlying process of neuronal activity. There's differentiation, and there's unity. There's a single process, neuronal activity, that we're aware of as different types of physical experience. Between the unity and the differentiation, there's some variability, some difference in the pattern of neuronal stimulation yielding different physical experiences. This difference may be in frequency, or it may be in some other factor, some other pattern of neuronal stimulation. The important thing here is the overall concept that some variability in the same underlying process, i.e., neuronal activity, is responsible for the different types of physical experience.

two halves of the brain, resulting in the awareness that's defined by these patterns of neuronal stimulation being presented with two slightly different experiences originating from the same stimulus. When these two different experiences are overlapped, or superimposed upon each other, the awareness of the combined experiential form has depth, or three-dimensionality. In this way, the awareness of overlapping experiences, each occurring in different halves of the brain, gives the show playing in the experiential theater a depth, a three-dimensionality, that the individual experiences themselves do not really have.

The process of getting a three-dimensional experience from two two-dimensional experiences is most easily related to visual experience. Close one eye, and what you see is a two-dimensional image. Open that eye and close the other, and what you see is a slightly different two-dimensional image, by virtue of the fact that human eyes see a scene from two viewpoints separated laterally by about 2½ inches. The two viewpoints each show slightly different spatial relationships between near and distant objects. Open both eyes, and each two-dimensional image contributes to the awareness of a three-dimensional visual experience, as depicted in **figure 89**.

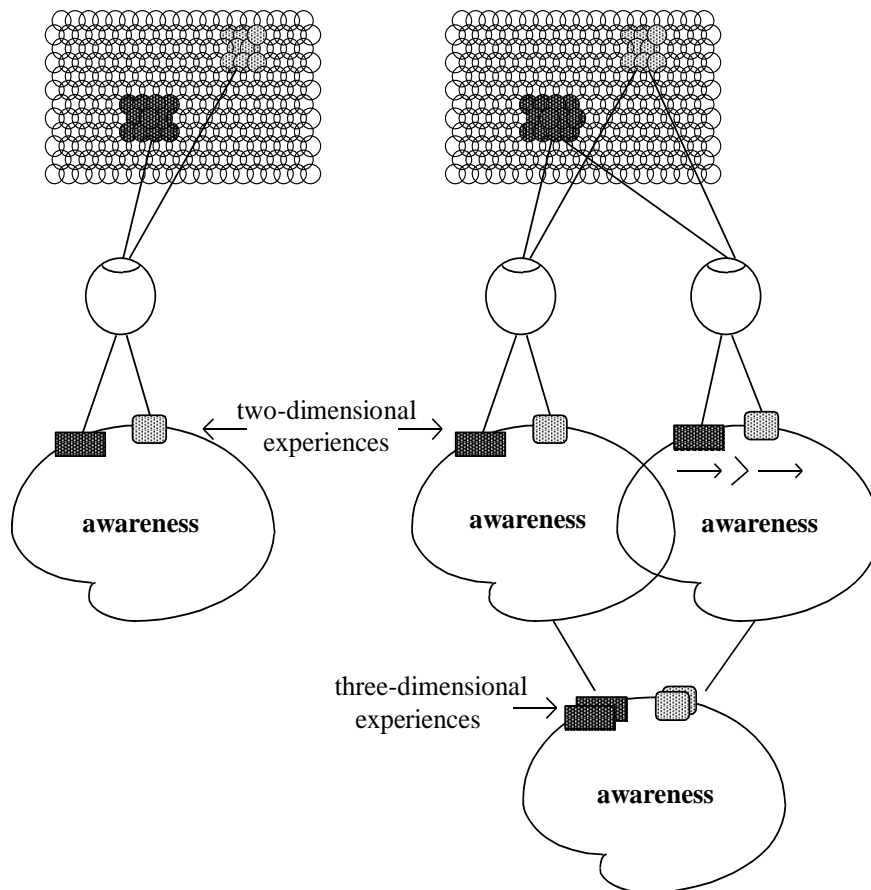


Figure 89 Three-dimensional experiences are actually composed of two two-dimensional experiences. (Left) With one eye open, the visual impacts from two different areas of relational-matrix distortion are transmitted to only one half of the brain, creating a flat or two-dimensional object-experience. (Right) With both eyes

open, the visual impacts from those two different areas of relational-matrix distortion are transmitted to both halves of the brain, creating two slightly different flat or two-dimensional object experiences. When the awareness of each of these two-dimensional experiences is combined into the awareness of a single experience by overlapping the two two-dimensional experiences, a three-dimensional experience is created.

The difference between the experiences from each side of the brain is that the closer area of relational-matrix distortion will have more lateral transposition in the combined visual field than the farther area of relational-matrix distortion, so that when the experiences from each half of the brain are superimposed upon each other, this greater and lesser lateral transposition of the experienced objects in the visual field is translated into the experience of relative depth between the two objects. To demonstrate this translation, look at any two objects that are at different distances from you. Close one eye, then open it and close the other; repeat as many times as necessary. Notice that the closer object always moves more from side to side in the visual field relative to the farther object.

In a very real way, the brain functions as an experiential theater that's showing a three-dimensional movie—i.e., a movie filmed from two slightly different perspectives—so that, as those two perspectives become overlapped into a single experience, our awareness gets to enjoy the show in three-dimensions rather than just the two-dimensions it was originally filmed (i.e., experienced) in.

The thing is, nowhere does there actually exist a three-dimensional image—i.e., there's no real depth to any single experience, to any single experiential form or impact. When the awareness of each two-dimensional experience is overlapped, a three-dimensional experience is created where there really are only two two-dimensional experiences. The experience of three-dimensions is a trick performed by the magician of awareness in the experiential theater by virtue of the brain having two halves, so that the awareness of experience occurs in stereo. Thus, the only place where three-dimensional experience exists is in relation to a single awareness of two overlapping two-dimensional experiences.

The fact that we experience what are really two-dimensional images as three-dimensional images illustrates clearly that what we experience doesn't exist as we experience it to exist, independent of our awareness. That is, what we're aware of as experience isn't and can't be what exists directly where the experience seems to be, but rather is the boundary or experiential construct that defines consciousness as awareness.

Existence around us may really be three-dimensional, may really have depth, but we can't experience that three-dimensionality as it is directly because experience is fundamentally a two-dimensional boundary, created when existence comes to exist in relation to itself and so becomes defined in relation to itself. In order to get around this experiential limitation, stereo experience evolved, so that when experiences from complementary areas in the two halves of the brain are combined or overlapped, awareness is presented with what appears to be a single experience that has a depth or three-dimensionality which correlates with what exists directly but still isn't that.

For example, in stereo photography, where photographs are taken with two cameras or a twin camera with lenses 2 1/2 inches apart, the result is two flat two-dimensional photographic images. When these images are viewed through a stereoscope, so that the left eye sees only the picture taken by the left-hand lens and the right eye sees only the picture taken by the right-hand lens, the result is an experience of a single three-dimensional picture, a photograph that seems to have depth, just as real as the depth of normal stereo vision. But where's that depth, that three-dimensionality? Nowhere but in our awareness of the two overlapping two-dimensional experiences. Likewise, where's the three-dimensionality of any visual or auditory experience? Nowhere but in our awareness of two overlapping two-dimensional experiences.

There's no fundamental difference between the way stereo photography functions to create a three-dimensional-image experience out of two two-dimensional images, and the way the brain functions to present awareness with three-dimensional experiences created out of two two-dimensional experiences. In each case, two two-dimensional experiences are combined or overlapped to create a single three-dimensional experience in relation to a single awareness. The three-dimensional images created by stereo photography are just as real (or unreal!) as the three-dimensional experiences created by the bilaterally symmetrical structure of the brain. As with experience of any sort, these image experiences are occurring or existing only within the experiential theater of the brain, not "out there" where they seem to be, as depicted in **figure 90**.

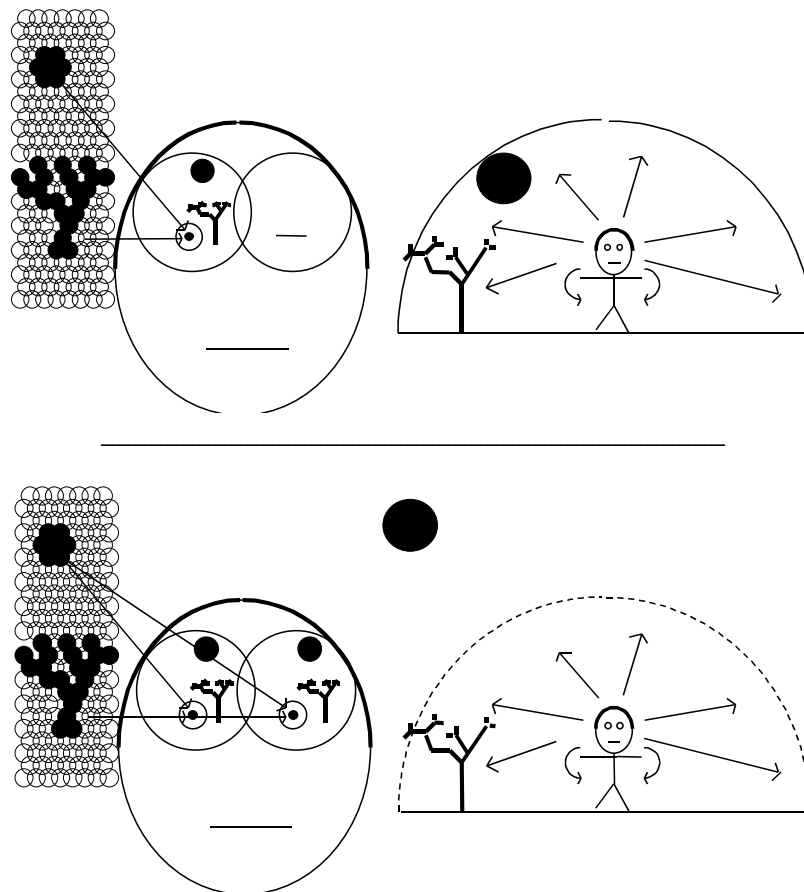


Figure 90 What we're aware of as experiences "out there" are actually occurring within our head, on the screen of our own experiential theater. These experiences seem to be "out there" because our awareness is actually surrounded by these experiences, and so, relative to our awareness, these experiences really are out there. However, although the experiences may actually be out there relative to our awareness, they aren't really "out there" relative to the differentiated area of existence where we are, i.e., beyond where we perceive our bodies to be. Actually, all experience is happening "in here," within the differentiated area of reality we call the brain. (Left) A visual impact occurs through one eye and so is experienced to be "out there" in two-dimensions, as if on a flat screen (solid curve). (Right) A visual impact occurs through both eyes and so is experienced to be "out there" in three-dimensions, seeming to dissolve the screen upon which experience occurs (dashed curve).

The three-dimensionality of experience contributes greatly to making it seem that what we experience as "out there" really is what's out there. Another reason why experience seems to be occurring "out there," beyond our bodies, is that our body, as a defined physical reality, is also part of our experience of physical reality. Our body is obviously outside of our brain, and we experience physical reality to extend beyond our body, and so it seems that what we experience must really be out there. However, what we experience as our body is just as relative, just as rainbow-like, as any other physical experience. That is, what we experience as our body isn't what exists directly where we experience our body to be. The physical experience of our body is just another part of the show playing upon the screen of the experiential theater.

What lies beyond the screen of the experiential theater? The same thing (or no-thing) that exists within the confines of the experiential theater—i.e., consciousness. What exists directly "out there" where we experience something to be is no different from what exists directly "in here" where we are. What exists directly "in here" is differentiated consciousness, i.e., consciousness existing in a state of self-relation. What exists directly "out there" also is differentiated consciousness. When differentiated consciousness impacts itself, thereby becoming defined in relation to itself, consciousness so defined then exists as an experiencer/experienced duality.

Although we need a functioning brain in order to experience physical and mental reality, and although what we experience as reality depends on the pattern of neuronal stimulation within the brain, this explanation shouldn't be construed to imply that the brain itself is the source of awareness or consciousness. Brain function doesn't create awareness; it creates experience, which localizes what already exists everywhere as consciousness into what exists somewhere as awareness. The difference is subtle, yet vital. Nothing can create awareness, because nothing creates consciousness. Consciousness is what-is, and awareness is ultimately consciousness. Existence existing in relation to itself creates something, the something-out-of-nothing of experience. Nothing in relation to itself turns nowhere into somewhere. This is the wonder of relative existence: An apparent something comes from nothing, albeit nothing existing in relation to itself. In this way, experience is the result of existence picking itself up by its own bootstraps, as it must, for there's nothing else.

Each of us experiences a unique physical and mental reality. What we experience as reality exists because we are where we are, interacting with the rest of differentiated existence surrounding where we are. What we each experience as reality exists only within our own awareness. Every spectator at a sporting event has a unique experience of the game, for each individual is aware of the game only as it's played out within their own experiential theater.

Why is it important to understand that experience isn't really what exists directly "out there"? Why is it necessary to understand the uniqueness of each individual's experience of reality? Because, for awareness, reality is whatever it experiences it to be. Awareness is nothing more than what exists everywhere as consciousness becoming defined by the something of experience. However, if, while functioning as awareness, we become caught up in the world of experience, mistaking the relativity of experiential reality for an absolutely or independently existent reality, we then also become confined by the limitations, boundaries, and definitions intrinsic to experiential reality, and so we lose sight of, become unaware of, our true nature as *sat-chit-ananda*, as existence-consciousness-bliss.

Consciousness is unlimited, borderless, and undefined, whereas awareness is limited, bordered, and defined. When awareness becomes caught up in experiential reality, mistaking experiential reality for an independently existent reality, it literally becomes un-consciousness, or the opposite of consciousness. Since, for awareness, reality is whatever it experiences it to be, although awareness always remains what it is (i.e., consciousness), what awareness can experience itself to be is another matter entirely. For this reason, awareness can become unaware, can become unconscious of what it is, can become experientially cut off or separated from the consciousness that lies both within and beyond the screen of experience.

In the upcoming sections, as we discuss emotional experience, we will also be examining how awareness becomes confined by its experience of reality and thereby becomes experientially separated from its larger consciousness-self. It will be helpful in the course of that discussion to understand how personal, individual, and unique each awareness' experience of reality is.

Conceptual Checkpoint II-4

-There exists no experiential reality in the absence of an awareness of that reality.

-The awareness of experience is formed as differentiated existence comes to exist in relation to itself at another relational level by impacting itself, thereby localizing what exists undivided everywhere into a somewhere/somewhere-else duality.

-What exists absolutely everywhere is consciousness. What exists relatively somewhere is awareness. The boundary or dividing line that defines existence everywhere as existence somewhere is experience.

-Consciousness localized to a relative somewhere through the process of self-relation functions as awareness.

-Experience is what awareness is conscious or aware of as the boundary that defines what and where it is.

-Experience is most fundamentally an awareness of something in relation to nothing.

-The differentiated area of reality we experience as brain functions as the impactive interface that localizes what exists absolutely everywhere to a relative somewhere, creating our individual awareness.

-We are surrounded by differentiated existence impacting us on all sides, localizing our awareness into a focal somewhere.

-The boundary or dividing line that defines that focal somewhere is the experiential construct.

-Owing to the brain functioning as both an invariant and a variable impactive interface, our awareness becomes sandwiched between externally and internally defining experiential constructs.

-The external and internal experiential constructs exist as what our awareness experiences as reality.

-Awareness of the external experiential construct corresponds to physical experience, and awareness of the internal experiential construct corresponds to mental experience.

-Each awareness, each localization of consciousness, experiences unique physical and mental realities, because all experiential realities exist as such only in relation to the awareness that's being defined by the impactive boundary or experiential construct which itself exists as the experience of reality.

Section 4 Experiential Mechanics III: Positive and Negative Emotional Experiences

The unified model of reality that has so far been developed in this work shows how existence as consciousness, through a process of repetitive and progressive self-relation, has evolved into an awareness of physical and mental experiences. However, our experience of reality also contains an emotional component. Therefore, to provide a more complete picture of reality, in this section we will incorporate emotional experience into that model.

Emotions seem to exist in complementary pairs, e.g., love/hate, joy/sadness, friendliness/hostility, empathy/antipathy, trust/fear. These emotional pairs each have a positive/negative polarity; that is, one of each pair is considered a positive emotion, and the other is considered a negative emotion.

According to the unified model of reality that has so far been developed in this work, emotions, as experiential realities, must represent an awareness of some alteration of the experiential

construct which defines that awareness. Therefore, in order to integrate emotional experience into the unified model of reality, emotional experience must be explained in terms of some alteration of the experiential construct that also accounts for the existence of the positive/negative emotional polarity. Providing such an explanation is the topic of the following subsections.

4.1 *What-is and what-is-not*

For existence to experience itself, it must exist in relation to itself. Absolute existence can't experience itself as such because it's nonrelational and nondual, while whatever is experienced must be relational and dual. For existence to experience itself, that process must occur at some relational level of reality, in the realm of relativity, and the experience itself must be of a relative reality, not of an absolute reality.

In the realm of relativity, whatever exists does so only in relation to its opposite or complementary relative reality. In the realm of relativity, we can, as existence experiencing itself, experience existence as what-is. However, because any experience of existence as what-is can only be an experience of a relative what-is, not of an absolute what-is, that relative what-is must itself exist in relation to a relative what-is-not. Essentially, in order to have the possibility of experiencing what-is relatively, there must also exist the possibility of experiencing what-is-not relatively.

This is the trick of relative existence. Duality means that unreality is also real, that non-existence also exists—not absolutely, but relatively. For there to be any reality, there must be a coexisting unreality. For there to be an existence, there must be a coexisting nonexistence. For there to be a what-is, there must be a coexisting what-is-not. However, we must be clear on the following point: The what-is/what-is-not duality is only relatively real and has no basis of existence outside the context of the experiential relationship. That is, within the context of the experiential level of reality, unreality is real, and nonexistence exists, while outside the context of the experiential level of reality, neither unreality nor nonexistence really exist.

As we will show in the following sections, the what-is/what-is-not experiential duality is the basis of the positive/negative emotional polarity.

4.11 *The positive and the negative*

In order to understand how emotional experience comes to exist, we must first understand the basis of the positive/negative emotional polarity. In order to understand the basis of the positive/negative emotional polarity, we must relate the relative concepts of what-is and what-is-not to the terms *positive* and *negative*.

In photography, the image that's first recorded on the film is called a negative. In that negative, relationships become the reverse of what they actually are, so that right becomes left and left

becomes right. This image is called a negative because it represents the situation as it was not. When the negative recorded on the film is transferred to photographic paper with the proper relationships restored, this image is called a positive because it represents the situation as it was. When making a cast for a sculpture, the form of the cast is called a negative because the cast represents the opposite of what-is, i.e., something where there's nothing and nothing where there's something. When plaster is poured into the cast, recreating the form of the original reality, this form is then called a positive because it shows what-is as it is, i.e., something where there was something and nothing where there was nothing.

Therefore, it seems that the word *positive* is related to the concept of what-is and that the word *negative* is related to the concept of what-is-not. These relationships can be seen to be intrinsic to the words themselves when the words are conceptually deconstructed, or broken down into their constituent concepts. Positive = posit + -ive; posit (Latin) = place, -ive = live = being. Thus, the word *positive* can be translated literally as "the place of being" or "the place that is." Negative = negate + -ive; negate = not, -ive = live = being. Thus, the word *negative* can be translated literally as "not being," or "that which is not."

We will now provide further evidence that the word *positive* refers to what-is relatively and that the word *negative* refers to what-is-not relatively by analyzing the associations between the terms *positive* and *good* and between the terms *negative* and *bad*.

4.12 *Projection and reflection, the good and the bad*

With regard to emotional experience, there's a consistent association between the terms *positive* and *good* and between the terms *negative* and *bad*—i.e., positive emotions make us "feel good," while negative emotions make us "feel bad." By analyzing the words *good* and *bad* within the context of these associations, we can gain a deeper understanding of the difference between what-is relatively and what-is-not relatively.

The association of the terms *positive* and *good* indicates that the word *good* is connected to the relative state of what-is. Likewise, the association of the terms *negative* and *bad* indicates that the word *bad* is connected to the relative state of what-is-not.

The word *good* is very much like the word *god*, for very good reasons. The word *bad* is associated with the word *evil*, which is the reverse or mirror image of the word *live*, also for very good reasons. God is the archetype of the ultimate good, the ultimate positive, the ultimate what-is. The devil, or "d(efined)-evil," is the archetype of the ultimate bad, the ultimate negative, the ultimate what-is-not.

It's been said that the universe was made in the image of God, or of the ultimate what-is. What we need to understand is that there are two types of images, projected and reflected. Projected images, though inverted, maintain the relationships intrinsic to the original reality, whereas reflected images reverse those relationships.

For example, if an image of you with a ring on your right hand is projected through a lens, your image will be inverted or upside down, but the ring will still appear on the right hand of your image. Conversely, if an image of you with a ring on your right hand is reflected in a mirror, your image will be upright, but the ring will appear on the left hand of your image. Thus, in a projected image, the relationships intrinsic to the original reality are inverted but maintained as what they are, while in a reflected image, the relationships intrinsic to the original reality are reversed, or what they're not.

The word *good* represents a projected image, a reality that's what-is. The word *bad* represents a reflected image, a reality that's what-is-not. The word *go/od* has a structure that's like the image projected through a lens, becoming inverted. The word *ba/ad* has a structure that's more like the image reflected in a mirror, becoming reversed. In *go/od*, the projected reality, "-od," is the inverted image of "go-." In *ba/ad*, the reflected reality, "-ad," is the reversed image of "ba-." In this way, the structure of the word *bad* itself is related to the unreality or what-is-not-ness of a reflected reality, while, conversely, the structure of the word *good* itself is related to the reality or what-is-ness of a projected reality.

The positive is good because it *projects* absolute existence as what-is relatively. The negative is bad or evil because it *reflects* absolute existence as what-is-not relatively. Yet there exists no absolute evil, nor any absolute good, because the state of absolute existence precludes any duality, such as the what-is/what-is-not experiential duality. Yet it's also true that we exist in a relative state, in an arena of relativity and relationality, and so we're bound, while operating in that state, by the polarity intrinsic to the good/bad duality, and by the association of good with what-is and the association of bad with what-is-not.

In summary, the difference between positive and negative, between good and bad, between what-is relatively and what-is-not relatively, is analogous to the difference between a projected image and a reflected image. Projection yields an image that shows an accurate representation of the relationships intrinsic to the original reality, making the projected image an image of what-is as it is. Reflection yields an image that shows an inaccurate representation of the relationships intrinsic to the original reality, making the reflected image an image of what-is as it isn't.

Before we can relate the experiences of what-is and what-is-not to positive and negative emotions, we must first relate emotional experience to an alteration of the experiential construct, with the awareness of that alteration existing as emotional experience.

4.2 *The alteration of the experiential construct that is emotional experience*

As explained previously, experience occurs when differentiated existence impacts itself, creating an experiential boundary that defines and delimits consciousness as awareness. Previously, we said that what awareness experiences is an alteration of the experiential boundary which defines the awareness. Specifically, this way of describing experience was used to explain our awareness of physical and mental experiences.

Although physical, mental, and emotional experiences are all different, they're also all experiences, and in that way they're all the same. Therefore, emotions as experiences must also be the result of some alteration of the experiential construct that defines awareness. Yet, since emotional experience is fundamentally different from physical and mental experiences, it must represent a different type of alteration of the experiential construct.

In order to approach the nature of emotional experience, we will first look at the differences between emotional experience and physical and mental experiences. Physical and mental experiences both have form, although, for reasons explained earlier, the form of physical experience is tangible, while the form of mental experience is intangible. Emotional experience, on the other hand, has no form whatsoever. This difference provides the first clue to the nature of the alteration of the experiential construct that exists as emotional experience.

Physical and mental experiences represent an awareness of alterations of the external and internal experiential constructs, respectively. Physical and mental experiences represent alterations of the shape or form of the experiential construct. On the other hand, emotional experience has no form, and so it must represent some alteration of the experiential construct that doesn't involve an alteration of the shape or form of the experiential construct. An alteration of a boundary that doesn't involve altering its form is an alteration of the area defined by that boundary—i.e., either an expansion or a contraction of the boundary.

Emotions come in complementary positive/negative pairs, and expansion and contraction represent complementary changes in an experiential construct. Therefore, it's reasonable to postulate that the awareness of one of these alterations of an experiential construct corresponds to a positive emotional experience, while the awareness of the other alteration corresponds to a negative emotional experience. In other words, emotional experience represents an awareness of the expansion and contraction of an experiential construct, as depicted in **figure 91**.

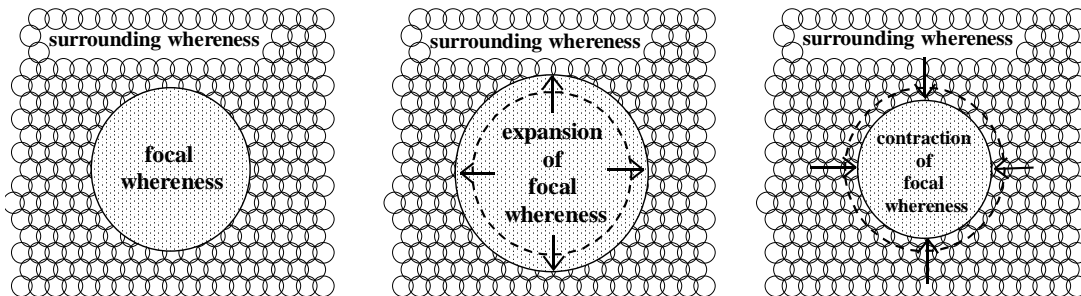


Figure 91 Changes in the size of a boundary, either expansion or contraction, don't involve changes in the shape or form of that boundary. Rather, expansion and contraction of a boundary involve changes in the area defined by that boundary.

There are two basic types of change that can occur to an experiential construct. First, an experiential construct can change in *shape* by being impacted, creating an awareness of experiential form, i.e., the tangible form of physical reality or the intangible form of mental

reality. Second, an experiential construct can change in *size*, by either expanding or contracting, creating the awareness of a formless emotional experience.

The question still remains, which alteration of an experiential construct, i.e., either expansion or contraction, corresponds to which type of emotional experience, i.e., either positive or negative? Furthermore, what's the nature of the experiential construct that expands or contracts to create the awareness of emotional experience? Further still, what causes an experiential construct to expand or contract? In order to answer these questions, we must return to the previous discussion regarding the correlation of what-is and what-is-not with projected and reflected images, respectively.

4.3 *Experiential optics: the projection and reflection of awareness*

On the basis of the relationships discussed previously, the alteration of an experiential construct that represents a positive emotion should correspond to an experience of what-is, and since what-is corresponds to a projected image, positive emotions should, then, also be related to projected images. Conversely, the alteration of an experiential construct that represents a negative emotion should correspond to an experience of what-is-not, and since what-is-not corresponds to a reflected image, negative emotions should, then, also be related to reflected images.

We have postulated that positive and negative emotions represent an awareness of the expansion and contraction, respectively, of an experiential construct. If an impact upon an experiential construct is viewed as a lens through which awareness can experience either a projected reality or a reflected reality, it becomes possible to see the relationships between the expansion and contraction of an experiential construct and positive and negative emotions, as depicted in **figure 92**.

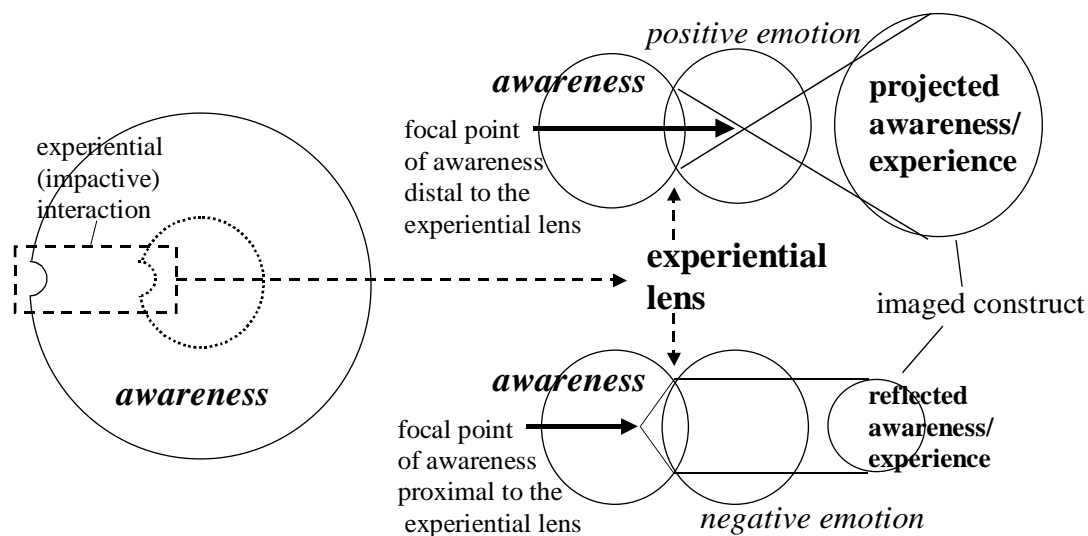


Figure 92 The expansion and contraction of an experiential construct corresponds to the awareness of projected and reflected images, respectively. The awareness of projected

and reflected images corresponds to the experience of positive and negative emotions, respectively. Expanded and contracted experiential constructs can arise if an impact upon an experiential construct is viewed as a lens, allowing the awareness of either a projected or a reflected image-experience. When the impact occurs, awareness experiences the form of the experiential construct as physical or mental reality. Awareness can also use the experiential relationship as a lens either to become aware of a projected image of the experience or to become aware of a reflected image of the experience.

