

NOTES AND TRANSCRIPTIONS FOR

AWAKENING FROM THE MEANING CRISIS

Lessons By: John Vervaeke

Site Made by:

Chris King, John Declan, and Benica Chua

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These Notes and Transcriptions for Awakening from the Meaning Crisis is compiled from <https://www.meaningcrisis.co/>

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What is the Awakening from the Meaning Crisis Series

The Introduction to the Meaning Crisis Series

What follows here is a transcription of the above video by John Vervaeke
(Sections added by MeaningCrisis.co)

What is the Meaning Crisis?

We are in the midst of a mental health crisis. There are increases in anxiety disorders, depression, despair, suicide rates are going up in North America, parts of Europe, other parts of the world. And that mental health crisis is itself due to and engaged with crises in the environment and the political system. And those in turn are immeshed within a deeper cultural historical crisis. I called the meaning crisis. So the meaning crisis expresses itself and many people are giving voice to this in many different ways, is this increasing sense of bullshit. Bullshit is on the increase. It's more and more pervasive throughout our lives and there's this sense of drowning in this old ocean of bullshit. And we have to understand why is this the case and what can we do about it? So today there is an increase of people feeling very disconnected from themselves, from each other, from the world, from a viable and foreseeable future.

What do we do about this crisis?

Let's discuss this. Let's work on it together. Let's rationally reflect on it. What can we do about the meaning crisis? These problems are deep problems that we're facing. Many people are talking about the meaning crisis, but what I want to argue is that these problems are deeper than just social media problems, political problems, even economic problems. They're deeply historical, cultural, cognitive problems, and we need to, we need to penetrate into them carefully and rigorously. Getting out of this problem is going to be tremendously difficult. It's going to require significant transformations in our cognition, our culture, our communities, and in order to move forward in such a difficult manner, we have to reach more deeply into our past to salvage the resources we can for such an amazing challenge.

What we'll be talking about

I'll be talking about a lot of people who have spoken in ways that will provide us the resources we need. We'll talk about ancient figures like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, Jesus of Nazareth, Siddhartha, Gautama, the Buddha, but we'll also talk about modern pivotal figures. We'll talk about people like Carl Jung. We'll talk about Nietzsche. We'll talk about Heidegger. We'll talk about current work being done by psychologists, cognitive scientists, neuroscientists. We're going to cover a broad range of topics. We're going to talk about shamanism and altered States of consciousness related to modern things like psychedelic experience, mystical experience. But we'll also talk about existentialism, nihilism. We'll talk about AI, artificial intelligence. What's that telling us? But also what can our evolutionary past tell us about how we wrestle with the meaning crisis. So this is a complex and difficult problem. There are no easy answers. We need to go through this very carefully and rigorously. We got to get clear about what the problem is and clear about what our answer could be. So I want to bring all of this together in a coherent and clear fashion so that we together can discover how to awaken from the meaning crisis.

The next episode is found below

Episode 1: Introduction

Welcome. This is a series in which I am going to endeavor to put together pretty much all of my work.

My name's John Vervaeke. I'm an assistant professor at the University of Toronto. I'm in the Psychology Department and in the Cognitive Science Program. And I also teach for the Buddhism psychology and mental health program. I produced a lot of videos on a lot of various topics. Some of you have perhaps seen them. But what I want to do now in this series is draw it all together and present to you a overall unified argument that can show you the interconnections between pieces that you might have seen before. Now how all this got started is I got very interested in a particular phenomena. I got interested in the fact that there seemed to be a growing confluence

between people who are interested in Buddhism and people who are interested in cognitive science. We'll talk a little bit later as we go on on what cognitive science is. But you know some of this already in the world at large because we're going through what's called the mindfulness revolution.

Mindfulness is being spoken of everywhere. I was in a bookstore yesterday - Chapters - and there's a whole section just on mindfulness itself. So why is the mindfulness revolution occurring? Well it's occurring particularly because of this intersection between Buddhism and cognitive science. But why is this happening and why is it so explosive in nature? And what do we mean by mindfulness? Some of the work I've done is trying to get clear about that! We're going to talk about that in this series. Now there's also a lot of other things that, in my mind, seem to be convergent with this growing confluence between Buddhism and cognitive science. There is an increasing interest both academically and in the public at large in the topic of wisdom - something that people did not talk about very much not that long ago! Well wisdom is now a very hot topic within psychology and cognitive science and books offering to train you in wisdom are again becoming popular.

Same bookstore experience: yesterday I bought my son a book called "[How to Be a Stoic](#)". How is it that a philosophical position from the Hellenistic Era has become a popular book that people are seeking? Why is there this hunger for wisdom and why are people meeting it with these kinds of things? The stoicism the philosophies of the Hellenistic Period - [I'm] going to talk about that. I think there's good reason for that. Of course there's increasing academic and public interest in psychedelics. I just gave a talk earlier this week at Yale about psychedelics and the increasing interest in psychedelics and psychedelic experiences.

You're seeing radical things with them. People can be released from treatment resistant addiction; they can overcome post-traumatic stress disorder! With the best therapy, solution rate[s] for people with post-traumatic stress disorder is about, if things go really well, 20% or so. You introduce psychedelics into the therapy and you can get the the healing rate up to 80 percent!

So what's going on there? Why is there this interest? There is an increasing public interest which is matched by a huge academic in the topics of

happiness.

Now we've always been a happiness oriented culture. "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" and so forth. Right? But it's taken a particularly interesting turn: the topic of "meaning" and "meaning in life" is coming to the fore. People, more and more, are talking about not just sheer contentedness, but what it is for a human life to be meaningful. And it turns out that meaning in life is terrifically important. It's very predictive of well-being. It's very predictive of how well you are doing in your life in general. So it is no wonder that people are seeking it out. Now my contention, and what I'm going to argue, is it's no coincidence that all of these things are happening right now!

It's no coincidence: this confluence between Buddhism, the mindfulness revolution, the interest in wisdom and ancient philosophies like "stoicism", the increasing public interest in psychedelics and transformative experiences and mystical experiences.

The increasing academic and public interest in meaning in life. There's a reason for it. There's a unifying account for why this is happening. But there's another set of things! This is sort of the light side of what I'm talking about. There is a set of dark factors that seem to be converging as well! We have what seems to be - although people have [been] disputing it, but I think the evidence is becoming clearer and clearer; the CDC just released some data recently - we're going through a mental health crisis. Suicide is spiking and it's... Now there are some socioeconomic factors, but there's clearly other things that are at work. There's an increasing sense - many people are expressing it of losing touch with reality. We encounter more and more often, in individuals and groups, Nihilism, expressions of cynicism.

Expressions of deep kinds of frustration and futility. You have the abandonment of trust in any of our public institutions. We've completely lost any sort of faith or trust in our political system. We're losing faith in our judicial system. Religious affiliation is declining consistently throughout. People's participation in clubs. Organization is in decline in general. And my co-authors on the book on "["Zombies in Western culture a 21st century crisis"](#)" (Christopher Mastropietro and Filip Miscevic), we argued that the sense of being out of touch has gone on with an increasing sense (and we'll talk about

this because I'm going to use this term technically. We're gonna talk about this and Frankfurt's use of it), there's an increasing sense of more and more bullshit, everywhere. Pervading! And if you take a look at the book we actually chart how this has been spiking and it's concorded with all kinds of other increases in these dark factors. People are getting the sense that we're spending - and you can see this already in the public media, but it's also within the academic world - that we're spending too much time in our virtual environments. There seems to be increasing evidence, for example, of a connection between various social media, increased depression, increased loneliness.

And then more in general, and we'll talk about how this shows up a little bit more implicitly, it shows up in the entertainment we seek and the mythologies we like, like the zombies! We're gonna talk about that. Why are zombies so big? Why are superheroes so big right now? There is an increase. These mythological - and we'll talk about myth means - these mythological forms, I'm gonna argue, are expressions of a cultural sense, a sense that we're stuck somehow. One way you can note that is just by noting how pervasive, almost to the point of being a constant factor in our background, is people talking about "crisis" and "collapse". "Apocalypse!" "The zombie apocalypse!" The imminent collapse of civilization. All of these things are now pervasive. They're taken for granted. At one point the movies demonstrating this had to be science fiction; they were considered radical. But now, this is becoming a pervasive background sense.

Now I think all of these negative factors also have a unifying explanation. In fact what I'm going to argue throughout the course of the series is that the positive factors and the negative factors all point to a unified explanation. This is gonna be an idea that our culture is experiencing a profound "meaning crisis". A "crisis in meaning".

Now we're going to have to talk about "what does that 'meaning' mean?"

Now, I'm not claiming that this is the only crisis we're facing! Far from it.

What I want to do in fact is talk about how the "meaning crisis" is interacting with other crises: the environmental crisis. The socio-economic crisis. But in addition to those which are quite well discussed in the public at

large. There is a meaning crisis which is being discussed quite significantly within academia but needs to be brought to the public at large because one of the things I'm going to argue is that these three crises are not independent from each other. They're interdependent in important ways. But what is this meaning that's come into crisis? Why do we hunger for it?

How do we cultivate the wisdom - because that's what I'm going to argue that wisdom is ultimately about - to generally enhance this meaning. Wisdom is about realizing in both senses of the word (becoming aware and making real), wisdom is about realizing meaning in life in a profound way. How do we cultivate this wisdom - what does it mean? And I'm not going to talk about that just theoretically, I'm going to talk about that practically as well. What are some practices that people can engage in and are engaging in to try and address this need for the cultivation of wisdom.

What role for example do do mindfulness practices play within the cultivation of wisdom. So, here's the three questions that we're going to keep coming back to again and again and again: What is this 'meaning'? Why do we hunger for it? And how do we cultivate the wisdom to realize it? So some of the topics, of course, [that] we're going be addressing are, centrally, the "meaning crisis" (How did this kind of meaning evolve - what is it? Why is it so important to the evolution of our humanity?) Then more specifically the history of the meaning crisis. (Why did it arise? What are the historical factors?) By doing that we'll get in a historical account of meaning. We'll get a sense of what this meaning is that has come into crisis that people, individually, feel they are lacking or losing in their lives.

We want to talk about connections between meaning, wisdom and - importantly - self transcendence. It's gonna turn out that this notion of self transcendence, again which we'll have to develop and explicate, is something that's a core need because it performs core functions for human beings. It is bound up with these ideas of wisdom, and of course meaning. And along the way, in fact right from the beginning, we're gonna start to see that there's deep connections between meaning, wisdom, self transcendence and altered states of consciousness. Why do human beings seek to alter their consciousness? In fact not just human beings; other intelligent organisms seek to do this. [New] Caledonian crows will tumble down roofs in order to

make themselves dizzy for no other purpose than to alter their state of consciousness. What is going on? Why does intelligence need to be conjoined to an altered state of consciousness and why in particular have human beings developed very sophisticated processes for generating, harnessing and interpreting these altered states of consciousness. I'm going to talk about that in connection with [Shamanism](#).

