

What is Consciousness?

Part II of *The Enigma of Consciousness*

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Introduction to Part Two

When we get out of bed in the morning we may say to ourselves, "I'm awake." That is, we may notice that we are conscious. Perhaps we dreamed and remember dreaming, but at the time we dreamed we were not *there* in the way that we are now *here* remembering being *there* in the dream. Yes, it was I that was dreaming, and this "I" was recording in my memory banks the dream being dreamed by me, but "I," the conscious "I" who is now conscious of my consciousness of having dreamed was not exactly *there* during the dreaming. Some sort of consciousness was doing that dreaming, but my consciousness of that consciousness was not *there* at the time.

So what is consciousness? And what is consciousness of consciousness? Who am I as a conscious being? These are surprisingly deep questions, for which easy answers are not forthcoming. Our neuroscientists tell us interesting things about how our behaviors and brain waves correlate with our inner experience, but these interesting things do not answer the question "What is consciousness?" Indeed, these busy scientists do not always admit that the only direct experience of consciousness that any of us have is from the quite unscientific contemplation of our own interior world of being conscious. These inner noticings are not the same as the objective observations that are the bread and butter of our communities of empirical scientists. We inner noticers can compare notes on our noticings and propose theories that we test with further noticing. But this is not exactly science. For these strange data are solitary noticings by noticers that are noticing their own noticing. Such subjectivity is not the content of science.

Consciousness and the consciousness of consciousness is a deep enigma. In the following Part Two of this book, I am going to share my noticings for your comparison with your own noticings. I am going to employ the contemplative approach to truth and do my theorizing about what I "see." I am going to do some poetizing and philosophizing that may or may not enlighten your own noticing, but I am hopeful that we may agree that we are all very similar members of a magnificently evolved enigma.

Chapter 8

Qualities of Consciousness

Consciousness (kon' shas • nis): The state of being aware of one's own existence, sensations, thoughts, surroundings, etc.

The word "consciousness" is customarily used in a rather narrow sense, applicable only to beings who are conscious of being conscious. "Conscious" usually means being alert rather than spaced out, awake rather than asleep. But even spaced out is a state of consciousness, and sleep can also be viewed as a state of consciousness. It is conscious beings who sleep, not rocks. In this and following chapters, I will distinguish between consciousness as a general state within living beings, and the consciousness of consciousness, which is a state of consciousness that occurs within humans and perhaps a few other species.

The nature of consciousness can be explored with all three of the approaches to truth outlined in Part One, but only the contemplative approach (the "I" approach) can inquire directly into the nature of consciousness. The scientific approach (the "It" approach) can correlate the reports and behaviors of conscious beings with objectively examined brain functioning. This is important work that calls our attention to the biological foundations of consciousness and explores how our inner experiences are biologically supported. I will be referring to these findings occasionally, but my main focus will be on what we can learn from our own contemplative inquiry within our own being.

The "We" approach to truth can also tell us things about the nature of consciousness. The social interactions of humans provide us wisdom about the enigma of consciousness not accessible with only the "It" or "I" approaches to truth. The dynamics of an intimate relationship and/or the dynamics of building a common society together can reveal things to us that neither the "I" approach or the "It" approach can show us.

Without denying the importance of the "We" and "It" approaches to the truth of consciousness, I will be focusing in this and following chapters on the "I" approach – on contemplative inquiry into our own inner experience of consciousness. Each of us can experience ourselves as a human subject that is observing that very subjectivity within ourselves. We can even say that contemplative inquiry does not have an object of observation, because that object is the subject doing the observing. Nevertheless, when "I" am viewing the subjectivity of my own inner being, "I" am viewing something more vast than "me-the-observer" can ever finish observing. When observing our own consciousness, each of us faces an infinite well of mystery. Part of that mystery is the rather astonishing truth that human consciousness includes the capacity to be a noticer of our own consciousness. Herein is one of the profound mysteries of our lives: *we can be conscious of our own consciousness*. So let us notice within our own consciousness some of the qualities we observe about that consciousness:

1. As we are already noticing, a first truth that a contemplative inquirer can notice is this capacity to be conscious of our own consciousness, a capacity that makes contemplative inquiry possible. I, the inquirer, can be conscious of my own consciousness and of my own capacity to inquire into the nature of that consciousness. Though this may seem an obvious thing to say, it is an important truth.

2. A second truth the contemplative inquirer can notice is that he or she cannot be directly conscious of the consciousness that is within another conscious being. We can

observe the behaviors of our dogs or cats or human companions, but we cannot directly experience the inner consciousness of those beings. With other human beings we can observe their behaviors and hear their reports about their inner consciousness, but we cannot be directly conscious of that other human's consciousness. Contemplative inquiry is a solitary enterprise. We can compare our findings with each other, but we must each find our verifications for these findings within in own solitary lives. We can make guesses, even very good guesses about what is going on in another person's consciousness, but the verifications for those guesses can only be found in that person's consciousness of his or her own consciousness. Furthermore, the guesses we make about another person's consciousness are based on our own experience of our own consciousness. The very language we use to make those guesses is defined (or needs to be defined) in terms of our own inward experiences.

3. A third truth that the contemplative inquirer can notice is that an accumulated wisdom about consciousness is possible. Indeed, such wisdom is about half of all that each human culture counts as its common wisdom. All of a culture's artistic collections are expressions of our contemplative accumulation of wisdom. By "artistic collections" I mean paintings, sculptures, music, dance, story, song, poetry, dramas, and more. Architecture is also an artistic form as well as a design of functional dwellings. Further, all of a culture's religious collections are the result of contemplative inquiry. Those who claim that their formulated religious wisdom dropped down from a supernatural realm are simply making up a story to fill a gap in their understanding of these deep matters. Religious wisdom is acquired through contemplative inquiry. Consciousness views its own inner life and then these conscious experiences of consciousness are expressed in analogies, myths, cryptic sayings, diagrams, parables, dogmas, creeds, rituals, icons, and the like. The truth test for a culture's artistic and religious wisdom is found, and only found, in the type of verifications that can be acquired by singular persons consciously inquiring into their own consciousness.

4. A fourth truth that the contemplative inquirer can notice is that consciousness is both passive and active. It is both paying attention and taking initiative. It is both attentionality and intentionality. For example, we can pay attention to water spilled on the kitchen cabinet, and we can take initiative in wiping it up before it drains down and injures the woodwork. Consciousness is both taking in various qualities of our surroundings and putting out responses within those surroundings. Consciousness is a reception of sensory inputs (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches) as well as bodily pains, pleasures, and emotions. And consciousness is also an active relationship to those inputs, and the initiation of bodily mobilization for movement, including speech, and including the inner movements that we call "thinking."

5. A fifth truth that the contemplative inquirer can notice is close to point 4, but slightly different. Consciousness is a co-creative force along with other forces in the outcomes of history. There are other forces – aspects of my own body about which I am not conscious as well as the vast forces of the cosmos. Consciousness does not create the whole of reality, but along with these other forces consciousness does co-create the course of events. Take the very simple example of raising your arm. All sorts of electrical, chemical, and mechanical functions are involved, but consciousness can initiate this string of functions. I am not simply watching my arm move. I am an arm mover, putting into play all these other forces of arm moving. Similarly, if I am batting a baseball, I am batting. The concentration of my consciousness makes me a better batter than if I am half asleep at the plate.

How do we know that this co-creation of events is true? We know because we simultaneously notice the inner initiation and the simultaneous motion of our limbs. We are guessing a very plausible correlation between what our consciousness intends and what our outward body does. I am saying “guessing” because we do not scientifically or contemplatively “view” how conscious intending and bodily movements are related. Nevertheless, it is plausible to assume that when we are consciously initiating responses, our consciousness is making a difference in what our bodies do. We do not absolutely control the difference conscious intending makes, but we can assume that some difference result from what our consciousness intends.

So let us look at the co-creative power of consciousness more closely. When we guess that there is a correlation between our inner intentions and our outward movements, we are using both the sensory-scientific approach to truth and the inner-contemplative approach to truth. And we are assuming that the two truths are part of the same overall Reality and that the simultaneous nature of these two verities is not just a coincidence, but a linkage. It seems that we have no ability to prove this linkage, but a lack of linkage seems to us to be farfetched. How inner intentions are linked to outward movements cannot be investigated by either the scientific approach to truth or the contemplative approach to truth. Why? Because the scientific approach to truth cannot directly view consciousness and the contemplative approach to truth cannot view anything outside the realm of consciousness. So neither approach is capable of viewing the link between the two. Yet we tend to be quite sure that there is a link even though that link is one of the most enigmatic aspects of both scientific research and contemplative inquiry. We can easily opt to be quite sure that both approaches to truth are approaches to the same Reality, and we can come to realize that our mental make-up is such that our reason is not capable of a rational understanding of how our inner intentions are linked with our outer movements. Consciousness and its linkages with the overall sensory-discovered world are enigmatic to human thinking.

6. A sixth truth that the contemplative inquirer can notice is that consciousness has a fragile or passing finite quality. We can go to sleep and be mostly unconscious. Even in our waking life we can be more conscious or less conscious. Something infinite would not be subject to the categories “more” and “less.” Consciousness is a finite process, for it can be spoken of as more conscious or less conscious. Also, we can notice that consciousness requires physical modes of energy to maintain it. Being conscious is hard work. We need to eat food to sustain it. We need to rest up after being intensely conscious in order to be conscious again with full attention and intention. Consciousness is a finite process within our temporal lives and this is especially true of our consciousness of our consciousness. Much of our living is done without the participation of our conscious presence as a conscious intender. Our memory of the past has gaps in it where we were not consciously present. Our life went on without us, so to speak. Sometimes a person can have a night of drunkenness that he does not remember at all. Other people can report to the drunk that he had a good time, but the drunk can be so drunk that he or she apparently missed experiencing that good time. Seeing a movie for the second time can be surprising in a similar way, revealing that we were not vividly present for a great deal of that movie the first time through. Consciousness of consciousness is a fragile, temporal thing that is not always present or fully present.