The experiential construct that defines awareness' experience of either a projected or a reflected reality is neither the external nor the internal experiential construct but is a virtual experiential construct, an imagined experiential construct—i.e., it's literally an experiential construct that exists as an *image in-to* which awareness moves through the lens of either physical or mental experience. This virtual or imagined experiential construct will be referred to as the *imaged construct*.

(Top) The nature of projections is such that the imaged construct which defines awareness' experience of a projected reality is *larger* than the experiential construct which defines awareness from where it's projecting itself. Thus, the imaged construct produced as a projected image-experience represents a relative *expansion* of the experiential construct that defines awareness. (Bottom) Conversely, the nature of reflections is such that the imaged construct which defines awareness' experience of a reflected reality is *smaller* than the experiential construct which defines awareness from where it's reflecting itself. Thus, the imaged construct produced as a reflected image-experience represents a relative *contraction* of the experiential construct that defines the awareness.

It doesn't matter that these expanded and contracted experiential constructs are only virtual, or imagined, because, for awareness, reality is how awareness is defined, and how awareness is defined is what awareness experiences as reality. That is, for awareness, the imaged construct is as experientially real as the external and internal experiential constructs, inasmuch as the imaged construct also defines awareness, although it does so in another way. In the case of these expanded and contracted imaged constructs, the way they redefine awareness exists as awareness' experience of positive (expanded) and negative (contracted) emotional realities. Emotions are thus what awareness experiences as the result of its movement into one of these two types of imaged construct.

Essentially, emotions are what awareness experiences as it's either projected or reflected through an experiential lens. These projections and reflections of awareness create an emotional experience because, as awareness is projected or reflected, it becomes redefined by an imaged construct. For awareness, experience is what defines it as awareness, and so, as awareness is redefined by this imaged construct, it becomes aware of another type of experience—i.e., emotional experience.

Emotions are literally e-motions, or existential motions, being the experiences that result from the movement of awareness (i.e., relative existence) into either a projected or a reflected reality,

either an image of what-is or an image of what-is-not. Emotions represent a movement of awareness from one relative experiential state into another. Through an experiential lens, awareness can move from what-is into what-is-not, from what-is into a relatively expanded what-is, from what-is-not into a relatively contracted what-is-not, or from what-is-not into what-is.

Since existence can move into either what-is (projection) or what-is-not (reflection), there exists a positive/negative emotional polarity. That is, if awareness moves into a projected reality, it's moving into an image of what-is, and so its experience as a result of that movement is a positive emotion—i.e., literally a movement of existence into what-is. Conversely, if awareness moves into a reflected reality, it's moving into an image of what-is-not, and so its experience as a result of that movement is a negative emotion—i.e., literally a movement of existence into what-is-not.

In other words, a positive emotional experience exists as the redefinition of awareness within the context of a projective and, therefore, relatively expanded imaged construct, while a negative emotional experience exists as the redefinition of awareness within the context of a reflective and, therefore, relatively contracted imaged construct.

How is it that the impactful experiential relationship can function as a lens for the projection or reflection of awareness? We have described experience as the awareness of an impact upon an experiential construct. All experience is a form of self-relation, of existence existing in relation to itself. While the experiential construct functions as a boundary or dividing line between what exists here and what exists there, what exists here and what exists there are actually inseparable. The experiential construct is, in this way, a transparent boundary. As the external and internal experiential constructs function as transparent boundaries between relative realities, alterations in the surface contours of those boundaries exist as physical and mental experiences, respectively, and also create a curvature of those transparent boundaries—i.e., a lens—that awareness can use as either a projective or reflective surface.

To understand how the experiential relationship functions as a lens allowing a projected or reflected emotional experience, look at a magnifying glass, or any lens. First, focus upon the lens itself, and what you see is a miniature reflection of yourself, a reduced image of yourself as you're not. This reduced image of what-is-not corresponds to the negative emotional experience that results from the movement of awareness into a reflected reality, where the awareness becomes redefined by a relatively contracted imaged construct. Next, focus past the lens, and what you see is a magnified projection of reality, an enlarged image of reality as it is, in which the relationships are maintained as they are, albeit enlarged. This enlarged image of what-is corresponds to the positive emotional experience that results from the movement of awareness into a projected reality, where the awareness becomes redefined by a relatively expanded imaged construct.

The relational matrix, which provides the underlying framework for experience, has a duality between spatial construct (form) and spatial content, as well as between spatial structure and dynamic. The construct (form) of the relational matrix is relatively stable, while its content is dynamic. Experiences also have a duality between construct (form) and content, as well as between structure and dynamic. Physical and mental experiences represent the form, the

structural aspect, of experience; emotional experience represents the content, the dynamic aspect, of experience. While the form of an experience is relatively stable, the emotional content associated with that form is variable or dynamic.

While an impact upon the external or internal experiential construct creates the form of a physical or mental experience, respectively, the shape or form of that impact also functions as a lens through which awareness can either project or reflect itself, redefining itself in terms of what-is or what-is-not, respectively, resulting in a positive or negative emotional experience becoming associated with the form of the physical or mental experience.

Positive emotions make us feel good because they represent an experience of what-is. Saying that we “feel good” is the same as saying that we “feel what-is,” which can also be translated to mean that our awareness has come into contact with what-is. Our awareness comes into contact with what-is by moving into a projected experiential sphere, and it’s aware of that movement as a positive emotional experience.

Conversely, negative emotions make us feel bad because they represent an experience of what-is-not. Saying that we “feel bad” is the same as saying that we “feel what-is-not,” which can also be translated to mean that our awareness has come into contact with what-is-not. Our awareness comes come into contact with what-is-not by moving into a reflected experiential sphere, and it’s aware of that movement as a negative emotional experience.

The form of a physical or mental experience is invariant, for it reflects the structure of the experiential relationship, as determined by the nature of the two relative realities impactively interacting. On the other hand, the emotional character or content associated with physical and mental experiential forms is dynamic, for it’s determined by whether the experiential lens corresponding to the physical or mental experience is used by awareness as a projective or reflective surface. If the experiential lens is used as a projective surface, the awareness of the physical or mental form occurs within the context of awareness moving into what-is, and thus becomes associated with a positive emotional experience. Conversely, if the experiential lens is used as a reflective surface, the awareness of the physical or mental form occurs within the context of awareness moving into what-is-not, and thus becomes associated with a negative emotional experience.

Note that the movement of awareness into either of these emotional spheres is mutually exclusive. That is, if awareness uses the experiential lens as a reflective surface, it can’t simultaneously use it as a projective surface, and vice versa.

What we’re saying here is that we’re responsible, to some degree, for the character of the emotional experience associated with our physical and mental experiences. Between the physical or mental experience of the interaction, and our emotional experience of the interaction, there seems to be a “choice” as to how we will relate to the physical or mental experience, since the experiential lens provides two possible imaged constructs, two mutually exclusive experiential spheres into which awareness can move. At this time, we aren’t concerned with how such a choice is made; here, we’re concerned only with the fact that there are two possible emotional

directions our awareness can move in any experiential relationship. **Figure 93** summarizes the relationships and terms relevant to emotional experience.

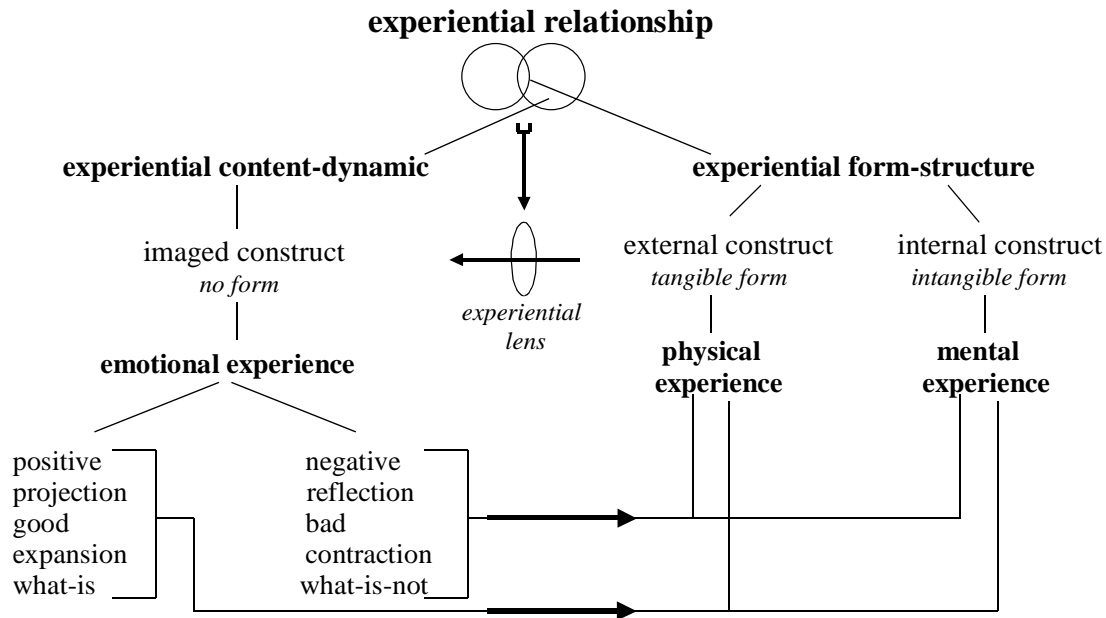


Figure 93 The relationships and terms relevant to emotional experience. The terms in this diagram are interrelated both vertically and horizontally: vertically through similarity or likeness and horizontally through complementarity. Vertically, the terms represent different aspects of the same relational pole of a given duality; horizontally, the terms represent complementary aspects of the two relational poles of a given duality.

The interaction-relationship that exists as physical and mental experiences can function as a lens. The projection or reflection of awareness through this lens is the basis of emotional experience. In this way, emotional experience can become associated with physical or mental experiences. Physical and mental experiences are in and of themselves neither good nor bad, neither positive nor negative. These terms are associated with those experiences on the basis of the emotional way we relate to experiences. Emotional experience can be said to color physical and mental experiences, for emotions provide experiential content relative to the shape or form of physical and mental experiences.

4.4 Attention

“Ladies and gentleman, please direct your attention toward the front of the airplane.” What is it that we’re moving when we direct our attention? Let’s say it’s springtime, and we’re in a classroom. Our teacher is discussing algebra, and there’s a squirrel we can see outside the

window, digging up nuts. We want to be outside, we don't have much interest in algebra, and so we watch the squirrel. Suddenly, our reverie is disrupted, as the teacher shouts, "Pay attention!"

The word *attention* reveals the situation awareness finds itself in as it's presented with different experiences. Attention is a form or aspect of awareness; attention is awareness that's focused upon a particular experience. The word *attention* refers to the fact that we can't focus our awareness upon two different experiences simultaneously. This puts our awareness literally under "a tension" as the focus of awareness is drawn or pulled between different experiences, as depicted in **figure 94**.

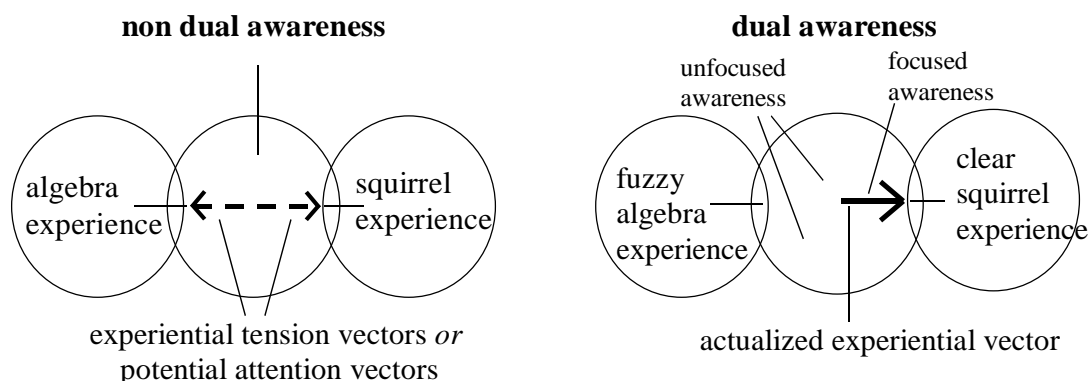


Figure 94 "Attention" is the word that refers to the focus of awareness upon a certain experience. As awareness is presented with different experiences, there are two general ways in which awareness can be aware of those experiences. First, awareness can spread itself evenly among the experiences, taking them all in as a whole (left); or, second, awareness can dualize, focusing or "concentrating" upon one experience, while not focusing upon all the other experiences (right).

The awareness of each experience represents an experiential tension vector or a potential focus of awareness. When awareness isn't focused or concentrated upon any one experience, these experiential tension vectors remain only potential attention vectors (left). When awareness focuses or concentrates upon one experience, actualizing one of the attention vectors (right), its awareness of all other experiences becomes unfocused or nonconcentrated. By focusing upon one experience, awareness intrinsically dualizes into focused and unfocused awareness. Because awareness and experience exist in relation to each other, when awareness dualizes into two types of awareness, experience also dualizes into two types of experience. Thus, in relation to focused awareness, there exists clear experience; and in relation to unfocused awareness, there exists fuzzy or unclear experience.

Attention is literally the direction of experiential *tension* that our awareness focuses *at*. So, we can focus our awareness on algebra, on the squirrel, or on neither, but not on both at once. Related to the word *attention* is the word *concentrate*. To concentrate on an experience means to gather or bring our awareness together to focus upon an experience. Just as the complementary forces of tension and compression are always found working together in physical systems, so too are attention and concentration found working together in experiential systems. Tension is a

force that pulls apart, and compression is a force that brings together. Attention refers to awareness being pulled or drawn in the direction of some experience, while concentration refers to awareness coming together to focus upon that experience.

Focus means a convergence at one point. Focusing our awareness on one experience means a convergence of our awareness toward that experience. Our awareness can focus upon only one experience at a time, or in any given instant. Thus, in terms of the focus of awareness, we can spend or use only one experiential tension vector at a time. Once any experiential vector becomes the one pointing to where our awareness is focusing at, the other experiential vectors can't be pointing to where our awareness is focusing at. Thus, the phrase "pay attention" or "give me your attention" is a request for awareness to spend its one attention vector by focusing upon a certain experience.

Because experiences occur all around us and we can focus upon only one experience at a time, we can pay our attention to only one experience at a time. Thus, our awareness of different experiences isn't always equal. Generally, there's one experience we have our awareness focused upon, while other experiences are in the background, as the objects of unfocused awareness. For this reason, although we're continuously aware of both focused and unfocused experiences, the quality of the awareness of these different experiences isn't equal or the same. Like in a photograph, where the object in focus is sharp and the background is blurred, when awareness focuses upon one experience, that experience is clear, and the rest of the field of experience is unclear or out of focus.

4.41 *Attention and the experiential lens*

When awareness focuses upon a physical or mental experience, that experience then has the potential to function as an experiential lens, thereby providing awareness with an emotional experience associated with the form of the physical or mental experience.

Not all experience has an emotional component. First, we don't pay attention to all of our experiences. Second, even if we do pay attention to an experience, this doesn't always result in the movement of our awareness into a projected or reflected image of the experience.

In order for an experience to have an emotional component, two things must happen. First, awareness must focus on or pay attention to the experience. Second, awareness must then, within the context of that focus, use the experience as a lens, as a vehicle for moving into either a projected or a reflected image of the experience, thereby becoming redefined by either a projected or a reflected reality.

When awareness uses experience as an experiential lens, awareness becomes redefined by an imaged construct, i.e., either the projected or reflected image of the experience. Whether awareness becomes defined by a projected or a reflected image depends on whether the experiential lens functions as a transparent or opaque surface—i.e., as a window or as a mirror. Although the experiential lens is by nature transparent, as previously described, whether or not

it's used as, and so functions as, a transparent surface depends on where awareness is focused or concentrated in relation to that lens—just as when looking at a magnifying glass, if the focus is on or proximal to the surface of the lens, the lens functions as a mirror, while if the focus is beyond or distal to the surface of the lens, the lens functions as a magnifying glass. Likewise, the focus of awareness in relation to the experiential lens determines whether awareness is able to project itself through the experiential lens or is reflected back by the experiential lens, as depicted in figure 92.

The focus of awareness in relation to the experiential lens is itself determined by how awareness uses attention to define itself in relation to an experience. If awareness defines itself in relation to the form of the experience in a way that *separates* it from what's being experienced, the experiential lens then functions as an opaque surface. Conversely, if awareness defines itself in relation to the form of the experience in a way that *connects* it to what's being experienced, the experiential lens then functions as a transparent surface.

For awareness, reality is whatever it experiences it to be. Awareness, by defining itself as separate from what it's experiencing, must then perceive the existence of a barrier between itself and what it's experiencing, and that barrier then becomes its operant reality, resulting in the experiential lens functioning as an opaque surface. On the other hand, awareness, by defining itself as connected to what it's experiencing, must then perceive the existence of a link between itself and what it's experiencing, and that link then becomes its operant reality, resulting in the experiential lens functioning as a transparent surface. Essentially, awareness won't try to focus past or move beyond whatever it experiences as a real barrier, any more than a sane individual would try to walk through a wall. Conversely, if awareness perceives a link between itself and what it's experiencing, then awareness will see that link as a doorway or window beyond which it can focus and through which it can move.

Therefore, awareness that defines itself as connected to what it's experiencing is able to focus beyond itself. In focusing beyond itself, awareness is then able to use the experiential lens as a transparent surface for projecting itself into a what-is imaged construct. As a consequence, awareness experiences positive emotions in association with those experiences it defines itself as connected to. Conversely, awareness that defines itself as separate from what it's experiencing is unable to focus beyond itself. In being unable to focus beyond itself, awareness is then unable to use the experiential lens as a transparent surface, in which case the experiential lens then functions as an opaque surface, or mirror. In this case, awareness is then reflected by the experiential lens into a what-is-not imaged construct. As a consequence, awareness experiences negative emotions in association with those experiences it defines itself as separate from.

In other words, awareness will tend to have a negative emotional experience in association with experiential forms it conceives or perceives as being separate from itself. Conversely, awareness will tend to have a positive emotional experience in association with experiential forms it conceives or perceives as being connected to itself.

Again, we see, just as was the case in the formation of wave and particle experiences, the nature of experiential reality—in this case, the positive or negative emotional reality—doesn't exist

independent of the role awareness plays in forming the interactive relationship that's experience. That is, the nature of experiential reality doesn't exist independent of the nature or state of awareness, because awareness itself is always part of the interactive relationship that's experience.

In the sections that follow, we will examine how our emotional experience of reality is affected and, in large part, determined by how our awareness defines itself.

4.42 *Emotional growth and atrophy*

Emotional experience isn't automatic; it requires that awareness commit itself to move into an experiential image. Emotional experience requires that awareness allow itself to be redefined by an imaged construct.

Awareness can expand or contract emotionally, as it becomes redefined within the context of an expanded, projected experience of reality or a contracted, reflected experience of reality. Emotional growth involves an expansion of awareness, as it becomes redefined within the enlarged context of what-is; emotional atrophy involves a contraction of awareness, as it becomes redefined within the reduced context of what-is-not. Thus, emotional growth is associated with positive emotions, and emotional atrophy is associated with negative emotions.

Note that a negative emotion, such as grief over the loss of a loved one, while representing a relative contraction of awareness, can lead to emotional growth if that negative emotion eventually leads awareness to redefine itself in a more connected way, in a positive way, such as by developing empathy for others in difficult situations. Conversely, a positive emotion, such as the happiness or pride that goes along with success in some endeavor, while representing a relative expansion of awareness, can lead to emotional atrophy if that positive emotion eventually leads awareness to redefine itself in a more separate way, in a negative way, such as by developing a sense of superiority.

In order to clarify and illustrate the overall experiential mechanism that we've just described, let's examine an experiential encounter in detail. Let's say we're standing in a crowd. Our awareness may or may not be paying attention to any of the people around us. Now, we direct our attention at the people one by one. Eventually, our attention falls upon a person we define as being of another race or class. Now, rather than just paying attention to that person, our experience of that person becomes an experiential lens, creating an emotional experience associated with our visual physical experience of the person.

Whether we have a positive or a negative emotional experience associated with that person depends on how we define ourself in relation to them. If we define ourself in relation to the person in terms of some connection, some underlying unity, such as that we're both human beings or that we're both fans of the same football team, then we have, in effect, by defining ourself as being connected to them, established a bond, a link, between what exists where we are and what exists where they are. This connection then allows our awareness to move, through the

experiential lens, beyond its current definition of itself, thereby redefining itself in a more expansive way. In this case, the experiential lens functions transparently, as a lens, projecting our awareness into an expanded image of what-is. As a result of our awareness being redefined by this projective imaged construct, we become aware of a positive emotional experience associated with the person, e.g., love, trust, or friendliness.

On the other hand, if we define ourself in relation to the person in terms of some separation, some divisive polarity, such as superior/inferior, good/bad, etc., then we have, in effect, established a barrier, a wall, between what exists where we are and what exists where they are. This barrier then prevents our awareness from moving, through the experiential lens, beyond its current definition of itself. Instead, awareness becomes redefined in a more contracted way. In this case, the experiential lens functions opaquely, as a mirror, reflecting our awareness back into a contracted image of what-is-not. As a result of our awareness being redefined by this reflective imaged construct, we become aware of a negative emotional experience associated with the person, e.g., hate, fear, or hostility.

One experience represents emotional growth, a redefinition of awareness within an expanded imaged construct; the other experience represents emotional atrophy, a redefinition of awareness within a contracted imaged construct.

Emotional growth requires that awareness commit itself to move beyond its current experiential boundaries. In the case of emotional growth, awareness is able to let go of its previous definition of itself so that it may create a new self-definition, a new experiential relationship with existence.

Emotional atrophy occurs when awareness is unable to move beyond its current experiential boundaries. In this case, emotional movement still results in a redefinition of awareness; however, this redefinition occurs within the context of the old self-definition, the old boundary, and simply represents a contracted form of its previous definition of itself.

Thus, over time, some people grow emotionally, while others atrophy emotionally. Some people mellow with age, while others embitter with age. Some people see the world in terms of connection, while others see the world in terms of separation. Some people move into an ever-expanding what-is, while others move into an ever-contracting what-is-not, and others just move back and forth between the two.

The more awareness becomes redefined within the context of what-is, the more awareness experiences “feeling good” (or feeling good about itself), because it literally exists in contact with what-is. Conversely, the more awareness becomes redefined within the context of what-is-not, the more awareness experiences “feeling bad” (or feeling bad about itself), because it literally exists in contact with what-is-not.

Whether our awareness undergoes emotional growth or atrophy, whether we feel good or bad about ourselves, depends greatly on how our awareness defines itself. For this reason, after the next subsection, we will analyze the factors involved in awareness’ definition of itself.

4.5 “*What’s love got to do with it?*”

Having discussed emotional experience as the movement of awareness into either a projective or a reflective imaged construct, we will now examine the basis of that movement in more detail.

For existence to exist in relation to itself, it must polarize or dualize. This polarization or dualization requires some force, some unfathomable effort of existence—an act of creation. To get from here to there, a force must be applied. For existence to move from an absolute to a relative state, a force must also be applied. This force is the mother of all forces, for it’s the primary movement. In absolute existence, there’s no-thing, no force, no movement, just what-is. Relative existence is created and sustained by this underlying force of polarization or dualization.

This primary act of creation is the primary force, the primary movement, from which all other forces and movements extend as derivations. From where we are now, existing in this relative state of awareness, this primary act of creation that extends from the absolute state is unfathomable. Yet, because we’re not ultimately other than absolute existence, because we’re inseparable from what-is, because this force supports our relative existence, this force must also exist within our relative experiential existence, within experiential reality. We experience this primary force, this primary movement of existence, this primary act of creation, as the emotion we call love.

We need to define our use of the term love as a force within this context, for we speak of many different types of love. When we use the term love, we’re speaking of unconditional love, love that’s outwardly radiating without limits, without self-concern, without needing any love in return for it to continue to radiate. This love is the love of a mother for her child, the love of the creator for its creation, for relative existence as child is the manifestation of this radiating love of absolute existence as mother. The mother wants the child to love her, but even if the child doesn’t, the mother’s love is unchanged, for it’s unconditional. We, as humans, are capable of radiating the same love as that which got us here in the first place, because ultimately we *are* that.

We’re both creator and created, both mother and child, in the same instant. We’re in the process of becoming, and we’re also where what’s becoming is coming from. We’re what exists absolutely, unchanging; and at the same time, we’re also what exists relatively, constantly changing within the dimensions of space and time, within the arena of relational structure and dynamic.

Love is the force that’s responsible for turning an absolute singularity into a relative duality, as that unfathomable force is “experienced” from our relational perspective. Love is the force that creates mutually sustaining relationships between relative existences, at all relational levels of reality, both universal and individual. Love is the force that sustains all individual relationships between relative existences, as well as the universal relationship between relative and absolute existence. Because our relative existences and individual relationships are inseparable extensions

of absolute existence and the universal relationship, this primary force is operant and existent throughout all relational levels of reality, as depicted in **figure 95**.

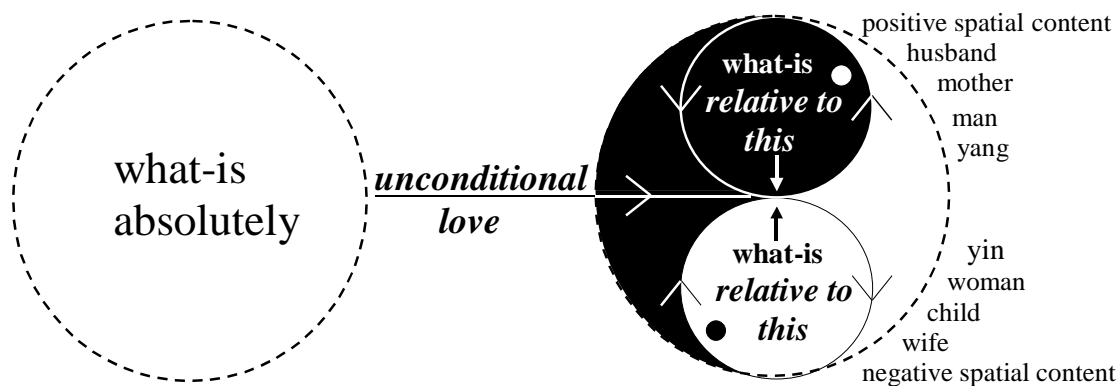


Figure 95 The force of unconditional love as that which drives the primary movement of singular or absolute existence into dualized or relative existence. Unconditional love is a dualizing force, not a dividing force. Love creates dualized or relative realities, realities that are mutually coexistent and fundamentally inseparable, and thus indivisible. When existence dualizes, it doesn't divide; it only forms a relationship with itself. That primary relationship is created and sustained by the force we experience as unconditional love. The individual relationships between all relative existences at all relational levels of reality are ultimately maintained or sustained by this primary force of love.

In becoming relative existence, absolute existence doesn't really go anywhere, for relative existence exists within it. Thus, the movement that the force of unconditional love induces is intrinsic to absolute existence; it's not a movement from here to there, as we normally think of movement, but a movement from singularity to duality, from absolute existence to relative existence. Love dualizes existence, and since relative existences are mutually coexistent and thus inseparable, love creates and sustains mutually coexistent relationships between mutually coexistent realities.

Love is the force driving the ongoing extension of absolute existence into relative existence. This primary force of love is itself an aspect of absolute existence, as all things must be, for there's nothing else. Love is what-is, but it's what-is in motion, in the act of creation, in the process of becoming, in the state of experiencing itself. Love, as the primary movement of absolute existence into relative existence, is the primary e-motion, the primary existential motion, the primary force underlying the evolution of existence into experience.¹⁴

This primary movement, this primary emotion, has no opposite, no complement, for it's what exists absolutely in the process of becoming what exists relatively. That's why this love is

¹⁴ It's no coincidence that the word *evolve* is very close in structure to the word *love* held up to a mirror, i.e., "evolove." This similarity occurs because evolution is fundamentally a process of love, evolution being fundamentally existence in the process of repetitively and progressively forming relationships with itself, as that process is physically, mentally, and emotionally experienced.

unconditional, existing without any conditions on its existence, as opposed to relative existence, which requires as a condition the co-existence of a complementary reality. Essentially, this love is absolute because this love is absolute existence in motion, on its way to becoming relative existence.

Unconditional love, the primary emotion, the primary existential motion, precedes all duality, for it's itself the cause or force underlying all duality or relative existence. This unconditional love can't be experienced, for it exists prior to the duality necessary for the self-relationship that's experience. While we can't experience this nondual force of unconditional love, we can *be* it, for this love is what we are in the process of becoming what we will be. When we feel this force of absolute love flowing through us, we in that instant transcend the duality intrinsic to experience, and in that instant we are *conscious* of being and becoming, rather than *aware* of doing and dividing. However, such a transcendent existential state isn't where most of us spend much, if any, of our time, and so we will dwell upon it no further for now.

As awareness, as a localization of consciousness existing in relation to itself, we can occupy a state of awareness of either what-is or what-is-not. Where most of us spend most of our time is either moving between the relative states of what-is and what-is-not, moving from what-is to a relatively expanded what-is, or moving from what-is-not to a relatively contracted what-is-not. In this way, we experience different positive and negative emotions, feeling either good or bad about what we experience as reality, as depicted in **figure 96**.