And ritual! We're going to talk about that in connection to the flow state. This is when you're in the zone and why people seek it and why it's so powerful. We're going to talk about it, as I mentioned, in connection with psychedelic experiences. More importantly the mystical experiences that can occur within some psychedelic experience because it turns out it's the mystical experience that is more important and transformative. But there's a subset of those mystical experiences that are very crucial. These are awakening experiences. These are experiences in which people come back from the mystical experience and say "that was somehow more real than this and I need to change my world. I need to change myself". They engage in what [L.A. Paul has called "a transformative experience"](#). What is also known as "quantum change"; a radical transformation of their lives. And we know, we've got good research now showing that they are right! Their lives get better after these awakening experiences.

We're going to talk about that in depth and, dare I say it, maybe we can bring all of this together and actually propose - and maybe some people will be affronted by this - but propose a scientific, a cognitive scientific account of what enlightenment is and why it alleviates the suffering from lack of meaning that is particularly pertinent for us today but has always been a perennial threat since the axial revolution. Now that means, of course, we're going to have to also talk about topics that have connection with the darker aspects, as I said, of meaning making. What's the connection, because they're deep and profound, between this meaning making that is so central and our endemic capacity for self-deception, for self-destruction. There's a reason why we are so awash in bullshit because bullshit is a perennial threat to us. Self-deception is endemic.

That means it'll be important to talk about foolishness as something different from ignorance. Ignorance is a lack of knowledge. Foolishness is a lack of

wisdom. Foolishness is when your capacity to engage your agency, pursue your goals is undermined and threatened by the self-deception and the self-destructive behavior that is a perennial vulnerability to your cognition. In fact, what I'm going to argue is the very same machinery that makes you so adaptive intelligent is the same machinery that makes you susceptible to foolishness. That will take us into some of the topics that are relevant to people's existential experience in meaning crisis. Topics like absurdity, alienation, futility, horror - real horror.

Most horror movies aren't horror. We'll talk about what horror really is and what people experience when they're actually experiencing horror. Their sense of grip on reality is being undermined and people find that, as you can imagine, terrifying. We're going to talk about meaninglessness and why more people experience this state. The state of despair. And once we do that, as we're moving into these kinds of topics, we will be moving gradually from the historical account of the origin of the meaning crisis - it would give us some sense from the history of what this meaning is - but we'll be moving into the cognitive scientific study of cognition. The cognitive, Scientific Investigation of meaning and meaning making. When people use this word "meaning", it's a metaphor. They mean there's something in their life that is analogous to how a sentence has meaning: the pieces fit together in some way. They can impact on your cognition and connect you to the world in some way. There's something about our lives that is analogous to the way sentences have meaning. We have to unpack that metaphor. Why is the metaphor used and what does the metaphor point to, when we talk about the meaning of our lives?

How is it, in fact it's some of the most meaningful experiences people have are precisely ones that are completely ineffable to them that they can't put into words.

What's going on? We're gonna have to talk about different kinds of knowing. Some of them that have fallen off our cultural radar precisely because of the meaning crisis. We tend to have reduced all of the ways that the ancients talked about how we know to one thing: To know is to have a special kind of belief. And so we are very belief centric which is why we are so focused as a culture on ideologies. But it turns out that we're gonna have to have a much

more expanded notion of what knowing means. There is much more to knowing than having justified true beliefs. There's the kind of knowing that's involved in knowing how to catch a baseball. There's the kind of knowing of what it is like to be having this experience right now. There's the kind of knowing that is knowing what it's like to be in something you're participating in like a relationship. We have to talk about all of that.

Now of course some of you might be aware of those other kinds of knowing because you know how integral and important they are to therapy, which is another thing that is booming in our culture. Part of why it's blooming is the meaning crisis. Part of why it's booming is because people seek out therapy precisely because they are trying to recover these lost kinds of knowing. The kinds of insight that is needed the kind of transformation not of your beliefs but of how you see things. Your sense of self and your sense of realness have to be transformed often in therapy. That is why the psychedelics are so important for therapeutic success because they transform these other kinds of knowing. We're gonna talk about all of that. This will give us a structural, functional account of meaning. What is the structural; what are its cognitive processes; what are its cognitive mechanisms? How do they function?

How can they fall into dysfunction? We're gonna have this historical account and this structural, functional account and we're going to make them talk to each other. They're gonna inform and constrain and enable each other. And from that dialogue, what I propose - audacious as it might sound - is a real response to the meaning crisis. An awakening from the meaning crisis. That's what this series is about: awakening from the meaning crisis. Not in some ideological fashion but in a profound, transformative and existential manner. So this is not something that I can do simply because this is not a problem for which there are simplistic answers. If anybody offers you an answer to this crisis in an hour I would wager that they are deceiving you, manipulating or they are in themselves significantly self deceived.

There is a reason why we're stuck, there's a reason why this is hard. This is a complex and difficult thing we are undertaking. So this series is going to be several videos long because I'm going to carefully and I hope responsibly build an argument to try and show how we can awaken from the meaning crisis. How that meaning crisis interacts with the mental health crisis; how it

interacts with the environmental crisis; how it interacts with the socio-economic crisis. Now, this is my commitment to you. I will always do my best to offer rigorous, rational argumentation. I will try my best to give proper scholastic credit to other people. Please understand that I'm aware that I'm not, and nobody should be claiming, to offer you the absolute uncontested truth. I'm going to offer you good arguments good evidence. But I don't want this to be an academic series. I do my academic work and I'm proud of it. But this, I want this to be for people who are coming to this precisely because of a genuine personal existential interest.

So I will try to keep jargon and technicalities to a minimum. I will have to introduce terms to you and I hope to explain them carefully along the way. So, my commitment to you is to - I can't be unbiased! That's not a thing! What I will try my best to do is to present to you my arguments, my viewpoints and why I think they can be understood to be highly plausible.

So, I want to start with how and why is this meaning so much a part of our humanity? Why is it sewn in to our humanity so much. And I think the thing that we want to understand is [that] I have to start somewhere, right? And that can be misleading because I think, and one of my co-authors Filip Miscevic, this is something that he's very concerned with, I think this is a continuum question: I think the deep connections between meaning making and cognition go deeply back into our evolutionary heritage way before our humanity. So the fact that I'm starting somewhere is not meant to indicate that this is the absolute starting point. What I want to do is point to a time when many people think our humanity, the kind of people we are now, came into form. Not fully like the way it is now, because of course there's been lots of historical and cultural processes, but the kind of humanity that we would recognize as "us" and how much this was bound up with meaning making in the way that I've been talking about.

So this period is known as the Upper Paleolithic transition. It occurs around 40000 BCE. Now what's interesting about this is that biologically as a species we've existed much longer than this. We existed about, and there's some controversy around this, but conservatively since about two hundred thousand BCE. But around, again roughly, 40000 BCE there's a change. A radical change.

Now, again, picking a specific time makes it look like there is nothing before; there are no precursors. Some people have presented the Upper Paleolithic transition that way, I'm not doing that.!I think that's a mistake. There's a continuum - you can see it back, but at some point there's this radical change: the upper Paleolithic transition. You see things human beings doing things, they're not doing before: they're making art. They're making representational art. They're making sculpture. They're making cave paintings. We have good evidence they start making music.

What else are they doing? Well we have some pretty good evidence that there is significant enhancement in their cognition. How do we know this? Well we have the first use of calendars. Obviously not with numbers and dates because numeracy hasn't been invented, but you have the symbolic representation of the phases of the moon and the passage of days and so human beings are keeping track of time across very abstract patterns so that they can enhance their hunting abilities. Something else is happening which, again it's so intrinsic to our humanity: we're developing projectile weapons.

We're developing projectile weapons! So the Neanderthals who are contemporaneous with Homo sapiens at this time don't have projectile weapons. Their spears are thick shafted heavy stone; they're thrusting tools. We know that they were getting in close to their quarry because they have bone damage that's similar to the kind of bone damage we see in human beings who are involved in cowboy rodeos where you're messing around with large angry mammals.

Homo sapiens do something different: they start to develop very thin spears, not with stone tips but with bone tip and bone is much harder to use. The point about these is [that] they're very good as projectile weapons, they're very light and human beings develop the spear thrower and sling and they start to develop the ability to carry multiple missiles and project them at a long distance. Now that requires increased development of your frontal lobe area which is going to turn out to be of course very important as we'll see for enhancing your intelligence.

Think about how deep this is in your cognition, this idea of like throwing. Think about how you talk about how you have a project that you're working on. "Project": you're throwing. Or people will talk about "oh there, over

there, there's an object"; that means 'thrown against'. Or "I'm the subject"; that means 'thrown under'. All day long, cognitively, you're throwing. That's because this 'throwing task' is such a complex task. We take it so trivial that there is a moving target and I throw something I can hit it but if you try and build artificial intelligence to do that as the military is discovered that turns out to be a really really hard problem. So there's the projectile weapons are developing, the calendar, the music, the sculpture, the paintings. What's going on? Why is all of this stuff exploding?

Notice how all of this is associated with different aspects of what we mean by meaning. Obviously there's art and there's music - that's somehow meaningful. But there's also time is being made more meaningful it's being measured and understood in calendars and even time and space are now more meaningful because they're being used in this highly dynamic way in projectile weaponry.

So what's going on? Why did it occur? Well, there's a lot of good work done by this. [David Lewis-Williams](#), Matt Rossano's work "[Supernatural selection](#)" I think is superlative. His articles like "[Did meditating make us human?](#)"

I got the pleasure of meeting Matt. He argues for what's going on at this time is a radical change in human cognition that's in line with the work of other people like Michael Winkelman. We know that before the Upper Paleolithic transition, about 30000 up to 60 thousand or 70 it's unclear because there's various times at what this might be happening. We know that we went through a near extinction event: human beings almost went extinct. We were crunched down they think maybe to a maximum of ten thousand individuals. We'd almost died off! Part of it seems to have been the overall climactic change at the end of the last ice age in Africa. Part of it there's a supervolcano that goes off around seventy thousand years ago. Not sure! But what happens is there's tremendous pressure put on human beings. They move to the coasts in general to try and survive. But, Human Beings seem to have adopted an interesting response to this. Now, first of all they diversify their diet and blah blah blah... that's all important, we'll talk about that. But what's really interesting is that they don't come up so much with a technological response because "climate" is too huge and too poorly

understood! They come up with a social cognitive response. What human beings do is they start creating broader trading networks. You see because when you do that, you're not a subject to individual environmental variation. You have much more resources both in terms of what people can have, what kind of discoveries they're making. And so what happens is people start forming these much broader trading relationships. Now that's very significant because it opens up the scale at which human cognition has to operate in an important way. And human beings plausibly responded by developing things that we see now is pervasive. They developed a bunch of rituals - and we're going to talk a lot about why ritual is so important - for dealing with both the environmental challenge and the enhanced social network that they were creating to deal with it. By the way we're gonna talk about that a lot in this series: how your cognition is very much participatory. You participate in distributed cognition. Large networks of cognition. Way before the Internet networked computers together, culture networked brains together in order to provide some of our most powerful problem solving abilities.