7. A seventh truth that the contemplative inquirer can notice is that consciousness is only present in living beings. A rock is not conscious. It does not pay attention or take initiative. A mountain is not conscious. We sometimes ascribe consciousness to mountains and other “inanimate” objects, but when we do that we are defining

“consciousness” in a way that makes the entire concept meaningless. We need to maintain our clarity. Calling a mountain “conscious” is an analogy or a projection created by a conscious human being. We also project the human quality of consciousness upon the quite different consciousness within our animal friends. We recognize them as conscious because their behaviors signal to us something familiar in our own consciousness, but we err to assume that their consciousness is everything that our own consciousness is. Our consciousness of consciousness, including the contemplative inquiry I am describing in this chapter, does not happen in our animal friends. Dogs, cats, horses, chimpanzees, porpoises, whales, etc. are clearly conscious beings, but humans enjoy (or are inflicted with) a mode of consciousness that I am calling “the consciousness of consciousness.” Later, I will discuss in depth this human mode of consciousness and how it differs from the consciousness of other living beings.

Are All Living Beings Conscious?

This question pushes us to define “consciousness” more carefully and fully. Clearly, not all living beings are conscious of their consciousness as we human beings are, or at least can be. All mammalian life is certainly conscious if we define “consciousness” as using an inward intelligence to select appropriate behaviors. Whether or not dogs and cats and other mammals are conscious of being conscious we do not know directly. We have to speculate about that on the basis of their behaviors. Do our other than human mammal friends have feelings? Again, watching their behaviors leads us to say, “Yes, they do.” Clearly, pet dogs act lonely when their masters are missing. Cats require snuggle time. Horses, elephants and porpoises surprise us with their capacities for empathy with humans as well as their own species. All mammals, especially the females, create strong bonds with their young. Relative to reptiles, mammals are found to have large middle brains that correlate with these emotional capacities.

Are reptiles conscious? Apparently so, though they do not appear to possess the emotional sensitivities we intuit in mammals. Are reptiles conscious of their consciousness? Answering “No” to this question seems easier than answering “No” for mammals. Are single cell amoebas conscious? They seem to take in touch and taste sensations. They seem to have some way of filtering and finding “meanings” in those sensations. They design appropriate movements toward food, away from dangers, and other behaviors. Surely, this is some sort of consciousness. A rock does not pay attention or take initiative. Amoebas do. Are amoebas conscious of being conscious? The probability of this seems miniscule.

In whatever way we answer these questions about the other species of animal life, our observations of living animals supports the statement that at some point in the evolution of animal life, consciousness became conscious of being conscious. This mode of consciousness is clearly present in the human species. Or it can be. Perhaps some humans have fled this potential and become little more than complicated rocks or a machine-liked set of psychological habits that automatically play themselves out unconsciously. But however unconscious some humans may be, the species is clearly capable of being conscious of consciousness. And humans may not be the only species that has this capacity. There is evidence that consciousness of consciousness may have been present in the Neanderthal species and perhaps in still earlier big-brained, upright-walking primates. The Neanderthals buried their dead, apparently conducting some sort of funeral. This witnesses to a consciousness of consciousness. It is a plausible speculation that big-brained primates evolved these bigger brains to handle the consciousness of consciousness that was increasing in these species. Among currently living non-human mammalian species, it is doubtful that consciousness of consciousness is present. or at least not the degree that human experience. Some

chimpanzees may be capable of such a human-type of awakening, though perhaps not without extensive effort from human beings. And I have doubts that even the most accomplished of these amazing animals, are, in the human sense, conscious of being conscious. In a later section, I will explore why I believe it is possible for a non-human mammalian animal to be highly conscious and highly intelligent without being conscious of being conscious in the way that we humans can experience.

Is a tree conscious? Many plants can turn their leaves to face the sun and other adaptive behaviors. If consciousness is defined as sensitivity to environment and creative responses, then some form of consciousness can be attributed even to plants. But this form of consciousness need not to be assumed to include every aspect of the consciousness found in animal life.

Is a single-celled animal conscious? As we have already noted, our microscopic companions give meaning to their sensory inputs and initiate relevant responses. If such a capacity is our definition of consciousness, then at least some single-celled creatures are to some extent conscious. Are viruses conscious? Perhaps viruses are only biological scraps that require living cells for their replication. Perhaps they are simply products of the life processes of living cells rather than a form of aliveness that preceded cells in the evolutionary process of life. If so, viruses may not be conscious beings but only complex materials constructed by living cells.

In conclusion, it appears to my conscious reflections based on my empathies with other species that there is consciousness within other-than-human species of life. We need to note that this view is not derived from direct experience; it is a guess derived from our observations of these living beings. It also seems highly probable to me that among existing species only humans have the ability to be conscious of consciousness, and can thus inquire into the nature of consciousness as we (author and reader) are doing right now. It seems to me that our experiences of living with our animal companions support the conclusion that many of the aspects of the consciousness that I experience within myself also exists in these other-than-human living beings.

It seems plausible if not obvious to me that as living forms become more complex, a more intense consciousness can be supported. I am guessing (theorizing) that consciousness is a basic process of nature that seeks to become more conscious. If so, then consciousness is one of the driving forces of evolution. Perhaps consciousness works to develop more complex organisms in order that an increased consciousness can be physically sustained.

Our biological life is clearly dependent upon mineral foundations, and our consciousness is clearly dependent upon biological foundations. But if we assume, as many do, that biological processes cause consciousness, we are assuming something far more complex than a pool-table-cause-and-effect process. Indeed, we know very little about how consciousness is related to its biological supports. We can make certain associations between brain processes and inner experiences, but the why and the how that pertains to these associations seem unfathomable.

Let us consider the following assumption (not yet refuted) about the relationship between biology and consciousness. Let us assume that consciousness is one of the cosmic forces that condition the coming into being of the biological supports for that consciousness. Let us assume that it is inadequate to suppose that the biological supports are the only causal factor. It remains true that certain conditions of temperature, chemical availability, and so on must be present for consciousness to do its creations. Let us hold in our minds the possibility that the first living cell on planet Earth did not come into being simply because some accident of physics came to pass. Let us guess instead that the first living cell came into being when consciousness as a force in the cosmos found on this Earth conditions favorable for its operation.

This assumption makes “consciousness” and “aliveness” companion concepts. Joining the concepts of “consciousness” and “aliveness” redefines both concepts. The concept of “consciousness” is expanded downward to the simplest cells. And the concept of “aliveness” is further distinguished from the chemical, atomic, and subatomic processes of the “physical” cosmos. The other elemental processes of the cosmos can be defined as unconscious or “physical” or “inanimate.”

Subatomic “particles” are very different from the solid billiard balls of hard substance, but their dynamic energy exchanges and transformations do not qualify them as living or conscious. To say that an electron makes choices is a stretch. The behavior of a single subatomic entity is unpredictable in a strictly mechanical way. Indeed, contemporary physicists are reporting that the behaviors of these tiny entities require an explanation of chance or probability rather than cause. But chance is not choice. The behavior of these tiny entities has been named “quantum mechanics” rather than “quantum aliveness.” Their behaviors do not require choice as an explanation; their behaviors can be accurately predicted with probability numbers. The behaviors of a living cell cannot be so predicted.

So aliveness remains a quality that has not been and cannot be analyzed by the discipline of physics. Physics can examine the behaviors of biological molecules and living bodies insofar as these entities are viewed in their pre-living or post-living aspects. But physics does not deal with consciousness or with life in its essence. And when biology is functioning as an empirical science, it also fails to deal with the essence of life. Aliveness is only known through the inner gaze of an alive being. To explore aliveness or consciousness we must employ contemplative inquiry. Empirical biology only studies the behaviors and the reports of living beings. The biologist assumes aliveness, and this alive biologist uses his or her own experience of aliveness to theorize about alive beings, but biology, as an empirical science, does not study aliveness directly. I repeat, scientific biology only studies the behaviors and the reports of alive beings.

Life and consciousness remain total enigmas within the scope of the scientific approach to truth. Yet this enigma of life/consciousness is clearly part of the cosmos. What part? I will explore this question further with a closer look at the physical world and the evolution of life.

Chapter 9

A Sixth Force in the Structure of the Cosmos

Students of modern physics have been made aware of the force field of gravity. In Einsteinian theory, gravity is not a force pulling from a distance but a force field created by the presence of mass. Gravity is a very weak force field. Each of my 160 pounds changes the shape of space around me, but this change is very, very small. On the other hand, the great mass of the Earth changes space considerably. It alters space in such a way that objects accelerate toward the center of that mass at approximately 32 feet-per-second-per-second (This is not a typo; acceleration can be measured in feet-per-second-per-second). What we all know, is that if we drop a pencil, it falls to the floor. Gravity is one of the primary force fields of the cosmos.

Electromagnetism is another. If you place a magnet under a piece of paper covered with iron filings, you see the filings line up with the fields of force created by the magnet. Electromagnetic fields operate in what we call "electricity." We also use the notion of electromagnetic fields to describe waves of light, ultraviolet rays, X-rays, radio waves, and more. Electromagnetism is another basic force field that characterizes the cosmos.

Within the interior processes of the atom, modern physics has discerned two more fields of force, typically called the strong force and the weak force.

Most physicists have claimed that these four basic forces are sufficient to explain the physical behavior of the cosmos. Other physicists have claimed that none of these force fields explain the phenomena of inertia. Why does an object set in motion continue in motion unless acted upon by another force? A fifth force field has been proposed, Higg's field.¹

These four or five fields of force provide an amazing array of wisdom about the manner in which our cosmos functions, but none of these fields explains life. None of them explains the presence of consciousness and of choice in the structure of the cosmos. Biologists have attempted to explain how physical processes can become living processes, but none of these explanations are convincing. From the laws of physics we cannot explain how the soil, air, and fluids of planet Earth sprouted living beings. How and why those enclosures of sensitivity and response came into being remains an unexplained mystery.