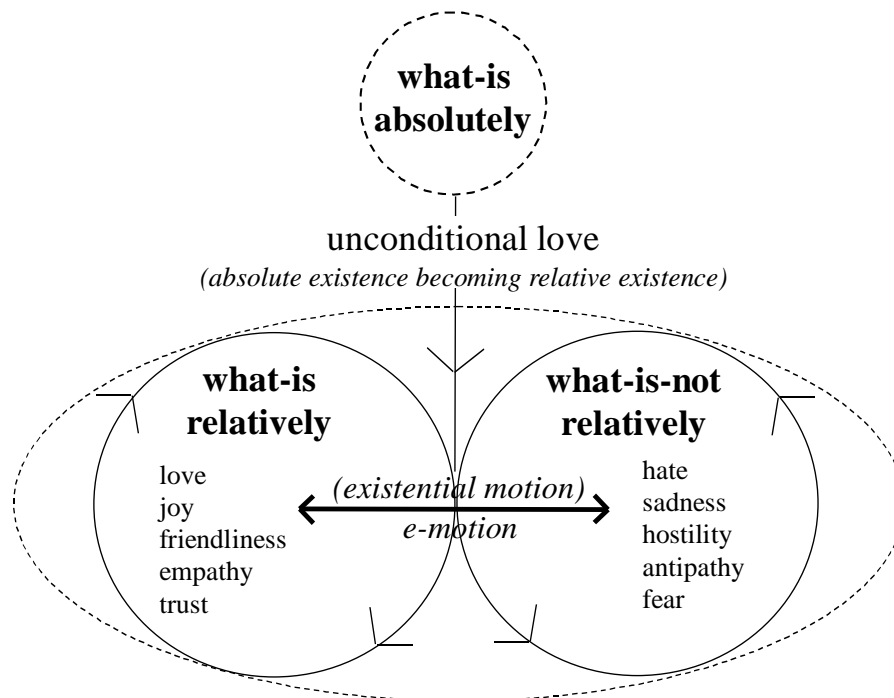


Figure 96 The same movement that drives absolute existence into relative existence becomes experienced as an emotion (literally, the existential motion into a relative state of experience), when that movement occurs within and between relative realities. From

the top to the bottom of the diagram, the movement of absolute existence into relative existence is depicted. From side to side at the bottom of the diagram, the movement within and between relative states of experience is depicted.

Unconditional love as a force, as an impeller of existential motion, is the foundation of all other emotions, both positive and negative. Unconditional love is a singular force, but from this love arises the what-is/what-is-not experiential duality, and so from this love arises the existence of both positive and negative emotions. Unconditional love is existence coming to exist in relation to itself, or existence forming a relationship with itself. Once this self-relationship exists, the relative states of positive and negative emotional experience can exist as further movements of absolute existence into relative existence. Essentially, unconditional love is the movement of absolute existence into relative existence, the movement of consciousness into awareness.

We always remain what we ultimately are, yet we can experience both what we relatively are and what we relatively are not, because experience occurs within the arena of relativity, where what-is and what-is-not coexist as relative realities, and so always exist as such only in relation to each other.

As awareness, as relative existence, we're bound to be always in existential motion, for ultimately we're what exists absolutely becoming what exists relatively. Relative existence is existence in motion; relative existence is intrinsically dynamic. This description applies to the relational structure of space, as well as to the relational nature of awareness. The question is, with regard to what we experience as that existential motion—i.e., as e-motion—is which relative state of experience are we moving into, what-is or what-is-not? Movement into what-is results in the awareness of a positive emotional experience, whereas movement into what-is-not results in the awareness of a negative emotional experience.

The most vital question with regard to the quality of our emotional experiences is, what causes our awareness, our relative existence, to move into one relative state of experience rather than another? We will address this question in upcoming sections.

Conceptual checkpoint II-5

-The nature of experience is such that it's possible for awareness to experience both what-is and what-is-not.

-Both what-is and what-is-not are relative realities.

-Every physical and mental experience has the potential to also act as a lens through which awareness can either project or reflect itself.

-Emotions are what awareness experiences as it moves through the experiential lens into either what-is or what-is-not.

-What-is is relatively positive, or “the place that is,” because a positive emotion is a projection of what exists, and in a projection an accurate representation of the relationships intrinsic to the original reality is maintained.

-What-is-not is relatively negative, or “that which is not,” because a negative emotion is a reflection of what exists, and in a reflection an inaccurate representation of the relationships intrinsic to the original reality is created.

-The movement of awareness into what-is corresponds to a positive emotional experience and results in awareness being redefined by a relatively expanded, projective imaged construct. The movement of awareness into what-is-not corresponds to a negative emotional experience and results in awareness being redefined by a relatively contracted, reflective imaged construct.

Section 5 The Dimension of Experience

What’s a dimension? It’s most simply a place to be, a place to exist within, a someplace existence can occupy. We build a house, and it has certain dimensions, and these dimensions provide us with a place to be. We add a room onto the house, and we’ve added a new dimension to the house; we now have a new place to be.

Experience works in pretty much the same way, only at a more fundamental level, where the dimensions that are created are the dimensions of reality, and the dimension of experience is occupied by awareness itself.

Consciousness exists everywhere and thus nowhere. Consciousness, through a process of successive dualization, creates within itself the relational matrix. The relational matrix provides consciousness with a place to be, a place to exist within, someplace it can occupy. In this respect, consciousness, while experiencing itself within the relational matrix, is some-where and is thus a-where (i.e., aware). Consciousness existing as awareness is defined by experience, and so the place that consciousness as awareness occupies is the dimension of experience.

Consciousness, as it exists within the experience-house it has erected, then becomes awareness. The reality for consciousness as awareness is the experience-room it exists within. Consciousness is never other than what it is, yet as it comes to exist within the dimension of experience, consciousness as awareness can experience itself as anything, as whatever it defines itself to be, since that self-definition depends on how the dimension of experience is constructed.

Let’s say that we’re standing on a mountaintop and can see all around, fully conscious of our surroundings. While we stand there, someone builds a house around us. Now, what we see as we look around are the walls of that house. We haven’t moved or gone anywhere, yet our reality has changed from one of unlimited vision to one of limited vision, from consciousness to the awareness of experience, as a new dimension was constructed around us.

This is essentially what consciousness does to itself as it becomes the awareness of experience. Consciousness doesn't really go anywhere or become other than what it already is; consciousness simply erects walls of self-definition around itself, thereby creating different experiential places it can exist within as awareness. This dimension of experience is real, but it's only relatively real, not absolutely real.

From within the house of experience, the mountaintop reality can be obscured. Within the house of experience, the rooms can seem to be all there is. Yet experience isn't all there is; experience actually extends from a more fundamental level of existence. Without the mountaintop there can be no house, yet without the house, the mountaintop still remains what it is. Beyond experience, the more fundamental level of existence from which experience extends always remains intact. That more fundamental level of existence usually is, but need not be, obscured by the walls of self-definition in the house of experience.

In this section, we will examine experience as a dimension, as someplace existence can occupy. What we will describe is how consciousness constructs walls of self-definition around itself, thereby becoming obscured from itself. By examining experience as a dimension, we will come to understand how consciousness as awareness can become lost while wandering about the house of experience it has built around itself. For it's through understanding how consciousness as awareness can become lost that we can then understand how consciousness as awareness can come to find itself again.

5.1 Projected and reflected states of being; Good moods and bad moods

The most vital question with regard to the overall quality of our emotional experiences is whether our awareness is defined by the dimension of what-is or the dimension of what-is-not. The what-is or what-is-not nature of our emotional experiences provides the context for all our physical and mental experiences. Once awareness has moved into an emotional dimension of experience, the nature of that dimension colors the form of all physical and mental experiences.

Let's say that we experience something physically, or think of something mentally, and this experience puts us in a bad mood. Now, what this means is that we paid attention to the experience and our awareness moved toward the experience, using it as a lens. This movement toward the physical or mental experience creates an emotional experience, for it results in our awareness becoming defined by an imaged construct. Whether our awareness moves into a projected or a reflected dimension depends on how we define ourselves in relation to the experience. In this case, we defined ourselves as separate from the experience, causing the experiential lens to function as a mirror, reflecting our awareness into the dimension of what-is-not. As a consequence, we experience a negative emotion in association with the experience.

However, the negative emotion we experience in association with the experience doesn't stop with the association to just that one experience. Once our awareness has become defined within the dimension of what-is-not, that negative emotion provides the context for all other experiences. As long as we're using the first experience to reflect our awareness into the

dimension of what-is-not, all other experiences occur within the context of what-is-not, in association with a negative emotional experience. This is called being in a “bad mood,” which is literally the movement of awareness in the direction of a negative experiential reality.¹⁵

Thus, while in a bad mood, we become unable to appreciate good things, good experiences, because we don’t see them as such, because we see them from within the dimension of what-is-not. While in a bad mood, someone can tell us what should be good news, and we’ll say, “So what?” We may see a beautiful picture and not be moved to feel a positive emotion. Other experiences can’t make us feel good as long as we’re locked into feeling bad. Other experiences can’t move us into what-is as long as we’re moving into what-is-not. That is, as long as our attention is focused upon an experience that has us reflecting our awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, we can’t simultaneously pay attention to an experience that would have us project our awareness into the dimension of what-is. To move toward one dimension, we have to move away from the other.

As long as awareness’ attention is focused upon the experience through which awareness is reflecting itself into the dimension of what-is-not, awareness remains stuck in a bad mood—i.e., awareness is bound to move in the direction of a negative experiential reality. In order to get out of this bad mood, either awareness must stop focusing upon the experience that’s acting as a reflective surface, or awareness must change the way it defines itself in relation to the experience, so that the experience can then act as a projective surface, rather than as a reflective surface.

Thus, when a father or mother comes home in a bad mood and sees their smiling child, this experience can allow them to move toward what-is, into feeling good, if they can let go of the bad experience, if they can stop paying attention to the experience that has them defined within what-is-not. However, if the parent is unable to let go of the bad experience, if they’re unable to stop paying attention to the experience that has them defined within what-is-not, then the goodness of the smiling child will be lost to them, and, instead, the child will be experienced as an irritant, colored by the bad mood.

As mentioned previously, we can also change our mood by changing the way we define ourselves in relation to an experience. That is, we don’t need to focus our attention upon another experience to change our mood; we can change our mood simply by altering the way the current experience is functioning as an experiential lens. Again, the way an experience functions as a transparent (projective lens) or an opaque (reflective mirror) surface depends on how we define ourselves in relation to the experience—i.e., as separate or connected. By changing our relationship to the experience, we change how we’re emotionally affected by the experience.

For example, let’s say that our boss comes in and yells at us. Perceiving this verbal assault as an attack, we define ourselves as separate from the boss within the context of an agonist/antagonist duality. Now, if we pay attention to the experience and use the experience as a lens, then the experience viewed as such will result in our movement into a reflected reality, creating the

¹⁵ Literally, mood = direction of movement. Therefore, bad mood = a negative direction of movement = movement into what-is-not, and good mood = a positive direction of movement = movement into what-is.

awareness of a negative emotion in association with the experience, putting us in a bad mood. We may hate the boss, we may get angry at the boss, we may even yell back at the boss.

Now, someone comes in and tells us that the boss is having some difficult times at home. We can relate to that, we can connect with that, and within this context we no longer define ourselves separate from the boss. Now, instead of feeling anger toward the boss in association with our experience of their having yelled at us, we may experience a positive emotion (e.g., empathy) in association with that same experience. The connection we make between ourselves and the boss allows the experiential lens (i.e., the experience of the boss yelling) to function as a transparent surface, so that, as we focus upon the experience, our awareness becomes defined within the projected context of what-is, rather than within the reflected context of what-is-not. The experience remains what it is; the form of the experience doesn't change. However, how the experience affects us emotionally depends on how we define ourselves in relation to it.

When we fall in love, or find true love, either in another human or within ourselves, the world seems brighter because all experience then occurs within the context of what-is. Conversely, if there's a breakup, when love is lost, the world seems darker because all experience then occurs within the context of what-is-not.

These moods, both good and bad, are to some degree self-perpetuating. Once awareness becomes defined within the context of what-is or what-is-not, this experiential reality then influences how awareness defines itself in relation to further experiences. *What-is is connection; what-is-not is separation.* That is, existence is ultimately unified, and so connection is an experience that accurately depicts the relationship of existence to itself. Conversely, separation is an experience that inaccurately depicts the relationship of existence to itself. For this reason, once awareness has become defined within the dimension of what-is-not, awareness tends to define itself as separate from what it experiences, and so becomes more prone to experience negative emotions in association with whatever else it experiences. Conversely, once awareness has become defined within the dimension of what-is, awareness tends to define itself as connected to what it experiences, and so becomes more prone to experience positive emotions in association with whatever else it experiences.

We keep returning to the importance of how awareness defines itself in relation to experience as determining the what-is or what-is-not (i.e., positive or negative) nature of its emotional reality. For awareness to define itself in relation to an experience, it must first define itself as awareness. In what way does awareness define itself? Definition is an experience, and so awareness' definition of itself is awareness' experience of itself. What awareness experiences as existence outside itself, as other, is referred to as "it"; what awareness experiences as its own existence, as itself, is referred to as "I." In the next section, we will examine how awareness experiences and so defines itself as "I." This understanding will provide the context for examining how awareness' experience of itself as "I" determines how awareness becomes defined in relation to other experiences, which relationship itself then determines whether awareness experiences a positive or a negative emotion in association with those experiences.

5.2 The creation of “I” as awareness’ experience of itself

Awareness is the experiencer, the seer, the eye. As the experiencer, awareness can’t experience itself directly, in the same way that the eye can’t see itself directly. For the eye to see itself, it must use a mirror. For awareness to experience itself, it must use an experiential lens. What the eye sees as itself as it looks in a mirror isn’t what the eye is directly; rather, what the eye sees is a reflected image of itself. Likewise, what awareness experiences as itself, as “I,” through an experiential lens isn’t what awareness is directly; rather, what awareness experiences is either a projected or a reflected image of itself, i.e., “I” as an experience of what-is or “I” as an experience of what-is-not, as depicted in **figure 97**.

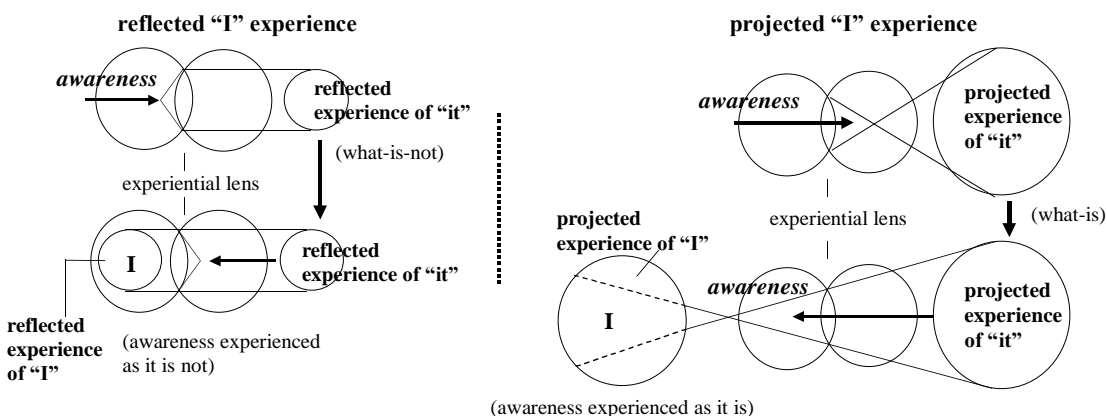


Figure 97 Awareness can experience itself as “I” within the context of either a reflected or a projected experience, i.e., within either the context of what-is or the context of what-is-not. Awareness’ experience of itself as “I” represents awareness looking back at itself (i.e., experiencing itself) from either a reflected (left) or projected (right) dimension of experience. In order for awareness to look back at itself, it must first move away from itself. Awareness moves away from itself by moving through the experiential lens into either a projected or reflected experience of “it,” thereby moving into either the dimension of what-is or the dimension of what-is-not, as shown at the top of both diagrams. From either of those positions, awareness is then able to “look back” at where it’s coming from, and experience itself as “I.” Since awareness can look back at itself from either the dimension of what-is or the dimension of what-is-not, awareness can in this way experience itself either as “I” within the context of what-is or as “I” within the context of what-is-not. In this way, awareness can experience itself either as it is or as it isn’t.

Awareness can experience itself as “I” from the perspective of its own object-experience because that object-experience exists fully within the awareness itself. Everything we experience is part of our awareness; otherwise, we wouldn’t be aware of it. Awareness can take any position or point of view within its sphere of experience. Once awareness becomes defined by an object-experience, awareness can then use that dimension of experience as a place from which to experience itself as “I,” as its own object.

“I” as an experiential reality is a relative reality—i.e., it exists as such only in relation to another relative reality. In this case, the relative experiential reality of “I” exists as such only in relation to the relative experiential reality of “it” (both of which exist as such only in relation to awareness itself). What awareness experiences as other is defined as “it”; what awareness experiences as itself is defined as “I.”

For awareness to experience itself as “I,” awareness must also experience another as “it,” for it’s from the position of experiencing another as “it” that awareness looks back and experiences itself as “I” experiencing “it.” For this reason, awareness’ experience of itself as “I” is inseparable from the experience of another as “it,” for “it” provides awareness with the perspective from which it may experience itself as “I.”

Awareness and experience exist as such only in relation to each other. Experience can be either of what-is or of what-is-not. The I/it experiential duality arises either within the dimension of what-is or within the dimension of what-is-not. An “I” that’s what-is can’t exist in relation to an “it” that’s what-is-not, for what-is and what-is-not are mutually exclusive dimensions of experience. Awareness can be in only one dimension or the other, not in both simultaneously. If awareness occupies one dimension of experience, then by definition awareness doesn’t occupy the other. If we’re in one room, then we aren’t in another room. If we’re in a room, then we see everything from the position and perspective of that room. Therefore, if the “it” that awareness experiences as another is an “it” that’s what-is, then the “I” that awareness experiences as itself, from the perspective of that “it,” will also be an “I” that’s what-is. Conversely, if the “it” that awareness experiences as another is an “it” that’s what-is-not, then the “I” that awareness experiences as itself, from the perspective of that “it,” will also be an “I” that’s what-is-not. This relationship is depicted in figure 97.

Since the experience of “I” always occurs in relation to an experience of “it,” the existence of “I” is defined by the existence of “it.” The association of the experience of “I” with an experience of “it” is the process of *identification*, or the way in which we, as awareness, create an *identity* (literally, an “I-defined entity”). Our identity is, then, our defined image of ourself or “I” as it exists in relation to what we experience as “it.”

As an example of the process of identification, we can consider materialism, which is the defining of awareness as “I” in relation to the “it” of material objects or possessions. Materialism, in this sense, is an example of one type of identification. In materialistic identification, the more and the better stuff we perceive ourself to own, the better we feel about ourself experienced as “I” in relation to that stuff.

However, one of the problems with materialism, or with identification with any object-experience, is that there’s always more and better stuff to be had. So, while awareness’ experience of itself as “I” may be elevated for a while by the acquisition of some new and better object, eventually there arises an awareness of an even-better “it” out there, or an awareness that there’s more of “it” out there. Relative to this awareness of the new “it,” the “it” that “I” owns—i.e., the “it” in relation to which awareness experiences itself as “I”—now seems lesser in comparison. As a result, awareness’ experience of itself as “I” in relation to this “it” is also

lessened, diminished, and thus generally depressed. In order to reevaluate its experience of itself as “I,” in order to feel good about itself again, awareness seeks a newer “it,” or more of “it.” Having acquired this better “it,” awareness now experiences itself as a better “I” in relation to “it.” However, eventually, another, even better “it” comes into view, and the cycle goes on. In this way, materialism, as awareness’ definition of itself as “I” in relation to object-possession, creates an endless cycle of desire/satisfaction.

As another example of the process of identification, we can look at how sports fans identify with their team. Their “I” is to some degree associated with the team as “it.” They feel good or bad, depending on whether their team wins or loses, because they identify with the team, meaning that their experience of themselves as “I” has become somewhat linked to their experience of the team as “it.” If the team wins, they see themselves as a winner, while if the team loses, they see themselves as a loser.

In the process of identification, the experiential existence of “I” becomes linked or attached to the experiential existence of some “it.” The concept of *attachment* is central to Hindu and Buddhist philosophies, which see our association of our defined image of ourselves or “I” with experiential reality as one of the primary reasons for our ignorance (i.e., lack of awareness) of our true nature. Since attachment and identification both involve the linkage of “I” to an experiential reality of “it,” we might assume that they’re two terms describing an identical process. However, attachment and identification aren’t identical. Attachment is a limiting experience, and so it has a negative connotation or association. Identification is itself neutral, for awareness can identify either with what-is or with what-is-not. Attachment can be seen as one pole of identification, wherein awareness identifies itself with an experience of what-is-not—i.e., attachment as a source of ignorance refers to an awareness’ experience of itself as an “I” that’s derived from an experience of an “it” that’s what-is-not.

However, identification can produce not only restriction, not only limitation, but also liberation, if awareness identifies itself with an experience of what-is. What-is is connection, what-is-not is separation. Experience, though self-defining, isn’t in and of itself restrictive or limiting; i.e., experience as the boundary that defines awareness can function as either a doorway or a wall, providing either passage into what-is or confinement within what-is-not. Identification, as awareness’ experience of itself as “I” in relation to awareness’ experience of another as “it,” therefore isn’t in and of itself restrictive or limiting. Experience is restrictive, i.e., confined by attachment, when awareness’ experience of itself becomes associated with what-is-not. Experience is liberating, i.e., free from attachment, when awareness’ experience of itself becomes associated with what-is. In other words, identification with what-is-not is restriction, while identification with what-is is liberation.

Awareness, through the experience of either what-is-not or what-is, can move either into further separation or further connection. It may seem paradoxical that feeling separated from the rest of existence is restrictive, while feeling connected to the rest of existence is liberating. To us it may seem that connections are restrictive and that having no connections is liberating. However, this is only because we’re experiencing connections from within the topsy-turvy dimension of what-

is-not, where everything appears as the opposite of what it really is. Liberation comes from being what you are; restriction comes from being what you're not.

No matter what we think reality is, and no matter what we think our relation to that reality is, we can't get around the underlying fact that existence is ultimately inseparable from itself. The individual truly becomes free only when they realize that being an individual doesn't mean being separate from the rest of existence but means being connected to the rest of existence, as one pole of an indivisible, mutually coexistent duality (literally, individual = "indivisibly dual"), as consciousness existing in relation to itself, becoming then existence which is somewhere and existence which is everywhere else. Therefore, identification and "I" aren't themselves "bad" things. It all depends on whether the identification is made and the "I" is created in relation to an experience of what-is-not (a negative) or what-is (a positive).

This ability that awareness has to create a defined experience of itself is what gives awareness the ability to bind itself within unreal experiential states. The ability of awareness to experience itself as what-is-not (or as what it's not) is what allows awareness to confine itself within the dimension of experience, to experience itself as separate from the rest of existence. Conversely, the ability of awareness to experience itself as what-is (or what it is) is what allows awareness to free itself within the dimension of experience, to experience itself as connected to the rest of existence.

In this way, experience is a two-edged sword: One edge is used to confine us, and the other is used to free us. To understand what freedom is, we must first understand the predicament of our confinement. Toward that end, we will now explore how awareness' experience of itself as "I" within the experiential context of what-is-not creates a self-perpetuating cycle of confusion, resulting in awareness being unable to experience its connection to the rest of existence. For if awareness experiences itself as what it's not, then awareness must remain unaware of what it is.

5.3 *The trap of misidentification*

Awareness itself isn't "I." "I" is an experience. "I" is what awareness experiences itself as; "I" is how awareness sees and defines itself; "I" is what awareness considers itself to be. For awareness, reality is whatever it experiences it to be; therefore, whatever form or definition of "I" awareness experiences itself as becomes its reality. For this reason, how awareness defines itself as "I" is of vital importance with regard to how awareness then defines itself in relation to other experiences. In other words, although awareness experiences itself as "I" in relation to another as "it," the nature of its experience of itself as "I" then determines how it will experience its relationship to other "its," other experiences—i.e., as separate from or connected to those experiences. This experience of separation or connection, in turn, determines whether the experience functions as a mirror, reflecting awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, or as a lens, projecting awareness into the dimension of what-is.

Awareness doesn't generally distinguish between what-is and what-is-not. Whatever awareness experiences *is* its reality, period. Awareness simply recognizes experience as such. Awareness,

while experiencing what-is-not, is unable to appreciate the ultimate unreality of its experience. This is because, as an experience, it's real, because the reality of experience is relational, and so the experience of what-is-not is just as real (i.e., just as relatively existent) as the experience of what-is. For awareness, any experience seems to be what-is simply because it exists as an experience. Therefore, when awareness experiences itself as "I," it considers that "I" to be what it is, regardless of whether that "I" is an experience of what-is or what-is-not.

It's this inability of awareness to recognize that experience occurring within the context of what-is-not is ultimately unreal, is ultimately an inaccurate representation of how existence relates to itself, which allows awareness to become effectively trapped within the dimension of what-is-not. In this subsection, we will discuss how this trap operates.

As awareness, we're facets on the diamond that's the totality of existence. We're in no way separable from the rest of existence, yet most of us are unaware of the depth of our connection to all that exists, unaware of the true relationship of our part to the whole. How does this unawareness occur? How does what's inseparable come to be experienced as separate? This experiential separation of our awareness from the rest of existence is the result of awareness' having walled itself off from the surrounding reality in an attempt to defend its mistaken notion of "I," its mistaken experience of what it is.

As explained in the previous subsection, how awareness experiences itself as "I" depends on whether its experiencing itself from within the dimension of what-is or from within the dimension of what-is-not. If awareness experiences itself as "I" from within the dimension of what-is-not, then what awareness experiences itself as is really what it's not. Once awareness experiences itself as an "I" that's not, awareness becomes effectively trapped within this ultimately unreal experience of reality, this experience that has no correlate in existence as it really is.

This functional confinement of awareness occurs in the following way. To awareness, this "I" that it experiences itself as is what it is, (even though it's really what it's not). In becoming aware of itself as this limited experiential "I," awareness simultaneously becomes unaware of the ultimately unlimited nature of its existence. By identifying its existence with this experience of itself as "I" (as an "I" that's really not), it then becomes inevitable that awareness will see any event leading to the dissolution of this "I" as something that causes its own nonexistence. Awareness, in mistaking itself for this "I" that's not, logically concludes that if this "I" ceases to be, then awareness itself will also cease to be. For this reason, awareness is bound to defend this self-image, bound to defend its mistaken notion of itself as this limited experiential "I," in order to maintain what it considers to be its own existence.

By becoming aware of its existence within the context of this "I" that's really not, awareness becomes unaware of the connection between its relative existence and absolute existence, and so awareness loses sight of the fact that what it really is can never stop existing. Thus, by attaching its existence to this limited and mistaken experience of itself as "I," awareness is able to conceive of its own nonexistence. In this way, awareness is able to experience fear, fear being the emotional experience of impending doom, or movement toward nonexistence.

Awareness can never really stop existing, for it's ultimately absolute existence. But once awareness experiences its reality within the context of what-is-not, the ultimately unreal, the ultimately nonexistent, becomes experientially real and existent. Thus, from within the dimension of what-is-not, the unreality of awareness' possible nonexistence becomes real, simply because it's an experience. (Again, because all experience is relative, unreality is real, and nonexistence exists, but only at the experiential level of reality, not at the levels of reality that precede experience.)

For an awareness that's experiencing reality within the dimension of what-is-not, a situation that ultimately doesn't and can't exist (i.e., its own nonexistence) seems as if it can exist, as if it's real. This, in a nutshell, is the conundrum that awareness finds itself in as it experiences reality. Awareness can experience either what-is or what-is-not, but, as experiences, they both seem on their face equally real. So, how is awareness to tell one from the other? How, when faced with an experience, can awareness tell whether it's experiencing what-is or what-is-not, since to awareness they're both equally experientially real and so appear equally as what-is?

Essentially, awareness can determine the nature of an experience according to the type of emotion it feels in association with the experience. If the experience is associated with a positive emotion, then awareness is moving into the dimension of what-is. Conversely, if the experience is associated with a negative emotion, then awareness is moving into the dimension of what-is-not.

Fear is a negative emotion. Fear is the movement of awareness into an experience of what-is-not. Existence is what-is; nonexistence is what-is-not. Awareness is aware of its movement toward the experience of nonexistence as the negative emotion of fear. Awareness is able to feel this fear, to move toward the experience of nonexistence, only because it has associated its existence with the limited experiential "I" formed within the dimension of what-is-not (i.e., because it has associated its existence with what-is-not.)

In order to try and avoid what awareness perceives as its own possible nonexistence, awareness then defends whatever notion of "I" it has, defends its self-image. That is, rather than overcoming its fear by realizing that it's more than what it experiences itself to be as "I," awareness tries to overcome the fear of perceived nonexistence by buttressing and reinforcing the experience of itself as "I." This buttressing and reinforcement of an "I" that's really not creates a vicious cycle, whereby awareness traps itself within an increasingly dense, fragmented, and ultimately unreal experience of what it is.

Awareness is unaware that the source of its fear, the source of its perceived possible nonexistence, lies in its mistaken definition of itself, in the association of its existence with an experience of an "I" that's really not. This is the problem with the awareness of experience that occurs from within the dimension of what-is-not: Awareness becomes unable to experience—i.e., becomes unaware of—the actual situation, the situation as it really is. Instead of experiencing the situation as it really is, awareness experiences the situation as it's really not. Instead of seeing the source of its perceived possible nonexistence as coming from within itself, as it truly does, awareness instead sees that source as coming from outside itself.

necessitating the erection of yet another barrier to help support the previous one. In this way, awareness, mistakenly functioning as “I,” becomes progressively defined and confined within an increasingly narrow self-definition, and so awareness ends up trapping itself in its attempts to protect itself.