So what are the rituals? You need various trading rituals because the thing you're doing now - and again think about how you take this for granted and living in a city it is the deep presupposition of civilization: you hang around with strangers! Lots of them, and that's just like "Oh yeah!" Well it's not "Oh yeah!" That's a hard thing! Other species don't do that. So what's happening is we're getting this shift, we're having to interact with people that are not in our kinship group, in our hunter gatherer group and we have to form relationships with them. So we start to develop rituals that have the function of enhancing our ability to come into communication and relationships of trust for individuals that we do not personally know. You say "OK!" That's why you still do stuff that makes no sense! You meet somebody and you do "that", you stick out your hand and they grab it and then they move it up and down. This is to show you have no weapons. This has allowed the person to touch you to see if your hands are clammy or not. There's all kinds of intuitive stuff going on. I can feel how tense you are. Most of us don't pay attention to this stuff anymore but it's there. When you shake hands. When you ask "How are you?" Now, again, that has become trivial! We don't want an answer! "How how are you...?" We don't... [Immitation answer...]

Somebody starts answering you. "Oh no!" But originally that reflects something, because think about what important skill has to be enhanced for these rituals.

I have to be able to take your perspective. I have to know what's going on in your mind. I have to know how you feel. I have to be able to move from a first person perspective to a third person perspective really really well. Because if I can't do that, I'm not going to be able to trade with you. Now that ability to take enhanced perspective on others especially people that you don't know really means you have to develop [the] ability - Daniel Siegel calls "[Mind Sight](#)" - to pick up on other people's mental states. And here's the thing. As you start to increase your ability to pick up on other people's mental states you increase your ability to pick up on your own mental states.

And that of course is going to be part of the origin of things like meta cognition and mindfulness. Then the next type of ritual you need, it goes in the other direction. The trade ritual is how I deal with strangers. The problem is now when I'm starting to interact with all these people, my commitment and loyalty to my group is now more in question than it used to be in the past. It could be taken for granted because you just were with these people and they were with you all the time! But now, if you allow me the word, there's "temptation" from the stranger which of course is now part of all of our myths. The way the stranger can come in and tempt us. And so what do we do? Well we we create initiation rituals. Rituals that are designed to show our commitment to the group. And those rituals often require risk, threat, sacrifice. Now our rituals, our initiation rituals, have been very tamed down. But if you look back in time these initiation rituals are often very traumatic! Dramatic. People are put into situations in which they they might experience tremendous pain or fear. We'll talk about some of these as we go through the series. So, why? Why make somebody go through pain and fear? Because if they go through pain and fear, that shows that they're really committed to you! They're really committed to your group.

But what does that mean cognitively? What does it mean for how the mind gets trained? You have to really improve your ability to regulate your emotion. You have to really improve your ability to do what's called "de-centering": to let yourself be in the hands of other people. A non egocentric

perspective because what's important now is it's not centered on you. The ritual is centered on you but you, through the ritual, are being centred on the group. This is having tremendous impact on your cognition.

Now there's a third kind of ritual that starts to emerge. And it seems to have picked up on these cognitive enhancements that the trade rituals and the initiation rituals bring. So I need to introduce an idea to you that's going to become pervasive. This is the notion of "Exaptation". "Exaptation". Now originally this is an idea from biology, but the [work of Michael Anderson](#) has brought it directly into understanding how the brain operates; how cognition operates. Exaptation, in biological terms, is an evolutionary mechanism. So for example I'm using my tongue now to speak. Tongues did not evolve for speech. If they did all the animals that had tongues would be speaking at you and that would be terrifying. Especially your cat! Your cat talks to you... I'm sure that that would be terrifying!

So, what did tongues evolve for? They evolved to move food around in your mouth. They're very flexible. And they're poison detectors. So they have all these - this is your last ditch defense for poison - they have all of these nerve endings. So you have this highly sensitive highly flexible muscle. Now just because of the way we evolved this muscle is also in the air passageway because evolution is not an intelligent designer: you use the same tube for breathing and for food - very bad design. But nevertheless that's how it is. So your tongue can interrupt your airflow. Flexible sensitive muscle that can interrupt airflow. That's what I need for speech. So the tongue was exapted. Evolution didn't have to make a speaking machine from scratch. It took something that evolved for one purpose and was able to exapt it and use it for another.

So what Michael Anderson and others are arguing is very often this is what the brain does. The brain will develop a mechanism a little machine instead of cognitive processes for doing one thing and then it will learn how to reuse that for something totally different. We're going to talk about that repeatedly through this series. So what happens is that these enhanced mental abilities that are coming out of the trading and initiation rituals seem to be taken up into another set of rituals - exapted into - that seemed to be also pervasive. These are shamanic rituals. These are shamanic rituals. We know that the

ability to become aware of the mind, to control the mind to control your emotions are being trained as I said. We know that human beings, just because - [and] we'll see more about this later - just because they're highly intelligent creatures with sophisticated consciousness seek out altered states of consciousness. In shamanism what you have is you have a cultivated practice for altering your state of consciousness that taps into and exapts this enhanced "mind sight", this enhanced ability to manipulate and control your mental state and your emotional state.

Now [Michael Winkelman's work](#) shows that pervasive through hunter gatherer groups are shamanic individuals. In fact the shaman is such a pervasive historical figure that I think you can make a good case that it has become an archetypal figure. Something like "the wise old man". So "Yoda" and "Merlin"... These are all shamanic figures. What we know about shamanism is that they're the best health care you're gonna have for a long time and we'll talk about how and why that's the case. We know that if you've got a shaman in your group it's going to help to reduce discord within your group. It's going to enhance your hunting abilities of your group. Now I'm a scientist; I don't believe in any supernatural abilities or spirits or things like that. So I seek an alternative - and Matt Rossano and Michael Winkelman - I seek an alternative explanation of why our shamans are so effective? What is going on? And what I want to talk about is how central shamanism was to the Upper Paleolithic transition because a plausible case can be made that it's the advent of shamanism that helps to explain how human beings are capable of this sudden explosion in their cognition.

This is of course the thesis of several people as I mentioned: Michael Winkelman. [Lewis-Williams](#) and others. Matt Rossano.

Because here's the issue: It's not a hardware change. The brain has already existed for one hundred and sixty thousand years. It's not changing significantly during the upper Paleolithic transition. It's much more likely that it's not a hardware change in the brain, it's a software change in how human beings are using the brain and what part of what I want to argue is that shamanism is probably playing a significant role in that software change. So now I need to introduce yet one more other term. And again this is going to be important. This is the idea of a psycho-technology.

Okay so technology means the systematic use of a tool - this [pen] is a tool right here right? The first thing to understand and this is [Andy Clark's phrase](#) "[You're a natural born cyborg](#)". your brain has evolved across several species to use tools. In fact when you start using a tool even for a very short period of time your brain will start to model it as part of your body. That is why you can do weird things like when you're parking your car you can feel where the edge of your car is and all that sort of stuff. You're a natural born cyborg you have evolved to be integrated with machines. Look at me. I'm a cyborg. Look at this around me. The only thing that's natural here biologically is naked me! Everything else is a tool! Everything else! These are tools! I wasn't born with clothing. I use this in order to modify my ability to move through environments and carry stuff around. This is a tool. This is a tool. This is a tool. This is a tool. These are tools.

Now, what's interesting is that can be exapted. Your brain's ability to attach to a tool can move off of a physical thing, onto a cognitive thing. So, a physical tool fits your biology, fits your biology and enhances it. I can leave permanent marks that I can't otherwise do biologically on this board. I have a bottle; it fits my hand and I can carry liquids around. If I had to carry it like that, the amount of liquid I can carry is minimal. It fits your biology and enhances it. A psycho-technology fits your brain and enhances how it operates. You say "What are you talking about? What's a psycho-technology?" Look... Here's one right here. It's called literacy. You're not born literate. You're born linguistic. You're born learning how to talk. ([Noam Chomsky](#) all that sort of thing.) But you're not born literate. In fact for most of our history we were completely illiterate.

What does literacy do for you? It's a standard set of tools that standardize how you process information. Notice how it enhances your cognition: I don't have to hold all these terms in my mind. I can leave them there on the board. I can write stuff down and come back to it later. So notice what I can do. I can take my brain now and link it to my brain back then and my brain in the future. So I'm networking all these instances together. I'm improving my cognition. I can also network my brain with your brain and improve my ability to solve problems. Think of, if I were you do this to you, I'm going to take literacy out of your brain right now! And you can't - and I mean literally in your head too - you can't imagine words. You can't put stuff on paper, you

can't reflect on your own cognition. I take that out of you. Your brain is the same hardware. But then the problems you can solve collapsed down dramatically. That's what psycho-technologies do. They enhance the software of your cognitive machinery. Shamanism is a set of psycho-technologies for altering your state of consciousness and enhancing your cognition. So, what does shamanism look like? What are the kinds of things you do when you're a shaman? There are many people of course who claim to be practicing shamanism today. And that's another thing. Why this rise in Neo shamanism? What are people thinking they're trying to get from it?

The shaman does a lot of interesting things in order to get into a particular state. The shaman will often engage in things like sleep deprivation. Intense long periods, hours of singing, dancing chanting. The shaman will often engage in imitation. Put on the clothing, mask that represents some other figure, some other animal. Sometimes the shaman will go into periods of isolation - social isolation. Go out into the wilderness. And of course, although it's not necessary but it has been pervasive, shamans will make use of psychedelics, in order to help bring about an altered state of Consciousness. So what's going on here?

Steve Taylor, In his book "[Waking from Sleep](#)" talks about these disruptive strategies that people, even today, use in order to try and bring about what I called awakening experiences. These radical transformations in people's sense of self and reality. I'm going to talk about that.

But one of the main ideas here is what a shaman is typically doing is trying to disrupt the normal ways in which you're finding patterns in the world. Why would you want to disrupt the normal way you find patterns in the world? Because the way you find patterns - and remember I said this; the very thing that makes you adaptive also makes you subject to self-deception - the way you find patterns is very profound.

So this is something I study as a scientist. Many of you may have seen this. So this is called "[The Nine Dot problem](#)". You have to join all nine dots with four straight lines. You have to start the next line from the terminus of the previous line and when people see this they initially say "well this is very easy! Of course I can do this! One, two, three, four... Oh wait I missed the Middle dot! OK one, two, three... Wait! One, two, Wait! One, two..." And

then a pause. This actually turns out to be a very difficult problem for people to solve: Joining all nine dots with four straight lines. But why is it hard? One line, two lines, three lines, four lines. What was hard about that? And when you do that of course people get angry at you they say "you cheated! You went outside the box! You went outside the square!" That's where 'think outside the box' comes from. Now why that was hard is because you projected a pattern here. The Square. And then you engaged unconsciously - unconsciously - your skills of connecting the dots. When you were a kid you'd connect the dots. And when you connect the dots you're not supposed to do this: make a non dot turn. If you do that, you won't get a picture of a picnic table, you'll get like an acid trip psychedelic thing. So, unconsciously, you project a pattern and then you activate the appropriate skills and then you're locked and you're blocked. You can't solve that problem, not because of anything there in the data but because of the way you have framed it.