So let us assume a proposition that few biologists and still fewer physicists are willing to even consider: **life/consciousness is a sixth force field in the structure of the cosmos.** Let us assume that whenever conditions are favorable, this force field kicks into action; consciousness begins making its choices, initiating its specific journeys of trial and error toward the goal of becoming more conscious and more practically effective in the environments in which it lives. Can we say that such a dynamic in the cosmos is less likely than the existence of gravity? The reason such an assumption seems outlandish to most physicists and biologists is that consciousness must then be viewed as not accessible to the physical or biological sciences. Consciousness can only be viewed inwardly by consciousness itself. Therefore, the strict empiricist is excluded from exploring consciousness and life directly.

When we creatures with human consciousness view gravity, we are doing something different than when we view consciousness. Gravity can only be viewed when consciousness "looks" outside the body in which this consciousness is living.

¹ For more on Higg's field see Greene, Brian; *The Fabric of the Cosmos* (Vintage Books 2005) page 257

Consciousness can only be viewed when consciousness “looks” inside the body in which this consciousness is living. We cannot see consciousness with the external view. Externally, we can see brains and nerves and genes and behaviors of living beings, but we cannot see consciousness. We only view consciousness when we look within our own now presently living consciousness. Externally, we can each see or hear reports from conscious beings through the motions and noises that these living beings make, but we do not experience their consciousness as they only can experience it. We base our assumption of the existence of consciousness in other living beings upon our experience of consciousness within our own living beings. This truth about consciousness is an offense to the usual assumptions of the physicists and biologists that consciousness will someday be explained by reducing it to one or more of the physical forces of physics.

If a direct experience of consciousness can only be had by our inward looking consciousness itself, we are stating an absolute limitation upon the scope of empirical science. This limitation on observation is not the case when we observe the array of factors we call “gravity,” “electromagnetism,” etc. All these forces are discerned by looking outward, by giving rational form to our outward experiences – experiences we have formulated into specific facts and have tested and retested in publicly repeatable experiences that a whole community of observers can observe.

Consciousness, however, must be explored within the singular person by the consciousness of that singular person. A community of persons can then compare notes on what they have discovered within their own beings. These inner experiences are not objective facts of scientific, empirical construction; they are interior noticings by human noticers. In terms of a strict definition of empirical science, interior noticing is not “scientific.” Nevertheless, consciousness is something “objective” in this sense: **consciousness is there to be noticed.** Consciousness is not simply an abstract idea that has no reference in experience. Consciousness is an actuality about which ideas have been and can be formulated. Consciousness is part of the structure of the cosmos. However different from empirical science our approach to this mysterious verity needs to be, consciousness is no less real than gravity.

If consciousness is a field of force in the cosmos, it is a field of force that is invisible to the scientific approach to truth. Its consequences are visible, but its “thereness” is not. We have to employ the contemplative approach to truth in order to notice consciousness. When we employ the “We” approach of truth, we can meld into our cultural overviews the outer truth approached by science, the inner truth approached by conscious contemplation, with the working hypothesis that consciousness is (or may be) another force field in the structure of the cosmos.

The assumption that consciousness is a sixth force field in the structure of the cosmos does not make necessary the assumption of a second universe alongside the universe described by physics. Consciousness is just another enigmatic force in the same universe as gravity. Nor does the assumption that consciousness is a sixth force justify belief in a supreme being alongside this one reality we experience inwardly and outwardly. Nor need we assume that consciousness is a mighty force that causes everything else. Consciousness is a history-creating force along with other history-creating forces, but this need not mean that consciousness has some sort of infinite standing. Seeking these and other truths about consciousness is simply a matter of noticing its functioning within our own lives.

In the chapters that follow, I am going to report on my noticings about this sixth force of the cosmos. This can become a discussion and a joint project of understanding only if you, the reader, “look” into your own inner world of consciousness to see if my reports correspond with your experiences. Indeed, I have clarified my own noticing by hearing the reports of many other explorers of that inner realm to which each of us has

access. This nonscientific contemplative exploration is in its own way “objective,” for consciousness and the phenomena of consciousness are indeed real – real dynamics that challenge our thinking minds to invent ever more profound clarity about them. Consciousness is an enigmatic reality in which we all dwell. So for the time being, let us just assume that consciousness is a sixth force field in the structure of the cosmos.

Chapter 10

Consciousness and Evolution

If being alive is being conscious, then our study of the evolution of life must include the story of consciousness. In this chapter, I will suggest that consciousness is an impetus that is seeking to remain conscious and become more conscious. Sometimes consciousness may choose to become less conscious. But in either case, if life is conscious and consciousness makes choices, evolution is surely affected by those choices. So, how do we tell the story of evolution with this in mind?

The classical theories of evolution describe evolution in terms of the causal factors of surviving in the specific environments in which species survive. Classical theories also describe evolution in terms of the chance factors of mutation within the genes of the evolving species of life. Less attention has been paid to the role that conscious choices play in the process of evolution. The facts of evolution can, in very large measure, be explained by causal factors and chance factors, but if consciousness has always been present in living beings, consciousness is also surely part of the explanation of evolution.

We need, therefore, to stretch our imaginations beyond the explanations of causality and chance when we tell the story of evolution. It is a bit too much to say that consciousness, through its evolutionary journey, chooses to develop eyes and ears and a sense of smell in order to be more attentive to its environment. It is bit too much to say that consciousness, through its evolutionary journey, chose to developed legs and arms and fingers in order to be more responsive to its environment. Yet these statements contain a fragment of truth. We need not assume that the whole of evolutionary development was an accident, though much of it certainly was. We need not assume that the whole of evolutionary development was environmentally caused, though much of it certainly was. So, let us assume that some aspects of evolutionary development can be and needs to be explained by choices, by conscious animal beings making choices. How can we train our minds to see this more clearly?

Here is a simple illustration. Let us say that some adult birds chose to move to a different environment. This move was not caused, and it was not accidental. It was chosen. Another environment might have been chosen. Then, this choice had consequences. The descendants that survived and flourished were those that were best adapted to that chosen environment, eating its food, escaping its enemies. At the end of this process we see birds, let us say, with a particular shape of beak. It is too simplistic to say that this species of bird chose their shape of beak. Nevertheless, it is true to say that the choices that adult birds made were part of the explanation for why that particular beak came into being.

Thomas Berry in one of his speeches made this basic point with respect to why we have both horses and bison. Both types of large grass-eating mammals came into being in very similar environments starting with gene pools that were also similar. Why then did some of this gene pool become horses and some of it become bison? Horses became horses, says Berry, for the love of galloping. The bison branch chose butting instead. Both choices worked well for the survival and flourishing of these two branches of life. Of course these statements of Berry's are a sort of poetry. It was surely true that the pre-horse and the pre-bison did not know how this basic direction was going to work out. They did not plan it. But choices were made. In the emergence of the horse clan

perhaps the females just liked gallopers better than butters. In other words, consciousness does not plan or control its future evolution. Consciousness simply tries experiments in living. Some experiments survive and some do not. But consciousness trying things is choice, not chance or cause. Choices matter. Alongside chance happenings and environmental causes, choices also influence results.

We may also theorize about how much influence the adult experience has on the mutation of genes. Does the trial and error process within adult consciousness have some influence on the probabilities of changes in that animal's genetic structures? This process may look like random chance, but with consciousness being a factor, perhaps useful change has the capacity to be faster than a process of complete randomness. And this is what we often see in the archeological record – rather sudden rapid changes taking place that stretch the theory of random mutations to its breaking point.

Also, it is helpful to point out that “randomness” is just a concept in the human mind. Perfect randomness is not found in the real world. As chaos theory shows us, chaotic processes are never perfectly random but possess a measure of order operating within the apparent chaos. And nowhere in the real world is the factor of chance altogether absent. Perfect determinism, like perfect randomness, is not how our cosmos works. Cause and chance mingle together as modes of explanation of real world process. In the real world of living beings, consciousness also enters the mingle. Uncaused choices do take place, choices that are not even probability-determined outcomes. To what extent choice is a factor in evolution remains open for further investigation.

Whatever such investigation shows, three things are true: Our living beings are caused. Our living beings are an accident. And our living beings are chosen. If consciousness is indeed what makes living alive, then choice must play some part of the explanation for how the evolution of life has worked out and how it is still working out. All three modes of explanation are valid. We need not say that having three modes of explanation is inconsistent. We need not insist that one of these modes of explanation must cover our entire view of evolution. When we insist on having the consistency of a single explanation, we are arbitrarily choosing that guess. We are probably choosing it in order to believe that the human mind has a capacity for correspondences with Reality that it does not have. So, let us be more humble. Let us accept the rather obvious truth that the human mind is a finite development and that Reality is only fragmentarily understandable by this amazing and yet puny human capability we call “mind.” Our mind uses cause, chance, and choice because all three of these modes of explanation help us construct our sense of reality and predict outcomes well enough to enhance our survival and well-being. It is not necessary for our well-being to have one consistent explanation that covers everything. And any claim that our biology is wired to seek a completely rational explanation for everything is just one more human guess, for which certainty is lacking.

In what we call “human history,” choice clearly plays a major part in that “story.” We choose to remember our past in a specific manner. We choose to anticipate our future in a specific manner. These chosen memories and chosen anticipations guide our choices in the living now, choices we make toward those future “Now(s)” that we hope to experience. The evolution of pre-human life took place without this human quality of consciousness (this aware history-making intentionality), nevertheless choices were constantly being made by all living beings, and those choices surely affected evolution.

In the evolution of life, the human mind confronts mystery, enigma, uncertainty, the unknowable unknown. Life is an enigma. Consciousness is an enigma, unknown in its fullness, inexhaustible in its mysteriousness. Choice is not reasonable; choice is uncaused, and nonrandom. Choice is arbitrary in a way that no probability numbers

can predict. "Choice" is a word for consciousness in action. Consciousness manifests its presence through choices.

The Origin of Life on Earth

Our scientific community has explored this planet's history deeply enough to have a fairly accurate picture of when life began on this planet. About three and a half billion years ago, single-celled life forms appeared. These simple cells had no nucleus or any other organelles within their membrane. These single-celled life forms are called "prokaryotes."