Ego is a term that’s closely related to “I.” Whereas “I” represents awareness’ experience of itself, the ego represents the totality of the structure of self-definitions which define that “I.” Ego is, then, the composite structure by which “I” is defined as awareness’ experience of itself. Saying that the ego feels threatened is the same as saying that awareness’ definition of itself is in some way threatened. When awareness feels that the ego is threatened, it either responds aggressively toward, or runs from, that threat in order to protect what it perceives to be its existence, as that existence has been defined as “I” by the ego structure.*

However, what awareness doesn’t realize, what it’s unaware of, is that these very barriers of self-definition which it erects between its experience of itself as “I” and its experience of the surrounding reality as “it” are themselves the ultimate source of its fear, the ultimate source of its experience of possible nonexistence. These barriers of self-definition erected between “I” and “it” are the ultimate source of awareness’ fear of nonexistence because awareness uses them as boundaries to separate itself from what it experiences.* These boundaries separating “I” from “it” then establish an experiential framework, a cage, that tends to keep awareness moving into a reflected reality, into the dimension of what-is-not, into an experience of reality where both “I” and “it” are what-is-not.

The deeper awareness moves into what-is-not, the more “I” becomes defined and experienced as it’s really not. This situation creates more ways awareness is able to experience itself as possibly not existing. Remember, awareness is able to experience its own possible nonexistence only because it has mistakenly associated its existence with its experience of itself as an “I” that’s what-is-not. By mistakenly linking its existence to a relative and limited experiential reality, awareness becomes bound to defend its experience of itself as “I” in order to protect and maintain what it perceives as its very existence. Thus, the erection by awareness of barriers of self-definition around “I” in order to defend its experience of itself as “I” from its experience of

* For example, the concept and existence of homosexuality poses a threat to an ego structure that rigidly defines the awareness in question—i.e., the “I”—in terms of strict and polarized male-female dominance-submission relationships. An awareness defined as such is often unable to tolerate the concept of homosexuality, since such a concept runs counter to the concepts by which awareness’ existence, experienced as “I,” has been defined. Therefore, such an awareness often responds to homosexuality aggressively, attempting to eliminate it as a reflexive way of protecting what it mistakenly perceives as its own existence. As another example, in racism, an awareness has defined itself as “I” in terms of strict and polarized us/them superior-inferior relationships. Thus, racists are unable to tolerate concepts of racial equality because such concepts exist in opposition to the concepts by which their existence, experienced as “I,” has been defined. Therefore, such an awareness often responds to symbols of racial equality aggressively, attempting to eliminate them as a reflexive way of protecting what it mistakenly perceives as its own existence. This dynamic functions in the same way for any concept or object that is seen as existing in opposition to the concepts by which “I” is defined. Conversely, concepts and objects that are perceived to reinforce the ego-structure are treated with the opposite of aggression, i.e., with empathy and understanding.

* As explained in a previous subsection, whether or not awareness moves into the dimension of what-is or into the dimension of what-is-not depends on whether or not the experiential lens functions as a mirror or as a transparent surface. When awareness defines itself as separate from what it’s experiencing, that experience, when used as an experiential lens, reflects awareness into the dimension of what-is-not. Conversely, when awareness defines itself as connected to what it’s experiencing, that experience, when used as an experiential lens, projects awareness into the dimension of what-is.

another as “it” both sustains and propagates a vicious cycle of increasing self-division, isolation, and fear.

To better understand how this cycle functions, an analogy will be useful. Let’s say you live in a field surrounded by no walls. You roam the field freely without fear. One day, you see what you think is a poisonous snake. This snake, seen as poisonous, is a threat to your existence—i.e., “it” is seen as being capable of causing the nonexistence of “I.” As a consequence, you fear the snake, as your experience of the snake becomes associated with the perceived nonexistence of your experience of yourself as “I.” So, you build a wall around yourself to separate and protect yourself from the snake. The wall works very well at keeping the snake separate from you, and so it assuages your fear, but it also works to keep you from the rest of the field.

Now, within the area of the field you’ve enclosed, resources appear limited. You now see yourself as being in competition for those resources with other creatures within the enclosure. If they eat too much, you won’t have enough, and you’ll starve and die. These creatures are now seen as being capable of causing the nonexistence of “I.” So, you fear the creatures, as your experience of the creatures as “its” becomes associated with the perceived nonexistence of your experience of yourself as “I.” So, you capture them and wall them off behind a second, more internally situated barrier. This barrier works very well at keeping these other creatures from the food the field has to offer, and so it assuages your fear, but it also confines you to an even-smaller section of the field.

Now, within the even-smaller area of the field you’ve enclosed, resources appear even more limited. Now, you see yourself as being in competition for those resources with other people within the enclosure. If they use too many of the resources, you won’t have enough, and you’ll starve and die. These people are now seen as being capable of causing the nonexistence of “I.” So, you fear the people, as your experience of the people as “them” (i.e., the human form of “it”) becomes associated with the perceived nonexistence of your experience of yourself as “I.” These people are seen as threatening your existence, and so you attack them and try to kill them first or drive them from the field. Eventually, you drive them from the best part of the field and then build another, more internally situated wall to keep them from getting back in. This barrier works very well at keeping these people from getting back into the best part of the field, and so it assuages your fear, but it also confines you to an even-smaller section of the field. And on and on it goes.....

Each wall, each boundary, each barrier of self-definition, while protecting you from one perceived threat, also creates the possibility and inevitability of another way your existence defined as such can be threatened, thereby necessitating the construction of yet another protective barrier.

Each time we build a wall to separate us from what we fear, in building that wall, we change the environment, the conceptual landscape, redefining our “I” in relation to “it.” This alteration of the environment always creates a new threat, a new fear. People think, if they have a lot of money, they’ll be happy, that this money will be like a wall keeping away what they fear. Then they get the money, and they assuage their old fears, but now they fear losing the money. So, one

fear is replaced by another. Once we build a wall to separate ourselves from what we fear, we must work to maintain that wall. Walls don't eliminate fear; they only mask it, only put another face on it. The walls we build can never separate us from the real enemy, for our real enemy, the actual source of our fear, always lies within. This is because the actual source of our fear isn't in the "it" that we wall ourselves off from; rather, the actual source of our fear is within ourselves, in the experience of ourselves as an "I" that's really not, in the way we experience our own existence as awareness from within the dimension of what-is-not.

The actual source of our fear isn't the "it" that seems to threaten us; the actual source of our fear is our misapprehension that this "I" is what we really are. No matter how sturdy and numerous the walls we build to separate ourselves from the threatening "it," as long as we defend our mistaken notion of "I" we're bound to fear, we're bound to experience ways in which we can cease to exist, we're bound to experience threats to what we mistakenly perceive as our existence. We will all die, but we will never cease to exist; we will never cease to be what we ultimately are.

In the final analysis we're just trying to hide from ourselves (although we're unaware of this, since we think we're trying to hide from "it"). So we can run, but we can't hide, for wherever we go, there we are, clinging to our mistaken notion of what we are. It's sort of like smelling a really bad odor, and so we keep trying to get away from it, to distance ourselves from it, not realizing that the odor is emanating from ourselves. The more we try to keep the odor out by building walls around ourselves, the stronger and more noticeable it becomes in the more enclosed area. Likewise, the more walls we build around our "I," the more concentrated, intense, and inescapable our fear becomes.

In this way, awareness becomes increasingly confined in a mistaken experience of itself as "I." The more barriers of self-definition awareness erects around "I," the more unaware it becomes of what it really is. The more unaware awareness becomes of what it really is, the realer its experience of itself as "I" becomes, increasing the apparent need it feels to defend this mistaken notion of itself as "I," this self-image. We will call this process of self-confinement the *cycle of self-ignorance*, since it's a cycle that perpetuates awareness' unawareness of what it is, as depicted in **figure 99**.

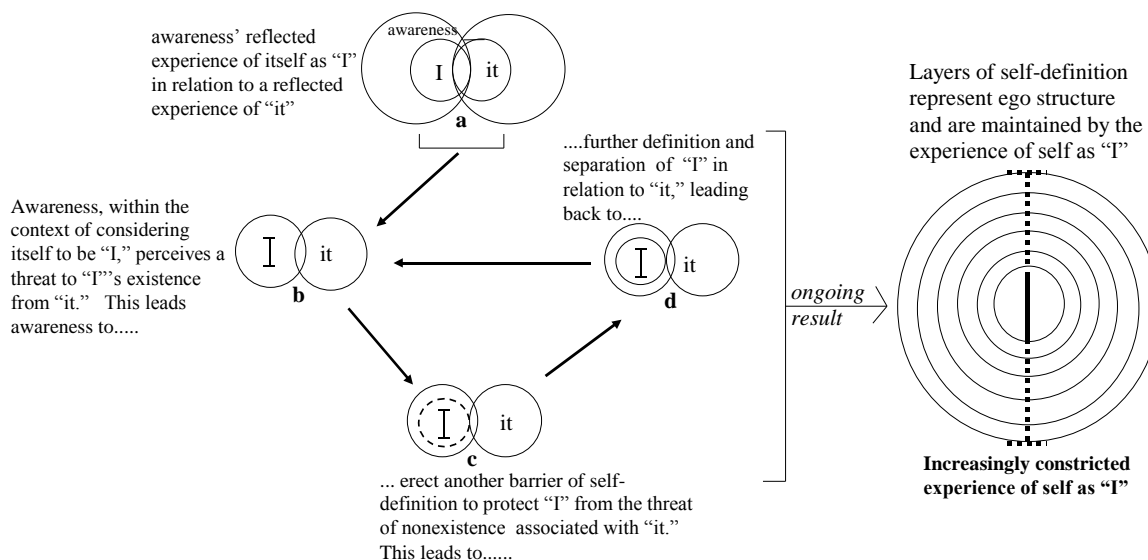


Figure 99 Awareness' experience of itself as an "I" that's really not within the dimension of what-is-not creates a self-perpetuating cycle that precludes awareness from experiencing itself as it is. Since this cycle keeps awareness unaware of what it really is, and thus unaware of its connection to the rest of existence, it's referred to as the cycle of self-ignorance.

The cycle is set into motion by the event depicted at the top of the diagram (a), wherein awareness uses the experiential lens as a mirror and so experiences itself as "I" within the dimension of what-is-not. Next (b), awareness, mistakenly considering itself to be its experience of itself as "I," perceives a threat to the existence of "I" from some experience of "it." Next (c), in order to protect "I" from this threatening "it," awareness erects a boundary, a new definition of itself as "I" in relation to this "it," in order to separate itself from this "it." This new boundary then reinforces awareness' experience of itself as "I," since now awareness is doubly defined as a mistaken "I" (d), which then leads back again to the situation depicted in (b), where awareness, with this modified definition of itself as "I," perceives a new threat to its existence as "I" is now defined. This leads again to the situation depicted in (c), which leads to (d), then back again to (b), and on and on. With each cycle, another barrier of self-definition is added, leading ultimately to the situation depicted on the right (also depicted in figure 98), where awareness' experience of itself as "I" becomes progressively restricted by ever-narrower self-definitions.

These barriers of self definition serve to separate awareness from the rest of existence, from the rest of consciousness. The link between all these barriers of self definition is "I"; they're all held together by awareness' mistaken experience of itself as "I." With each new barrier of self-definition, "I" becomes more confined. Furthermore, owing to the increasing inability of awareness to experience the surrounding reality beyond these self-imposed limits, awareness is unaware that it's "I" which is holding all these walls in place. As long as awareness considers this "I" to be what it is, then the walls remain in place; and as long as the walls remain in place,

awareness is bound to experience “I” as what it is, and also is bound to erect more walls to protect and maintain this experience of “I” it mistakenly considers itself to be.

Physical reality has its dangers, but the point here is that our actual existence as consciousness can never really be in any danger of not existing. Therefore, the barriers of self-definition that awareness erects between what it experiences as itself and what it experiences as another in order to protect its notion of “I” are walls erected to protect awareness from a danger and an outcome that don’t and can’t actually exist. “I” as an experience can and will cease to exist, but awareness isn’t “I”; awareness is what-is, albeit what-is existing in relation to itself.

Although the threat of nonexistence isn’t ultimately real, the walls, the boundaries, the barriers of self-definition, do have an impact upon the way awareness experiences its existence, and so do have an impact upon the quality of our emotional experience as long as we’re functioning as an awareness within the universe of relative existence. Because we’re aware, our experience is real. For this reason, the walls we use to define and defend “I,” though conceptual, though experiential, nonetheless function as real, even though the danger they protect us from is ultimately unreal. As long as the danger seems real, any wall which awareness uses to separate itself from that danger also functions as real. The thing is, these barriers of self-definition don’t separate us from any real danger; all they do is create an experiential framework that separates us from an experience and an awareness of what we really are.

Now, it could be said that any experience of awareness as “I” is mistaken, is confining, since awareness isn’t experience. However, there’s a difference between awareness experiencing and defining itself as “I” within the dimension of what-is, and awareness experiencing and defining itself as “I” within the dimension of what-is-not. Awareness experiencing and defining itself as “I” within the dimension of what-is is aware of connection and so can experience itself and remain aware of its true relationship to the rest of existence, whereas awareness experiencing and defining itself as “I” within the dimension of what-is-not is aware of separation and so is unable to experience its true relationship to the rest of existence and instead experiences that relationship as it’s not.

Awareness experiencing itself as “I” within the dimension of what-is remains aware that “I” is an experience and not what it really is. Awareness experiencing itself as “I” within the dimension of what-is doesn’t become attached to “I,” doesn’t identify with this experience of “I.” “I” is simply seen to be an experience like any other, as a relative reality, not as an absolute reality. Just as we can see a magic show and enjoy the experience but not be drawn into the illusion, into the unreality of the apparent experiential reality, so it’s also possible for awareness to experience reality as what-is and so remain aware of the actual relationship of itself to existence, and of experience to existence, and not be drawn into the separating and self-limiting illusion of what-is-not.

The experience of what-is is liberating, as awareness that experiences what-is becomes defined by an ever-expanding boundary of relative existence. Conversely, the experience of what-is-not is confining, as awareness that experiences what-is-not becomes defined by an ever-contracting boundary of relative existence. So, the problem for awareness isn’t in the existence of “I” as an

experience but in the existence of “I” as it’s experienced within the separating and self-limiting dimension of what-is-not.

At some point, awareness experiencing itself as “I” within the dimension of what-is-not feels limited and confined by the increasingly dense barriers of self-definition. At that point, awareness may decide that it would like to get rid of some of these barriers. So, awareness makes an effort to get out of the cage it has erected around its experience of itself—i.e., awareness tries to extract itself as “I” from the cage it now feels itself to be trapped in. What awareness doesn’t realize is that “I,” as an experience of what-is-not, is itself the bolt which holds together the cage that awareness finds so limiting and confining. Thus, the more awareness tries to get “I” out of its cage, the more this effort just reinforces the mistaken notion that “I” is what awareness really is, and so the more this effort reinforces the barriers of self-definition that awareness is trying to get rid of. No matter where awareness goes, no matter what experience awareness tries to use to escape, to get “I” out of its cage, so long as awareness maintains its mistaken notion of itself as “I,” awareness simply winds up trapping itself in the same way within a different experiential framework.

In this way, awareness is put in the paradoxical position of defending and maintaining the existence of the cage it’s trying to get out of. Efforts to get out of the cage as “I” only make the cage more real and thus more inescapable. The limitation that awareness imposes upon itself as a result of its experience of itself as an “I” that’s not, functions to make awareness unaware of what it really is, thus leaving awareness with the experience of itself as a separate “I,” as opposed to being inseparable from the rest of existence. Once awareness has entered the dimension of what-is-not, unreality becomes its reality. In this way, the limitation awareness imposes upon itself through the mistaken notion of itself as “I” becomes self-sustaining, as well as self-perpetuating.

To get beyond the walls, to get free of its self-limitations, to get “I” out of its cage, to escape from its trap, awareness must let go of its mistaken notion of itself as “I.” Once the “I” is seen to be unreal, the barriers that define that “I,” the bars of the cage that are bolted together with that “I,” themselves are seen to be unreal and so are no longer defended and maintained. The problem is, as has just been described and as is depicted in figure 99, the mistaken notion of “I” is self-sustaining and self-perpetuating once awareness has experienced itself as this ultimately unreal “I.”

Any attempt to get “I” out of its cage only makes the bars of the cage stronger. The bars define “I,” and “I” bolts the bars of the cage in place. The more awareness struggles to get “I” out, the sturdier and realer the cage becomes, because in struggling to get “I” out, what awareness unknowingly does is strengthen the relative reality of the “I” bolt that holds the bars of the cage together. Even if awareness stops struggling, the cage still may not go away if awareness stopped struggling with the intention of making the cage go away so that “I” could be free. For this intention itself is an action that reinforces the existence of “I,” though passively.

The only way for awareness to get beyond the confining barriers of self-definition once the cycle of self-ignorance has been entered is for awareness to become aware of the nature of its

dilemma, to become aware that it's its own jailer. Once awareness realizes this, it stops struggling with no effort, with no intention, simply because the absurdity of continuing to do so has finally become clear. In this way, the cycle of self-ignorance is broken.

The problem is, once again, how is awareness supposed to become aware of its dilemma, to escape from the trap it has gotten itself into, and so exit the cycle of self-ignorance, if the dilemma by its very nature precludes awareness from being aware of what it's doing to itself? It seems that existence has played quite a nice trick upon itself. It's as if existence says to awareness: "Here, awareness, go ahead and experience what-is-not. Sure, you can get back again. You can always get out of what-is-not by seeing that what you experience isn't ultimately real. But, oh, by the way, as long as you're experiencing what-is-not, what you experience will appear to be ultimately real. Ha ha ha..." It seems to be the perfect double bind, a very sticky wicket indeed, or more like a Chinese finger trap. You can get in quite easily, but once you're in, the harder you try to get out, the tighter the trap becomes.

Awareness' wandering into the dimension of what-is-not is also like Alice going through the looking glass, where everything appears as the opposite of what it really is, everything works backward, everything is "topsy-turvy," turned upside down, reversed. Like the Red Queen who runs faster and faster just to stay in the same place, the harder awareness tries to get out, the more it stays right where it is, i.e., in the topsy-turvy land of what-is-not. Conversely, once awareness stops trying to go anywhere, it's then able to move from where it is. But again, the problem is, as long as awareness is experiencing reality from within the topsy-turvy land of what-is-not, awareness is impelled to keep trying to do something to change its position, which then only keeps it trapped where it is.

Yet there must be some way for awareness to get out of this dilemma, some way to exit the cycle of self-ignorance, or else awareness would remain forever lost to itself, spiraling farther and farther into the dimension of what-is-not. Fortunately, no force is without its complementary counterforce. As the cycle of self-ignorance drives awareness farther into the dimension of what-is-not, the result of movement in that direction causes another experience to become predominant, an experience that eventually serves to counter to some degree the deepening descent of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not. We will now explore the nature of this complementary counterforce by examining the pleasure/pain experiential duality.

5.4 *Pleasure and pain*

Awareness is defined by emotional experience as existing within either the dimension of what-is or the dimension of what-is-not. An emotional experience that defines awareness within the dimension of what-is is positive, while an emotional experience that defines awareness within the dimension of what is-not is negative.

What-is is connection; what-is-not is separation. The universe consists of existence repetitively and progressively existing in relation to itself. Existence in this relational state is in no way ultimately separable from itself. Therefore, the experience of existential connection or unity—

i.e., the awareness of existence as inseparable from itself—is an accurate representation of the actual relationship existence has with itself. Conversely, the experience of existential separation—i.e., the awareness of existence as somehow separable from itself—is an inaccurate representation of the actual relationship existence has with itself.*

In the previous subsection, we described how awareness' experience of itself as "I" within the dimension of what-is-not leads to an experience of increasing existential separation. We also touched upon how awareness' experience of itself as "I" within the dimension of what-is leads to an experience of increasing existential connection. To quickly review, the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not causes awareness to experience itself as an "I" that's really not, leading awareness to define itself within a contracting barrier of self-definition, an exclusive experiential boundary, thereby progressively separating itself experientially from the rest of existence. Conversely, the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is causes awareness to experience itself as an "I" that really is, leading awareness to define itself within an expanding barrier of self-definition, an inclusive experiential boundary, one that takes into account relatively more of existence, thereby progressively connecting itself experientially with the rest of existence—even within the confining context of a barrier of self-definition.

Therefore, for these reasons, another aspect of the movement of awareness into the dimensions of what-is and what-is-not is the experience of increasing existential connection associated with movement into the dimension of what-is, and the experience of increasing existential separation associated with movement into the dimension of what-is-not.

In this subsection, we will make the case that the experience of increasing existential connection which accompanies awareness' movement into the dimension of what-is is what we call pleasure, while the experience of increasing existential separation which accompanies awareness' movement into the dimension of what-is-not is what we call pain.

To begin our analysis, we will examine the words themselves, for the words *pleasure* and *pain* each indicate the relational states that awareness finds itself in as it becomes, respectively, experientially either connected to or separated from the rest of existence.

The word *pleasure* represents the state of existential connection that awareness experiences as pleasant: "Pleasure" = "please-sure," a complementary relationship between asking and giving, which are mutually coexistent and mutually supportive movements. Thus, the form of the word *pleasure* indicates a relational structure wherein existence is aware of its connection to itself while existing in relation to itself, dualized but undivided, with the relative existences of experiencer and experienced seen as they are, as mutually coexistent.

* What existence actually is lies beyond experience. However, the experience of what-is, as a projected reality, maintains the relationships intrinsic to the original, while the experience of what-is-not, as a reflected reality, reverses the relationships intrinsic to the original. For this reason, although neither the experience of what-is nor the experience of what-is-not is what exists directly, the one accurately displays existence's relationship to itself, and the other inaccurately displays that relationship. One displays that relationship as connection, while the other displays that same relationship as separation. Neither is what exists directly, but one is certainly closer to it than the other.

When the experiential boundary functions as a lens, projecting awareness into the dimension of what-is, awareness as “I” feels connected to what it experiences as “it,” as well as to the rest of existence. Awareness experiences this state of existential connection as what we call pleasure. The experience says to awareness, “*Please* come in,” and awareness says, “*sure*,” and so awareness is projected through the experiential lens into the dimension of what-is, and in the process experiences please-sure, which is simply the awareness of a connection between itself as the experiencer and the experienced reality. Pleasure is, then, most fundamentally what awareness experiences as the state of its being connected to another relative existence.

The word *pain* represents the state of existential separation that awareness experiences as unpleasant: “Pain” = “pane” (as in window pane or pane of glass) = a barrier = separation. Pain is awareness’ experience of its isolation or apparent separation from some aspect of existence that awareness actually exists in relation to. Since what awareness exists in relation to is actually part of its larger existence, the apparent separation of awareness from what it exists in relation to is another way of saying awareness’ separation from itself, or self-division.

The experience of pain isn’t the awareness of an ultimately or absolutely real separation, since this is impossible. However, pain does represent the awareness of an experientially real separation. That is, to the awareness that experiences the separation, the separation is real, and so the pain, the self-division, is real because for awareness, reality is whatever it experiences it to be.

When the experiential boundary functions as a mirror, reflecting awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, awareness as “I” feels separate from what it experiences as “it,” as well as from the rest of existence. Awareness experiences this state of existential separation as what we call pain. In this case, the experience says to awareness, “*Please* come in,” and awareness says, “*no*” and so awareness is reflected off the experiential lens into the dimension of what-is-not, and in the process experiences pain, which is simply the awareness of a separation between itself as the experiencer and the experienced reality. Pain is, then, most fundamentally what awareness experiences as the state of its being separated from another relative existence.

Pain is an experience of what-is-not, because pain is awareness’ experience of separation from what it’s truly inseparable from. Pleasure is an experience of what-is, because pleasure is awareness’ experience of connection to what it actually exists in relation to. Because pleasure involves movement into the dimension of what-is, it’s a positive emotional experience. Because pain involves movement into the dimension of what-is-not, it’s a negative emotional experience.

Pleasure projects the state of existential connection or unity and the awareness of mutual coexistence, while pain reflects the state of existential separation or self-division, where the awareness of mutual coexistence is lost. Unity is what-is; division is what-is-not. Our greatest physical pleasure comes during sex (literally “self-extension” or “self-expansion”), when we exist in connection to another, in unity with another, in harmony with another. We are drawn to the orgasmic state because at that moment we physically experience the underlying unity of what-is. Our greatest physical pain comes when some part of our body is destroyed, i.e., when some part of our physical being becomes separated or divided from the rest.

Our greatest mental pleasure comes when we're able to see relationships, to form connections between different ideas, to understand something as part of a greater whole. Our greatest mental pain comes when we can't figure something out, when we can't make the connections between this idea and that idea, when we can't see where something fits.

Our greatest emotional pleasure comes when we reunite with a loved one, and our greatest emotional pain comes when we lose or are separated from a loved one. Thus, there's a consistent association between pleasure and the experience of existential connection, and between pain and the experience of existential separation.

However, painful experiences can also lead to a greater positive emotion, and pleasurable experiences can lead to a greater negative emotion. For instance, the pain of surgery can lead to the pleasure of better health, and the pleasure of sex can lead to the pain of a broken relationship.

Analyzing an individual experience as either pleasurable or painful, then, depends on the larger context within which it's occurring. That is, there can be unselfish pleasure and selfish pain, and there can be unselfish pain and selfish pleasure. Unselfish pleasure is positive all the way around, because it occurs within the larger context of an awareness of existential connection or unity. Selfish pain is negative all the way around, because it occurs within the larger context of an awareness of existential separation or self-division.

On the other hand, unselfish pain, while involving some apparent separation of existence from itself, takes place within the larger context of an awareness of existential connection or unity and so is ultimately positive, representing the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is. Conversely, selfish pleasure, while involving some apparent connection of existence to itself, occurs within the larger context of an awareness of existential separation or self-division and so is ultimately negative, representing the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not.

An example of unselfish pain might be giving something you really like to someone who needs it more than you do. Parting with whatever you're giving away is somewhat painful, but in the end it feels good. (However, it only works this way if you're really giving it away without attachment, without expecting anything else in return. For if you give something away expecting something in return, even just a good feeling, then you're not really giving it away but rather are selling it.)

An example of selfish pleasure might be cheating on your lover or spouse, whatever the case may be. The experience of sex may be pleasurable, but in the end it creates greater pain for those involved. The lover or spouse either finds out about it, causing both them and yourself pain, or you manage to keep it hidden, in which case the maintenance of this secret requires that you build a wall between yourself and your lover, creating an unseen rift that creates problems and pain for the duration of the relationship.

As awareness' what we are is existence existing in relation to itself and so inseparable from itself. Thus, it's our nature to be connected to the rest of existence rather than to be separated

from the rest of existence. For this reason, it's our nature to seek pleasure and avoid pain, since pleasure represents the experience of existential connection, while pain represents the experience of existential separation. The increasing isolation we experience as our awareness progressively defines itself as "I" within the dimension of what-is-not is unnatural, inasmuch as it represents an experiential state that's really contrary to our nature.

How is it that awareness can do something which isn't in its nature to do? That is, if it's the nature of awareness to be connected to the rest of existence, why does awareness move in the direction of disconnection and existential separation? Again, awareness considers whatever it experiences to be reality, i.e., to be what-is. Thus, awareness moves into the dimension of what-is-not, into self-division, because it doesn't recognize that it's experiencing what-is-not, because it thinks it's experiencing what-is. Once what-is-not has been mistaken for what-is, the nature of awareness to be connected to what-is, to seek what-is, is turned on itself, taking awareness deeper into what-is-not. In this way, awareness is moved by its nature in a way that's actually against its nature.

However, as awareness moves deeper into the dimension of what-is-not, it increasingly experiences pain and negative emotions (or angst). While the experiences within the dimension of what-is-not seem to be real, to be what-is, they also seem to bring more pain than pleasure. This pain provides awareness with a clue that it may not be going in the right direction, toward what-is, and that things may not be as they seem.

The pain we're speaking of here isn't just the prick of a needle or a bump on the head, although these pains do cause us to change our physical patterns of movement. The pain that causes awareness to reevaluate the overall direction of its movement is the deep emotional distress, the anxiety, that seems to come from nowhere but that actually comes from awareness' experience of increasing existential separation from the rest of existence, as awareness experiences the walls, the panes, that it has erected within itself, between its mistaken experience of itself as an "I" that's really not and the rest of existence as "it," as awareness mistakenly moved deeper into the dimension of what-is-not.

So, while awareness may experience what-is-not as real, the underlying unreality or what-is-not-ness of these experiences eventually asserts itself in the form of pain and negative emotions. What-is and what-is-not may be equivalent in terms of their experiential reality, but they aren't the same experience. When awareness moves into the dimension of what-is-not it finds itself in a different place than when it moves into the dimension of what-is. Again, relative realities may be coexistent, but they're still different.

Pain and negative emotions, because they're unnatural—i.e., because they don't exist according to the way existence is actually structured—do provide some resistance to the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not. Awareness, experiencing itself as an "I" that's really not, confined and limited by multiplying barriers of self-definition, begins to experience an increasing amount of pain as the manifestation of its increasing isolation from the rest of existence. At some point, the unnaturalness of the pain, of the increasing isolation, becomes great

enough to act as a force resisting awareness' further movement into the dimension of what-is-not.

Eventually, the increasing pain and negative emotions resulting from awareness' further movement into the dimension of what-is-not causes awareness to reevaluate its sense of direction. "Perhaps this isn't where 'I' really want to be. Perhaps this isn't really the direction 'I' want to go. Perhaps 'I' isn't what 'I' really am." At this point, awareness starts trying to escape from what-is-not but finds it very difficult to do so, owing to the cycle of self-ignorance it's trapped within, as explained in the previous subsection. Remember, any attempt by awareness to extract "I" from this situation only reinforces the mistaken notion that "I" is what awareness really is.

If awareness' further movement into the dimension of what-is-not causes pain, causes an apparent separation of existence from itself, how or why is it that awareness goes there in the first place? Why does a child touch a hot stove even though they've been warned that it will hurt? Because they want to experience it for themselves. Why does awareness move into the dimension of what-is-not, setting in motion the cycle of self-ignorance? Because, like the child, awareness wants to experience what-is-not for itself.