You have to disrupt your framing. We're going to talk a lot about that: in order to get an insight, in order to get an insight. Now let me tell you something, again to start to introduce this to you. Saying to people "think outside the box", and this is kind of funny if you think about it... Saying to people "think outside the box" does not help them with this problem. Giving them the belief that they have to go outside the box does not help them to solve this problem! That's what I meant when I said "you shouldn't reduce all of your sense of knowing to believing". What's involved here is not believing that you have to go outside the box. It's knowing how to go outside the box; how to alter your attention; how to change your perspective on what's salient to you. [On] what is relevant. How to alter what's important or real to you. Now what shamanism is, is it's a set of practices, disruptive practices and attentional practices that are designed to disrupt everyday framing so that the shaman can get enhanced insight. Now what kind of insight? Insight into patterns in the environment that other people might not be picking up on. Enhanced insight - mind-sight - into other people. And here's the sense of participatory knowing that I mentioned. When the shaman is enacting the animal, the shaman isn't having beliefs about the deer. The shaman is becoming the deer. I don't mean metaphysically, but the shaman is trying to get together the sense of the skills, the kind of perspective the deer has, the way the deer thinks, the kind of world the deer lives in... And by

becoming the deer, by having this participatory knowing of what it is to be a deer, it enhances the ability to track and find the deer. Now these enhanced capacities for insight, and mindset, participatory knowing, means the shaman combines a lot of things that are for us in separate individuals. shamans are highly charismatic. Imagine if you could take a rock star, a super rock star, a super therapist, a super artist, put them all in one individual and then they come to you when you're sick! They can enhance your ability to trigger your own [placebo effect](#). The placebo effect is real! 30 to 40 percent of all real medication - the ones we sell as real drugs - is placebo effect! If you have an individual that can trigger that, and that's all you have at that time, that's still 30 to 40 percent better than you had before. So what are the shamans doing?

Notice what they're doing. They're really enhancing their capacity for cognition. Now what we're going to do in the next video is we're going to come back to the shamans. We're gonna talk more about what they're doing. How they're enhancing their cognition and why this played such an important role in making human beings into the kind of meaning makers there are. We'll see what it is. But you can see already - notice, in order to tap into all these kinds of knowing in order to bring about this altered state of consciousness, notice how much the shaman is manipulating the meaning of things which isn't the same thing as being a charlatan.

So we're starting to see right from the beginning the connections between meaning making, altered states of consciousness and enhanced capacity to be in touch with the world... and then, what's the connection to "wisdom". The word "Shaman" means "one who knows", "one who sees", "one who has insight". Shamans are considered wise people, and that's why we have all these words. Like the word "Wizard" means "a wise person".

OK. So that's it for our first video. You get a sense from this of how we're going to proceed. Thank you very much for your time.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

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Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Episode 2: Flow, Metaphor, and the Axial Revolution

Welcome back. I'm John Vervaeke and this is a video series on awakening from the meaning crisis.

So last time we were beginning our historical examination of the origin of this capacity for meaning making to try and get a clearer picture of what it is. And today I'd like to continue on with that. We were talking about the connections between meaning making, enhancing cognition, altered states of consciousness, wisdom. And we were talking about that in connection with the Upper Paleolithic transition in which human beings seem to have gone through this radical change which was not so much a biological change but a change in how they were using their cognition.

We talked about important ideas such as cognitive exaptation and psycho-technology and we talked about how the upper Paleolithic transition was probably driven by the way shamanism was a set of pscyho-technologies for altering states of consciousness to cognitively exapt the enhanced abilities that trade rituals and initiation rituals and healing rituals had already been creating.

And we talked about the way that shaman engaged in various disruptive strategies to try and alter their framing of reality because how we frame reality is both the source of our adaptivity - our ability to find patterns - but it is also how we can get locked in, or how we miss frame reality and how we are in need of insight. And then we talked about that in connection something like the nine dot problem. And that led us to realize that there's kinds of knowing that are independent from the knowing that we capture in our statements of our beliefs. There's knowings about knowing how to do something; what it's like to have a particular perspective and what it's like to know something by identifying with it and participating in it. And I was starting to show you how the Shamen's altered state of consciousness was also enhancing and altering meaning making, affording insight and

improving the ability of the shaman to help in hunting and healthcare to things that would radically improve survival. I want to continue now and talk more about that and more about what's going on in shamanism in order to get more explication of this meaning making, wisdom, altered states of consciousness, different kinds of knowing and how they're all interrelated together.

So typically the shaman engages in practices that are putting significant changes in their attention. As we mentioned there's often significant disruptive strategies: sleep deprivation, sex depravation, social isolation, the use of psychedelics, extended chanting, dancing. All of these things are designed to bring about radical changes in the way in which the brain is operating. Now part of what a shaman is doing is, I would argue, also getting into the flow state.

So the flow state has become something that has [been] discussed both academically and in the popular culture. It was made famous in work by Csikszentmihalyi. His book "[Flow. The \[The Psychology of Optimal\] experience](#)" brought it to the forefront in 1990. So what is the flow experience? So the flow experience is experience people get into; they often describe it as like "being in the zone". So you are involved in a task that is very demanding. In fact it has a particular structure to it. So... These are your skills [presentation]. And these [are] how demanding the situation is. And the flow state is one in which the demands of the situation just slightly go beyond your skill abilities. And so you get what's called [here] Csikszentmihalyi represents this by the "flow channel". When my skills can just through - we'll talk about this through insight and restructuring - when I can just enough adapt and extend my skills to meet the demands - so I have to put everything I've got into it - then I get into the flow channel. If my skills exceed the demands, I fall into boredom. If my demands exceed the skills, I fall into anxiety.

Now of course the thing about you is you are very good at learning in situation. So you need a kind of context in which, as your skills improve, your environment also improves. So one of the things we've created in our culture... We have created flow induction machines because what those machines have are a situation where your skills are constantly improving and

the demands of the environment are constantly improving and these flow induction machines have other properties that are very important in them. There is a very tight feedback between what you do and how the environment responds. You're getting very clear information and failure matters. At least symbolically because you can die. And of course some of you probably realizing that I'm talking about video games.

Video games are one of the most reliable ways of inducing the flow state in people. In fact part of the reasons why video games are addictive - and they are now being considered to be a bonafide addiction by the World Health Organization - is precisely because they engender the flow state. Addictions - and we'll talk about this later when we talk about addictions - addictions run off machinery that is evolutionarily adaptive. That's why it's compelling. So the flow state: what are other things that people do to get into the flow state? They play jazz. They do martial arts - I'm a martial artist! One that's particularly interesting because there's no other explanation for why people do it other than they get into the flow state is rock climbing because rock climbing, other wise, [is] like some sort of torture from Greek mythology, right? You presented it like "here's a rock face! What I want you to do is, I want you to go up that! It's going to be really physically demanding. It's going to hurt you. You might fall and harm yourself. And once you get to the top you come back down!" It would seem like a torturous thing to do. Well we know why people rock climb - they rock climb because they get into the flow state and the flow state is deeply positive for people.

It's not the same thing as physical pleasure. In fact the flow state is much more connected to meaning in life. In fact the more often you get into the flow state the more likely you will rate your life as meaningful. The more you will experience well-being.

And what's interesting also about the flow state. And remember we're doing this because I'm talking about that shamanism is probably a practice for practicing getting into the flow state. So remember that. The thing about the flow state [is] it's a universal. People across cultures, socioeconomic groups, genders, language, environments, age groups, report being able to get into the flow state and they describe it in detail almost exactly the same way. That's a universal and universals are important in cognitive science. You pay

attention to the universals because they give you profound insight into the machinery.

What's it like to be in the flow state? Well when you're in the flow state you feel like you're deeply at one with things. So for example I'm a martial artist and when I'm sparring it's like my sense of connectedness to my opponent is really enhanced and I'm really at one. And that comes with this kind of spontaneity. So when a strike is coming to my hand, I don't [mock instruction] "raise your hand now John!", it flows out of me - hence the word - and the block is there! The hockey player, the goalie, just puts out his hand, the gloved hand, and the puck is there. There's this tremendous sense of "at-onement" and then closely allied to it is this: At one level you know, like the shaman dancing or chanting, that there's tremendous metabolic energy at work. Effort! You're making at one level all this effort but at another level it feels effortless. That's the spontaneity. Again it just seems to flow from you. Your sense of time is passing differently. Your sense of self is being dramatically altered. So when people are in the flow state, a kind of self-consciousness disappears. That self-consciousness we carry around. That self-consciousness that's always doing this sort of thing. It's constantly doing our autobiography. (How's my day going? How am I doing? Who am I? What am I doing?) And it's also checking (how do I...?) "image management". How do I look? What are people thinking of me? How am I doing? Am I under threat? All of that nattering - "all my feeling... Was that... I knew about it..." - and that, of course, that can get out of hand.

Like when you're in depression you ruminate on all that stuff and it overwhelms you. But we all carry that burden around. It's taxing. And in the flow state, it's gone because there's no space for all of that because you're so engrossed in the task. The other thing about the flow state is It's super salient. It's like the kind of brightness and vividness you get in a videogame. The world seems more intense and people really like this experience and not only do they like it, it seems to be where they do their best work. So the flow experience is an optimal experience in two ways: Many people regard it as the best experiences they can have. But it's also where they're doing their very best at what they want to excel at. That's why it's so motivating to get into the flow state. So, why is the flow state so good? So, this year - 2013 - I published some work with Adrian Bennett and Leo Ferraro, in which we

tried to argue for what the cognitive mechanisms are in the flow state. See, Csikszentmihalyi tells you the environmental conditions - what you need in order to get into the flow state - you need skills and demand to be matched. You need for there to be a very tight coupling between you and the environment like in the video game. You need very clear information - it can't be ambiguous or vague. And failure has to matter - it has to be costly to you in some fashion. He specified all of that. He also specified the kind of training that helps enhance you, to get you into the flow state. And, think about this, think about what I said last time - and we're gonna explore this more - training in mindfulness. The more people have training in mindfulness increases their capacity to get into the flow state. Now can we come up with a unified explanation for all of this? I think we can, both for the phenomenology - why we're experiencing what we're experiencing when we're in the flow state - and why is it improving your cognition and therefore why would the shaman be enhancing their cognition by getting into something like the flow state through their ritual practices?