Over a billion years later, some of these simple cells formed the more complex cells that are called "eukaryotes." Eukaryotes amount to communities of simple cells (prokaryotes-type organelles) within the single membrane enclosure of the eukaryotes. One of these interior structures, the "nucleus" contains the chromosomes and genes. The familiar amoeba is an illustration of this development. The life of the amoeba has evolved since its first appearance and is still evolving, but as a form of life it is very primitive. If we look at it closely we get some clues as to what life is and how it arose on this planet.

We see its nucleus swimming in a fluid with millions of other simple life forms, each of which now depend for their survival and thriving upon the whole cell. They make their contribution to and they receive their needs from this overall complex organization. At some point in the deep past the ancestry of these many life forms chose to cooperate together rather than live separately. Yes, there were chance factors. Yes, there were causal factors. And we can also visualize that each of these organelles of life within the complex nucleated cells has its own sensitivity and response-ability. Further this sensitivity and response-ability played some role in the coming into being of this complex nucleated cell type.

Biologists have attempted to explain the functioning of such cells in a mechanical manner. They imagine that the genes in the nucleus control the life of the cell like a computer program. Or to use another analogy, we commonly view the genes as the brain of the cell, an unconscious mechanical brain that determines causally all the parts and functions of the cell. But upon more careful observation we find that these genes are turned on or off by a very large number of switch-like entities. The study of these entities is being called "epigenetics." "Epi" means "over." These overlords or "switches" are many-fold larger in number than the genes. Now, this question arises: Who tells these overlords what to do? Who turns these switches on or off? It turns out that the skin or enclosure of the cell contains the sensors and responders of the cell. The skin or membrane of the cell turns out to be the brain-like feature of the cell. This skin takes in the environment and chooses what responses the whole cell needs to make to escape danger and select food. This skin also makes choices about the internal organization of the cell. The evolution of this single celled life form is in part conditioned by the choices made by its skin. And this includes changes made in its genes. So the evolution of the cell is not simply a matter of accidents of gene mutation. Rather the possibilities for gene change are in part selected by the skin's "consciousness" of what is needed for survival and thriving. The skin of the amoeba is alive with choices being made for the entire organism. And each of the tiny sub-cells or organelles that comprise the millions of subparts of this organism is also alive in a similar way. Each has its skin. The life of the amoeba is at least this complex. Indeed, the complexities are difficult even to imagine.

Nevertheless, let us imagine further. About a billion years after the first eukaryotes (amoeba-like beings) came to be, these complex cells began working together in multi-cellular organisms. Our human body is an example of that development. The human

body has whole cells that specialize in being our skin. Those skin cells communicate our sense of touch to our nervous system and brain. We might say that our brain and nervous system is an evolutionary development of the function played by the skin or membrane of the amoeba. Our skin is part of our brain. Our eyes and ears are part of our brain. The amoeba was blind and deaf; it got by with a sense of touch, and perhaps taste and smell. Clearly the senses of the amoeba were fewer in number than ours and very elemental compared with ours. Our evolution has greatly expanded that aspect of aliveness we call "sensing the environment." With this expansion has come an expansion of our consciousness. Or we might say that consciousness in our evolutionary story participated in making choices that made for an increase in consciousness. We can meaningfully theorize that consciousness has the propensity to not only survive and thrive but to expand the intensity of its consciousness.

When the first simple cells joined to make complex nucleated cells, they expanded the intensity of consciousness. When nucleated cells combined to form multicellular organisms, they expanded the intensity of consciousness. The evolution of our species demonstrates not only an expansion of relative brain size, but also an expansion in the intensity of our consciousness. We might even speculate that it was the expanding consciousness that kept opting for an expanded brain capacity to handle the thrust of that expanding consciousness. We need to assume that the story of life is at least this complex.

All this means that life forms are not the victim of their genes. Rather, genes are developed to pass along the experiences of conscious living. Genes are not the brains or the consciousness of a cell. Genes are the gonads of the cell. And the evolution of the gonads is in part a product of the choices made by that skin of consciousness. And consciousness is the essence of being alive. Without consciousness an organism or a cell is just a rotting collection of complex compounds.

So how did that very first simple cell come into being? All our attempts to tell this story in a mechanical way do not succeed. All our efforts to create life from unlife have failed and in all likelihood will continue to fail. Some of the complex molecules appearing in living cells might come into being through physical processes, but how can we be content with the explanation that the appearance of an enclosure of such compounds within a skin that is sensitive and responsive was somehow caused by unliving causes? Indeed, we must at least consider that if we are working with only the axioms of physics we have locked our minds into a box of reasoning that can never build a meaningful scenario for the appearance of a living enclosure – a skin that can take in what it needs to produce the ever-more-complex compounds it needs to survive, thrive, reproduce, and evolve. It is not beyond the bounds of plausibility to assume that these complex happenings of living forms required "choice."

So, we arrive again in the presence of the enigma of consciousness. Even if we cling to the story that a select number of the solids, gases, and fluids on this planet possessed the capacity for springing into life, we are asserting that these materials are strange indeed: they are more strange than the concepts of physics can express. We can just as easily suggest that consciousness is some sort of sixth force in the structure of cosmos, waiting to happen when conditions are right. Gravity and electromagnetism are also strange forces. Einstein's explanation of the nature of gravity is still quite baffling to most people. And electromagnetism, of which light is one aspect, is even more baffling. Is light propagated as waves through some kind of medium, or is light a stream of specifically sized energy packets? We have sophisticated mathematical elaborations for both pictures. So what is light really? The scientific approach to truth cannot come up with one image for light. Light is unimaginable in a singular consistent way. Life may be equally unimaginable within the bounds of any rational system that human minds have or can ever create.

Not only is consciousness enigmatic to the human mind, but also the scientific approach to truth cannot even observe consciousness directly. Science is restricted to observe only behaviors of and reports from conscious beings. In order to see consciousness in operation, we have to use the contemplative approach to truth. That is, we have to look within our own conscious being and report what we observe in our own inward experience. This is contrary to the objective and public nature of the scientific approach. Contemplative wisdom can be objective in the sense of being honest reporting, but such objectivity is not the same as public facts that can be tested scientifically. The behaviors and report of consciousness can be public facts, but not consciousness itself. Consciousness has to be inquired into contemplatively by consciousness. At the same time the scientific approach to truth does assume the consciousness of the scientist about whose consciousness the scientist, as scientist, is responsibly silent. And the scientific approach does encounter in the functions and evolution of biological life that unapproachable enigma of consciousness. The scientific knowledge we have about biological life can provoke us conscious beings to imagine an enigmatic presence of a reality we call “consciousness” or “aliveness” – the same consciousness and aliveness that we can contemplate within.

Finally, it is important to say that our having to use both the scientific approach and the contemplative approach to elaborate the presence of consciousness does not mean that Reality has two realms, the material and the spiritual. No, we can quite easily assume that there is only one realm – that we are merely looking at this one realm in two different ways. The material/spiritual duality of realms is a picture in the human mind – a picture that has become exceedingly doubtful in its application to what is Real. This picture has had some meaningful uses in the past, but it has worn out its usefulness in the actual living of millions of people today. Indeed, the very words (“material” and “spiritual”) have become misleading to us. The good news is that the war between the material and the spiritual is over – because there never needed to be a conflict between the truth held in each these two concepts. Humanity had always been experiencing not two realms but two approaches to the same unity. We cannot interpret our so-called spiritual insights as something material, as some materialists attempted to do. And we cannot interpret our so-called material experiences as something spiritual, as some spiritualists attempted to do. That discussion has reached an absolute dead end. In the words “material” and “spiritual” we have two companion illusions fighting each other in an endless and futile battle. From now on we will be creating some confusion whenever we use the words “material” or “spiritual.” We need to assign these words to the shelf of history as parts of an interesting, but now obsolete pattern of thinking.

The Confusion of Intelligent Design

Including consciousness and choice in our theories of evolution does not justify the theories of intelligent design that are being promoted by persons who oppose classical evolutionary thought because it conflicts with a literal interpretation of the two-story metaphorical writing of the biblical heritage. Intelligent-design thinkers have asked us to notice the complexity of the design of biological organisms and therefore to conclude that this complexity is proof that such designs could not have come about by chance occurrences. Such intelligent designs, we are asked to believe, imply the existence of a Final Designer occupying that assumed upper realm. These thinkers are not using the scientific method of thought; they are simply assuming the existence of a Final Designer from their acceptance of some authoritative source.

Let us examine more closely the thinking that is going on in this intelligent-design discussion. First of all, the word “intelligent” is rooted for its meaning in our

experience of our own minds or perhaps also the minds of other animals. When we use the word “intelligent” to refer to Reality as a whole, we are using an analogy from our finite experience to speak of something that has infinite scope. All we have in the way of a direct experience of Reality-as-a-Whole (or Reality with a capital “R”) is the experience of sheer Mystery. So when we suggest that Reality has an Intelligent Design we are extrapolating from our puny concepts of “intelligence” and “design” to a realm that can never be tested scientifically or contemplatively. To say that the Infinite Mystery is a Design is a myth. It is story made up by humans. The story may say something, but it is a story and, therefore, must not be taken literally.

Over seven centuries ago Thomas Aquinas used the term “Eternal Law” in virtually the same way that Intelligent Design is being used today. But Thomas admitted that his “Eternal Law” is not accessible to the mind of humanity. He saw that Eternal Law was an analogy applied to an Absolute Mystery. Here is a paraphrase of Thomas’ thinking: “Let us suppose that there is an Eternal King who promulgates an Eternal Law.” This “supposing” is analogical thinking. The only lawfulness or design we have ever grasped with our minds has been a lawfulness or design invented by human beings. Such lawfulness or intelligent design is finite, a finite creation by finite minds. Thomas Aquinas called such finite designs “natural law” – that part of Eternal Law that the human mind can possess. Thomas also spoke of “human laws” as designs invented by humans to render social life workable. Final Reality, the “Eternal Law,” is unknown to us. Final Reality is Sheer Mystery to us. All our experiences of design are partial, finite, limited, and changing. Furthermore “Eternal Will” is as good or perhaps a better metaphor than “Eternal Law.”