In the early stages of awareness' movement into the dimension of what-is-not, awareness still is relatively more connected to than separate from the rest of existence, and so there's little pain or negative emotion associated with that movement. The novelty of the experience of what-is-not outweighs the pain and negative emotions associated with that experience. Similarly, putting your hand on a hot surface might not cause intense pain immediately; in fact, the novelty of the warmth might even feel good, but the longer the hand is held there, the worse the pain gets. Likewise, awareness in the early stages of its movement into the dimension of what-is-not is so fascinated with the form of this new experience that it doesn't pay attention to the pain and negative emotions which accompany that experience—like a person who sees something in a forest, goes walking toward it, and becomes so fascinated by what they see that they pay no attention to the bushes and briars which are poking and scratching them along the way. Likewise, as long as awareness is able to ignore the pain, it can continue relatively unimpeded into the dimension of what-is-not.

However, as awareness moves deeper into the forest of what-is-not, the balance between fascination and pain shifts, as the underbrush becomes denser, as the barriers of self-definition multiply. At this point, the pain and negative emotions caused by any movement deeper into the forest of what-is-not begin to outweigh the fascination that awareness has with this new experience. At some point, the pain and negative emotions accompanying further movement into the forest of what-is-not become so great that awareness can't help but pay attention to it, as pain and negative emotions start to become the predominant experiences. It's at this point that the experience of pain and negative emotions is able to act as a force countering to some degree the impetus toward movement into the dimension of what-is-not that's provided by the cycle of self-ignorance. It's at this point that the pain and negative emotions caused by awareness' movement into the dimension of what-is-not literally *force* awareness to stop and pay attention to where it's going.

However, while getting into the forest of what-is-not was fairly easy, getting out is another matter. Once awareness moves deep enough into the forest of what-is-not, the way out can't be seen, and movement in any direction seems only to cause more pain. In trying to get out of the forest of what-is-not, awareness often becomes only more and more lost.

5.41 *Karma*

It's impossible to escape the what-is or what-is-not nature of the experiential context within which all our actions occur. That is, if an action is born of an awareness of existential separation, regardless of whether the action appears on its surface to cause pleasure or pain, it will eventually and inevitably produce a negative or painful experience. Conversely, if an action is born of an awareness of existential connection, regardless of whether the action appears on its surface to cause pleasure or pain, it will eventually and inevitably produce a positive or pleasurable experience. You may be able to fool others around you, and even yourself, regarding your deepest motives, but you can't avoid the mechanics of experience—i.e., you can't fool Mother Nature.

For example, punishing a child for misbehavior may cause pain to both the parent and the child, but if it's done within the larger context of existential connection, of love, then the end result will be a more positive and pleasurable relationship between the parent and child. Conversely, not punishing a child for misbehavior, owing to parental guilt or out of fear of alienating the child, may in the short term be quite pleasing to the parent and the child, for it avoids conflict, but the end result will be a more negative and painful relationship between the parent and child.

We exist in the ocean of experiential existence, and every move we make creates a wave within that ocean. Movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is creates a wave that propagates as what-is; movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not creates a wave that propagates as what-is-not. Every wave we create eventually returns to us in the form in which it was created, and then impacts our awareness as either a pleasurable or a painful experience, i.e., as either what-is or what-is-not. We're thus bound to experience the results of our actions. This is what's known as the law of karma. Jesus of Nazareth had this to say about karma: "As ye sow, so shall ye reap."

Karma is experiential feedback. Karma is a function of the way experiential waves propagate within the interconnected and unified underlying framework of relative existence. What is an experiential wave? Every action we take, every move we make, creates an impact on the rest of existence. When the rest of existence then impacts our awareness, it becomes our experience of reality. The way we act impacts the rest of existence as other awareness' experience. Like a wave caused by dropping a pebble into the ocean, those impacts we create don't stop with our action, but propagate throughout the ocean of experiential existence, destined eventually to return to their source.

To understand the propagation of these experiential waves, we need to visualize existence as a sphere, as an interconnected, unified whole, which, indeed, it is. Our awareness, as inseparable

from the rest of existence, occupies a point somewhere on the surface of that sphere. Let's say that we can move either away from the center of the sphere (outward), or toward the center of the sphere (inward). We will define movement relatively away from the center of the sphere as movement into the dimension of what-is-not, and movement relatively toward the center of the sphere as movement into the dimension of what-is. As awareness, we can move into either the dimension of what-is or the dimension of what-is-not and so effectively extend the surface of the sphere either inward or outward. Each of these two different directions of movement creates a different experiential-wave orientation on the surface of the sphere. Once an experiential wave is created, it propagates around the surface of the sphere and eventually back to its point of origin, where it then impacts the awareness that originated it. An experiential wave that propagates as an outward extension, as movement into the dimension of what-is-not, eventually returns with that same orientation to negatively impact the awareness that originated it. Conversely, an experiential wave that propagates as an inward extension, as movement into the dimension of what-is, eventually returns with that same orientation to positively impact the awareness that originated it.

Just as there exist physical laws, such as the speed-of-light constant, that represent consistent relationships within the structure of the universe, so there also exist nonphysical laws, such as the law of karma, that represent other consistent relationships within the structure of the universe. The law of karma is the experiential equivalent of Newton's third law of motion, which states that for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction. Thus, according to the law of karma, according to the way experiential waves must propagate within the context of an interconnected, unified whole, if an awareness does bad things—i.e., moves toward what-is-not, thereby creating waves of what-is-not—that awareness will itself eventually experience those what-is-not waves in the form of painful experiences as the waves inevitably return to impact their point of origin. Conversely, if an awareness does good things—i.e., moves toward what-is, thereby creating waves of what-is—that awareness will itself eventually experience those what-is waves in the form of pleasurable experiences as the waves inevitably return to impact their point of origin. These experiential waves may not return in one lifetime, but they will return at some point in the course of an awareness' ongoing existence.

The movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not thus creates two types of painful experiences: pain from within and pain from without. Pain from within is what awareness experiences as increasing existential separation and self-division, resulting from its increasingly confining self-definition. Pain from without is what awareness experiences when an experiential wave of what-is-not returns to impact it. The external pain, the pain that comes from without, and the internal pain, the pain that comes from within, are each the result of the same movement, each the result of the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, creating an experience of existential separation both from within and from without.

Awareness tries to avoid paying attention to the internal pain, the pain from within, by immersing itself in external pleasures. However, when awareness tries to mask the internal pain of existential separation by engaging in selfish pleasure, in actions that make it feel good but cause pain to others, then the pain simply ends up coming at awareness from the opposite

direction—i.e., from without rather than from within. Awareness can run, but it can't hide, from the pain of self-division.

If it weren't for the law of karma, awareness could go on fooling itself indefinitely, forever masking the internal pain of its isolation through external pleasures that are ultimately self-division. However, owing to the law of karma, an experiential wave of what-is-not always returns to the originating awareness. Awareness turns to external pleasures to try to avoid internal pain, and awareness turns to internal pleasure to try to avoid external pain. However, when faced with increasing external pain, as awareness turns inward to try to get internal pleasure, awareness is then confronted with internal pain, the internal self-division it's been trying to avoid. In this way, external pain, by approaching awareness from without, eventually forces awareness to turn toward, face, and deal with the internal pain created by its mistaken self-definitions. If not for the inevitability of experiential feedback, awareness could avoid this internal pain forever, thereby remaining forever isolated from the rest of existence.

At some point, awareness has nowhere else to go, and so it turns inward to face its pain, the pain of self-division. Eventually, awareness becomes so fatigued from being caught in the cycle of self-ignorance, from fighting a battle it can never win, that awareness simply gives up. Awareness finally stops pushing "it" away, lets go of its hold upon the barriers of self-definition, and surrenders to the "it" that it feared, that it perceived as the enemy, as other, as the threat to the existence of itself as "I."

However, instead of this surrender resulting in the oblivion of nonexistence that awareness had expected when it stopped defending "I" from "it," awareness instead experiences release and relief from pain it had all along sought, a release and relief it could never have experienced as long as it maintained the wall separating "I" from "it," separating one aspect of its existence from another.

In that moment of fatigue, in that moment when all seems lost and awareness sees that there's no way to win, awareness by giving up finally frees itself and so allows itself to experience the connection between itself and the other part of itself it had for so long been pushing away. In that moment, awareness realizes that "it" wasn't the source of the pain but that the source of the pain was, in fact, the act of pushing "it" away, walling "it" off as something separate from awareness as "I."

In that moment, there's revelation—there's literally the revealing to awareness of what-is as it is. In that moment, awareness is able to experience the nature of its relationship to the rest of existence, which is one of connection, not separation. In the light of experiencing what-is, awareness now has a point of reference and is able to recognize the difference between what-is and what-is-not. After seeing the light of what-is illuminate the dark forest of what-is-not, awareness is no longer quite so attached to the unreality of what-is-not, for it has experienced another reality, a reality that lies beyond the forest.

However, awareness doesn't usually get out of the forest of what-is-not right away. After this initial revelation, the light fades, and the unreality of the forest reasserts itself. For awareness has

wandered deep into the forest of what-is-not and in so doing has built many walls between itself and the rest of existence. These walls must each be deconstructed, and with each deconstruction, with the removal of each barrier of self-definition, awareness is reunited with whatever aspect of itself it had separated itself from by using that barrier of self-definition.

Inevitably, awareness must face its fear, because what awareness fears are those aspects of existence it hasn't accepted as itself, those aspects of existence it has defined as other, as "it," as separate from its mistaken experience of itself as "I." Because existence is ultimately singular, in facing its fear, awareness faces itself; and in accepting its fear, awareness accepts itself and so becomes able to experience the nature of its relationship to the rest of existence, becomes increasingly aware of what it really is.

While pain counters the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, pain and negative emotions can't by themselves be the only force that extracts awareness from the forest of what-is-not. There's a difference between running away from what-is-not and running toward what-is. Trying to run away from what-is-not isn't, in and of itself, movement toward what-is. While lost in a forest, we can run blindly with fear and only get increasingly lost. However, if we see a beacon and go toward it, then that movement can lead us out of the forest.

Awareness can't extract itself from the forest of what-is-not and return to an experience of what-is until it actually re-turns its attention toward what-is. Pain eventually causes awareness to run away from what-is-not, but as long as awareness remains focused upon its fear, as long as awareness runs away looking back and being driven by what it fears, then awareness really is still moving within the dimension of what-is-not.

Fearing existence isn't the same as loving existence. Fearing God isn't the same as loving God, although many people equate the two. Hanging out with God because we fear God is not the same as hanging out with God because we love to be in God's company. This is simply not the same relationship. In one relationship there's explicit connection, and in the other relationship there's implicit separation.

As an example, let's say that someone we love becomes dangerous and has to be put in some type of psychiatric facility. Because we still love them, we want to see them, to be close to them, but because we also fear them, when we see them, we want a barrier in place that separates us from them. As long as that barrier is in place, we can't touch them, we can't be completely connected to them.

As long as awareness fears existence in the largest sense, then awareness is bound to erect a wall between itself and the rest of existence in order to protect itself from the rest of existence. As long as such a wall is in place, awareness can't fully experience what-is because it's experiencing what-is-not. The reason why sincere "God fearing" people often engage in actions of intolerance that cause others pain is because they're functioning within the self-divisive context of what-is-not (although, of course, they perceive themselves to be functioning within the unified context of what-is, inasmuch as they see themselves as performing the will of God). So, actions arising from within the self-divisive context of what-is-not naturally result in pain

and negative emotions. Conversely, “God loving” people function within the unified context of what-is, and so their actions arising within that context inevitably result in ultimately positive outcomes.

The trouble here is that everyone sees themselves as doing the right thing, because it’s the right thing for them within the context of the experiential reality or dimension of experience they occupy. What people don’t generally realize is that their conception of reality may be a complete reversal of the actual nature of reality, and so what seems to be the right thing may actually be the wrong thing. People act according to the way they see reality structured, which includes the way they see themselves fitting into that structure. If they see reality as divided, they’ll act in a way that’s consistent within the framework of that view. No awareness is really evil; no awareness is fundamentally what-is-not. Some people are just more lost and confused than others, and so their actions create more pain and more negative emotions than others’ actions. Even people we may perceive as evil are just acting in a way that’s consistent with their topsy-turvy, reversed view of reality. They’re trapped deeply within the dimension of what-is-not, and we, as well as they, feel their pain.

For this reason, if we hate evil, we ourselves inadvertently and unknowingly support the evil we hate, becoming twisted around and bound to act in ways that are ultimately self-divisive and self-destructive. When we hate evil, we’re not seeing the situation as it is but as it’s not. When we hate evil, we want the evil to not exist; we want to destroy it. However, by trying to destroy what doesn’t really exist in the first place, we prop it up; we help to create a relational dynamic that actually sustains and perpetuates the situation we’re trying to destroy. By hating evil, by actively trying to get rid of evil, we provide evil with a relative basis for existence.

Mahatma Gandhi understood this relational dynamic, and so he advocated and practiced passive resistance. People want to do the right thing; it’s in their nature, but many times they become confused as to what the right thing is, because they’re unknowingly functioning within a mistaken conception of reality. Actively trying to destroy what you perceive as evil only strengthens the position of what you’re trying to destroy. Perhaps this is why Jesus of Nazareth advocated “turning the other cheek” in response to aggression.

Because evil doesn’t ultimately exist, because what we see as evil is actually just the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not due to a mistaken conception of reality, evil can continue only so long as that mistaken conception of reality persists to support it. By hating and attacking what we see as the source of evil, we actively support the evilly acting awareness’ perception of existence as separate from itself and so as dangerous to itself. On the other hand, when an evilly acting awareness eventually perceives no threat to its existence, the basis of its evil actions ceases to exist, and so the actions themselves must cease, since there’s then no longer an experiential framework to support those actions.

This relational dynamic is especially evident in the debate over abortion that’s currently raging in the United States. In this debate, each side tries to “demonize” the other, to portray the other as the devil, as “evil.” Some who believe that abortion is an evil act consider the doctors who perform the abortions evil. A few anti-abortionists become so caught up in this mistaken

conception of reality that they're driven to try to kill the doctors, and in so doing commit the very act of ending life that they find so evil. This is an extreme example whereby the act of attacking what we perceive as evil itself creates the very evil that we're attacking. This is what happens when awareness functions fully, without restraint, within the dimension of what-is-not. The same relational dynamic also functions with regard to environmental extremism, whereby people injure other people (living creatures) to prevent animals (living creatures) from being injured.

An action that's intended to destroy what we perceive as evil will always be an action that's equivalent to the evil we intend to destroy. Thus, we can't eliminate racism by attacking bigotry, for this action only polarizes each side of the conflict, and makes the reality of each position seem more independently real. Racism can't be eliminated by acting to eliminate racism itself but only by changing the experiential environment of separation and self-division from which bigoted actions naturally extend. Not wanting bigots to exist is itself a form of bigotry and, again, is equivalent to the action it's intended to stop. Bigots aren't evil people; they're just people whose awareness is experiencing the pain that goes along with being lost in the forest of what-is-not. If a person is acting in a certain way out of experiencing pain, we can't stop their actions by causing the person to experience more pain. Rather, we can stop their actions only by first eliminating the cause of their pain, which is the actual source of their "evil" actions.

How many of us have been in an argument, and the more we yelled, the madder both we and the other person got? As long as we're yelling back at them, all they see is our attack upon them, convincing them of the need to attack back. So, the yelling just escalates the argument. On the other hand, how many of us have been in an argument but just let the other person yell and not responded with our own yelling? At some point, the other person, unless they're completely insane, hears themselves yelling, since there's nothing else to hear, and just stops because they're then able to see what they're doing, and their aggressive action no longer has the necessary support of a complementary aggression. This relational dynamic functions in the same way at all levels of human interaction.

5.42 *Judgment*

Jesus of Nazareth is quoted as saying, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." This saying represents a special case of the law of karma. If awareness judges some aspect of existence, then that judgment will inevitably come back to it and serve as a judgment upon itself.

The universe itself is nonjudgmental; it just is what it is. In order for awareness to judge something, that something must first be *charged*—i.e., there must exist the experience of a positive/negative polarity between the existence being judged and the judging awareness. Where there's polarization, there's an experience of existential separation. Awareness generally sees its own position as positive, as what-is, and so in relation to itself inevitably considers any other awareness or aspect of existence that takes a different position as negative, as what-is-not. It's this experiencing and defining of another aspect of existence as what-is-not that's "passing

judgment,” and the sentence that awareness inevitably passes down is that this other aspect of existence shouldn’t exist, or has no right to exist, since it’s perceived to be what-is-not.

In this way, awareness creates an experiential barrier between itself and the aspect of existence it judges to be nonexistent, or unworthy of existence. Thus, the act of judgment represents another way in which awareness becomes experientially separated from the rest of existence. Because existence is really inseparable from itself, the act of judgment must represent a movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, into an experiential reality where the relationship that existence has with itself is experienced as it’s not—i.e., as separate. In this way, the act of judgment, denying the right to existence of some other aspect of existence, creates an experiential wave of what-is-not that eventually returns to its point of origin, impacting the awareness as a denial of its own right to exist, as a judgment upon its own existence. Thus, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Or, stated in the opposite way, if you judge, then that judgment will inevitably return as a judgment upon yourself.

All existence is equal, because it’s all the same existence. The act of judgment involves awareness attempting to assign different degrees of validity to different aspects of existence. This action applies to judging things as either good or bad, as more and less deserving of existence. Both types of judgment are equally mistaken, equally what-is-not, for we can’t judge something as better without simultaneously judging something else as worse.

However, isn’t saying that the act of judgment is a mistake itself an act of judgment? No, it’s simply a nonjudgmental recognition of the way existence functions within the dimension of experience. Saying that an action is a mistake isn’t the same as saying that the existence undertaking that action is a mistake, i.e., something which shouldn’t exist. A mistake is an action that awareness takes which creates a result that’s the opposite of what was intended, usually because awareness wasn’t fully aware of the context within which it was acting.

So, there’s a difference between recognizing negative actions, actions that arise within the dimension of what-is-not, and trying to assign or attribute that negativity or what-is-not-ness to the awareness that’s taking the negative action. While actions may be what-is-not because the awareness that’s taking them is lost within the dimension of what-is-not, awareness itself is always what-is, always existent. This is why judging *actions* is necessary, for they may arise from either what-is or what-is-not; but judging other *existences* is a mistake, for existence is always what-is—i.e., existence always exists. Thus, for example, there are no bad children, only children who do bad things. More inclusively, there are no evil existences, no evil awarenesses, only aspects of existence that take actions from within the confusion and relative unawareness of the dimension of what-is-not.

Any action arising from within the dimension of what-is-not is a mistake, for it will have an ultimate result that’s the opposite of its intended result. This is because, when awareness is experiencing what-is-not, the perception that produces the intention-action is always the exact opposite of what the situation actually is. Awareness always acts upon reality as it is, regardless of how reality is perceived. That is, our perceptions and conceptions regarding the nature of reality, while they may shape our own experience, have no effect upon the nature of reality

beyond experience. So, an action arising from an experience of what-is-not acts upon reality not as it's perceived or conceived to be, but as it actually is, and it therefore has a result that's the opposite of what was intended, because the reality it acts upon is the opposite of how it's perceived or conceived to be.

Science often speaks of action and reaction. However, as Buckminster Fuller liked to point out, there's action, reaction, and resultant, the resultant being the way the reaction affects what performed the action. I push on a wall (the action), the wall pushes back (the reaction), and my hand goes nowhere (the result). In the case of awareness, there's intention-action-reaction-result. This is both a linear and a cyclic relationship. The intention is the desired result, the result that's intended, the "carrot on a stick" that sets awareness in motion, that causes awareness to act. Awareness acts with the intention to create some result. The action is suited to impact existence and cause a certain reaction, producing a certain result that corresponds to the intention. The difference between the intention and the result is that the intention is born of, and determined by, how awareness experiences reality, while the result is determined by the actual nature of reality. The intention is purely experiential, while the result transcends the relativity of experiential reality, although it may be experienced.

When the intention arises from a mistaken conception of reality, i.e., from an experience of what-is-not, the result will itself always be a mistake, or the opposite of what was intended. This is because, when existence is perceived incorrectly, reality won't react in the way anticipated but rather will react oppositely; so, the action arising from a mistaken intention will cause an opposite reaction and, thus, an opposite resultant acting back upon the doer of the action. For example, let's say that in front of me sits a bowl of some liquid. I perceive this liquid to be water. I have a burning match in my hand that I *intend* to put out, and so I perform the *action* of dropping it in the water, so that the water can *react* to the match, producing the *result* of its being extinguished.

However, as it turns out, my perception of the liquid is incorrect, isn't what's was really there. The liquid isn't water but gasoline. So, while my *intention* and *action* remain the same, being born only of experience, the *reaction* and *resultant* are quite a bit different, since these are dependent on what actually exists where I experience the water to be. Although my intention is to put the match out so that I won't get burned, the actual result is the opposite of my intention, because the chain linking intention to result has a twist in it, inasmuch as the reaction is the opposite of what was anticipated. The intention itself isn't wrong; it's natural not to want to get burned, to be hurt, to feel pain, but the actual nature of reality in which the intention-action-reaction-result arises as an experiential construct isn't what it appears to be—i.e., it's what-is-not.

At the deepest root of all actions are seemingly good intentions, basically the intention to create pleasure and to reduce or avoid pain. By its nature as what-is, awareness can't act with any other intention; can't seek or form any other idea of how it would like to be impacted by a result, other than in an ultimately positive way. However, the key is the context within which such an intention is defined as good. *That is, the key is how the intending awareness defines itself in relation to the rest of existence.* The more awareness defines itself as separate from the rest of

existence, the more its good intentions will be selfish, designed to result in pleasure for its isolated self. Conversely, the more awareness defines itself as connected to the rest of existence, the more its good intentions will be unselfish, designed to result in pleasure for whatever aspects of existence it defines itself as connected to.

Awareness doesn't care what result its actions have on those aspects of existence it doesn't feel connected to. Awareness defines itself as what-is, and what awareness experiences as separate from itself is defined as what-is-not. Awareness develops good intentions only within the framework of results as they apply to the existence that awareness defines itself as connected to. As perverse as the notion may sound, Adolph Hitler had to be acting within the context of what he had defined as good intentions, within an exceptionally mistaken conception of reality, thereby resulting in exceptionally painful experiences for large number of people. Hitler wasn't intrinsically evil; he was an awareness that had become very deeply lost in the forest of what-is-not. If we can understand how these concepts apply in the most extreme cases, then we can more easily apply them to less extreme cases as well. Hating Hitler, wishing Hitler didn't exist, judging Hitler to be evil, does absolutely nothing to Hitler's awareness or existence. Karma takes care of that without judgment. Likewise, hating anything or anyone, judging anything or anyone to be evil, to be undeserving of existence, can have no effect upon their existence because they can't be made to not exist. However, hatred does have an ultimately negative impact upon those who do the hating, regardless of how righteous their hatred may seem.

Yet we still feel the need to hate, to pass judgment, because we think that if we don't, then we're not "doing our duty" to rid existence of what we perceive or conceive to be evil. In this way, hatred and judgment are themselves evil actions borne of mistakenly good intentions. The mistake is that we perceive the person, the awareness, as evil, when only the actions taken are evil. Hatred and judgment, like all actions taken out of a mistaken conception of reality, out of an experience of what-is-not, produce a result for awareness that's the opposite of what was intended. We hate and judge, intending to act as a force to rid the world of evil, but all that hatred and judgment accomplish is the creation of the very actions they were intended to stop.

The source of evil actions is experiential self-division. To stop evil actions, experiential self-division needs to be lessened. However, all that hatred and judgment do is increase experiential self-division, thereby forming the basis for more evil actions, more actions born of an experience of what-is-not. This is how hating evil with the intention of eliminating it has the opposite effect of promoting evil actions. Good intentions occurring within the context of ignorance, within the context of self-division, produce a reaction and then a result that are the opposite of what was intended.

In fact, whatever result is created ultimately impacts the intending awareness itself, not the existence it was intended for. We can't cause some other aspect of existence to not exist; all we can do is increase our own experiential self-division and thus drive ourself deeper into the dimension of what-is-not. Whatever the actual result is, it always returns to the intending awareness; this is the law of karma. In other words, awareness always must itself eventually bear the actual result of its own intentions. Intentions may always be good, but results aren't always good, because intentions can be defined both within the dimension of what-is and within the

dimension of what-is-not. Good as defined within the dimension of what-is is good, but good as defined within the dimension of what-is-not is actually evil.

If we're judgmental, then we become bound to defend our polarized position, because, having become polarized, we become engaged in a battle of perceived good versus evil. Conversely, if we can remain nonjudgmental, then the situation can present itself as it is, without the blinding context of polarization and separation. Being nonjudgmental doesn't mean being wishy-washy. On the contrary, being nonjudgmental means recognizing the underlying unity of existence, the ultimate equality of all that exists, while simultaneously recognizing the relative existence of what-is and what-is-not. In the context of nonjudgment, we don't make the mistake of supporting what-is-not by trying to destroy it.

This is the tricky part. We need to be able to recognize mistakes, to see the difference between what-is and what-is-not, but we need to do so nonjudgmentally, without passing judgment, without becoming polarized. Because if we become polarized, we become lost; we separate ourselves in some way from the rest of existence. Recognizing mistakes doesn't create a negative experiential wave; passing judgment upon those who make mistakes does. By not judging, we can support what is good, rather than accidentally supporting what is evil.

Here, in describing karma and judgment, we aren't trying to say what should and shouldn't exist. Rather, we're simply describing how awareness functions within the context of different experiential realities. By passing judgment, by polarizing ourselves, by putting ourselves in a position that says "this or that other aspect of existence shouldn't exist," we engage ourselves in a battle against existence that can never be *won*, i.e., where there can literally never be the experience of oneness or unity. For whatever exists does exist, and when we intend for it to not exist, we separate ourselves from it. We thus create internal pain, and we also create experiential waves that eventually must return as a resultant force in opposition to our own existence. Whenever we reject existence, existence rejects us; whenever we accept existence, existence accepts us. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." It's interesting that passing judgment on something or someone else actually results in our own awareness becoming imprisoned.

We humans seem to be highly judgment prone. This is because, as awareness operating to a great extent within the dimension of what-is-not, we've confused the need to distinguish with a need to destroy, and confused the need to determine with a need to discriminate against. We need to distinguish between what-is and what-is-not, but we don't need to destroy what-is-not. We need to determine what-is and what-is-not, but we don't need to discriminate against existence that we perceive as operating from within the dimension of what-is-not. Within the context of what-is, awareness considers all existences equal regardless of their perceived stature, because it's aware that they're all equally valid.

This doesn't mean that we go walking down a dark alley with a murderous lunatic so as not to offend them. While we have no real ability to deny the validity of any existence, it's equally true that we have no real obligation to accompany or assist another existence in actions that we determine to be what-is-not. Everything works both ways. Actively opposing what-is-not is a mistake, in that it produces results that are the opposite of what's intended, while not assisting

what-is-not isn't a mistake, in that it produces results that are consistent with what's intended. Ergo the validity of passive resistance: providing neither opposition nor assistance to actions that are perceived to be evil, or what-is-not.

At this point, we might ask whether, according to this philosophy, shouldn't the world have just let Hitler run over it without opposition or resistance to his evil actions? Here, all that we can say is that there's a subtle difference between *resisting* evil, and *opposing* evil. *Resisting* evil means that you don't let evil actions complete their cycle or produce their intended result. *Opposing* evil means that you try to eliminate from existence the apparent doer of the action. One method is effective, and the other ultimately isn't, but the difference isn't always clear-cut.

We're correctly taught that some actions are good and some actions are evil. However, we're incorrectly taught that good deserves to exist and evil shouldn't exist, for this leads us to self-righteous attempts to destroy what we perceive as evil. There can be no experience of what-is except in relation to an equally valid experience of what-is-not. Without the possibility of knowing what-is-not, we couldn't know what-is. Good and evil, what-is and what-is-not, both exist, but only as relative realities, only as relative actions. There's no existence that's absolutely what-is-not; there's nothing that exists which shouldn't exist. This is simply the way the universe is structured. You can fight it, or you can accept it. Fighting it simply creates more of what you're fighting. Accepting it doesn't mean that you promote the negative, but it does mean that you don't try to destroy the negative, because trying to destroy the negative only inadvertently creates more negative. This is simply the way things work in the topsy-turvy land of what-is-not, where destroying what-is-not actually creates it, and accepting what-is-not actually causes it to cease to exist.

5.5 *The evolution of awareness*

Moving our awareness toward what-is for the sake of what-is means that we're being moved by an attraction to what-is, out of love, rather than being moved by an aversion to what-is-not, out of fear or hate. In moving toward what-is for its own sake, and for our sake, we feel a connection to what-is, and so we experience this movement toward what-is as the positive emotion of love, rather than as the negative emotion of fear or hate. We're naturally attracted to what-is because it's what we are. We're attracted to what-is as the manifestation of our unbreakable connection to what-is. Being aware of the connection, we experience the attraction and feel the love; being unaware of the connection, we experience the separation and feel the fear or hate.

Once awareness has had enough of pain and negative emotion, it begins to make a conscious attempt, a determined effort, to escape from the cage it finds itself trapped in. Again, the difficulty is that awareness, having wandered into the dimension of what-is-not, is caught in a vicious cycle of self-ignorance. Once awareness has gotten lost in the dimension of what-is-not, even though it may want to get out, because it's in the topsy-turvy land of what-is-not, the actions that it thinks will free it only bind it tighter. The cycle of self-ignorance accompanying the experience of what-is-not keeps awareness from seeing that it's its own jailer.

At this point, we can identify three stages in the evolution of awareness. The first stage is a *free fall* into the experiential dimension of what-is-not. In this first stage, awareness moves relatively unimpeded into what-is-not. In this first stage, the external pleasure that awareness derives through selfish actions outweighs the accompanying internal pain of self-division. This first stage was described primarily in subsection 5.31, “The trap of misidentification.”