Okay so think about the rock climber. The rock climber is climbing. Remember we talked about how you frame and find patterns last time. Remember the 9 dot problem. These patterns aren't just patterns in your mind they're patterns and knowing how to make sense of things. So you're rock climbing and if that breaks down you impass - you're stuck. And I don't mean just cognitively! You're physically stuck! Now if you want to be a good rock climber, what you have to do is you have to break that framing. You have to train yourself to break the frame. Restructure, change what you're finding relevant and salient and then change yourself to fit that. And then you refit yourself to the rock face. You refit yourself to the rock face. Then you have to do it again. And then you have to do it again and then you have to do it again.

Or the jazz musician. The jazz musician is playing. They pick up on a pattern they play with it but they can't stay with it too long. What do they have to do? They have to shift, they have to restructure. They have to shift into a new pattern and then play with that but they can't stay with it too long. They have to pick up on it they have to refresh again and again and again and again and again. Do see what's going on with the rock climber, the jazz musician, the martial artist, is this idea of a cascade of insights. You're

having an insight that's leading to another insight that's leading to another insight. It's priming. So, you know when you have an insight you have an "Aha!" and you get that burst of energy and it's like a flash. That's why we put a light bulb over somebody's head when we want to show them having an insight. There that flash! Now imagine if I took that "AHAHA" and I extended it: "AHAHAHAHAHA...!" That's the flow state. It's an insight cascade. So the more you flow, the more you're training your ability for insight. And direct interacting with your environment. Now the trouble of course with the video game is the environment isn't a real world.

But in the shamans world, of course, the shaman's flowing in the real world, the real social world. The real ecological world. But there's something more. It's not just an inside cascade that's going on in flow. That in and of itself would be great. There's something else going [on]. This has to do with your capacity for implicit learning. Now notice what's happening here. Notice that, although even I'm doing the history, I'm always also doing the 'cog-psy' because while I've been emphasizing the history, the historical account, I'm starting to build what I need to give you the structural functional account. So implicit learning. This goes back to work led in the '60s by [Arthur Reeber](#) and a whole bunch of other people. So what Robert was doing is he was really trying to understand how people learn language. What he was doing was he was generating an arbitrary set of rules - completely arbitrary just make them up on the spot set of rules - for how you can link strings of letters and/or numbers together. Like the rule might be you can't have more than three vowels in a row or you have to have two continents and then you generate letter strings; eight [or] nine long.

These are so long that you can't easily hold them in your working memory. And then this is what you do: You can generate an indefinite number - you generate a huge number of these strings and you just show them to people. Here's one, here's one, here's one, here's one, here's one, here's one. That's the first part of the experiment. Then you do the second part of the experiment. Now you generate a whole bunch of strings, but two kinds. One set of strings is generated by that artificial set of rules and so follows the same rules as the first set. And then the second set is generated by completely different set of rules.

And what you do is you mix up the first and the second together. And this is the task you give people. Can you tell me the strings that belong with strings you saw before? Now we originally thought what would happen is people would [pshhhh?? shrugs unknowingly]. Because it seems so random. What he found was people score well well above chance consistently on this.

People can tell you. "Oh no. Those strings. Yeah those belong with though the old ones. No, that one doesn't, that one does that one does." Now here's what's interesting. You now ask people "why?" "How do you know that?" And they'll give you one of two answers. They'll say "I don't know. I don't know! I just I just 'feel' it!" Which is [woooooooo. makes spooky sound and gesture]. Or they say, they give you some explanation, they'll give you some rule or procedure. They're using - and here's what we know - they're deceiving themselves or lying to you because that rule that they're using wouldn't actually predict their success.

So you are picking up... you have this tremendous capacity outside your conscious awareness - to pick up on very complex patterns in your environment. You say "OK, why? What does this have to do with shamanism?" Well hang on, because we talked about the shaman picking up on patterns last time. Let's go back to this. Let me talk about an experiment that's really interesting. So there was some work done on this idea. That people have psychic abilities and there's this 'feeling' of being stared; at the people can tell when they're being stared at and people reliably report that they think "Oh I knew somebody was staring I could just feel it in the back of my neck". And so they ran an experiment in which they did the following: they'd have somebody in a room, blindfolded ear-plugged. They can't sense anything. Nobody's allowed to wear perfumes or anything. That person can't see or hear or feel and they're just standing in the room. Unbeknownst to that person people would come in and stare at them and then the person at the center of the room had report if they were being stared at or not. And people were reporting this well above chance. They were saying "I think I'm being stared at!" and there was somebody there. And of course first of all it's [woooooooo. makes spooky sound and gesture again].

But then it turned out that if you made a slight change to that experiment it wouldn't replicate. So what was going on? You bring people into the room and they say "I think I'm being stared at." and the researchers would tell

them if they were correct or not. They would say "you're right" or "you're wrong". So what you say, so what. Well here's the thing: the researchers thought they were introducing people to viewers into the room randomly. But it turns out they weren't introducing them randomly because you know what's very hard for you to do? Random stuff! They were actually introducing people as viewers in a complex pattern. And the person that was blindfolded and earplugged was implicitly learning the pattern because they were getting feedback. If you take the feedback away - if you don't tell them whenever they say I'm being stared at or not, if you don't tell them either that they're either right or wrong, their performance drops to chance. See, a lot of what looks like psychic abilities are your ability to pick up implicitly on complex patterns in the environment without being aware of it. Hogarth, in his book on "[educating intuition](#)", makes a really, really cool claim; makes a very good argument in fact I think for this. He says that what we call intuition is a real thing but there isn't anything magical about it, in [the way] the psychics say, your intuition is the result of your implicit learning.

You pick up on all kinds of complex patterns not knowing how you have done that but you get an ability to detect patterns and you don't know how. That's why your intuition feels the way it does: you just sort of know. You know things! You're doing it all the time! To use a famous example from [Dreyfus](#), you know how far to stand from somebody and what angle to stand - where you should stand how close you should stand what angle you should stand how as the conversation or the context changes you're allowed to move closer or farther away what angles you're allowed to be at. But if I were to ask you to tell me how you do that you wouldn't know! You would just say "I know how to do it". And yet when people don't know how to do it it creeps you out. It creeps you out!

So intuition. Hogarth points out - and this is something very common - Hogarth points out that we have two different terms and we don't realize we're talking about the same thing. We have intuition when we think it's going well - that Implicit learning. But we also have bias. And prejudice for when we think that implicit learning goes bad. The bigot has got intuitions about races that are wrong. Now how is it that implicit learning goes wrong? Well here's the thing. You have some complex pattern in the environment and your implicit learning picks up on it. The problem is that there's two

kinds of patterns in your environment. There's correlations. There's correlation patterns and causal patterns. So what do I mean by that? Correlations is when any two things are related to each other. So let me give you an example of a couple of correlations that you shouldn't confuse with causation. There is a correlation between how large your wedding is and how long your marriage will last. You have a bigger wedding; your marriage will last longer. Now you would be a fool to therefore think you should have the biggest possible wedding because the reason why bigger weddings predict longer marriages is not because bigger weddings cause longer marriages. It's because they're only correlated. It's because bigger weddings reflect a bigger social network more financial resources and having a bigger social network for the couple having more financial resources actually does cause a marriage to last longer.

Here's another one. So I'm old enough and I was brought up in a religious household when prayer was taken out of the schools and of course people were very upset about that. You're taking a look at "crime is going up as we've taken prayer out of the schools" and things like that. By the way crime hasn't been going up. Read some of [Stephen Pinker's work](#). But let's say it was. That's only a correlation because here's another correlation: We know that greenhouse gases have been going up steadily and that's part of the environmental crisis we're going to talk about. You know what has been also consistently going down for the exact same time period? Caribbean piracy! Having pirates in the Caribbean and wooden ships with cannons and stuff. As that went down, greenhouse gases went up. Now I hope none of you think that we could solve global warming by bringing back piracy.

So there are many things, there are many patterns in the world that are illusory because they're only correlational. They're not causal. See the bigot has picked up on correlational patterns, not causal patterns. So what you want to do is you want to train your implicit learning to pick up on the causal patterns that are real rather than the correlational patterns that are illusory. Now here's what you can't do. You can't tell people to look for patterns explicitly. Go back to Reeber's experiment. If you put people into that experiment where they're looking at the letter strings and you tell them explicitly what they're supposed to do - try and figure out the rules!

Consciously deliberately try to figure out the rules! - their performance doesn't get better it gets worse.

And Hogarth notes this in his book on "[Educating Intuition](#)". We can't replace implicit learning with explicit learning because it is precisely by being implicit that it works so well. What can we do explicitly then? What we can do is set up the right context, the right environmental factors. So that my implicit learning machine will tend more likely to get onto causal patterns rather than correlational patterns. So I'll get good intuition rather than bad intuition. How do you do that? Well Hogarth says the way you would do this is the way you do science. You want to control the context. Because what science is, science is a way of distinguishing causal patterns from correlational patterns. You set up an environmental situation so that you can distinguish the causal patterns from the correlational patterns.

What do you do? Well in an experiment first of all I make sure that everything is very clearly measured. I get very clear information. Very clear information. I make sure I'm looking to see that the change in one variable is closely followed by a change in another variable. So I change your drug dosage till your symptoms get better. So I look for clear information. I look for clear feedback. And in science failure matters. You test a hypothesis. And this confirmation has to be possible. Failure matters. Now notice this. What Hogarth says is "Well what I want to do is I want to put you into an implicit learning situation where you get clear feedback like you do in science where there is a tight coupling between what you do and how the environment responds and where error really matters." Like in science. And he says "what we should do is we should try and do implicit learning in those kinds of contexts."

Well here's what myself and my colleagues argued: those three criteria that will turn your intuition into good implicit learning are exactly the conditions for flow. Clear information. Tightly coupled feedback. And error matters.

The rock climber is looking for/ needs clear information, tightly coupled feedback and error really matters. That context really means that there's a much greater chance that their implicit learning machinery is gonna pick up on causal patterns rather than correlational ones.

So. Notice what we've got going on here. The shaman is getting into the flow state; is developing all these techniques for getting into this deeply immersive, comprehensive, flow state and they're getting an insight cascade. And they're also getting enhanced implicit learning picking up on very complex real, complex patterns. Now this is intuitive. They don't know how they're doing it.

Now here's what's interesting too. These two are reinforcing each other because the insight gets your cognition to explore for new patterns and then the implicit learning picks up those new patterns and then those new patterns enhance your ability to restructure. And then you keep exploring for new patterns acquiring the new patterns of implicit learning and you keep ratcheting your skills up. Getting into the flow state is deeply deeply enhancing of your cognition. Somebody who's an expert at getting into the flow state is going to be an individual you want to have around. Now that individual is going to have some really serious challenges facing them. They don't know how they're getting a lot of the information they're getting. They don't know why they're so insightful! They're experiencing this radical "at-onement" (oneness) with the world; this loss of sense of self when they're enacting the animal. You have to understand these insights aren't verbal insights! Like in the 9 dot problem, it's not words, not beliefs getting an insight in how the deer moves! It's getting an insight an intuitive insight in how to talk to this person to trigger the placebo effect to help them to heal right now.