We are speaking with analogies whenever we speak about Final Reality with such terms as law, will, mind, intelligent design, spontaneous generation, random madness, or anything else. Reality with a capital “R” is sheer Mystery relative to our human experience. Reality is infinitely beyond the capacities of our human minds to grasp. We can talk about Reality in stories or myths, but if we do not notice that we are creating myths, we veer into illusion – the illusion of literalism.

If we admit that we are doing analogical thinking, then such thinking is at least honest. And such honesty includes the admission that we are creating a sort of poetry about a Mystery of which we know nothing, rationally speaking. If we speak of knowing God, we have to be pointing to how consciousness bumps up against Sheer Mystery. In such a way, our poetry may be expressing some inner realizations of our relations to Sheer Mystery. But our poetry is not science. Our poetry may be a witness to some inner truth, or our poetry may be an expression of some superstition. In either case our poetry is not science; that is, it is not literal truth.

As I will maintain throughout this book, religion has no quarrel with science when science is understood to be the creation of theoretical summations of what can be observed through the human senses by a community of observers. With these “outward” observations the scientist can widen his or her experience of that Final Mysteriousness about which scientific work creates a partial knowledge. But anyone claiming a “discovery” of intelligent design for the whole of Reality is not doing science. Such thinking is “pseudo-science,” that is, it is actually an authoritarian religion seeking justification for itself through the practice of an incompetent view of science.

Consciousness and the Complexity of Life Forms

The complexity of life forms does, however, make implausible the claim that life emerged exclusively by chance mutations. The quickness with which new species have arrived suggests probabilities that are so low that it becomes a stretch to make chance our only means of explanation. Seeing consciousness as a third factor (in addition to

cause and chance) in the story of evolution opens our minds to far more plausible explanations of what happened and is still happening in the evolution of living forms.

Life has been and is conscious. It makes choices. And these choices speed the emergence of survivable species. Like chance happenings, choices can create organisms that turn out to be mistakes in terms of survivability. But choice can do better than chance because it is a determination made on the basis of inputs from the environment sorted out in the lived consciousness of adult members of a species.

But however all this may be, my brief journey into evolutionary theory has been taken merely to open our imagination to the rather astonishing implications of seeing consciousness and choice as the very essence of aliveness. We move on now to observe consciousness more closely with the inner eye of contemplation.

Chapter 11

Five Layers of Consciousness

The consciousness that characterizes human beings contains at least five layers of evolutionary development: (1) the cell-based consciousness that humans share with single-celled creatures, (2) the image-using consciousness that humans share with animal life, (3) the emotion-based consciousness that humans share with the other mammals, (4) the symbol-using consciousness that is unique to humans among existing species, and (5) the consciousness of wonder that is foundational for understanding human religious practices. This fifth layer of consciousness is variously referred to with terms like “aware presence,” “awakenment,” “enlightenment,” “true nature,” “essence,” “holiness,” “the numinous,” “awe,” “the nonconceptual” or simply “wonder.”

Earlier primate species, such as *Homo Erectus* or the Neanderthals, may have been gifted with: (4) the symbol-using type of intelligence and (5) the consciousness of wonder. But whether the dawning of these last two layers of consciousness took place before our species, with the dawning of our species, or after our species had evolved, it is probable that we now live on a planet on which only humans manifest the 4 and 5 layers of consciousness.

In the following discussion, I will refer to these five layers of consciousness as: (1) cell-based consciousness, (2) image-using consciousness, (3) emotion-based consciousness, (4) symbol-using consciousness, and (5) wonder-based consciousness.

(1) Cell-based Consciousness

As suggested in earlier chapters, I am assuming that all cells, including the cells of our own human bodies, are characterized by an elementary level of consciousness. A rock does not pay attention to its environment nor take initiatives toward its environment. An amoeba takes in signals from its environment and initiates responses. We can watch that under a microscope. Similarly, each cell in our body takes in signals from its environment and initiates responses. Strict materialists have tended to assume that a living cell is machine/like, similar to a very complex human-made robot. Such materialists tend to claim that a cell is understandable with cause and effect relations, and therefore devoid of self-initiated behaviors. Such a view does not look carefully enough at the enigma of life. A cell is a living being.

I do not believe that the cells of our bodies are conscious of being conscious. And I realize that I, though conscious of my consciousness, am unconscious (or only vaguely conscious) of the consciousness in my body's cells. My heart beats without any need for assistance from my self-conscious awareness. It may be true that my self-conscious stress may increase my heartbeat. It may be true that my consciousness, intensely applied, can affect my heartbeats to a limited degree. But basically, I am unconscious of the work of my heart cells and glad that they do their job without assistance from the conscious me. My limbs grow and repair without any input from my conscious awareness. Billions of life functions go on without my being conscious of them. Nevertheless, we can define these amazing cellular functions as conscious. We can define “consciousness” in a wide enough way to take in these cellular functions. In defining “consciousness” in this manner, we make clear that consciousness is aliveness, and that aliveness is consciousness. What distinguishes a tree from a rock is cellular consciousness. A tree is alive because a cosmic force field called “consciousness” is functioning in the tree. Being alive and being conscious are corresponding concepts. The implications of this perspective are vast.

(2) Image-using Consciousness

By image-using consciousness I mean a capacity for multi-sensory reruns that we humans call "memory." This layer of consciousness is present in all animal life. Snakes, lizards, dogs, cats and other animals appear to function with memory reruns. They learn from their experiences. I believe that the amazing intelligence of some of these animals is nothing less nor more than high levels of skill in associating and projecting the meanings of these vivid memory reruns. To do this, animal life uses what I am calling an image-using intelligence.

Here is an illustration of how this image-using intelligence works. A dog, genetically driven to be curious, chases down a porcupine and painfully injures his nose on one of its quills. This multi-sensory experience is recorded in the dog's brain and reruns as a memory when another porcupine is encountered. Image-using intelligence uses this and other such memory reruns to create projections of possible future outcomes that inform the dog to construct a next response to porcupines that is less painful than the last one. This process does not require what humans call "thinking;" it only requires a form of image-using consciousness that need not be conscious of being conscious. This image-using process is a type of consciousness, however. Evaluations are made. Projections are made. Decisions are made. Image-using consciousness is not a billiard-ball-bouncing process or a probabilistic process. Image-using consciousness is creative, experimental, trial and error learning.

This mental process of using images (multi-sensory reruns of past experiences) is also an important process within human functioning. Because we, like all animals, are equipped with this image-using consciousness, we can identify with our dogs, cats, horses, frogs, snakes, and other animals. A key issue for defining "image-using based consciousness" is distinguishing it from "symbol-using based consciousness." Our dog or cat does not use words, numbers, or other mathematical and linguistic symbols. We humans do. Our languages, our arts, our mathematics allow us to build grand cultural memory banks that greatly improve our capacity to survive, to know ourselves, to know our world, and to create alternations in the course of events. This capacity for symbol-using is a significantly different capacity than the capacity of using images or multi-sensory reruns. Nevertheless, we humans are also dependent upon our image-using consciousness, just as we are also dependent upon our cell-based consciousness.

For example, imagine yourself swinging a bat at a pitched baseball. Your eyes pick up a flow of images of that arriving baseball. That flow of images becomes a flow of memories or reruns that your consciousness observes. Your consciousness uses those memories to predict where that ball is going to go next and how it will be curving or not curving as it passes you. At some point in your awareness about that ball you begin swinging the bat in the hope of meeting that ball where you "anticipate" it is going. All this is accomplished with images. You don't need your linguistic thinking process to bat this ball. You may use such thinking ahead of time to calculate what to expect from this pitcher. But in the act of batting itself, as Yogi Berra once remarked, "You don't think; you just bat." Image-using intelligence is operating in a vast portion of our lives. We would not be able to function as we do without this type of consciousness. We could not walk up a flight of stairs without image-using based consciousness. Without it, a dog would not be able to catch a Frisbee in midair. Without it, a cat would not be able to remember where its cat bowl was located. We would not be effective animals without these mental images that rerun in our "minds." The specific sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches we have keenly noticed in the past are recorded in our brains or nervous systems and these recordings of past multi-sensory experiences automatically associate with our currently happening experiences. This is only a rough sketch of this powerful mode of conscious intelligence.

(3) Emotion-based Consciousness

In mammalian life, sensory inputs have been augmented with the input of highly sensitive emotional feelings. Emotional feelings are a mode of sensitivity that allows for the bonding relations and charged responses not yet fully developed in a snake or frog. Emotions require a new layer of brain very minimally developed in reptiles. This mid-brain is highly developed in mammals. Emotions provide us with hot interpretations of the sensory inputs. These interpretations are hot in the sense that our present beliefs or taken-for-granted images of reality are involved. The quality of our emotions is not determined by sensory inputs alone. Our beliefs play a big role in determining the quality of an emotion. Emotions are indeed enacted by inputs, especially those that pertain to our individual survival, comfort, drives, projects, communal relations, and more. But the same emotions can happen when we incorrectly believe that the sensory inputs pertain to our survival, comfort, etc. Our body produces emotions in keeping with what our brains tell our bodies is happening. If our stories and beliefs are realistic, then our emotional responses are also realistic. But if our stories and beliefs are illusory, then our emotional signals are also illusory.

Here is a second key fact to take in about emotions. Emotions are a capacity in our biology that precedes the evolution of the human quality of consciousness. Emotions are clearly present in all forms of mammalian life. Emotions are one of the foundations upon which human consciousness has developed. This is not a critique of our emotional life. The emotional repertoire of mammalian consciousness is an essential component of human functioning. Without it we would be severely handicapped. Since all mammals appear to have emotions, it is obvious that emotional life can function without the presence of our uniquely human symbol-using consciousness. Emotional life is pre-human. It uses images not symbols. Emotional life becomes further enriched and more complex as symbol-using consciousness evolves.