The second stage in the evolution of awareness is the *slowing or stopping of its free fall* into the dimension of what-is-not, as the pain and negative emotions coming from both within and without begin to dominate the awareness. Awareness’ natural aversion to the self-division that it experiences as pain, begins, in this second stage, to counter its tendency to move confusedly deeper into the forest of what-is-not, where it has mistaken what-is-not for what-is. This second stage was described primarily in subsection 5.4, “Pleasure and pain.”

The third stage in the evolution of awareness is marked by awareness’ determined effort to get itself out of the land of pain, negativity, self-ignorance, and confusion that it eventually discovers it has wandered into. This third stage involves awareness’ becoming increasingly aware of its connection to the rest of existence, and thereby learning or remembering how to create ultimately positive rather than ultimately negative experiences for itself, within the context of an expanding self-definition. This third stage has yet to be described; it will be the subject of the upcoming section on *free will*.

The free fall of the first stage in the evolution of awareness is like falling out of bed while asleep and dreaming. Awareness is literally asleep, inasmuch as it’s completely unaware that its experience of reality as what-is-not is a dream, real yet ultimately unreal within the context of a more fundamental reality. Dreams are real while you’re asleep, just as what-is-not is real while you’re experiencing it. Likewise, in contrast to awake experience, dreams don’t seem to be real; and in contrast to the experience of what-is, what-is-not no longer seems to be real. The increasing pain and negative emotions of the second stage in the evolution of awareness is analogous to awareness as it hits the floor, being jarred awake from the dream, just beginning to wake up and realize that the dream may not have been as real as it seemed.

The determined effort of the third stage in the evolution of awareness is analogous to awareness trying to wake up while still being very sleepy. Some times awareness starts to get up but ends up falling back asleep and resuming the dream, reentering the dimension of what-is-not out of habit, out of being caught in the cycle of self-ignorance. Other times, awareness thinks it has awoken, like the person whose alarm clock goes off and then begins getting out of bed, only to wake up later and find they’re still in bed and that their getting out of bed was itself a dream.

Eventually, the pain and negative emotions become great enough, and awareness hits the floor hard enough, that it’s jarred awake, allowing it to see clearly the difference between the unreality of the dream (what-is-not) and the reality of awake experience (what-is). Awareness then decides that it’s had enough sleep, has had its fill of relative unawareness and what-is-not, and becomes determined in its effort to wake up and become aware of what’s really going on. In the next section, we will look at this conscious attempt by awareness to wake up, to use what it sees as its “free will” to extricate itself from the painful emotional experience of what-is-not.

Conceptual checkpoint II-6

- Experience, as what defines awareness, represents a someplace awareness can be.
- Awareness can experience what-is or what-is-not and so can exist within the dimension of what-is or the dimension of what-is-not.
- Awareness can experience itself as “I” in relation to “it” within the dimension of what-is or within the dimension of what-is-not.
- Awareness that experiences itself as “I” within the dimension of what-is doesn’t become confused as to the actual nature of its own existence, since within the dimension of what-is, existence’s relationship to itself is projected as it is.
- Awareness that experiences itself as “I” within the dimension of what-is-not becomes confused as to the actual nature of its own existence, since within the dimension of what-is-not, existence’s relationship to itself is reflected as it’s not.
- Awareness that experiences itself as “I” within the dimension of what-is-not, being then unaware of what-is, being unaware of its connection to the rest of existence, mistakes this limited experience of itself as “I” for what it really is. That is, awareness considers “I” to be all it is.
- Once awareness has mistakenly associated or attached its existence to the experience of “I” awareness is then able to perceive and conceive of the dissolution of this “I” as its own nonexistence.
- Awareness then feels the need to defend this “I” in order to prevent its own nonexistence.
- In order to defend “I,” in order to maintain the existence of “I,” a vicious cycle ensues, whereby awareness erects progressively more barriers of self-definition between its experience of itself as “I” and the “its” which are perceived to be a threat to the existence of that “I.”
- These barriers of self-definition serve to functionally (but not actually) separate awareness from the rest of existence, for they cause awareness to become increasingly unaware and unable to experience its connection to the rest of existence.
- Existence is inseparable from itself. Therefore, in terms of experience, connection is what-is, and separation is what-is-not.
- The functional separation of awareness from some aspect of existence is experienced by awareness as pain. The more narrowly defined “I” is, the more functionally separated awareness becomes, and the more pain awareness experiences as a result.

-The functional connection of awareness to some aspect of existence is experienced by awareness as pleasure. The more broadly defined “I” is, the more functionally connected awareness becomes, and the more pleasure awareness experiences as a result.

-It’s natural for awareness, as existence, to seek pleasure and avoid pain—i.e., to be in a state of what-is, rather than in a state of what-is-not.

-Any attempt by awareness to get itself as “I” out of the painful state of what-is-not only reinforces the mistaken conception of reality that “I” is what it is, which is itself the source of the pain. Once awareness moves into the dimension of what-is-not, it becomes bound by the cycle of self-ignorance to move deeper into that dimension, and to remain inadvertently trapped by itself within that dimension, until the unnaturalness of the pain of self-division becomes great enough to counter the direction of movement caused by the cycle of self-ignorance, finally allowing awareness to reevaluate its direction of movement and where it’s really going.

Section 6 Free Will and Intention

6.1 *Free will and experience*

In order for awareness to extricate itself from the pain of what-is-not, awareness must learn how to use its *free will* to direct itself into experiences of what-is rather than experiences of what-is-not.

The concept of free will itself centers on the concept of choice, a seeming ability to choose between opposite paths or actions. To understand free will and how we can use it to escape from the experiential dimension of what-is-not, we need to understand what it really means to *choose*. As we’ve seen throughout this work, the deeper meaning of a word, the underlying process or reality a word points to, can often be found in its homonym—i.e., an identity of sound between different words indicates some level of shared meaning. In this case, the word “choose” sounds like the word “chews.”

Chewing is a well-known physical process. Choosing is a nonphysical process, a process of awareness, and is therefore more difficult to pin down. So, let’s use what we know about the well-known process of chewing to help uncover what’s involved in the unknown process of choosing. Question: What do the words “choose” and “chews” (choosing and chewing) have in common—i.e., what’s their shared meaning? Answer: Both words refer to processes of *consumption*.

In order for our physical bodies to continue to exist, it’s necessary for us to process (chew) and consume other physical objects, i.e., food. Likewise, in order for the nonphysical aspect of our being to continue to exist—i.e., our awareness, our particular localization of consciousness—it’s necessary for our awareness to process (choose) and consume something nonphysical as well.

What is it that our awareness must consume in order to continue to exist? *Experience*. Without experience, awareness simply ceases to exist as such. Awareness is consciousness localized to a particular somewhere through experience. Experience defines consciousness as awareness. Therefore, for awareness to continue to exist as such, it must continuously consume experience, continuously define itself through experience.

Before we can properly consume something physical —i.e., use it to sustain our physical being, our body—we must process it in some way: we must chew it. Likewise, before we can properly consume an experience—i.e., use it to sustain our nonphysical being, our awareness—we must process it in some way: we must choose it. When we chew food, we’re in the process of making what’s in the food a part of us, part of our physical being, part of our body. When we choose an experience, we’re in the process of making what’s in the experience a part of us, part of our nonphysical being, part of our awareness.

Physically, we are what we eat. Nonphysically, we are the experiences we choose to nourish our awareness. If we consume rotten food, our physical body will become diseased, it won’t grow and won’t be able to heal itself. Likewise, if we consume negative experiences, experiences of what-is-not, our awareness will become diseased, it won’t grow and won’t be able to heal itself.

The dimension of experience exists to allow consciousness functioning as awareness to create and consume the experiences of what-is and/or what-is-not, i.e., positive and/or negative experiences, respectively. Positive experiences represent realities and relationships that transcend experience, that exist beyond the dimension of experience. Negative experiences represent realities and relationships that have no existence beyond the dimension of experience. Only within the dimension of experience can what-is-not appear to exist. So, only within the dimension of experience can there be a real choice between what-is or what-is-not, between positive and negative.

Existence is inseparable from itself, yet we can choose to create an experience of separation, and thereby experience what-is-not as real. On the other hand, we can choose to create an experience of unity, and thereby experience what-is as real. Such is the situation for consciousness functioning as awareness within the dimension of experience: the possibility of choose to create the experience of what-is must coexist with the possibility of choosing to create the experience of what-is-not.

Choosing to consume positive experiences allows our awareness to grow beyond the confines of five-sensory experiential reality, to expand into the dimension of what-is that lies beyond experience and is the source of all experience. Choosing to consume negative experiences hides from us the dimension of what-is that lies beyond experience and is the source of all experience.

Our existence as awareness creates for each of us a unique experiential reality. Experience is a relationship between the consciousness we are “in here” and the consciousness impacting us from “out there.” Were we not here to be so impacted, what we experience as reality simply wouldn’t exist as we experience it to exist. Therefore, we’re an integral part of whatever we

experience as reality. Experience isn't just something that happens to us passively; experience is something we're each actively involved in creating, in each moment.

Just as the experimental setup determines whether the experience of a wave or particle becomes a physical reality, how we set ourselves up, how we ourselves up, how we position ourselves, determines the nature of the experiences we create as our reality. How we position ourselves is called our *attitude*. The position of an airplane relative to a runway as it approaches the runway for landing is called its attitude. Likewise, our position relative to the experiences approaching us is our attitude. When the airplane meets the ground—i.e., is impacted by the ground—the nature of the landing as either smooth or rough primarily depends on the airplane's attitude. Likewise, it's our attitude—our position and posture relative to existence that's impacting us—that determines, more than anything, the nature of our experiences. Position ourselves one way, and we create for ourselves the experience of what-is; position ourselves the opposite way, and we create for ourselves the experience of what-is-not.

To understand how we position ourselves to create experiences of what-is and/or what-is-not for our consumption, we need to examine the word “intention.” Intention = in-tension. Physically, a tension is a bending force. Therefore, nonphysically, intention refers to an internal bending force. *Intention is literally the internal force of consciousness we use to bend, shape, move toward, and create the experiences we will consume.*

Again, we create experiences for our consumption in order to maintain our existence as awareness. Creating experiences for our consumption is analogous to cooking, to preparing food for our consumption. How we feel after we eat depends on the ingredients we put into the food. Intention is the ingredient that consciousness uses to create an experience. In terms of how we feel emotionally after consuming an experience, the form or shape of the experience itself isn't important; what's important is the intention—i.e., the force of consciousness—used to create the experience.

We each are an inseparable, yet individual, part of the flow of existence. The dimension of experience gives each of us the ability and opportunity to create experiences by directing our individual flow either with or against the larger flow of existence. Actually, we're always going with the flow of existence, for there's nothing else. However, experiential reality, with its relativity of what-is and what-is-not, where both what-is and what-is-not are real, provides awareness with the opportunity to experience the unreal as real, to experience the impossible as possible, to experience itself as flowing in opposition to the flow of existence, in opposition to itself.

The flow of existence is called Tao. Consider the flow of existence as a river. The river flows from the source to the source. That's its direction—away from the source and yet always toward the source. We experience the force of this flow as the force of *desire*.

Experience places us upon the bank of the river Tao, in relation to the timeless flow of existence. We too are that flow, and the force of our flow is also the force of desire, but we're an aspect of

that flow which has formed a relationship with itself. Our aspect of the flow that exists in relation to the larger flow is a force of *will*.

That is, the force of consciousness intrinsic to our part of the flow is called our *will*. The word “will” is the future tense of the verb “be.” Being is what we always are. “Will” is the force that we, as individual beings, use to get where we’re going—i.e., “will” is the force of consciousness we use to become what we are. We are beings that are in the process of becoming, moving from the source to the source, and so the individual force that moves us toward what we’re becoming is called “will.”

It’s all still existence, all still consciousness; however, at different relational levels of reality, the force of the flow of existence has different names. The force of will is the force of desire, but it’s the force of desire that has formed a relationship with itself.

As a consequence of that relationship, we can direct our part of the flow, our individual flow, our force of will, either with or against the larger flow of existence, depending on which direction we focus our attention, upstream or downstream. In directing our individual flow—i.e., our force of will—the force of our will becomes the force of *intention*. That is, the force of intention is the force of will that’s been directed either with or against the flow of existence. Thus, there are only two basic forces of intention: a force that goes with the flow of existence, i.e., a positive intention; and a force that goes against the flow of existence, i.e., a negative intention.

Free will is our ability to direct the force of our individual flow, our will, in relation to the larger flow. Free will is the ability to choose which force of intention, positive or negative, to use in creating experience. Free will is our ability, within the dimension of experience, to control the direction of our becoming by allowing us to choose the type of experiences we’ll create and consume in order to nourish our awareness, the becoming of our being.

How do we use free will? How do we control the direction of our flow in relation to the larger flow? How do we direct our individual force of consciousness with or against the larger flow, making it then our force of intention? We direct our will, making it intention, according to the possible experiences upon which we focus our *attention*. We direct our will, making it intention, according to whether we focus our attention on possible experiences (i.e., experiences we can create) that require us to move downstream or upstream, with or against the flow of existence.

Attention and intention are closely related. *Attention determines intention*. That is, the direction in which you focus your awareness, your at-tension—with or against the larger flow of existence—determines the direction in which your force of consciousness, your will, flows, and so determines whether your force of will functions as a positive or negative intention in creating the experiences your awareness will consume. The relationships between the forces of desire, will, and intention are depicted in **figure 100**.

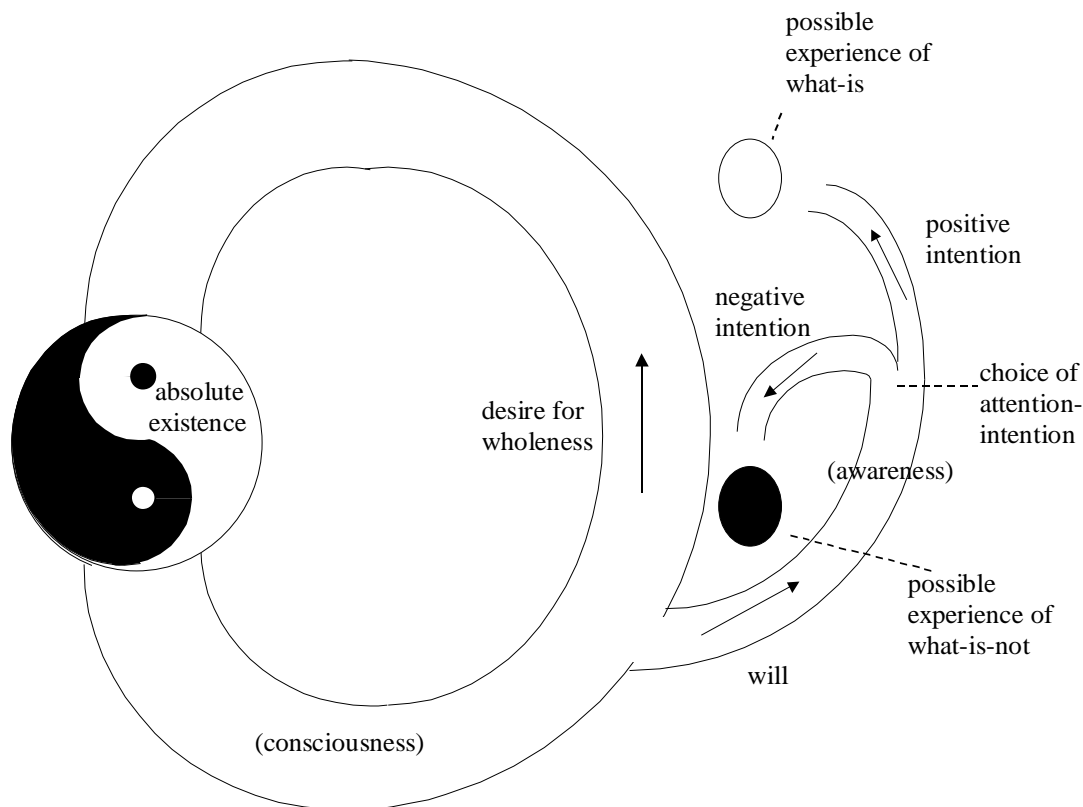


Figure 100 The dimension of experience in which we currently find ourselves is composed of consciousness-existence that has formed relationships with itself. Intrinsic to these relationships is a dynamic, a flow, from the source to the source. The force of that flow in its most basic state is the desire for wholeness, the force of the unbroken flow from the source to the source (the direction of flow denoted by arrows). As tributaries of awareness develop in relation to the larger flow of consciousness, the force of desire in those tributaries becomes the force of will. Thus, the force of will is the force of desire functioning at the level of individual beings.

Because will exists as a force of the flow of our existence in relation to the larger flow, there are then two possible ways our awareness can direct itself relative to the larger flow in order to create experience for itself. The force of will becomes the force of intention once awareness chooses to focus its attention on moving toward, and thus creating, one of two complementary possible experiences, one lying downstream and the other lying upstream. Thus, the force of will becomes the force of intention once awareness has chosen between creating an experience by moving with or against the larger flow of existence.

Whether it's called desire, will, or intention, it's always the same flow, always the same force; but that same flow and force acting at different relational levels of existence seems to be something different. Furthermore, that same flow and force moving in different relational alignments creates different types of experiences. Thus, intention, whether positive or negative,

is fundamentally the force of desire, the force of the flow of consciousness, acting in a directed way within the dimension of experience.

That our will exists as a force of the flow of our existence in relation to the larger flow means that there are always two possible ways our awareness can direct itself relative to that larger flow in order to create experience for itself. Thus, the nature of the experiences we create depends on how our force of will directed as intention is aligned in relation to the larger flow.

If attention determines intention, then what determines the direction in which we direct our attention? We act in accordance with whatever experience we think will satisfy our *desire*. Desire is the mover, but it doesn't itself determine the direction of motion, any more than gasoline determines where a car goes.

What we desire is part of what we are, part of what we are becoming. We can't change what we truly, in our deepest self, desire. What we can control is the nature of the experiences we create and consume to satisfy our desire. If our stomach is empty, we'll feel hungry—i.e., we'll desire food. We can't help but desire food; it's part of being physically alive. However, we do usually have choices about how we'll satisfy that desire. Some foods are good for us, some are bad for us. Some foods make us healthy, some make us sick. Why would we choose to eat foods that make us sick, that make us unhealthy? Because of the confusion that results from mistaking what-is-not for what-is, mistaking what's bad for us for what's good for us.

Desire is the force and flow of existence moving toward itself. As awarenesses, we all have the same hunger, the same desire, to be whole, to move toward the source. As awarenesses, we seek wholeness through the consumption of experiences. Just as being alive creates hunger (an emptiness of the stomach) and so creates the desire for food as a way to put an end to the feeling of emptiness in our stomach, being aware creates an existential emptiness and so creates the desire for experience as a way to put an end to the feeling of emptiness in our being.

The Buddha is often quoted as having said that “desire is the cause of all suffering,” implying that desire is by nature a negative force. However, the quote is more accurately translated as “*deluded* desire is the cause of all suffering.” In this translation, it's not desire itself that's said to be the cause of suffering; rather, it's the force of desire used within the context of delusion, of self-deception, of self-division, of what-is-not, that's said to be the cause of suffering. This is a very important distinction.

Just as we have a choice about what food to cook and eat in order to satisfy our physical hunger, the emptiness of our stomach, so too do we have a choice as to what experiences to create and consume in order to satisfy our nonphysical hunger, the emptiness of our being.

Our actions are driven by the force of intention, powered by our desire for wholeness. Our intentions, the force and flow of our consciousness, create experiences for ourself and also contribute to the experiences of those around us. Likewise, the intentions of those around us contribute to our experiences. However, it's our own intentions that determine the what-is or what-is-not nature of our own experiences.

The types of experiences we create depend on our intentions, not on our actions. Paddling upstream or downstream involves the same action, but the destination isn't the same; the destination depends on the intention. Likewise, the experience we arrive at depends on whether we use a positive or negative intention to get there.

Positive intentions have many names: love, compassion, understanding, and tolerance, to name a few. Whatever positive intention we use, they all have the same result—an experience that feels emotionally good. Negative intentions also have many names: fear, hate, anger, and intolerance, to name a few. Whatever negative intention we use, they also all have the same result—an experience that feels emotionally bad.

Emotions = existential motions = the movement of our awareness into the experiential dimension of either what-is or what-is-not, into either a positive or a negative experience. The emotion we experience, positive or negative, isn't determined by external events; it's determined internally, by intention, by the force of consciousness we're using to create our experience of reality. For example, if someone cuts us off in traffic, sometimes we get angry, and sometimes we let it go. Externally, it's the same event, but what we feel emotionally depends primarily on our choice of direction, our intention, the force of consciousness we ourselves are adding to the experience.

Free will operates when we choose what intention-ingredient, positive or negative, to put into our experience-recipe. If we're unaware of what's going on within ourselves at this level of choosing, then our intentions are hidden, but they have the same effect: we still must eventually consume any experience we create and feel how we feel. It may be that we consume the experience immediately or in another lifetime.

That we ourselves must eventually consume the experiences we create has already been discussed in subsection 5.41 as the law of karma. *Karma, positive or negative, is the result of intention, not action.* We can create our karma in either ignorance or awareness. We can choose our intentions openly or hiddenly, overtly or covertly: in either case, we choose; and in either case, we're responsible for the experience we create as a result of our intentional choice.

Before we create an experience, we must envision it as a possibility—i.e., we must “in”-vision it, literally see it in our mind's eye. Once we've envisioned the possible experience, we can then focus our attention on it, thereby turning our force of will into a directed force of intention, which force is then capable of converting the envisioned experience into an external or actualized experience.

How is it that we have the ability to create experience for ourselves? The universe was created by consciousness existing in relation to itself, and we are that consciousness. Therefore, the creative force responsible for the existence of the universe resides in each of us as well. As a consequence, through the force of our localized consciousness, we're able to create just as the universe creates, using our consciousness to create relationships on a smaller scale, on an individual scale. The force and flow of our will directed as intention in relation to the larger flow creates currents in the larger flow. Those currents, if sustained long enough, can eventually lead

to an actualized or externalized experience. Although few of us may be aware of it, we each have this power and are using it all the time.

As consciousness flows through us, by directing our will as intention, we create currents of consciousness, relationships of consciousness to itself. Since reality is composed of consciousness existing in relation to itself, we're able, by creating currents of consciousness, to create reality. Thus, we each have the ability to create reality through the directed force of our will, through intention. *Reality is existential self-relation. Create relationships, and you create reality.* However, there's a catch. Whatever reality we create, we must ourselves eventually experience.

What's the difference between the force of will and the force of intention? The force of intention is the force of will that's been *committed* to creating a certain experience. That is, the force of will doesn't become the force of intention, capable of creating experience, until a choice has been made between opposite paths, between going with or against the flow.

The nature of experiential reality is such that there are always opposing choices, always two basic possible experiences to choose to create. For any possible experience of what-is, there must also exist the possible experience of what-is-not. These two paths of experiential creation always lie before awareness. Thus, awareness must continually choose between directing its will either with or against the larger flow of existence.

It's only once awareness has chosen to direct its attention toward the possible experience of either what-is or what-is-not that the force of will then functions as the force of intention, capable of actualizing an envisioned experience. It's only once the flow and force of desire-will-intention is committed to a single direction that there's then enough conscious force to convert the envisioned experience into an actualized external reality, into a consumable experience, into an experience that's capable of sustaining the existence of awareness.

As an analogy, let's say that we have two ovens in which we can create experience. One oven creates experiences of what-is, and the other creates experiences of what-is-not. Although we have two ovens, we have only one source of energy, one pipeline of consciousness that splits, leading into both. Where the pipeline splits, there's a switch that can set the flow of creative energy completely to one oven or the other, or to any amount in between. If we split the energy—i.e., the force of consciousness—coming through the single pipeline into both ovens, neither oven is able to get hot enough to cook and create the possible experience inside. Only once we commit all the energy coming through the pipeline toward one oven or the other can either get hot enough to convert the possible experience into an actual experience, into a consumable experience.

Likewise, only once we direct our attention fully toward one possible experience over another does our will then become intention, able to act as a force in creating experience. That is, intention, in order to function as such, needs to carry the full force of our will.

Not choosing between possible experiences itself represents a choice that's been made, a choice of not choosing over choosing. In the case of not choosing between possible experiences, we then create the experience that's the result of the choice to not choose. Thus, it's impossible to not choose; it's impossible to not direct our individual flow, our will, in one direction or the other, with or against the larger flow of existence, while existing as awareness. Sometimes not choosing may be going with the flow; sometimes it may be going against the flow. Sometimes it may be time to choose between opposite paths; sometimes it may be time to stay the course and choose neither.

In the moment of choosing, we move toward one experience and away from it's opposite. Choosing means that awareness continues to focus on one possible experience as opposed to its complementary experience. In most cases, choice, the exercise of free will, is ongoing. We're not committed to creating a possible experience by glancing at it just once or twice. We commit to creating an experience by continuing to focus our attention on it for a relatively long period of time.

Intention functions both in the long-term creation of experience and in the immediate creation of experience, i.e., the experience we're having right now. The long-term function of intention is a group effort, inasmuch as we contribute to the growth and evolution of reality along with the rest of the planet and the rest of the universe. We have differing degrees of control over the creation of experience at this level. The immediate function of intention is in providing a context for experience as it's occurring right now, in the present moment. The immediate function of intention is an individual choice, like adding spice of one type or another to whatever food we've harvested and are cooking to eat. We have total individual control over the creation of our experience at this level.

To return to the traffic analogy, if someone cuts us off in traffic, we have no control over the external event as it happens (although it's possible that, through prior intention, we contributed more or less to creating the reality that's the external event). What we do have complete control over is the intentional context, positive or negative, within which we experience that event as an individual being. That intentional context is the force of consciousness, the force of will, we add to the experience in the present moment. It's the force of our intention in the present moment that determines how we feel emotionally about an external event and how we react to it. This present-moment intention is also what we're contributing to the creation of realities that will present themselves to us as experiences in the future.

Imagine that we're in a small pool of water splashing around. The splashes we make create waves, and those waves eventually reach the edge of the pool and bounce back to us. Each time we make a splash, we're using the force of our intention in the present moment. Once we've made the splash, there's nothing we can do about it, and off it goes to return at a later time. In this same pool are many other people splashing around. The waves we make and the waves they make combine to form the reality that eventually impacts us, creating the *form* of our experience. This combination of waves is intention functioning in the long-term creation of experience, as a group effort. Intention at this level creates the form and shape of our experience, but the

experience isn't complete, isn't truly chosen, chewed, or consumed by our awareness, until we color it in or spice it up with the force of our intention in the present moment.

Intention is always happening now, in the immediacy of the present moment. Even when we envision a future experience, our intention is happening now. The power of intention to create our experience lies in the present moment—not in the past, not in the future, but right now. Our present-moment intention is coloring (or flavoring) the reality we experience now and shaping the reality we'll experience in the future. It's no use worrying about what we intended in the past, for we no longer have control over that. Although an intention we had five years ago (or perhaps five lifetimes ago) may have helped to shape an experience we're having now, the only thing that matters now, the only thing we have control over now, is the intention we have right now, the type of spice, positive or negative, we're adding to our harvested experience. If we direct the force of our consciousness as a positive intention in the present moment, the chains of the past can't bind us, and the future will take care of itself. More than that we can't do.

No matter what form our current experiences are taking, we create our immediate experiential environment according to the nature of our present-moment intention, according to the waves we're currently creating as we splash around in the ocean of consciousness. The reality we've helped to create returns to us in a certain form, and we, as individual beings, each color it in, spice it up in our own way with our present-moment intention, to turn the form of that reality into a unique personal experience.

We're bound to the past, to the karma of the past, only inasmuch as we choose to be bound to it. We must eventually experience the realities we've created, but we still get to choose how we'll experience those realities when they return to us—i.e., within a positive or negative intentional context. If we helped to create a monster, we must experience the monster, but we still get to choose how we approach the monster, we still get to choose our attitude toward the monster. Our present-moment intention is really all that matters, for that's all there really is. Our present-moment intention is what we are, acting as a force of creation.

We are our will, our being that's in the process of becoming, the flow of consciousness, and we can choose freely, without hindrance or limitation, how to direct the force of our flow of consciousness in creating your experiences—i.e., with the flow or against the flow, constructively or destructively, positively or negatively.

Think of our free will as a waterhose that we can spray this way or that in our garden for growing experiences. The force of the flow is our will, and once we direct that flow, it becomes intention, capable of inducing the experience-plants to grow. Spraying water one way is a positive intention; spraying water the opposite way is a negative intention. Direct our attention this way, and we water one kind of experience-plant; direct our attention the other way, and we water the opposite kind of experience-plant. Which type of experience-plant will grow and ripen into our actualized experience depends on where we spend the most time watering with our intention. Each time we focus our attention on a possible experience, the force of our intention goes in that direction and acts to develop that experience. At any moment, we can turn from one type of experience to the other, choose to water what-is or what-is-not.

It's impossible to create an experience for yourself unintentionally, i.e., without using intention. Experiences can be created when the intention is hidden from our view, but not without intention itself. At some level of our individual being, there's always the awareness of intention. If intention is hidden, it's because we've hidden it from ourself, and the part of our awareness that's doing the hiding knows the intention. This could then be called "unconscious intention," except that this then makes it sound as if such intention is devoid of consciousness, when it's really nothing but consciousness.

If our intention is hidden from ourself, we remain responsible for the choice nonetheless. If our intention is hidden, it's we who hold the veil, it's we who've chosen to hide it from ourself. If we put on a blindfold and go racing in a car down the street, we remain responsible for any damage we cause. "I'm not responsible because I couldn't see where I was going" isn't a valid excuse, because the reality is that at some level we chose to be blindfolded, chose not to see where we were going, chose not to see the nature of the experiences we were creating. At some level of our individual being, we chose a negative intention, chose to use the negative intention called ignorance.