So getting into the flow state: Notice what's going on here. Notice you're getting something that's almost like a mystical experience. It's a powerful, altered state of consciousness. It's enhancing your cognitive processing. And the shaman is making meaning. They're singing, they're dancing they're telling stories they're altering people's sense of what matters they're altering people's sense of identity. They're healing and transforming people.

What does that mean? Why would that have powered the Upper Paleolithic transition? Well first of all this is enhancing your cognition. But - and this goes towards the work of [Michael Winkelman](#) and also [Matt Rossano](#) - what's happening in this state is your brain is learning to get areas to talk to each other that normally don't talk to each other. This is especially the case if

you've gone through a massive disruption strategy - fasting, social isolation, taking psychedelics - because if you look at a brain scan of somebody who's having a psychedelic experience, areas of the brain that do not normally talk to each other are talking to each other now.

Now if I were just to do that to you, if I was just to get areas to talk to each other, you'd experience that as just noise. But if you've got enhanced insight and enhanced intuition, those areas are now talking to each other and you can bridge between them. You can connect them. And now this is an ability that you take for granted. You think it is just a normal part of your cognition. This is your capacity for metaphor. The word metaphor is itself a metaphor. It means to bridge, to carry over, to connect things that are normally not connected. And what you need to understand is how pervasive metaphor is. I showed you a little bit last time - the idea of a project. But I want you to reflect now - And notice the word reflect as a metaphor - On how your thought and language is filled with metaphor - by the way, that was a metaphor! I'll say for example "do you see what I'm saying?", "Do you get my point?" "Do you comprehend it?" "Can you grasp it?" "Do you understand it?" These are all metaphors!

How about "halfway through" this talk. I hope it's not "too hard" for you. Do you see? It's pervasive and profound - all of your cognition. This is work done by [Lakoff](#) and others. I have some criticisms of some of their theory but the idea that your cognition is filled and functions through metaphorical enhancement... that's just I think the case. Now why is metaphor so powerful? Because metaphor is how you make creative connections between ideas. Metaphorical cognition is at the heart of both science and art. When the shamans are enhancing this machinery they're connecting areas of the brain that normally do not talk to each other and affording a massive enhancement in metaphor. One of the ways in which your cognition and meaning and altered states of consciousness come together is in how your mind, your embodied mind, is generating metaphor in order to make insightful connections. There's a deep connection between how insightful, how good a problem solver you are and your capacity for metaphorical thought. That's why when somebody is facing a problem and they need to restructure how they think about it we tell them to use an analogy to think of a metaphor. So, this is the point: the shaman is developing psycho-

technologies for altering the state of consciousness to get into the flow state and that flow state is already making them more insightful and more intuitively powerful. But it is also making them generators of metaphor. They're literally providing people with the forms of thought that will allow them to connect ideas such that making inscriptions on a piece of bone can track the moon. [Carving this figurine](#) can connect me to ideas of fertility.

So, we're seeing a lot of the themes that we're going to develop coming to the fore here. How much the shaman is weaving together, enhancing cognition, altered states of consciousness and improving our capacity for making sense of the world. Literally making more meaning.

If you are a hunter/gatherer group and you have a shaman, you're going to outcompete groups that don't. There's a reason why it's universal. There's a reason why the flow phenomena is universal. Because this exapts some of our most basic machinery [and] enhances it in a powerful way. The shamans have a very interesting kind of experience. They go through this transformation. They often experience what's called "[Soul flight](#)" as if they've gone to another world and they're flying through it. This is the origin - think of how we've come to this - but this is the origin of "getting high". In the shaman, does this.... The shaman experiences themselves as if they're flying above the world. Why? Why would the brain generate that? Well think about this. The shaman is getting a much more comprehensive grasp of more complex patterns. But they're experiencing it mostly intuitively and metaphorically. Where are you when you get a bigger picture of things? You're above them.

How do we often explain this even to ourselves metaphorically? You say you have "oversight". Somebody who is in charge of things has "oversight" of them or has "super-vision" of them. Do you see that? Those are metaphors. Those are metaphors that are little whispers little echoes of shamanic flight. Flying over things. Getting an intuitive, insightful grasp that is expressed metaphorically of a deeper connection to the world.

We're gonna pick up on all of these themes as we investigate more of the machinery of meaning making. They need to move forward now. So I want to talk about another revolution. This was the Upper Paleolithic transition. This is where the meaning making machinery, the altered altering

consciousness, the self transcending, the flying above, the cultivation of wisdom associated with a lot of things that we consider spiritual and religious. You see them all together. That's the Upper Paleolithic transition. Now there's another important revolution that takes place around 10000 BCE. That's the [Neolithic revolution](#). You get the invention of agriculture. Now agriculture is important because it adds to this machinery in an important way because now individuals are part of complex societies and for the first time, because of agriculture, people start to stay in one place for significant amounts of time. So their relationship to the environment, to each other because they're living with large groups of strangers now, and to themselves radically changes.

That goes through a very long period of development. This world then becomes the ancient world as stone gives way to metal and we get the [Bronze Age](#). The period of the first great civilizations in [Mesopotamia](#), in Egypt and there's a transformation that's happened in the way people are experiencing their world. Human beings are still doing everything we've been talking about. They still have rituals - of course they've developed them into very sophisticated, complex systems. They're still engaging in altered states of consciousness and that world is pervasive for a very long time. But our connection to it is very odd! If I were to ask you if you've read anything from the bronze age, chances are you haven't! Have you read the Epic of [Gilgamesh](#)? No, probably not. Have you read any Egyptian mythology? Probably not. Why the Sumerian, Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations are titanically important? Long lasting? But notice if I ask you if you've read parts of the Bible, or perhaps Plato, or perhaps some of the Buddha. Or Confucius. Chances are you have read some of that. You somehow feel that those people are relevant to you in a way that people from the Bronze Age aren't! Now why? There seems to have been another great change comparable to the change of the Upper Paleolithic transition.

Again whether it's a one shot or more of a continuum... Again I don't need to decide that, and I'm not confident that the debates around that are actually very fruitful. But [Karl Jaspers](#) talked about the "Axial Age". [Karen Armstrong](#) has made famous "that" in a [recent book](#). So around 800 BCE to around 300 B.C. there's this great change such that you will read, connect to, find relevant authors, systems of thought, ways of being from that time

period. And yet back here - where the Bronze Age ends - you don't read this stuff. In fact - or at least most of you don't - you don't find it relevant. You don't identify with it. Something happened here that is formative of us. Just like the Upper Paleolithic transition was formative of us as human beings, the Axial Age is formative of us as Western civilization. Or at least world civilization, because not just in the West that the Axial Revolution occurs. It also occurs in India and China.

Now, what happened? Why this change? Well there's a bunch of stuff that happens; we don't quite know. There's a lot of discussion about it but we know! The Bronze Age collapses. There's some good books [about] this. A Book by Drews. There's a book by [Klein 1177 B.C.](#) Different discussions about why it collapsed - was it a change in chariot warfare? Is it general systems failure? Is a combination of changing military technology? Don't know! Doesn't matter for our purposes. What we know is that it's a collapse. Now you need to grasp the gravity of this collapse.

This is the greatest collapse in civilization the world has ever known. The fall of the Roman Empire is nowhere near as devastating as this. More cities go out of existence at this time - the Bronze Age collapse - than any other time in recorded history. More cultures disappear. Greatest loss of literacy. Greatest collapse of trade. This is the closest thing the world has actually experienced to apocalypse. The end of the world. What happens here is a dark age. So before this you have the Egyptian Empire, these titanic dinosaur empires, huge and powerful. Lasting for centuries. Cultures the last millennia and then they disappear. And what you would find is something like when the dinosaurs went extinct. When the dinosaurs went extinct the little mammals that had been scurrying about, they start to evolve. What you have once these dinosaur empires past out of existence in the dark age is you have a lot of little small scale societies. People barely hanging on. [A] Very tough time. Another time in which there's a demand made on cognition to adapt. Remember the bottleneck in Africa preceding the Upper Paleolithic transition. Here's another bottleneck kind of event. So people are more willing to experiment. To try new things than they have before in the past. They're willing to try new forms of social organization.

But importantly they start to invent new things and they start to invent new psycho-technologies. Remember the last time we talked about what a psycho-technology is. It's a standardized way of doing information processing that improves and enhances your cognition by linking brains together. Your brain to your own future states of your brain. Your brain to other people's brains. Something happens here in one of the areas that was hit hardest by the Bronze Age collapse. The area Palestine. Palestine and what's modern Israel, Jordan, places like that. It used to be the old... referred to as the land of Canaan. What seems to be invented here is a new kind of literacy. Remember we talked about literacy as a powerful psycho-technology. Now the Bronze Age world had literacy. The [Egyptians had hieroglyphics](#) famously. The Sumerians had [cuneiform](#). Now the thing about those forms of literacy is they're very difficult to learn. You've to go to school for very very long time. And your job... You can have this job in the ancient world. This was your job - to be literate. It's called being a scribe. It's where we get words like scribble from. Your entire job was you were literate because it was a tough thing to be literate and it was a very valuable thing and it was a rare thing because literacy was hard. When it's ideoographic. I have some ideograms tattooed here. This means meditate. What gets invented here is alphabetic literacy. It seems to be invented in Kanan and then it's taken up by the [Phoenicians](#) and then they take it to the Greeks and then the [Canaanite alphabet](#) merges imperceptibly into [archaic Hebrew](#) and then gets taken into [Hebrew](#). That's going to be important. These two groups of people are going to be very important.

Now why is alphabetic literacy so powerful? It's much more learnable. It's a more effective and efficient Psycho-technology. Remember when I said last time how much literacy enhances your cognition. If I give you alphabetic literacy you can learn it much more powerfully and more people can learn it. So your ability to learn and access and share with others the benefits of literacy gets magnified tremendously. So the number of people that can be literate expands. Now, literacy does something very, very important. Really, really interesting and its effect on your sense of self and your sense of cognition. As I noted before when I can write things down I can come back to my thoughts later and I can reflect on them. I start to become more aware of my own thoughts and noticed something else I can do: I can correct my

thinking more readily because I don't have to rely on it being held in my mind. I can put it, I can externalize it, I can put it out there, I can reflect on it, I can correct it. I can store it independent of my memory.

So I start to get a capacity for what [Robert Bellah](#) calls "second order thinking". Now, we all have metacognition - we'll talk about this later - metacognition is your awareness of your own mind. I can ask you right now "what are you thinking" you can become aware of it. "Do you have a good memory? Yes or no?" You'll say "I do or I don't". That's meta cognition. It's your knowledge and awareness of your own mind. We all have metacognition. But one of the things you can do with literacy - alphabetic literacy - is you can internalize literacy into your metacognition. So, notice I'm becoming aware of my own cognition here. I can reflect on it. I can correct it. I can enhance it. I can store it. I can share it with others. Second order thinking is when you internalize a psycho-technology into your metacognition and it improves your capacity to critically examine your own thinking and correct your own thinking. Second order thinking starts to emerge because of alphabetic literacy.