Emotions are part of all mammalian life. Your dog has emotional feelings; including deep grief over your extended absence. Your cat may discharge anger by an all too vigorous scratching on the rug or other strange behaviors. Your pet snake has the drive for survival, pleasure seeking, pain avoidance, sensual sensitivities, and sexual urges, but its emotional life is paltry compared to a member of a mammalian species. A snake's capacities for bonding with you or with its own young are minimal compared with that of your dog or horse.

Emotion-using intelligence is one of the developments that distinguish the mammals from the reptiles and birds. In mammalian life, emotional inputs are added to the more primitive sensory inputs and image-using capacities. The remembering and anticipating process in mammals is enriched by the memory and anticipation of emotions. Mammals remember emotionally, anticipate emotionally, and choose their responses emotionally. Like humans, they apparently feel affection, loneliness, sadness, joy, fear, anger, and many other feelings. This highly developed emotional form of consciousness existed in mammalian life forms before that leap into the uniquely human quality of consciousness was taken – a leap that I am calling “symbol-using consciousness.”

(4) Symbol-using Consciousness

Symbols are not the same as images. Symbols are not multi-sensory-reruns, not vivid memory recordings. “Symbols” is my term for mental entities that form complex generalizations from the more practical, vivid, and perhaps emotional charged image-formed memory reruns. For example, the symbol “four” applies to four cats, four dogs, four tables, four days, four years, four miles, etc. The mental entity “four” is not

a sensory image, but an abstracted quality found in many images. Symbols can associate a large number of images into what we human treasure as abstract thought. Image-using alone, without any use of symbols, creates a high level of intelligence in many animals. A cat or dog does not require symbols to live its life. It is my belief that even when we humans have taught a very smart dog, horse, chimpanzee or bird to count, these animals still do this trick using their image-using consciousness. A human child of two years old, if raised in a human society, is skilled with symbols in a way that no other species can remotely match. As adults we use words, numbers, art constructions, and other abstractions with a facility that is truly amazing. With ease we compose large generalizations about life and ever more elaborate designs for living. Intelligent animals do something different. Their communication with one another does not use language and art, but "signs." A bow, a bark, a growl, a posture, and many other subtle acts are signs that indicate something to other members of their species, as well as to other species. Humans can communicate with other species using visible movements and oral sounds that operate as signs that communicate with the image-using intelligence of these companions. Humans communicate with one another in the image-using manner as well as with language, mathematics, and art. But words, language, music, painting, dancing, rituals, and so on indicate a whole new order of communication, self-expression, and self-understanding.

Indeed, we humans often overuse our symbol-using consciousness. We get lost in it. We find ourselves living in delusory worlds of our own creation, rather than using our symbol-using consciousness to live more consciously and usefully in the real world. This mode of consciousness is our gift and our nemesis. Because of this endowment we are the most powerful and creative species, but we are also the most destructive and dangerous species on the planet. Our potential to be a powerful form of destructiveness is rooted in this symbol-using consciousness.

Symbols are used by humans in the type of mental process we customarily point to with the term "thinking." Thinking uses both the symbol-using and image-using processes. When our thinking is only symbol-using without being rooted in our imaginal reruns of actual experiences, our thinking has become excessively abstract and potentially delusional. Abstraction is not a problem in itself. It is a great gift enabling the kinds of thinking human can do. Our very best thinking, however, remains conscious of its abstractness and remains attentive to the "grounding" of our symbols in our imaginal reruns. When we work puzzles or do word and number games, we are consciously playing with our symbol-using capacity. Being aware of our capacity for abstraction is also an awareness of our capacity to return to the concretely imaged encounters and responses of our practical living.

Mathematics is the most abstract of all our abstract thinking. We might define mathematics as the abstract exploration of the human mind's capacities for abstraction. Mathematics is so abstract that the mathematician is often the most aware of how abstract all thinking actually is. Because of this awareness, many mathematicians are also musicians or poets. In the arts, abstract symbols are used to evoke rich fabrics of our sensory images and emotional feelings that connect us with our total living. Though mathematics is abstract, our use of it need not be delusional, if we are aware that we are dealing with abstractions. We become delusional when we assume that our mathematics has a reality other than the capacities of the human mind for abstraction. The actual cosmos is not mathematical; it is mysterious to our mathematics-ordered minds. The relevance of mathematical order in our understanding of the cosmos derives from the fact that our mind's capacity for order evolved within this cosmos. But mathematics, like all forms of human logic and thought, are human-made and thus finite, limited, capable of being improved, and potentially delusional if we misapply these patterns of order to our experienced reality. So what is delusional is not

abstractness itself, but our confusion of our abstract constructions with the processes that are the real world. This confusion can be called “misplaced concretion,” seeing the abstract as the concrete.

It is also important to emphasize that symbol-using consciousness includes more than language and mathematics. A painting is a symbol-using creation; it creates a virtual spatial experience that can call our attention to or give meaning to our actual experiences in space. Similarly a piece of music is a highly abstract symbolization of the flow of emotional feelings. Music helps us become conscious of our consciousness of the emotional flow of our lives. It may seem paradoxical that music is both a very high abstraction and an evoking of deeply concrete emotionally charged experiences. All the arts are symbolic products that evoke imaginal memories and anticipations.

Important for the central aim of this book is the insight that symbol-using consciousness produced the symbols that constitute what we call “religion.” Religious symbols are constructed by taking linguistic symbols and artistic symbols and stretching them into tools of expression for those aspects of human consciousness that can reach into the essential mysteriousness of our experience. Human consciousness has the capacity to reach beyond both images and symbols, beyond emotional and sensory inputs, into the enigma of consciousness itself and into an awareness of the overall, impenetrable Mystery out of which our consciousness comes and to which it returns.

Religion is our temporal, finite, down-to-Earth human attempt to access and express to one another what I will call our wonder-based consciousness. When religious communicators speak of the overarching wholeness of Reality with a capital “R,” they are actually speaking of our wonder-filled experiences of actualities that are entirely mysterious to the human mind.

(5) Wonder-based Consciousness

The functioning of image-using and symbols-using consciousness is frequently lumped together under the abstraction “mind.” Some psychologists call the image-using consciousness “the reactive mind.” Imaginal reruns of previous experience are reactive in the sense that they require no conscious intentionality for them to function. For example, the sight of something dangerous puts our body in motion before we have time to think with language. This is useful for our survival. Thinking is too slow to be useful in many circumstances. Our immediate experience calls upon our reruns of old experiences and our cellular endowments to initiate movement quickly. This is intelligent activity, but it happens quicker than thought. Thought requires a pause in this reactivity. Thought requires “time to think.” Only after such responses are already in motion do self-conscious choices begin to take place. At some point we pause to think and make choices. Our symbol-using mind is used to guide these more time-consuming choices. Psychologists often call this “the reflective mind.” Image-using and symbol-using intelligence constantly interact in complex patterns we typically call “thinking.”

When “thinking” and “mind” are so defined, we view a very powerful tool; nevertheless, mental functioning is not the deepest layer of consciousness. We have to look deeper to see the true essence of consciousness that undergirds all the other layers of consciousness described above. For example, when we meditate for sustained periods of time, we begin to notice that our conscious being is able to watch the mind function without engaging in its busy patterns. The experience of being the “watcher” points to a truth about human consciousness. We can notice that consciousness precedes reason – is more basic to our existence than thinking. We exist as a conscious being in a way that is deeper than and prior to thinking.

Competent contemplative inquiry can also assist us to be aware of an inability to put into words this experience of being conscious of consciousness. Consciousness has a transrational quality. To speak of this quality we have to twist words into poetry, myth, analogy, paradoxes, parables, koans, and other such constructions that allow us to communicate to one another our consciousness of a consciousness that is beyond words – indeed beyond art, beyond mind, beyond rational understanding. Such communication can only be communicated with persons who likewise possess this transrational awareness. Here are three poems that can assist us to notice our personal experience of this transrational quality of our own being.

Alert

I am an alert deer.
Dread gets my attention
and I can move quickly
in many directions.
I am a surprise
and hard to predict.
A fear of real enemies
is the alertness of a deer,
While my alertness is
dread of a mysteriousness
no deer can know.
And I am unpredictable
in a manner
no deer can match.
Dread of the Unfathomable
is my essence.
Surprise
is my being.

Ode To Wittgenstein

Words cannot say how words say anything
Words can only point to REALITY beyond words.
“Reality” is itself a word,
a word which points to what is not a word.

And yet, since the word “reality” is itself
part of REALITY,
there has to be a relationship between
“reality” the word
and REALITY which is not a word.

“Can this relationship,” the philosopher asks,
“be expressed in words.”
“NO!” is the answer.

In other words, REALITY is a MYSTERY
not reducible to words,
And the relationship between words and MYSTERY
is itself a mystery beyond words.

The logic of words is not, no, never,
the “LOGIC”

of MYSTERIOUS REALITY.
“Logic,” when applied to REALITY,
is a metaphor
stolen from the experience of
human languages and mathematics.

The world of rational understanding
is a world of made not a world of born.
Trees, squirrels, birds, rainfall, grass,
are a world of born gleaming there
quite beyond our mind-made world of words.

So thinkers, let us think
about these matters that humble all thinkers,
that render us mere children at play,
children who play with words
who play with REALITY
who play with the relationship between
words and REALITY.

I asked REALITY, this morning,
if what I am saying in words is correct,
and SHE said, “It is very close.”

What is the Purpose?

“The purpose of life,”
some theologian said,
“is to trust the Mystery
and to enjoy Mystery forever.”

Some sage in the East put it this way,
“Those who say what the purpose of life is don’t know,
And those who know what the purpose of life is don’t say.”

The Infinite seems to be silent on the subject.

So I say, “The purpose of life is to ask
what the purpose of life is continually,
but to never know or expect to know –
indeed to know
that the purpose of life is
not to know
what the purpose of life is.

So let us choose in freedom
some finite purpose for our lives,
knowing that we have chosen it
and that we can choose again
when its limitations appear.

Through the aid of such poetry (and other means) we can notice the limitations of our image-using and symbol-using minds. And when we do, we are ready to grasp with our consciousness, if not our minds, how and why religion is part of every human society and how healthy religion is a means of aiding consciousness to journey into the depths of consciousness. Like any social process, religion can be unhealthy; it can provide substitutions for the authentic journey into our real depths. And even the healthiest religion has been created by humans, not by gods or goddesses or God.