Most people think of experience as something that just happens to them, something they just observe. Likewise, science used to think that the experience of physical reality was something that just happened, something the scientist just observed. Science is beginning to learn that the experience of reality is created in part by the experiencer, and people are starting to learn that their experience of reality is created in part by their own force of consciousness, by their own intentions.

We all know that how we feel physically after we eat something isn't due to the form or shape of what we've eaten; what's important is what's in what we've eaten. For this reason, when we're cooking food to eat, we choose our ingredients accordingly. Likewise, if we can realize that it's the intention, not the action, that causes us to feel good or bad, emotionally healthy or sick, we can then begin to choose our intentions accordingly, thereby creating healthier emotional experiences for ourself and for those around us.

Choose positively often enough and consistently enough, and we'll eventually create for ourself the experience of heaven. Choose negatively often enough and consistently enough, and we'll eventually create for ourself the experience of hell. The choice is ours.

6.2 *Free will and action*

Free will is our ability to choose an intention, positive or negative. However, since, more often than not, we've hidden our intention from ourself, all we're aware of is our action, leading us to mistakenly believe that free will is our ability to choose to perform this or that action.

Intention determines action. Our will is the flow of our individual being, the flow of the force of our consciousness, in relation to the larger flow. Intention is the flow of our will directed with or

against the larger flow of existence as our awareness creates experiences for itself. Once our flow is directed with or against the larger flow of existence, thus becoming intention, action follows based on that intention, as depicted in **figure 101**.

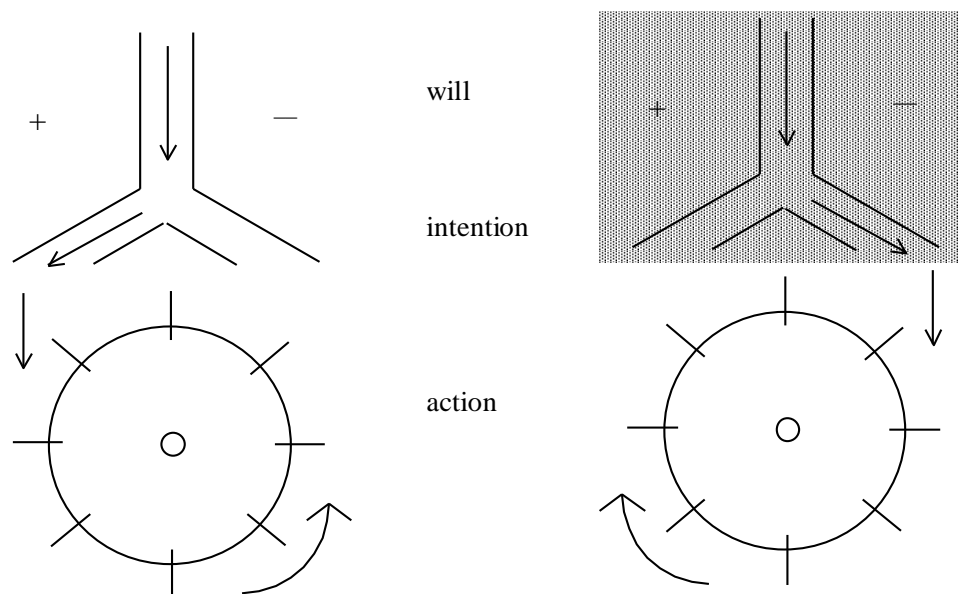


Figure 101 (Left) A positive intention (flow) turns the pinwheel one way. (Right) A negative intention (flow) turns it the opposite way. Just as the motion of the pinwheel is determined by which tube the water comes out, our actions are determined by whether we choose to power our actions with a positive or a negative intention. Thus, while we control our intentions directly, depending on how we choose to apply the force of our consciousness, we don't control our actions directly, because action is determined by the flow of intention. Also (right), if our intention is hidden, all we're aware of is the action, which makes it seem as if free will is the ability to control action directly.

We can exercise direct control over ourselves only at the level of intention, not at the level of action. Once the force of intention has been directed with or against the larger flow of existence, that force flows through our bodies, and action follows indirectly. Our bodies move, perform actions, on the basis of the direction in which we intend that flow, just as a pinwheel moves on the basis of the direction of the water that flows past it. Action is only the most superficial part of a process that flows from a much deeper source.

However, often we try to control our actions directly, by applying an opposite force, by trying to make the pinwheel spin the other way once the force of intention has already been applied. Again, we attempt this because we don't see that we control the action only at the level of intention. We see only the action. If we feel compelled to perform an action we know is bad for us, instead of changing the original action at the level of intention, instead of choosing a different intention, we use an opposite force of intention to create an opposite action to try and stop the

original action. This creates stress and self-division for the awareness performing such a maneuver.

We eat or drink too much, and we want to stop, yet we continue with the action. The intention, once applied, is unstoppable; action must result. Trying to stop oneself from performing an action once we have chosen the intention requires constant effort, a continuous counterforce, and eventually we tire. *To change our actions, we must change our intentions.* To change negative behaviors, we must find their root in some negative intention.

Let's say that we find ourselves poking ourselves in the face with a pointed stick. All of a sudden, our right arm shoots up, and we jab ourselves. This hurts. Yet our right arm continues, on occasion, to jab us. We can't see why this is happening; the intention is hidden, yet we want to stop ourselves from doing this. So, the next time our right arm starts to come up, we use our left arm to stop it. The intention of our left arm is clear: we intend to stop our right arm from hurting us, and so the action of our left arm follows from that intention. However, the intention of our right arm isn't clear; all we see is the action.

As long as our left arm holds our right arm, our right arm can't complete its action. However, as soon as our left arm relaxes or gets tired, our right arm completes its action, and we end up jabbing ourselves anyway.

This is essentially what's happening when we try to control ourselves, to use free will, at the level of action. It's ineffective and inefficient. Furthermore, it's self-divisive, because it pits us against ourselves, in opposition to ourselves, since the only way to oppose an action born of intention is to apply an opposite intention. The self-opposition that occurs when we try to control ourselves at the level of action creates stress within our awareness.

To truly stop an action, the force that drives the action must be changed at the source, at the level of intention. In this effort there's no self-opposition, no self-division; there's just the flow of our consciousness directed differently, rather than pitted against itself.

6.21 *The stress of controlling our actions*

The only truly free will is the will that's controlling its intentions. Attempts to control the creation of experience at the level of action creates self-division and stress. The exercise of free will to attempt to control action is never free, for in doing so, our will becomes bound to maintain a certain position.

Wrestling involves trying to pin an opponent by making them move in a certain way. Any position we have our opponent in requires that we also maintain a certain position. Our efforts to use free will to control our actions are like wrestling with ourselves. In using free will to control our actions, we're trying to make ourselves go in a certain direction by holding ourselves in a certain position, and as a consequence we must maintain a controlling position.

By attempting to use free will to control action, awareness can literally tie itself into a knot, while it also binds itself to the experience of what-is-not. In this way, by attempting to control its actions directly, awareness chains itself—i.e., awareness literally creates a chain of command by which it's bound. The more awareness tries to control itself or the surrounding reality through action rather than intention, the more links there are in the chain. The more links there are in the chain, the more tightly awareness becomes bound, and the more constrained, restricted, and inflexible awareness then becomes. This situation creates a *controlling relational structure within awareness*, as depicted in **figure 102**.

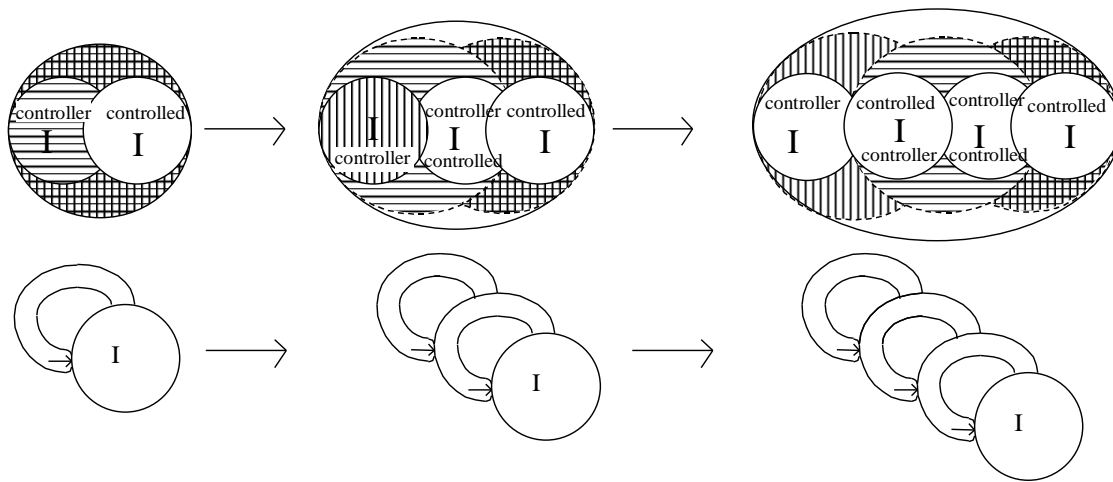


Figure 102 The development of multiple levels of control within awareness, which are created as a controller aspect of awareness dualizes in order to exert control upon itself, upon its own actions (rather than intentions), thereby forming a chain of control through repetitive and progressive self-relation. The three diagrams at the top show awareness dualizing three times, thereby forming three controller/controlled relationships, as depicted by the differently patterned spheres. The three diagrams at the bottom depict those relationships in terms of the control or force that awareness exerts upon itself through those relationships. The cross-hatched sphere represents the first level of control, the horizontally patterned sphere the second level of control, and the vertically patterned sphere the third level of control. In the second level of control, the controller aspect of awareness created in the first level of control itself dualizes into a controller/controlled relationship. In the third level of control, the controller aspect of awareness created in the second level of control itself dualizes into a controller/controlled relationship. This process can go on endlessly, creating a chain of self-control, a chain of command, within awareness.

By developing these multiple levels of control, this chain of command, awareness becomes locked into certain positions, becomes bound to act in certain ways. There's no freedom in this situation. There's an inflexibility that results the more we try to control ourselves at the level of action rather than intention. As the whole awareness becomes more inflexible, as it develops more and more levels of control within itself, it becomes increasingly prone to experience stress.

Stress, as the term is used in physics, refers to an applied force or system of forces that tends to strain or deform a body, i.e., any object or structure. The more inflexible something is, the more prone it is to stress. A force applied to a flexible body will bend the body but not cause strain or deform it, i.e., permanently change its shape. That same force applied to an inflexible body can deform it, permanently changing its shape, or even cause it to break.

In terms of an awareness that has created within itself a knotted chain of command, the “body” that’s subjected to stress is the relational structure of awareness itself, as that structure has been formed through the controlling relationships within itself. The more extensive this chain of command, the more tightly bound the awareness is to a certain course of action, and the more rigid and inflexible its structure will be, making it more prone to experience stress. Conversely, the fewer levels of control that exist within awareness, the less tightly bound the awareness is to a certain course of action, and the more flexible its structure will be, making it less prone to experience stress.

The forces that can act upon this controlling relational structure of awareness as stressors are simply the circumstances of life we encounter from day to day and from moment to moment. The more tightly bound our awareness is to a certain course of action by our chain of command, the more rigid we are, and the more prone we are to being stressed by the circumstances of life.

What we need to understand is that stress isn’t something that exists by itself, without our tacit approval and cooperation. *Stress is a relationship, a relationship between a force and a structure.* Thus, in order for stress to exist, there must be both an applied force and a structure to which that force is applied. Whether or not the force is able to act as a stressor, and the degree to which it acts as a stressor, depend primarily on the nature of the structure that force encounters, not on the force itself.

When a force meets a flexible body, stress is minimized. When that same force meets a rigid body, stress is maximized. The force is the same; the difference between minimal or maximal stress is in the flexibility or rigidity, respectively, of the structure that force encounters. Thus, whether or not we experience stress as the result of our encounters with the circumstances of life is primarily dependent on our degree of rigidity or flexibility, which itself is dependent on the degree to which we’ve become bound by our attempts at exerting self-control at the level of action rather than intention.

Being bound to a certain course of action means that not only is awareness determined to get to a certain place, but also that it’s trying to get there in a certain way. Nothing is more determined to get where it’s going than a river, yet nothing is more flexible than water. The desire and determination of awareness to experience wholeness are part of its flow, intrinsic to its being, just as the desire and determination of a river to flow downstream is intrinsic to its being.

The river doesn’t know what it will encounter around the next bend, yet it takes whatever course presents itself. Nor do we know what circumstances we will encounter around the next bend, yet unlike the river, we often find ourselves unable to accept the course that presents itself. Accepting

circumstances doesn't mean that we have to like them, only that we don't try to deny the reality of their existence.

Circumstances are literally the situations that surround us. Circum = encircle or surround, and stance = where we stand. A circumstance is then by its nature a situation that's acting as a sort of barrier, surrounding us. Thus, not all situations are circumstances. Circumstances are those situations that seem to have us trapped. A situation that doesn't make us feel trapped is simply an event, i.e., e-vent, literally an existential vent or opening. Circumstances become events once we find the door leading out of them.

It's only once we accept that a situation exists that we then become capable of changing it, of turning a negative experience into a positive experience. We won't try to walk through a door that we believe is a wall, and we won't try to change a situation or circumstance that we're pretending doesn't exist. As long as we deny the existence of a circumstance, we remain trapped in that circumstance by our own denial of it. Every circumstance is an opportunity to grow, for within every circumstance lies a door that leads to greater understanding and self-awareness. However, that door remains hidden until we accept the existence of the circumstance. Deny the existence of the circumstance, and we also deny the existence of the door that circumstance contains. Accept the existence of the circumstance, and the door appears automatically.

The inflexibility of awareness and its accompanying proneness to stress occur as awareness exerts multiple levels of control upon the flow of its existence in an attempt to get downstream in a certain way, along a predetermined course of action. By establishing this chain of command, awareness then becomes unable to change its controlling posture when other circumstances arise, causing the relatively inflexible controlling relational structure of awareness to be stressed by those altered circumstances.

There will always be bumps in the road of life. The question is, are we flexible enough so that when we inevitably do hit those bumps, we can absorb the impact; or have we become so rigidly controlling that they can fracture us or cause us to "get bent out of shape"?

Somewhere along the road of life, we got the idea that the way to happiness or contentment was to never be disturbed, and the way to never be disturbed was to never hit a bump. So, we spend our time trying to steer ourself around all the bumps we see coming, both real and imagined. This steering involves the attempt to use free will to control action, as we try to manage all eventualities. Maintaining this control causes us to be rigid and inflexible, and this inflexibility makes the bumps all the more stressful. This stress, in turn, makes the need to avoid those bumps seem more imperative, causing us to multiply our levels of self-control, thereby increasing the inflexibility of our awareness, which then increases the stress we experience when we inevitably do hit one of those bumps—and on and on it goes.

There are two types of stress, tension and compression. Thus, at times we feel torn, under tension; and at other times we feel overwhelmed, under pressure or compression, depending on what we perceive as the primary force of stress that's being applied to the controlling relational structure of our awareness.

When the circumstances of life seem to be pulling us in opposite directions, the controlling relational structure of our awareness is subjected to tensile stress, and we experience this stress as *tension*. Conversely, when the circumstances of life seem to be pushing upon us from opposite directions, the controlling relational structure of our awareness is subjected to compressive stress, and we experience this stress as *pressure*. Thus, at times we say, “I feel the weight of the world on my shoulders” or “I feel overwhelmed” or “I feel under such pressure,” while at other times we say, “I feel torn” or “I feel like I’m being pulled in two directions,” depending on how the external and internal circumstances of life are being applied to the controlling relational structure of our awareness.

What we need to become aware of is that we ourselves determine to some degree, through our own controlling posture, the level of stress we experience as a result of our encounters with the circumstances of life. Life is what it is, things happen as they happen, and most of these things are out of our present control. For although we create our own experiences, much of what currently happens to us is the result of previous intentions returning to us in the form of experiences. The only thing we have control over is our current intentions (literally, the flow of our will). We can’t directly control experiences that come to us on the basis of past intentions; we can control only our current intentions with regard to those experiences.

By trying to control circumstances through action rather than intention, we become trapped in a cycle of increasing stress, increasing control, and increasing self-division and thus experience increasing pain, increasing discontent, and an increasing lack of fulfillment.

Because we’re unaware of the mechanism by which stress occurs, we think stress comes from “out there,” outside ourselves. Part of stress does come from out there as a force acting upon us, but the other component, the component that determines the level of stress, is our own degree of flexibility or rigidity in terms of the controlling posture our awareness is trying to maintain.

We’re unaware of the mechanism by which we become prone to stress for the same reason we’re prone to stress—i.e., because we’ve inadvertently trapped ourselves in a controlling relational structure wherein our awareness is experientially and thus functionally separated from itself and so remains unaware of the big picture, unable to understand the overall situation and the position it’s in. In this structure, we lose sight of our intentions, and all we see are our actions.

As long as we think stress is purely a function of what’s “out there,” we’re powerless to stop it or modify it, and we then become its victim. As long as we *blame* our stress completely on the circumstances of life, we’re literally “being lame,” literally disabling ourselves from being able to do anything about our stress, since we don’t see ourselves as in any way responsible for it. As long as we look “out there” for the source of our stress, we’re looking in the wrong place, because its source is “in here,” where we are, in the controlling posture we’ve set up and then become bound to maintain within our awareness.

The wind is what it is. The flexible tree bends with the wind and so feels little, if any, stress, while the rigid tree finds the wind stressful. The rigid tree blames the wind for the stress it feels

when the wind is just being itself. The rigidity of the tree is itself responsible for the tree's experience of stress. The flexible tree is able to enjoy the wind, to dance with the wind, because it doesn't resist the wind. The circumstances of life are like the wind; they're just being what they are. We can dance with them, or we can resist them, but if we resist them, we shouldn't blame them for the stress we feel, for it's we who have, through our choices, put ourselves in that position.

As awareness, we exist in relation to, but not actually separable from, the flow of existence. In existing in relation to that flow, we're like a person in a boat, defined by the boat in relation to the river, yet still existing within the context of the river. The more awareness experientially takes itself out of the flow of existence through self-division, the more necessary paddling (i.e., control of action) seems to become. This situation arises because the more experientially disconnected awareness becomes from the flow of existence, from what it really is, the more unknown and unexperienceable the river becomes. The more unknown and unexperienceable the river becomes, the more awareness feels the need to control its actions in order to avoid possible danger. Conversely, if awareness understands its connection to the river, to the flow of existence, then awareness will have faith in the river, will trust the river as an aspect of itself and, having faith in the river, will accept what the river brings and where the river takes it.

Understanding the part we play in creating experience and stress, understanding that all our experiences have the potential to guide us to greater awareness, doesn't eliminate the pain we feel when someone we love is lost or injured, or when some other horrible circumstance arises. However, understanding can modify the nature of the pain, make it more tolerable, less stressful, and so less painful. Furthermore, understanding can allow us to approach negative experiences with positive intentions, and thus use the negative experiences as seeds for creating positive experiences. Otherwise, if we fail to understand, we usually approach negative experiences with negative intentions, in which case the negative experiences act as seeds for creating more negative experiences.

6.22 *Attempting to escape control*

Much of what we see as the self-destructive nature of addictions represent an attempt by awareness to escape the controlling relational structure it has built in attempting to control itself at the level of action rather than intention. Awareness, finding itself trapped by itself, imprisoned by itself, then attacks itself as it tries to disable its jailer, which is itself. When someone overeats, overdrinks, or uses drugs, we say they lack self-control. The irony is that these self-destructive actions are oftentimes the twisted byproducts of excessive attempts at self-control at the level of action rather than intention.

People use drugs, including alcohol, because for a while these things in some way disable the controller awareness and so eliminate the stress associated with this self-control, relieve their pain, and in this way make them feel good. Drugs, a.k.a. "mind-altering substances," by altering our awareness, change the way we usually perceive or conceive reality, and so for a time this unusual perception or conception changes the internal dynamic of control that's based on our

usual perception or conception. Therefore, while on drugs, we don't feel the need to control ourself in the same way or to the same degree, and so the stress and pain we were feeling because of this ongoing control are temporarily relieved. Thus, people on drugs seem to be "out of control" because that's exactly what they are, having stepped out of their usual control mechanisms.

The problem is, once the drug wears off, the control mechanisms reestablish themselves, and the stress and pain experienced by awareness now feel even more intense in relation to the temporary relief associated with drug use. Therefore, there's now an even-greater need for relief from the stress and pain of self-control, and so there's now an even-stronger desire for whatever drug was used to gain such relief. With each use of the drug, with each episode of temporary relief, this desire becomes stronger, increasing the likelihood of another usage. This is the vicious cycle of addiction.

In using drugs for the purpose of temporarily relieving ourself from the stress and pain of self-control, what can happen is that another, even more destructive level of self-control can be created in attempting to control all the other levels of self-control. On the surface, drugs seem to free us from the stress and pain of self-control. However, in order to free ourself from one control mechanism, we use another control mechanism, and the drug itself can then become the controller, or the controlling factor, in one's life. This situation is another example of how any effort at self-control at the level of action, through whatever means, can never free us from the accompanying experience of stress and pain.

Drugs are called a crutch, but they're really only the illusion of a crutch. A crutch allows us to walk until we heal, and once we've healed, we can put the crutch away and walk as we did before. A drug can enable us to walk for a while, temporarily relieving the pain of self-division, but when we try to put it away, we find it even more difficult to walk than before, and so we use it again, until eventually we find that we can't walk at all without it.

Drugs come in many forms other than tablets, liquids, or powders. Money can be a drug, power can be a drug, sex can be a drug, food can be a drug, gambling can be a drug, commercial products can be a drug. Anything can function as a drug, i.e., as a control mechanism used to temporarily disable other control mechanisms and thus temporarily relieve our awareness from the stress and pain of self-control.

Like the circumstances of life that seem to cause our stress, the harm isn't in the drug itself but in the way it's used. Most drugs also have beneficial purposes. For example, opium derivatives are widely used as analgesics, and the active ingredient in marijuana decreases nausea. However, when used to relieve the stress and pain of self-control, these substances can become self-destructive if a cycle of addiction ensues.

The trick is to find a means of relieving the stress and pain of self-control that's not itself self-destructive, or self-controlling, and thereby to some degree allow awareness to step out of the cycle of increasing stress. Toward this end, creative activities often work well, because while creating, if we create properly, by going with the flow of our existence, by letting the creative

juices move as they will, we're released from self-control. In this way, we find an activity that is self-constructive rather than self-destructive. Creativity is a relief and a release precisely because, while truly creating, we're not controlling our actions but just being, going with the flow. Meditation, yoga, and certain forms of physical exercise also work well, as long as they're not forced—i.e., as long as they release us from self-control and aren't just another task imposed by a controller awareness.

In a way, we're all trapped like Atlas with the world on his shoulders. Atlas is trapped by the idea that the world needs him to stay on course, just as we're trapped by the idea that our lives need constant control to stay on track. In the process of exercising free will at the level of action, we lose freedom, we become restricted. In the process of trying to control where our world goes, our world controls where we go. The more we try to control our actions, rather than our intentions, the more we become controlled. It's only by controlling oneself at the level of intention, rather than at the level of action, that we become truly free, free to go where we really and truly, in the deepest level of our being, desire to go.

Section 7 Moving Naturally Against Our Nature

In its most fundamental state, existence is inseparable from itself. In any state of being, existence is actually inseparable from itself, for all experience of existential separation is ultimately unreal, having no independent foundation, no actual basis in what-is as it is. Nonseparation is thus natural, or the nature of existence; separation is unnatural, or not the nature of existence.

Therefore, the experience of any separability of existence from itself is in this regard unnatural, or against our nature. Thus, our continued movement deeper and deeper into experiential division is also unnatural, or against our nature.

However, all movement must be natural, even when it appears to be unnatural. It can't be any other way, for all movement is ultimately the movement of what-is as it is, as a self-expression of its nature. In this subsection, we will examine the paradox between what appears to be our unnatural movement into the dimension of what-is-not, into experiential division, and why this apparently unnatural movement must in some more fundamental way be our nature—i.e., we will examine why it's actually our nature to be unnatural.

7.1 Biting into the apple of knowledge

If it's our nature to move toward unity, toward what-is, then why do we ever move toward experiential division, toward what-is-not, to begin with? The situation of our first movement into the dimension of what-is-not is reflected in the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve eat the apple of knowledge and, in so doing, get themselves tossed out of paradise. In paradise, Adam and Eve exist in union with God. In paradise, all their desires are fulfilled, and they know not want or longing. Thus, paradise is a metaphor for the awareness of existential connection or unity.

The apple of knowledge is a metaphor for awareness' definition and experience of itself as "I," the knower, seemingly separate from "it," the known, which definition and experience first occur as awareness moves into a reflected experiential reality. If awareness wants to know the apple as other than its own existence, then awareness must move into the dimension of what-is-not and so create the illusion that what exists as the apple is separate from what awareness itself is.

Knowing is a form of experience. To know something, we must first exist in relation to it; then, as we interact with it and it becomes defined in relation to us, and we in relation to it, there's the experience of knowing. The type of experience that is knowing is by nature divisive. It's no coincidence that the word *know* sounds like the word *no*. To know is literally to "no," to experience existence as what-is-not, as defined, bordered, and so experientially separate.

Biting into the apple of knowledge is, then, a metaphor for the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not. This movement is what creates the first experience of existential separation, as awareness experiences itself as an "I" separate from another as "it." This experience of an apparent separation between "I" and "it" is what causes awareness to conceive the need for self-control at the level of action.

Before biting into the apple of knowledge—i.e., before moving into the dimension of what-is-not—awareness existed in full awareness of its unity with, and its inseparability from, all that exists, and thus in communion (literally, "common-union") with God as the expression of that awareness of existential unity. This is paradise, this is heaven. Once awareness sees the apple of knowledge as something it wants, as something other than what it is, then awareness has wandered into the dimension of what-is-not and so is no longer able to experience the paradise of existential unity. Awareness, having wandered into the dimension of what-is-not, instead experiences the perpetual want, longing, discontent, and relative hell of experiential division—i.e., awareness experiencing itself as separate from the rest of existence.

If we want to stay in paradise we can't eat the apple of knowledge, the apple of no-ing. This isn't a command or a threat, it's just a statement of fact, i.e., a statement of the fact that we can't be in opposite and so mutually exclusive existential states simultaneously. If we want to stay in paradise, aware of our connection to existence, then we can't define ourself as separate from existence. If we want to remain aware of existential unity as the ultimate reality then we can't be aware of existential division as the ultimate reality.

Biting into the apple of knowledge (which could also be called the apple of experiential division) is described as humanity's fall from grace. To be graceful is to move fluidly, in harmony with what-is, inseparable from what-is. When we bite into the apple of knowledge, we fall from grace, our movements no longer graceful, no longer in harmony with what-is, as we try to control and wrestle with the flow of existence, having conceived ourself as separate from the river of existence.

So far, all we've done is explain how biting into the apple of knowledge is a metaphor for awareness' movement into the dimension of what-is-not. The question still remains, *why* does

awareness bite into the apple of knowledge and so lose sight of paradise? What first impels awareness to move into the dimension of what-is-not? What first impels awareness to move from a natural position of unity into an unnatural experience of division? In the Bible, this action is interpreted as Adam and Eve *disobeying God's command*. Eve is tempted by the Devil, disguised as a snake, to eat the apple, even though God has told them this is the one thing forbidden to them in all of paradise. Once they eat the apple, God then tosses them out of paradise as punishment for their sin of disobedience.

This eating of the apple against the command of God is called *original sin*. It's regarded as the first mistake that estranges humanity from God that separates humanity from God. This sin or mistake that results in the estrangement of humanity from God is a metaphor for awareness' experience of itself as separate from the rest of existence. Thus, this biblical story of humanity's fall from grace is consistent with the results of the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, since the experience of an "it" that appears to be separate from "I" is the first experience that awareness has of existence as separable from itself.

However, although the result of the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not is consistent with the biblical story, there are problems of consistency with regard to the biblical interpretation of the motivation Adam and Eve had for eating the apple of knowledge, for the motivation behind this first movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not.

In the Bible, biting into the apple of knowledge is regarded as a mistake, as disobedience to God, as sin. This is a metaphor for seeming to go against our nature, moving in opposition to the will or flow of existence. It's true that this movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, into experiential division, seems to be counter to the will or flow of God (as a representation of the totality of existence) and, in this way, against our nature.

However, in the Garden of Eden, an experiential division already seems to be operating within existence even before the apple is eaten. In the Garden of Eden, God is the controller, and Adam and Eve are the controlled. This controller/controlled relationship (also called the creator/created relationship) indicates that there must be an already-present experiential division. Such an already-present experiential division is inconsistent with the state of paradise and existential unity that's supposed to have existed before the apple was eaten, or before the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, into the divisive experience of knowing.

What we're presently trying to discern is what could motivate awareness to move into a state where it experiences itself as somehow separate from the rest of existence. So, to assess the eating of the apple of knowledge, the first movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, as a mistake, as disobedience, as sin, on the basis of a divisive controller/controlled relationship, would be inconsistent with the previous state of existential unity from which such a movement must occur. Before the apple was eaten, there was the awareness of existential unity; after the apple was eaten, there wasn't. So, the first movement of awareness into an experience of existential separation must occur from a position of existential unity—i.e., this movement must occur in full consciousness, awareness, and understanding of the condition such a movement will produce.

The first movement of awareness into an experience of existential separation can't be treated as a mistake, because before that movement, there simply exists no context for making such a mistake. A mistake (literally, "miss-take") is a movement or action taken out of an erroneous or incomplete awareness of the way things are, causing that action to not turn out the way it was intended. Before the first movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, the relative unawareness and ignorance that are the basis for making such a mistake wouldn't yet exist.