What else is being invented at this time? Well, you've got lots of armies moving around in this period because what's happening is empires are being rebuilt. Famously the [Assyrian empire](#) in the Middle East. Mobile armies are needed and so there is an invention here that's really important that we also take for granted. It's the stuff we carry around - well we used to carry around we don't carry around anymore; we'll talk about that - It's money! Coinage! Coinage is invented. Now coinage is obviously a physical technology. In one sense I carry coins around - although the sense in which money is now physical is very, very tenuous because most of us don't carry anything physical anymore - money is just a purely symbolic thing. And that's the point. Money teaches you to think in an abstract symbol system. You start thinking in abstract symbol systems and it also teaches you something else. Numeracy. You have to start thinking mathematically. At least arithmetically. So you now have abstract symbolic, logically rigorous thought being trained. It's being trained for practical purposes but is being trained. It's ready for exaptation. The alphabetic literacy is training this second order thinking. It's ready for exaptation. You say "OK, I get it! The psycho-technologies are training skills that are ready for exaptation!". Well, bring that second order

thinking and bring that abstract symbolic thought - more logically rigorous together - and what are you going to start getting. You're going to start getting people having a very clear sense of two things about their cognition.

One thing is how much they can correct their cognition. How much they can transcend themselves; self transcendence. It enhances their sense of self transcendence. But what's it also doing? It's also enhancing their awareness of how self deceptive they are. How much error is in their cognition and they previously couldn't be aware of it but now with second order thinking with literacy an abstract symbolic thought and numeracy they can become aware of this. They put those two together: a tremendous capacity for self correction and tremendous capacity for self-deception. And Human Beings start to do something very differently. They start to change their sense of self and their sense of the world. They start to realize a more personal sense of responsibility which of course is going to change how people think morally about themselves.

What do I mean? Let me give you a specific example. If you look before this time, people think of chaos and warfare and violence as just part of the natural order. But after the Axial revolution with the advent of second order thinking with this increased awareness of self transcendence and self correction people start to realize "no no no!", we're responsible for the violence. We're responsible for the chaos. Not just in some vague sense but it's the way my mind makes meaning. That's why [the Dhammapada](#) begins "The Mind is the chief thing." People understand that - you see this in the [Dhammapada](#) - there is no enemy greater than your own mind. But there is no ally greater than your own mind. People start understanding this double edged sword of their own cognition. Undisciplined leads to violence through self-deception and illusion. But discipline, through self correction, and self transcendence leads to wisdom and the ability to reduce the violence and the suffering.

So in our next meeting together we're going to talk more about this actual revolution and this sense that people had of their capacity for self transcendence and their capacity for self-deception and how that changed, radically, their sense of self and their sense of the world. And how that

changed what meaning meant and what wisdom meant. Thank you for your time.

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Episode 3: Continuous Cosmos and Modern World Grammar

Welcome back to "Awakening from the Meaning Crisis". This is our third time together. Last time we were talking about more what was going on in Shamanism and the Upper Paleolithic Transition. We talked a lot about the flow experience and how it integrates altered states of consciousness.

Something like, or at least on a continuum with, mystical experiences and meaning making. Enhanced insight and intuition and how this resulted in an enhanced capacity for metaphorical cognition which greatly expands human cognition, makes it much more creative, much more capable of generating all of those fantastic connections in meaning that drove the Upper Paleolithic transaction's explosion in culture and technology. And then we moved to consider some other intervening revolutions that also had an impact. We talked briefly about the Neolithic revolution and the beginning of agriculture and the rise of civilizations. We got into the Bronze Age civilization and then that led us into the revolution we're concentrating on now which is the Axial Revolution - a period around between 800 B.C. and 300 B.C.

following the Bronze Age collapse. The Bronze Age collapse, if you remember was one of the greatest if not the greatest collapse in civilization the world has ever seen. Then that facilitated much more experimentation in smaller scale societies, and that experimentation resulted in the creation of new psycho-technologies. One was alphabetic happening in the area of Canaan, and it's eventually going to be taken up very quickly by the

Hebrews and then taken up by the Phoenicians and taken to the Greeks. The Greeks, as we'll see today or next time, further improved it. We talked about how that psycho-technology - alphabetic literacy - makes literacy more effective, more efficiently learned, more powerful and its operation greatly expands the number of people that can be literate, [it] enhances the distributed cognition, and how that psycho-technology gets internalized into our metacognition and produces second order of thought.

We get an enhanced awareness of our own cognition. Both its power and its peril. We get an enhanced awareness of its capacity for self correction self transcendence. We also get an enhanced awareness of its capacity for self-deception. We talked also about the invention of coinage to help deal with the mobile armies of this time and how that trains you in abstract symbolic thought and more rigorous mathematical reasoning. And that also gets internalized, it gets exapted into second order thinking and people start to become aware of themselves in a different way. They start to become much more aware of the meaning making nature of their cognition, its capacity to generate illusion and self-deception and also its capacity to break out of illusion and self-deception and to come into a contact with a more real world.

So, this leads to some fundamental changes. People start to become more aware of their responsibility for the violence and the chaos and the suffering in their own lives and they start to become aware of how much that transformation of mind or mind and heart - because in the Axial age these terms are often referred to in a singular manner - how much transformation in the mind and heart is the way to alleviate suffering. So what starts to happen is the mythological framework and the way people are framing [themselves] and their world changes. Now let me explain to you how I'm using this word "myth", because I'm not using it the way we standardly we use it. The use I'm going to talk about, it's been deeply influenced by people like Jung, people like Tilak, Victor Turner... just a whole bunch of different thinkers. So when we use the word myth we tend to mean a falsehood that is widely believed. And that's unfortunate because we've lost the term for what I want to talk about. See myths aren't false stories about the ancient past. They're symbolic stories about perennial patterns that are always with us. That's a very different thing! So a lot of what's going on in myth is an

attempt to take these intuitive, implicitly learned patterns and put them into some form that is sharable with ourselves and with each other.

So in the Bronze Age world, before the axial revolution, people experienced the world in what's been called by Charles Taylor "the continuous cosmos" (I have a few questions about the use of word Cosmos but we'll come back to that later.) The idea here is human beings experience themselves in radical continuity. That sense of connectedness that you see even back in the shamanic world was very prevalent in the continuous Cosmos. In the continuous Cosmos. people feel there's a deep connection, a deep continuity, between the natural world and the cultural world. And between the cultural world and the world of the gods. So the differences are not really differences so much in kind as they are in power. It's not odd that animals might talk or [that] they might have deep societies. It's not odd for us, for certain human individuals to think themselves divine like the great greatest pre Axial Age empire is Egypt. The Pharaoh is a god king! He's something like a god! Why? For us we can only understand that, at most, metaphorically. Here's what we have to try and understand: it's not a metaphor for the ancient Egyptians.

Why? Because the differences between human beings and the gods are differences in power. This is a cosmos where reality is experienced primarily in power, in terms of power. The gods are just more powerful than us, more glorious than us. You can even see this in the Old Testament where, if you ask people/you can ask people "what term is most often used of God?" and people will say "righteous or holy"! Well those are used quite often, but the term that's most used is "glorious" - shining with power! Which is not a moral term at all. So think of the Greek gods. They're not moral exemplars at all. They're just extremely glorious and extremely powerful. The Egyptian king, the pharaoh, is extremely glorious and extremely powerful. So of course he's godlike or potentially even a god. So there's this continuous cosmos. And it's continuous in another way. It moves like this - It moves in great cycles. Just like the seasons. Just like day and night. Time moves in large cycles that repeat through eternity. In fact, what you're often trying to do with your ritual behavior is you're trying to tap into this continuity. You're trying to get back to the original power of creation. So you often enact the metaphorical story - the myth - of how the universe is created in order to try

and tap into. That creative power. There's a constant nostalgia for getting back, and your attitude towards the world is you want to fit into these cycles. You want to be in harmony with them. You don't want to really change things a lot because if I change this, if I change my future, I'm actually undermining my past. It's a very different way of relating to the world. There's this continuity between the natural world, the social world and the divine world, and time is wrapped on itself in this really important way.

Now what happens in the axial age is this way of looking at things is shattered. Now it doesn't go away. There's aspects of our thinking that are still like this. But what gets layered on top of it is a totally different world view. A totally different mythology for understanding the relationship between the self and the world.

So Charles Taylor talks about this as "The Great dis-embedding": when the Axial revolution hits, this world is replaced by a different one. Now again I'm speaking mythologically here. People will talk about it mythologically and you have to understand that it doesn't mean the way we would think of it as a literal scientific thing. Nor is it what we would merely call metaphorical. Mythological is neither scientific nor just metaphorical.

Now what's this new world? Well, this new mythological world view uses a mythology of two worlds. The idea is "this" is the "Everyday World". This is the world of the untrained mind. This is a world that is beset by self-deception, self-destruction, illusion, violence, chaos. It's a world in which we are out of touch with reality. But, opposed to this is the "Real World" and mythologically you can talk about this as two worlds. But of course in a lot of the traditions the real world is just cutting through the illusion of the everyday world. But the idea is the real world is how the trained mind, the wise mind, sees the world. This is how the world looks when you're in touch with reality. When your mind is not beset by illusion and delusion. When you have that sense that this is how things really are. This is a world also in which there is reduced suffering and violence precisely because the mind is not beset by foolishness, precisely because it is not out of touch with reality.

Now here (indicating left side of the board - The Continuous Cosmos), wisdom is power oriented. To be a wise individual is to learn how to acquire the power that was imbued at creation into the cycles. Its like energy's put

into the system and it cycles around. And then energy is put in the system [and] it cycles around... and you want to tap into that power. Wisdom is how to tap into that power because what you're after is "long life". "Live long and prosper" as it's in the Star Trek mythology for the Vulcans right? You want to be prosperous, you want to live long, you want to be free of conflict, you want to provide security for your offspring. So that's a sense of wisdom that is still captured in our sense of the word prudence - being very "Prudential" is to have that knowing how to fit into the power structures of your society - how to make things work for you. Getting the most power and prosperity you can. But over here (right hand side of the board - Modern World) there's a radical change. Wisdom changes because "you" do not want to fit into this world because this is the world of suffering and violence. It's a world in which you're out of touch with what's real. And as we'll talk about it later you deeply desire to be in touch with reality. It's one of your most powerful drives. You don't want to conform to this world. You want to be transformed out of this world. You want to move from here [Every day world] to here [Real World]. Now notice what's happening here. The old shamanic enacted myth of soul flight - flying above - is being exapted into a new sense. It's being exapted into this sense of self transcendence out of the everyday world into the real world and wisdom is now knowing how to make that transformative leap. And meaning isn't about just 'connectedness' as it was here but a special kind of connectedness; a connectedness to the real world as opposed to a detrimental connectedness to an illusory world.