Indeed, "God," "gods," and "goddesses" are all symbols created by human beings to indicate our experience of transrational Reality. For example, the word "God," as it appears in the Bible, is not an idea that makes sense of anything. The word "God," as used in the Bible, is a word that points to the FINAL NONSENSE, the FINAL MYSTERY, the FINAL UNKNOWABLE. Paradoxical as it sounds to our rational minds, we can "know" the UNKNOWABLE directly through contemplative inquiry. This sort of knowing is transrational. And, transrational knowing is the deepest kind of knowing; it defines what knowing is. We know Reality with our consciousness. Our mind is just a tool with which we reflect upon what our consciousness already knows. This reflection can make conscious knowing more useful and even expand what our consciousness knows. And certainly our reflective mind is enormously useful in communicating our consciousness to other conscious beings. But the mind as mind knows nothing. Mental knowing is an illusion. "Knowing" as well as "being" and "doing" are categories that describe consciousness, and consciousness in its essence is transrational. The rational is a tool of transrational consciousness.

So when consciousness becomes conscious of its essential nature, it is revealed to be a Wonder-based reality. Consciousness can have a direct experience (a knowing) of the UNKNOWABLE. Our rational mind can come to such an experience with all its rational screens still operating, but consciousness, not mind, is having the experience. Mind, we might say, can only "sit by" in infinite bafflement. These statements are not just arbitrary opinions of some weird, anti-intellectual philosopher; they are poetry for an experience that we conscious beings can experience every day as we view deeply the passing flow of our lives. Life is a Mystery, and our consciousness can know that, even while our thinking mind has no comprehension whatsoever of this Mysteriousness.

In addition to pointing to the absolute Mysteriousness, the biblical use of the word "God" includes meanings like commitment, choice, loyalty, and trust. In other words, the word "God" is a relational term like "sweetheart." In the Bible the word "God" means that to which we are ultimately loyal. So to name the FINAL NONSENSE "God," means that we are committed to living realistically within our awareness of this FINAL MYSTERIOUSNESS. This awareness is also the awareness of our profound ignorance. Our thinking minds are wondrous, but more wondrous still is the limitation of our minds and the capacity of our transrational consciousness to be aware of the overarching MYSTERIOUS REALITY within which we and our minds are one tiny part.

Sometimes research physicists and biologists and other empirical scientists become contemplative and thereby honestly tell about the experience of living on the edge of empirical scientific research. Here is a commonly heard admission: "The more we know about the natural world the more we know we don't know." Every new bit of order we discover in nature brings up new questions, new mysteries, new unknowns that we may or may not one day know more about. In post-relativity, post-quantum-mechanics physics, physicists have learned that physical nature is, in the final analysis, unpicturable by the human mind. I have already used the illustration of how the natural actuality we call "light" requires two contradictory pictures to cover all we know about light. Having one mental picture that holds the nature of light may never be found. Nor do we have one picture that fully comprehends an electron or an atom. Surprisingly, we need contradictory pictures to hold what we experience about the basic building blocks of the physical cosmos. Contemporary biology likewise confronts the boundaries of human mental capacity. It remains enigmatic what life is or how life began or how it is related to the pre-life functioning in which it is embedded. All our disciplines of empirical learning silently witness to the FINAL NONSENSE, the FINAL MYSTERY, the FINAL UNKNOWABILITY of the overall "Reality." The scientific disciplines are customarily silent about such matters, but being human beings, scientists know or can know that their science is an exploration into Mystery. Our conscious

knowing of this same Unfathomable Mystery is also the root experience that has made religion a recurrence in every human culture.

Persistent contemplative inquirers in the artistic and religious fields of expression continually witness to the unknowability of Reality. One of the most important mystical writings of Western history is named *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Again and again the Bible indicates that its use of the word "God" points to a Final Reality that is Mysterious beyond human understanding. Here are a few lines from Psalm 139:

How deep I find thy thoughts, O God,
how inexhaustible their themes.
Can I count them? They outnumber of the grains of sand.
To finish the count, my years must equal thine.

In other words, God's thoughts (Final Reality's Intelligent Designs) are incomprehensible to the human mind. The Infinite Reality is experienced by the finite mind as Unfathomable Mystery. What we call "natural law" is actually human creations of order that seem for the time being to fit our experience of the natural world.

When we human beings (as writers of religious works, or as theologians, rabbis, pastors, mullahs, gurus, shaman, witches, or seers) dare to speak about the thoughts of God, we are speaking in metaphors. We are using the experiences in our finite human minds as metaphors for pointing beyond thinking to the enigmatic processes of Final Mysterious Reality. No human has actually thought Reality's thoughts. When we speak of God's thoughts we are composing a type of poem. We are saying that if Final Reality had thoughts, this is the sort of thinking that Final Reality would be thinking. This is fiction – like Homer or Shakespeare or Little Red Riding Hood. But this can be serious fiction, seeking to express through the limitations of words and fiction an experience of THAT which is infinitely beyond words.

If we picture THAT Reality as love for us from a Personal Father or Mother, we are poeticizing our trust in this Final Mysteriousness. We are not describing Final Reality. Some religions do not emphasize personalized symbols for Final Reality. Instead they use more impersonal metaphors like "Tao" (The WAY it is) or "Dharma," (the Wisdom). Without recourse to a personalized metaphor, these religions evolve practices that have to do with being devoted to the same Final Reality that is indicated by religions that prefer the intimate metaphors of Father to son, Mother to daughter, or I to Thou.

A fully "realistic" philosophy of religion needs to begin with some basic axioms: (1) Consciousness itself is transrational. (2) Consciousness of consciousness is transrational. (3) Overall Reality is transrational. Any religion that loses touch with the transrational quality of human consciousness is a perversion of the basic function of religion. Good religion is that religion that is capable of connecting human society to THAT which is beyond all cultural canopies of understanding created by humans.

Good religion is founded upon trust in that Overall Mystery that never makes sense. Nevertheless, the sense-making function of our human minds can be affirmed as good (as gloriously human) by the same religions that witness to and trust the Overall Mystery that never makes sense. Sense-making is a function of our symbol-using form of consciousness. In order to live within our transrational consciousness, we do not need to negate the task of sense making. We simply need to be aware that our sense making is finite, temporal, provisional, ongoing, never ending. Our sense of things is never permanent. The FINAL NONSENSE is permanent, and will continually undo whatever sense we have made or will make for the living of our lives. A viable human culture is one that is, to a large extent, supported by Reality, yet in the end Reality undermines all of our cultural, political, and economic creations and challenges us to create better ones.

Once we have noticed this limitation of our thinking minds, we can notice ourselves noticing a much deeper noticing within our beings. We can call it “consciousness.” We can notice that consciousness is essentially Wonder based. And as the wondrous ‘I’ that we each are, we can notice ourselves noticing these basic realms of noticing: (1) our inward body’s sensations, (2) the environmental inputs to us through our senses – through sights, sounds, taste, smell, touch – and how these inputs are imaged in multisensory reruns, (3) our emotional responses, (4) the thinking of our symbol-using minds, and (5) the noticing of ourselves as noticers filled with Wonder.

When this fifth layer of wonder-based consciousness is full blown, we can call it “enlightenment.” It can also be called “presence,” for this awareness exists only in the Present in which we are Now living. We can also call ourselves “saved,” “delivered,” “healed” from fighting Reality – for insisting that our self-made sense of things be substituted for the enigmatic glory of WHAT IS. Fighting Reality is despair, because Reality will always win the fight in the end.

Visualizing the Whole Spectrum of Human Consciousness

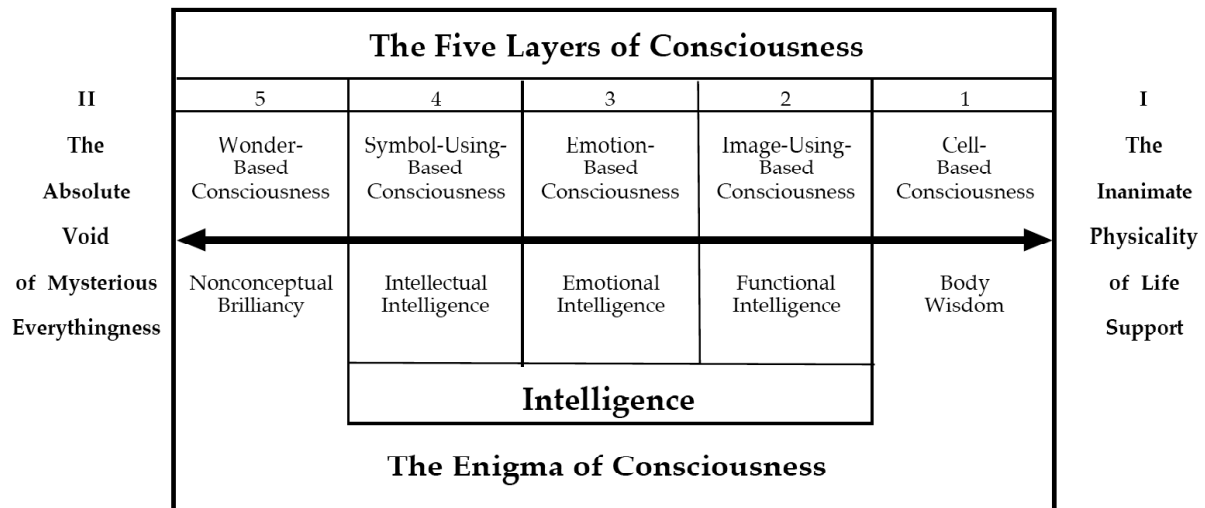
So far in this chapter I have expanded my description of “consciousness” by describing five layers of consciousness. These five layers have developed through the evolution of life on this planet. And all five layers exist and function within the current life of each human being. I have named them: (1) cell-based consciousness, (2) image-using consciousness, (3) emotion-based consciousness, (4) symbol-using consciousness, and (5) wonder-based consciousness.