Likewise, the first movement of awareness into an experience of existential separation can't be treated as disobedience to God, because before that movement, there simply exists no context for such disobedience. Before and beyond awareness' movement into the dimension of what-is-not, existence is unified, and creator and created are inseparable. There's then nothing and no one for awareness to disobey, since the context within which awareness experiences the divisive controller/controlled relationship doesn't yet exist.

By treating eating the apple of knowledge as something bad, as a mistake, as disobedience to God, as sin, the Bible must assume that this action was taken out of ignorance, out of unawareness, and so within the context of an already-present experiential division. Yet how could this action be taken out of ignorance if Adam and Eve were in paradise, in union with God, in union with all that exists? If eating the apple of knowledge is itself the act that separates humanity from God, divides awareness from the rest of existence, then how could such an act be a mistake, or against the will of God, against the flow of existence, since such an action must originate from a position of existential unity?

Therefore, although the biblical story of Adam and Eve being tossed out of paradise is an accurate metaphor for the first movement of awareness into an experience of existential separation—i.e., how awareness loses sight of existential unity, owing to knowing "it" as apparently separate from "I"—the biblical story of Adam and Eve doesn't adequately or consistently address the question of the *motivation* for why awareness first bites into the apple of knowledge, for why awareness would first move into the dimension of what-is-not, into experiential division, and in this way seem to go against its nature as actually inseparable from the rest of existence.

The first movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, into experiential division, can't be a mistake, can't be disobedience, can't be sin, because this movement must occur from a position of existential unity. This movement must be in some way consistent with the nature of existence to be whole, to be unified, to be what it is.

But how can the first movement of awareness into experiential division be consistent with the natural movement of existence toward unity? When do brothers, sisters, or friends who love each other, who feel and recognize a connection between each other, agree to split up and oppose each other? Well, when they want to play a game and thereby enjoy themselves. They begin the game in full understanding that playing the game means that they'll oppose each other and, in so doing, *act as if* they're separate from each other. Yet they also fully understand that the

opposition and apparent separation are neither permanent nor ultimately real but are only an illusion necessary for playing the game.

We can understand how awareness can move into experiential division naturally, as part of its nature, only if we understand that this first movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not is taken in full awareness of the consequences. And we can understand the real nature of those consequences, and why it's in the nature of awareness to accept those consequences, only if we examine this first movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, and the ensuing drama, as a game that existence is playing with itself.

The apple was put there in the first place to be eaten so that the game could begin. Adam and Eve are extensions of existence, and existence fully understands what's going to happen when they eat the apple of knowledge. That's why awareness eats it, because it understands that it will thereby become hidden from itself, and then it can have the fun of finding itself again.

7.2 *The cosmic game*

Why does existence want to play a game with itself? Because it wants to enjoy itself. Why does existence want to enjoy itself? First, we must ask, what is enjoyment? To enjoy is to experience joy, to be surrounded by joy, to be permeated by joy. Joy is bliss, and bliss is the nature of existence. *Sat-chit-ananda*: existence, consciousness, bliss. Therefore, existence enjoying itself is existence surrounding itself with its own joy, its own intrinsic bliss, its own nature, which is the same as saying existence forming a relationship with itself.

So, now we can ask, why does existence want to surround itself with its own joy, its own intrinsic bliss, its own nature? Perhaps only because that's what it's all about. Perhaps this desire is simply an aspect of its infinite nature. At some point, there's no proximal cause, no motivation, no why or wherefore, only what-is being that. Here, we'll just say that it's the nature of existence to enjoy itself, to surround itself with itself, to exist in relation to itself, and so the universe happens, spontaneously, without forethought, without planning, as part of the natural movement of existence in that direction, in the direction of enjoyment, in the direction of self-relation. No purpose, no reason—just existence being what it is, naturally, without effort.

However, existence, in being moved by nature to enjoy itself, is limited by its own infinity, is constrained by its own singularity. Have you ever tried to play monopoly or any other game by yourself? It's not much fun, because you always know what you're going to do next. What fun is hide-and-seek if you always know where the other player is hiding? Existence is in the same position.

How can existence play a game and enjoy itself if it's the only player? For existence to enjoy itself, to play a game with itself, it must create the illusion of opponents, of two players who aren't connected. So, what does existence do? It hides from itself so that there seem to be two separate players when there's really only one. How does existence hide from itself? By moving

into the dimension of what-is-not, where the one player as “I” seems to be separate from the other player as “it.”

The relational structure of existence that’s been described in this work is a unified model of existence in the process of enjoying itself, in the process of experiencing its own joy, its own intrinsic bliss, its own nature. Because this process of enjoyment is somewhat analogous to what happens when two people play a game together, the stages in the evolution of existence into experience can be related to the steps necessary in order to play a game.

What’s the first step in playing a game? Having more than one player. Even in solitaire, we have an opponent, for we play against the deck of cards. So, before the game can begin, existence must exist in relation to itself so that there’ll be enough players to play the game.

What’s the next step in playing a game? Once there are enough players, then the players, the eventual opponents, must first agree on what game they’ll play. So, before the game can begin, there must be agreement between the players, there must be cooperation between the eventual opponents. At this stage in the evolution of existence into experience, although existence already exists in relation to itself, the relational aspects of existence remain aware of their inseparability and interconnection. It’s only later, within the context of experience—specifically, within the context of the experience of what-is-not—that the relational aspects of existence lose sight of their connection to the whole.

What’s the next step in playing a game? Setting up the gameboard or playing field, defining the boundaries of play, determining the rules of play. The successive dualization of existence into a relational matrix represents setting up the playing field, defining the boundaries of play, and determining the rules of play.

What’s the next step in playing a game once the game, the playing field, and the rules of play have been established? Splitting up into opposing players, or into opposing teams. Is this a mistake? No! It’s done on purpose, so that we can have the fun of playing a game, of interacting with our friends, or, in the case of the cosmic game, so that existence can interact with and enjoy itself. In this step, in board games, the players choose pieces or characters of different shapes and colors. This step of picking pieces or characters represents the differentiation of the relational matrix into primary and compound distortion processes.

Once all of this preparation has been done, the cosmic game is almost ready to begin, but not quite, because even with all of this preparation, the players in this game are still aware that they’re a singular existence. In order for the game to begin in earnest, one more step is necessary. In order for the competition and opposition to seem real, *the illusion of separation* between the players must be created. It’s this step in preparing to play the game that represents the movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not. At this point, relative existence as awareness loses sight of its connection to the rest of existence, and the game can then begin in earnest.

So, what game is it? What’s the game that’s being played? To me, it seems to be most like a game of hide-and-seek: existence hiding from itself so that it can find itself, and in the process of

looking and finding, enjoying itself. For existence to reveal its own joy to itself, it must first conceal that joy from itself. In other words, for existence to reveal itself to itself, it must first conceal itself from itself.

However, within the context of the cosmic game of hide-and-seek, there are an infinite number of other games being played. All of these other games are smaller games played within the context of the larger game of hide-and-seek. What game are you playing? Whatever game you want to play. The form that the game we each play takes depends on what we see as the gameboard—i.e., how we see reality arranged—and on the gamepiece we see ourself as using—i.e., how we define ourself in relation to the surrounding reality. Some people are playing monopoly, trying to possess as much material wealth as they can before they die. Others are playing chess, trying to put themselves in a position of power and control. All of these smaller games are extensions of the larger game, the cosmic game of hide-and-seek, whereby existence enjoys itself as it naturally seeks the fulfillment, completion, and wholeness of the experience of being connected to itself, the experience of being surrounded by its own joy, its own intrinsic bliss.

Why do children love to play hide-and-seek? Why do infants love to play peek-a-boo? Perhaps because these activities are extensions of the same activity as that which got them here in the first place, as they take part in the cosmic game of hide-and-seek, or the game of “now you see it, now you don’t.”

What’s the first step in playing a game of hide-and-seek? Someone has to be the seeker and so close their eyes while the others go hide. At this point in the cosmic game, we’re the seekers, and we’ve closed our eyes by moving into the dimension of what-is-not. In this process, existence becomes hidden from itself, and the game begins.

Existence says to itself, “You turn around and close your eyes, and I’ll go hide, and then you come and find me.” Turning around and closing our eyes means turning away from ourself, from what-is, by directing our attention and thus our awareness toward an experience of what-is-not. In this way, by experiencing what we are within the context of self-dividing boundaries, of defined realities, we experientially wall off our awareness from the rest of existence, and thereby literally close our “I.”

This is the motivation for the first movement of our awareness into the dimension of what-is-not, into experiential division. Some religions treat our presence and activity here on Earth as some sort of punishment for either ongoing or previous bad behavior. However, we don’t come here and do this because we’re bad or evil or mistaken or lost or disobedient, or for any reason that has a negative connotation. We come here and do this because we’re existence in the process of enjoying itself, in the process of playing a game with itself, and this first movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not is a necessary step in the game.

However, once our awareness begins to function within the twisted context of the dimension of what-is-not, our awareness becomes lost in relation to itself. Once awareness loses sight of what it is, awareness then moves in ways that are mistaken, in ways that increase its experience of

existential separation, of self-division. Movements that increase the experience of existential separation are, by definition, bad or evil actions. Again, awareness itself is never bad or evil, but when awareness functions within the twisted context of the dimension of what-is-not, the chain of intention-action-reaction-result itself becomes twisted, causing results that are the opposite of awareness' deepest intention, which is to enjoy itself, to find itself, to reconnect with itself, to experience itself as it is, as intrinsically blissful.

The reason why we tend to see this first movement of awareness into the dimension of what-is-not as bad or evil is precisely because we're seeing this movement from the perspective of what-is-not, where everything is topsy-turvy, seen as it's not, as negative. For this reason, the natural movement of existence in the process of enjoying itself appears as it's not, as negative, as existence punishing itself.

We come into the world playful, full of joy; but as time goes on, we grow serious as we get more caught up in cycles of self-division and increasing stress. Life is no longer experienced as a game but instead becomes a task, a chore to be dealt with, a process to be controlled. Or, if life is treated as a game, the game is taken very seriously indeed, as if it ultimately matters who wins and who loses, and so it's then no longer really a game, it's no longer really done for the enjoyment of playing, but instead the goal becomes to win at any cost rather than to enjoy with no real cost.

The best athlete wants his opponent at his best.
The best general enters the mind of his enemy.
The best businessman serves the communal good.
The best leader follows the will of the people.

All of them embody the virtue of noncompetition.
Not that they don't love to compete,
But they do it in the spirit of play.
In this they are like children
And in harmony with the Tao.

*Lao Tzu*¹⁹

A game is something done for sheer enjoyment. In a true game, who wins and who loses doesn't matter, because the game is played for the sake of enjoying the interaction with the other players. In the case of existence, where there's really only one player, existence plays the cosmic game for the sake of enjoying itself, for the sake of experiencing the intrinsic bliss of its own nature. In a true game, the outcome of the game is irrelevant; what's important is the process of play itself, the enjoyment of interaction that the game provides.

However, if the game in question is being played for the sole purpose of obtaining some tangible reward at the conclusion of the game—e.g., money, a trophy, the status of being “number one”—rather than for the enjoyment of playing, then winning, by definition, becomes the only thing, the only reason for playing the game. The more attached a player is to a particular outcome, the less

¹⁹ From the *Tao Te Ching*, translated by Stephen Mitchell, of Harper and Row, 1988.

enjoyable playing the game will be. This is because if a player is attached to a particular outcome, then their attention will be focused on the outcome rather than on the game itself. How can we enjoy playing a game if we aren't paying any attention to it? If, on the other hand, the goal of the game is to enjoy playing, then the outcome becomes irrelevant. In a game that's nothing more than a game, the real winners are those who simply enjoy playing.

In order to understand why winning and losing are ultimately irrelevant in terms of the cosmic game, we need to see how the players in the cosmic game, the perceived winners and losers, actually relate to each other, as depicted in **figure 103**.

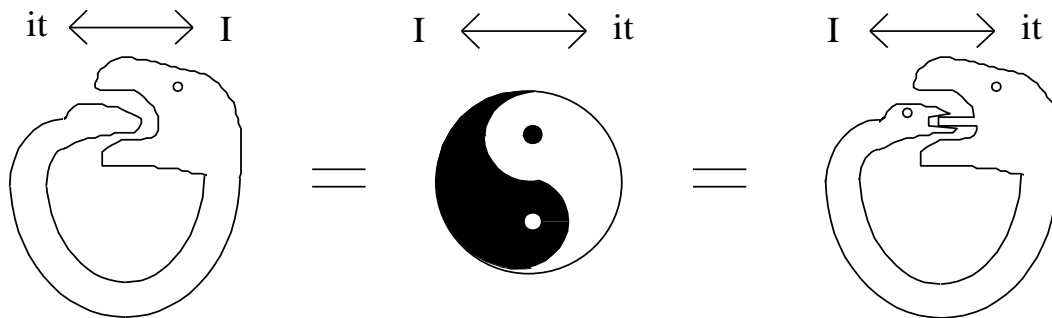


Figure 103 Different ways of depicting how existence is enjoying itself by existing in relation to itself. (Left) In the ouroboros symbol, the relationship in which existence enjoys itself is depicted as existence nourishing itself by consuming itself: The serpent eats its own tail and thus feeds itself, including the tail it's eating. (Middle) In the *T'ai-chi T'u* symbol, the relationship in which existence enjoys itself is depicted as existence penetrating itself: There's mutual interpenetration as the yin consumes the yang and vice versa, so that each sustains the existence of the other.

(Right) The modified ouroboros symbol, in which two heads are depicted as consuming and nourishing each other, is a more accurate representation of our current situation and also is more in harmony with the balanced situation depicted in the *T'ai-chi T'u* symbol. In the modified ouroboros symbol, both mutual consumption and mutual interpenetration are depicted. In order to sustain oneself as a compound process—i.e., while we're alive—we must consume other aspects of existence, while as time goes on, we ourselves are consumed by the ongoing dynamic of existence. Thus, while we consume, we're also being consumed.

In these diagrams, in which an awareness of the unity underlying the experiential process is maintained, "I" and "it" are shown as they are, as interchangeable or existing as such only in relation to each other. An awareness of underlying unity doesn't eliminate the experience of "I" and "it," doesn't eliminate the players in the game, but it does eliminate the basis on which "I" can be seen to overcome or dominate "it" as something separate from itself. Within the context of existential unity, the idea that existence can somehow be victorious by defeating itself has no basis and actually becomes quite absurd. Therefore, within the context of existential unity, there's no basis for awareness to become attached to winning, and no basis for awareness to fear

losing, since both outcomes are then seen as they are, as two sides of the same coin, rather than as separate, independently existent realities.

Winning and losing are an experiential duality, two seemingly opposite experiences that actually exist as such only in relation to each other. Although existence is the basis of experience, existence exists independent of experience, and so existence is ultimately unaffected by the relative states of winning and losing. No matter what we experience as happening on the gameboard, existence always remains what it is. It's for this reason that awareness is able to begin the cosmic game by moving fearlessly into the dimension of what-is-not, into experiential division, into the inevitable experience of pain and suffering that such movement entails, because awareness does so at first with the understanding that it can never actually be separated from what it is, and therefore with the understanding that the pain and suffering of self-division are ultimately an illusion.

However, once awareness enters the dimension of what-is-not, awareness then becomes unaware of the underlying unity of existence, as the apparent separation between "I" and "it" becomes its experience of reality. Once awareness loses sight of its connection to the rest of existence, instead of experiencing the situation as it is—i.e., the mutual coexistence of "I" and "it"—awareness instead experiences the situation as it's not—i.e., as "I" and "it" existing in opposition to each other, as depicted in **figure 104**.

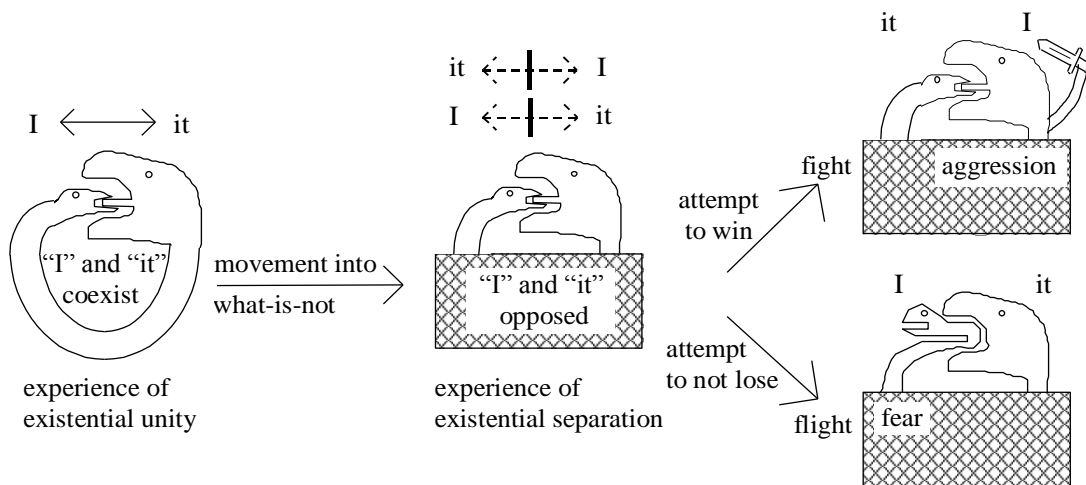


Figure 104 How existence as awareness experiences its relationship to the rest of existence once it has moved into the dimension of what-is-not. (Left) The modified ouroboros symbol depicts the situation before awareness moves into the dimension of what-is-not, as existence consuming itself, enjoying itself, experiencing itself, while remaining aware of underlying unity. (Middle) How awareness experiences this same situation once it has moved into the dimension of what-is-not, thereby becoming unable to experience (i.e., becoming unaware of) the unity underlying what it experiences as reality. This unawareness of the underlying unity of existence is depicted by the gray shading of the connection between the two mutually consuming heads. In this situation,

in which existence is experienced as it's not, "I" and "it" are then experienced as separate and opposing realities rather than as the unified and coexistent realities that they actually are. Within this context, the process of mutual consumption and mutual coexistence is experienced as a situation of mutually exclusive existence, where "I" and "it" are seen to be in competition for continued existence.

Within this context, the relative states of winning and losing are experienced as separate, independently existent realities, and awareness becomes attached to the idea of winning while also fearing the idea of losing. Functioning within this context as an experientially isolated "I," then either awareness takes on an aggressive posture and fights with the rest of existence as "it," trying to overcome "it," trying to beat "it," in order to win; or awareness runs from the rest of existence as "it," fearing "it," trying to avoid losing to "it," in an attempt to avoid the threatened nonexistence of "I." Trying to win and trying not to lose aren't the same action, although both actions arise from the same experience of existential separation and self-division. (Right) Whether awareness fights or flees from "it" depends on which aspect of existence (i.e., "I" or "it") awareness sees as having the ability to overcome the other in a direct conflict. Either action is ultimately futile, for the mutually coexistent nature of relative existence is such that awareness can neither successfully overcome itself nor successfully run from itself. Either action is also counterproductive, since these actions only reinforce awareness' experience of existential separation.

As previously discussed, once awareness experiences itself as "I" within the twisted context of the dimension of what-is-not, awareness then becomes bound to defend the independent existence of this "I," since awareness then perceives any dissolution or diminishment of this "I" as its own nonexistence. Awareness then fears any "it" that's perceived as a threat to its "I"; in other words, awareness fears any "it" that's seen to exist in conflict with or opposition to its definition and experience of itself as "I." Again, fear is the emotion that awareness experiences as it moves toward nonexistence. Although awareness can't actually cease to exist, awareness can experience itself as moving toward nonexistence once it defines itself as an experiencer, i.e., as "I."

If we fear death, it's because we see death as nonexistence. If we see death as nonexistence, it's because we've identified what we are with our organic physical experience of ourself, with our physical body. Once we identify what we are with our physical body, then we're bound to see death as the cessation of our own existence. People fear aging for the same reason, because they see it as movement toward death or nonexistence. Within the twisted context of the dimension of what-is-not, the natural and synergetic process of mutual consumption that sustains relative existence is seen as movement toward nonexistence, and so as something to be feared, and those who fear it are bound to try to avoid it. Such avoidance is futile, unnecessary, and counterproductive.

For example, racism is based on fear. People with different physical attributes can easily be identified as other, as separate from what we are, as separate "its." Within this context, under even minimal environmental stress, these experientially separate others are seen as the monster

“it” that threatens the existence of our “I,” of our way of life, and so either they’re attacked, resulting in racial violence, or they’re run from, resulting in racial segregation.

When we’re aware of underlying unity, we see the cosmic game, the process of mutual consumption, as a process of mutual coexistence. When we’re aware of underlying unity, we don’t become attached to the idea of ourself as an impermanent experiential form, as our physical body. Within the context of existential unity, we’re able to appreciate the process of living without fear, without the threat of impending doom or nonexistence, not having separated what we experience ourself to be from the rest of existence.

However, when we become unaware of the underlying unity of existence, unaware of the unity underlying the experiential process, what we perceive as “I” and “it,” then we experience the cosmic game as conflict, and we see the inevitability of being consumed in that conflict as the threat of nonexistence. Within the context of this experience of self-division, we’re bound to fear “it,” we’re bound to fear the rest of existence, and we experience time as a monster that’s slowly devouring us. So, we end up in the futile position of fighting with the rest of existence and struggling against time as we try to preserve what we experience as our own existence.

Living in fear, we spend our lives either fighting with or avoiding the rest of existence rather than embracing it. Actually, we’re always being embraced by existence, although we don’t always see it that way, and so we don’t always experience it that way. Because of the law of karma, we’re bound to experience existence treating us as we’ve treated it. If we fight with the rest of existence, then we’ll experience existence as fighting back. If we run from the rest of existence, then we’ll experience existence as running from us. If we embrace the rest of existence, then we’ll experience existence as embracing us. In other words, experientially we get back from existence what we give to it.

The underlying unity of existence doesn’t change, but how we experience that unified reality depends on how we approach it. That is, how we experience our unbreakable connection to the rest of existence literally depends on how we as “I” approach the rest of existence as “it”—i.e., either with open arms, with weapon in hand, or cowering in fear. And, of course, how we approach the rest of existence depends on whether we’re moving within the dimension of what-is or what-is-not, within the context of existential unity or self-division.

As stated previously, we can play any game we want within the overall context of the cosmic game of hide-and-seek. These days, a game many people play is called “the rat race.” It’s called that because it’s analogous to a bunch of rats racing to get to a chunk of food before the other rats do, so that they can consume the largest portion. In this game, winning is seen as the continuation of existence, and losing is seen as nonexistence. For this reason, the players become attached to winning, and fear failure or losing. The players want to win because they naturally want to continue to exist. The players fear losing for the same reason, because it’s their nature to continue to exist.

How is it that in this game, the concept of winning becomes attached to continued existence, and the concept of losing becomes attached to nonexistence? The players in the rat race see winning

as maintaining control, as being allowed to maintain their position, their experience of what they are as “I,” and so they see winning as necessary for the continued existence of “I.” On the other hand, they see losing as a loss of control, as a situation where they don’t get to maintain their position, as a situation where their “I” is altered in some way, and so they see losing as something to be avoided in order that “I” may continue to exist.

It’s impossible for us to not exist. We need make no effort to continue to exist. However, the degree to which we experience effort as necessary for our continued existence depends on how narrowly we define our existence. The more narrowly we define our existence, the more likely our possible nonexistence becomes, and the greater the apparent need to control oneself at the level of action becomes.

Once we wander into the dimension of what-is-not and its attendant experience of existential separation, the gameboard then becomes arranged in such a way that any move we make in an attempt to win the cosmic game, to beat the rest of existence, can serve only to further reinforce the illusion of existential separation. In this situation, by trying to win, we lose, inasmuch as when we try to win, we become experientially lost to ourself. Actions always have the opposite effect of what we intend whenever those actions arise from intentions formed within the topsy-turvy land of what-is-not.

So, how does awareness get out of the cage of self-division once it has constructed it? How does awareness play the cosmic game without becoming endlessly trapped within the dimension of what-is-not? The only way is for awareness to, at some point, in some way, comprehend the existential unity underlying the game that it’s playing, and so comprehend the situation it’s in. Within the context of that comprehension, the impulse toward further mistaken movement ceases. By understanding the nature of the cosmic game, the playing field, and the rules of play, awareness then is able to move without continuing to create a twisted, self-divisive chain of intention-action-reaction-result. Once awareness learns to control itself at the level of intention, rather than at the level of action, awareness is able to recognize more clearly which movements go with the flow and which movements go against the flow.

Once we understand the nature of the cosmic game, the playing field, and the rules of play, we can see the folly in trying to relieve an itching eye by scratching it with a stick, and so the impulse toward such an action simply doesn’t occur. In this way, mistaken action ceases with no effort. Awareness doesn’t need to apply an experientially self-divisive force of action in order to stop itself from acting mistakenly. Rather, awareness stops acting mistakenly because the reality of the experience on which the mistaken action was based no longer exists for awareness. Understanding how the gameboard is laid out doesn’t stop the itch, doesn’t end desire, but it does allow awareness to scratch the itch in a way that’s truly enjoyable, in a way that isn’t experientially self-divisive.

All experience is like a rainbow that extends from and depends on a relationship which existence has formed with itself, and what we are most directly is that existence. Existence doesn’t need experience to exist because experience is an extension of existence. So, what we are must

ultimately exist outside the context of and beyond any experience, including the experience of ourself as “I.”

Understanding that all experience is like a rainbow, including awareness’ experience of itself as “I,” we cease to become attached to this idea of ourself as “I,” and then we’re no longer moved to defend this “I,” any more than we’re moved to seek the end of the rainbow. If we think that the rainbow is an independently existent structure, we’ll seek its end; and if we think that “I” is what we are, we’ll become attached to this narrow self-definition and defend it. The quest for the end of the rainbow ceases once the relational nature of the rainbow is comprehended, and the attachment to and defense of “I” cease once the rainbow-like nature of “I” is comprehended.

Once we’re able to see through the illusion of independent-object existence, what we’re left with is what we really are. Seeing through the illusion of independent-object existence doesn’t mean that all experience ceases, just that awareness no longer mistakes its object-experiences for separate, independently existent realities, and so no longer becomes attached to them, no longer engages in a futile and experientially self-divisive quest for the end of the rainbow.

Attachment to the idea of winning and fear of the idea of losing make us unable to fully enjoy the game we’re playing, which is nothing other than existence in the natural and spontaneous process of enjoying itself. Understanding our existence as a game doesn’t end the or alter its eventual outcome, but it does make playing the game more enjoyable, which is what got us here in the first place. By understanding the nature of the cosmic game, the playing field, and the rules of play, we become more able to play our life as a game, enjoying the rest of existence as our friend, rather than becoming so focused on winning that we lose sight of what the cosmic game really is all about, and thereby cause the rest of existence to experientially function as, and so become, our enemy.

However, becoming attached to the experience of ourself as “I” and seeking the end of the rainbow are themselves just aspects of the cosmic game of hide-and-seek. We search for something in the distance, failing to realize that what we see “out there” can never be what’s actually there, because what we see “out there” exists as such only in relation to where we are “in here.” We go off looking for something over there, only to eventually find that it’s been right here all along. So, have fun, enjoy yourself as you search for what’s actually yourself, inevitably coming back to what you are, always have been, and always will be.

A final note

Descriptions, by their nature, are limited with regard to what they can tell us about the nature of reality, because descriptions require experience and experience works by defining existence. Since the ultimate nature of reality is beyond experience, forming the basis of experience, no model or theory of reality can ever be perfect or complete or without limitations, inasmuch as all models or theories are derived from some level of experience and therefore are in some way attempts to define what exists in the absence of definition.

The nature of knowing as an experience is such that the whole from which knowledge extends and on which knowledge depends can never be known completely as it is, as a whole. Existence is unified, reality is ultimately nonseparate, and yet the process by which experience is formed by nature precludes an experience of that wholeness. In describing existence, we're defining existence. In defining existence, we must create apparent divisions within what is indivisible, apparent separations of what is inseparable. Therefore, in order to describe existence, we must in some way distort it, make it appear as it's not.

If existence "as it is" is the ocean, then experience is the sand. Both a beach and a desert are made of sand, and one is certainly closer to the ocean than the other, but neither is the ocean—neither is what exists directly. We can, by using experiential descriptions and definitions, move ever closer to the ocean of existence, but we shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that those experiential descriptions and definitions can ever by themselves take us into the ocean of existence itself.

Experientially describing and defining the nature of reality is useful and liberating only as long as we remain aware of the context within which such descriptions and definitions must occur, only as long as we don't mistake them for existence itself. Accurate descriptions and definitions of reality can be used as a tool—let's say, as a rope to help lift awareness out of the pit of experiential delusion that awareness can dig for itself. However, like all tools, this rope is useful only to the extent that it's used as intended or as designed. As it so often says on the box: "The use of this device for purposes other than those for which it was intended may cause injury." If the rope is mistaken for the reality it's being used to tie down or get to, then the user will eventually become snarled in that very rope, which then will function as just another hindrance to progress. Thinking that the ultimate nature of reality can ever be described and defined is just replacing one set of chains with another. The new set of chains may be relatively shinier and less cumbersome than the old set, but they're still chains nonetheless.

Thus, although existence has been modeled in this work as a relational matrix, existence itself isn't that. The relational-matrix model is only an approximation to knowledge of a level of reality that by nature defies complete knowing. Although we can use a map to increase our knowledge of where we are, the map itself isn't where we are. Where we are is just where we are, what-is is just what is, and neither is amenable to being completely known. Experience as a relative reality has its limits, whereas existence, being ultimately nonrelational or extrarelatational, has none.