Instead of picturing these elements as five layers of evolution, we can picture them five aspects of being humanly conscious – five segments on one line that stretches between two limits: Limit I – The Inanimate Physicality of Life Supports, and Limit II – The Absolute Void of Mysterious Every-thing-ness.

This line of consciousness is pictured on the following chart. Human consciousness is depicted as a line limited by the above two limiting factors. Consciousness arises out of the mud of the physical world and gains in intensity until it meets an internally experienced limit, a sort of “stone wall,” a “can’t-go-farther” in being conscious. Beyond this point consciousness does not exist. We can be conscious of this Absolute Void of Mysterious Every-thing-ness, but the Void itself devours consciousness just as it devours everything else. In becoming aware of this Void, we also meet the boiling Source of all things, including consciousness. We also meet the tomb of all things, including consciousness. This Void is the Every-thing-ness in which all things cohere. This Absolute Void of Mysterious Every-thing-ness starts us, sustains us, and ends us as the conscious beings that we are.

Our awareness of this Void tells us something about the enigma of consciousness. First of all, such awareness tells us that our fifth layer of consciousness is in close conversation with this Void. As a wonder-based consciousness we are or can be conscious of the presence of the Void, but we cannot consciously enter the Void. We have reached a limit that dramatizes a truth about consciousness: consciousness, like gravity, is a finite field of force within the terrain of temporal nature.

I have already described the five layers of consciousness that appear above the heavy line in the following chart. Beneath the line are companion categories that I will describe next:



Body Wisdom

I will use the term “body wisdom” to exemplify how humans can experience the cellular-based aspect of their human consciousness. A common example of body wisdom is experienced by many athletes. It is often called “being in the zone.” This happens in many sports, but basketball may be the easiest to understand. Sometimes a player finds himself or herself in a *zone* where it seems that shots just don’t miss. This is a state of consciousness that has nothing, or little, to do with the mind. It is as if the body knows what to do; the mind just follows along. When someone is in this zone, his alert fellow players give that player the ball. The defense attempts to do something that will “interrupt” this zone state. This is a deep truth about the game of basketball, one of the things that makes it the unpredictable game that it is.

A similar zone can be experienced in dancing, painting, composing music, even writing. The body knows what to do. Consciousness relaxes the mind into paying attention to this bodily knowing and goes along with it.

And there are more controversial examples of Body Wisdom. Many alternative health practitioners rely on something they call “muscle testing.” The practitioner asks yes-or-no questions of the arm muscles or finger muscles or feet muscles of the patient. “Is this herb what is needed by this body at this time?” “Is three times a day enough?” The muscles selected respond with strength or weakness as answers to the questioning. The theory here is that the body knows something that the conscious mind does not. So the conscious minds of the patient and the health practitioner devise ways of asking the muscles of the patient about what these cells of the body know. Many reject this entire practice as superstition. But for those who use it and trust it, it may be just another example of what I am pointing to with the term “Body Wisdom.” And there are other seemingly “spooky” phenomena that our ordinary, rational, scientific culture tends to find too odd to consider. Some of these may turn out to be examples of Body Wisdom. Much of what is customarily said about these areas is indeed superstitions. But maybe some of these so-called superstitions are simply Body Wisdom that our scientific and contemplative approaches to truth have not yet incorporated into our categories of common sense.

Intelligence

On the above chart I have labeled the layers of consciousness 2, 3, and 4 as forms of intelligence. I will clarify further our human experience of these three layers of consciousness and what I mean by "intelligence."

In some of our conflicts with other persons, we can notice a conflict between intellectual intelligence and functional intelligence. Those who major in functional intelligence tend to call those who overemphasize intellectual intelligence nerds or egg heads. I am visualizing here the common view of a Texas oil-rig worker of a New York City scientist or poetry writer. Functionally oriented persons frequently view the more intellectual members of our species as lost in worlds of abstraction that lifts them above the needed competencies of ordinary life. On the other hand, those who major in intellectual intelligence tend to view those who overemphasize functional intelligence as dullards, commoners, slugs, or with other demeaning names. The truth is that both ends of this polarity are important, and there are individuals who balance this polarity pretty well. I think of the Nobel-prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman. He was not only a competent mathematician and research physicist, but he was also a quite humorous, practical, approachable person who was a skilled musician on the bongo drums. But balance like this is not all that common. A young house repairman I know could care less about my intellectual pursuits, but he is a genius in creating fixes for anything that goes wrong on our property. At the other extreme I know people with several postgraduate degrees who are helpless with a hammer or with figuring out practical solutions for the simplest of household problems.

Emotional intelligence is another aspect of human consciousness that manifests in a stronger way in some persons than in others. The term "intuition" is sometimes used to mean emotional intelligence. There may be other ways to define "intuition," but it seem to me that most of what we may mean by intuition is indeed the emergence of wisdom for living based on the feelings of the body rather than the thinking of the mind. In intuition, the mind gives form to something discovered with the feelings. Intuition is a truth awareness that can be very quick compared with a logical step-by-step put together by the mind.

There are many women and men who have accessed deeply both their emotional intelligence (intuition) and their intellectual intelligence; however, it is frequently the case that a friendship or mating happens between a man who has accessed his intellectual intelligence quite deeply, but has accessed his emotional intelligence much less deeply than his woman friend or mate. The woman in this relationship may depend more fully on her emotional intelligence than on her intellectual intelligence. What happens in such a relationship? It may be that each deeply respects the other and uses the other to enrich what is less developed in his or her own self, thereby finding that two of them form a more balanced access of intelligence than either do alone. But it may also happen that tensions develop between them. The woman may become irritated that this man who is so emotionally slow or so negligent in noticing when she is simply expressing her feelings. Rather than hear her feelings, the man may view her as putting forth a set of thoughts that cry out to be elaborated or contested. Similarly, the man may become irritated with the woman when she finds some of his finest insights overly abstract, irrelevant, and boring rather than personal enough for her liking. Variations on this little drama are quite familiar to many of us. The truth beneath these conflicts is that emotional intelligence and intellectual intelligence are both important aspects of human intelligence; they are both important gifts, rather than grounds for holding one another in contempt.

Our male-biased, hierarchical, over-intellectualized culture has typically ignored or demeaned emotional intelligence. Some subcultures have even been loath to admit that

there is such a thing as emotional intelligence. The emotions have been dismissed as meaningless approaches to truth or exaggerated expressions of the trivial. The truth is that each of us would be severely handicapped without our emotional intelligence. In Antonio R. Damasio's book *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* we find the amazing story about a man who lost portions of his brain that enable emotional intelligence. He could move and talk well, but in decision-making he was greatly hampered; in ordinary and practical ways, he was almost helpless. As Damasio illustrates, our bias against emotional intelligence needs to be overcome if we are to enjoy a fully realistic appropriation of human life and consciousness. And we need to end the war between the intellectual and emotional aspects of human consciousness. We need a balanced and holistic appropriation of human intelligence in order to create a grasp of the truth that enriches us and provides us with the intelligence we need to handle the huge challenges we face.

Nonconceptual Brilliancy

In addition to the complexities and conflicts within human intelligence, we also need to access what is being called the "nonconceptual" aspect of consciousness. This aspect of consciousness has been strongly resisted and even denied by many specialists in intellectual consciousness. Indeed, for such "specialists" to admit the importance of nonconceptual consciousness means they have to fully embrace the limitations of their intellectual consciousness. The defenders of intellectual truth frequently oppose the very notion that human consciousness can be conscious of an aspect of consciousness that precedes all thinking and exceeds all thinking in realism. This brilliance, however, is precisely what is meant by the non-conceptual layer of consciousness – a layer I have also described as "wonder-based." The wonder-based layer of consciousness is beyond symbol-using, emotion-using, and image-using consciousness. And it is beyond these important forms of intelligence, not in the sense of being more or less important, but in the sense of being the very essence of intelligence, a brilliancy that lights up every aspect of human intelligence. For a full development of this important point, I recommend a book by A. H. Almaas: *Brilliancy: The Essence of Intelligence*.

Nonconceptual consciousness is more easily accepted by many of the defenders of emotional consciousness, but this is not always the case. Nonconceptual consciousness is also an aspect of consciousness that precedes emotional feelings and exceeds emotional intelligence in realism. So defenders of emotional intelligence are also forced to face the limitations of their emotional clarities and understand that while emotions are extremely useful, they are also limited. Emotions are often useful as guides into the realms of wonder-based consciousness. Nevertheless, the brilliancy of wonder-based consciousness is trans-emotional as well as trans-conceptual. The trans-conceptual realm is beyond emotion in the sense that it reveals the limitations of emotional truth.

For example, our emotional feelings can simply be reactions based on our personality constructions, our self-images, our systems of thought, and other clearly partial perceptions of reality. Fear can arise when we mistake a stick for a snake. Anger can happen in our bodies when we mistake a friend's helpfulness for an attack on our lives. This undependability of the emotions can be very complex. Whatever we *think* is real about the world or about ourselves affects what we feel. Nevertheless, the emotional capabilities of our bodies are doing their best to help us live our lives and in that sense emotions are quite trustworthy. Also, as we move beyond our conceptual and emotional realms of truth into our nonconceptual consciousness, our intuitions (instances of emotional intelligence) become more dependable. Feelings attend each state of Wonder, and these feelings are useful for describing our awareness of Wonder.

We might say that Wonder-based consciousness tends to cleanse the emotional aspects of our lives of their unrealism.

In conclusion, the nonconceptual or Wonder-based aspects of human consciousness constitute a brilliancy that both transcends what we usually mean by intelligence and undergirds all forms of intelligence. In Part III, "What is Wonder?" I will use my conceptual mind to chart and describe the domain of nonconceptual consciousness. The fact that a human being can do such a thing is one of the enigmas of consciousness that I will describe. It is indeed a paradox that we can use our minds to poetically describe what is beyond the concepts of our minds. Such poetry-type descriptions communicate to others only to the extent that the others who "hear" are finding within themselves the capacity to be aware beyond the concepts of their minds.