So meaning is changing and the notion of wisdom is changing. And the notion of your "self"; what it is to be a self. Because here (Continuous Cosmos) you're defined largely by how you fit in. And of course that's always going to be part of our definition. I'm talking about emphasis here, not talking about absolute differences. But here (Continuous Cosmos) you're defined more by how you fit in. But here (The Modern World) you're defined increasingly more by how you can self transcend; self transform. How you can grow as a person. Notice how pervasive this has become in our self understand. Notice how we don't like to be with people who aren't growing, who aren't somehow transcending. Growing... Which way do you...? Growing up [gesturing upwards]. Becoming "more" mature. Getting "more" in touch with themselves and reality.

So this is called "The Great dis-embedding" because now we have a different relationship to "the everyday world"! And this is a metaphor that you don't see before. You don't see over "here" (Continuous Cosmos). This (Modern World) is the idea that we're somehow strangers in the world. We're pilgrims. We don't belong "here" (The Everyday World), we belong "there" (The Real World). Now as I keep saying, some people of course will literalize this, and this is really one world and another world. Most people will see this - when we talk about Plato and others - they're understanding this as a mythological representation for the process of self transcendence and self transformation. Once again we see the exaptation, just like the shamans were engaged in exaptation - we see the exaptation of that shamanic ability into this new mythological framework.

So, there's three places that I want to talk about in particular about this because they're the ones that we're going to talk a lot about. I will mention China periodically throughout especially when I talk about Taoism. But I want to talk about Greece and ancient Israel because those are the two foundational world mythologies for us. Those are two places in which the Axial revolution took place in a way that has become deeply, deeply constitutive of what "we" are - how "we" are still here in our minds the way we experience ourselves and the world.

I also want to talk about India because India is the source of that of that - how do I put it? - that source of the confluence between Buddhism and the Western world that we talked about in the first session together - the mindfulness revolution. Mindfulness is a psycho-technology that came from India. So the axial revolution of Siddhārtha Gautama and the Buddha we're going to talk about that. And what I want to talk about is how each one of these areas, in addition to the axial psycho-technologies of literacy and coinage - alphabetic literacy and coinage - how they also develop particular psych-technologies that have become internalized. A lot of what you think is natural to you - just part of how your mind works - is actually culturally internalised. It has been generated historically and you have internalized it culturally and you think of it just as how your mind works. Think again about literacy. It is hard for you to remember, and I mean to reenact, what it was like to not be able to think in literate terms; to imagine words. In a similar way, a lot of these ways of thinking, these psycho-technologies have

become so second nature to us that we forget the historical origin and that's problematic because the degree to which we don't have a historical understanding is the degree to which we are going to be ignorant of the historical factors that are driving the meaning crisis.

Let me foreshadow that meaning crisis right now. So this is a mere foreshadowing. We're going to come back to it. This (Modern World - "The Every Day") is a mythological way of thinking which allows us to articulate and train the psycho-technologies of the Axial revolution; these psycho-technologies of self transcendence. Of wisdom and enhanced meaning. But the problem is, this (the Modern World) mythology is failing for us now. The scientific world view is destroying the possibility of this for us. In a way that might seem sort of cosmically ironic, the scientific world view is returning us to a "continuous Cosmos". There is no radical difference in kind between you and the primates that you evolved from naturally. There isn't some radical difference in kind between your mind and your embodied existence. Science is levelling the world and returning to a "one world". We're going to talk about that. But if we can no longer live in this (Modern World) mythology - and that's what mythologies are: they have to be liveable. People claim to "believe" this. Don't tell me what you believe. Tell me what you can practice. Tell me what's liveable for you. For most of us we can't live this anymore. We still talk this way. But we can't live it. So here's part of the problem: this is a foreshadowing. How do we salvage the ability to cultivate wisdom, self transcendence, enhanced meaning, overcome self-deception, realize who we are and how the world is, when we can no longer use the mythological world view in which it was born?

We are going through a re-embedding. It's been progressive and increasing. Copernicus and Galileo re-embed us. Darwin re-embeds us. Einstein re-embeds us. We're being re-embedded back into the physical world but we don't want to lose all that we gained through the "Great dis-embedding". How do we reconcile those? How do we live with the legacy of the Axial revolution when we can no longer inhabit its world view? That's part of the problem. That's only part.

Now the place I want to turn to first is ancient Israel. As I mentioned, some of you have probably read parts of the Bible or at least heard parts of the

Bible, although biblical illiteracy is rising and that's problematic, not because I think people should be Christians or Jews - I'm not here to proselytize - but the degree to which you don't have a grasp of the grammar of the Bible is a degree to which you don't have a grasp of the grammar of your own cognition. And you may say I'm an atheist! I don't care! That's irrelevant! I'm not talking about 'what' you say. I'm talking about how you think. There's a big difference there. Grammar is how you put thoughts together. It's not the vocabulary; it's not what you say. So this is what Nietzsche meant when he said "I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar".

We still talk this way. We still are filled with the God grammar of the Bible and you say "no I'm not!" Yes [you are]!!! You go to a movie and you watch the person who falls in some way, and then they have an insight and they are redeemed and they find their way back - maybe it's through Alcoholics Anonymous or they come out of addiction... That's biblical grammar!

Again, what matters here is how it shapes our sense of self and world. I'm not advocating for a particular religion but of course I am going to talk about the Judeo-Christian heritage precisely because I want to explain to you how these psycho-technologies have become part of the very grammar, not only of your cognition, but of your existential sense of being.

So, there is an important psycho-technology that's invented, or at least significantly developed, by ancient Israel. Perhaps it was influenced from Persia through Zarathustra. But it's this idea - and when I say it ,it's going to seem to you like "of course!", but it's not "of course!"; even saying "of course" is important, remember that.... Here's the idea: It's a psycho-technology of understanding time as a cosmic narrative, as a story. It's applying something, again, that's universal - all cultures tell stories, and we'll talk about the cognitive science of this later - but you see this isn't a story. This is a circle. It's a cycle.

What kind of structure does a story have? Well a story has a beginning. It has some crucial climax, a turning point in it. And there's a resolution. There's a direction to it. There's a purpose to it. So you get this idea of cosmic history; of using our skills for story to explain how the cosmos is unfolding through time. It's a radical idea! So why is it radical? Well, notice

the difference here (The Continuous Cosmos). This this is not an open future. You are condemned to repeat! So cultures where cyclical time is still prevalent - Eastern cultures for example - the repetition of the cycle is onerous. It's horrible. People think reincarnation, for example within an Indian context, is a wonderful [idea]: "I'll be born again!". No! That's horrible. What you're trying to do is get free from those cycles because doing this again and again and again and again and again is terrifying.

[unintelligible word]. You want freedom - Nirvana! You want cessation. You want release from the cycle because there is no purpose to it. But here (Modern World) the future is open. Your actions now can change the future. If you figure out how to participate - remember that participatory knowing - if you figured out how to participate in the story, your actions can change the future. There isn't 'the all at once' creation at the beginning. There is an ongoing creation through history and you can participate with God in the ongoing creation of the future. How? Because... How do stories operate? They operate in terms of meaning and morality. How you make meaning - the moral content of your action - decides how things are going to go.

This is why the god of ancient Israel is such a different God. You look at the gods of the Pre-Axial world... Look, you've got a God and it's a god of a place. A particular function: here is the god of weaving, or here's the god of ancient theives. The gods are located in place. They're tied to function. They have no significant moral arc attached to them. What's the God of the old testament? What he or she like? It's not bound to time and place. Think of the great story of the Old Testament; the story of the Exodus. Here you have the Israelites and they are imprisoned. They are imprisoned in the epitome of the Bronze Age world: Egypt. And God comes and liberates them and sets them on a journey towards a future that is promised - the promised land. This God moves through time and space.

The God of the old testament is the God of the open future. That's why at first he has no name because to name something is to locate it, to specify it, to tie it down and for the longest time this God has no name. And then, when Moses finally challenges, and he reveals his name he says - it's badly translated In the older versions of the Bible; it's often translated as "I am that I am". But it [actually] in Hebrew means "I will be what I will be", "I am the

god of the open future and you can participate with me in this". This ongoing creation of the future because you can shape it; you can cause it to come to resolution but you can also cause it to go off course.

The idea - when I said "of course" to you, remember? The sense of time passing as a 'course'. We still take 'courses' in universities. This is what we have here and you're looking for turning points where the course turns. And of course that's what you're looking for in a movie. You know at some level that none of that is how the real world works. You know at some level, come on you do!! ...that your life doesn't unfold like a movie. Yet you love it! You love going to a movie. You love seeing this structure and participating in it and there's the great turning point where something is learned or problem is solved and there's resolution and the future is now made.

So, this God is interested in... becomes progressively...

Now, again you can't point and say "there! There is where it changed!" in the Bible! But you can see there's aspects of a Pre-Axial God. But as you read through the old testament God becomes more and more axial. He becomes more and more the deity of something that you now take for granted: Progress. The idea - for us it's not just an "idea", right? - it's in the life blood, it's in the very bones of your sense of self and your life. Is your life progressing? Or are you stuck? Is it moving forward? This is this idea. History progresses and it can degenerate and it can improve. God becomes more and more a representative of that.

Now, there's a technical term for these turning points: Kairos. It's developed by the theologian Paul Tulloch. This is this sense of the crucial turning point. Getting things at the right time and the right place to turn things. Either back on course or to further develop them. Now let's talk about that because, again, we're gonna go back to talking about these senses of knowing that we've lost touch with. (Important is this sense: "DA'ATH".) So people sometimes note, and often humorously, that the Bible will talk about sex - sexual intercourse - with the verb 'knowing', so you'll get things like "Adam knew his wife Eve" and it's like "What? What does that mean?" ...and it means has sex with. Its "DA'ATH" in this sense. And it's like "What? Why? We don't use sex as a metaphor for knowledge!" You'd be surprised how many cultures actually do! Because this is, again, this is a participatory

sense. There's a course here and you're participating in it. Now what do we mean by participating. You don't know it from the outside just having beliefs about it or just having skills. You know it in this way: you know it by identifying with it. You change it while it's changing you and you're changing it while it's changing you. You are immersed in it like a stream, like a course of a river. You are participating in it. When you're making love with somebody you are participating in them. You're identifying with them, empathizing with them, resonating with them. You are changing them as they are changing you and it - Forgive me the pun - to a climax! To a turning point to a resolution.

See in ancient Israel, "faith" - this term has become useless for us now - but "faith" didn't mean 'believing ridiculous things for which there is no evidence'! That is a recent idea; that is not what it meant. Faith was your sense of "DA'ATH". Faith was your sense that you are in this reciprocal realization: you're "in course". You're "on course". You're involved and evolving with things. It's your sense "Ah! I'm on course" or even your sense "Ah! This is the turning point and I, I know what to do. I know who I need to change into." ...I knew how to turn myself in things.

Notice you have this in your relationships. You'll often be asking yourself "How is this relationship going? Is it on course? Is it progressing? Is it growing? Is this the kind of person I want to be? What's my... Am I becoming? What's my sense of how I'm changing? Is this all going well?" That's "DA'ATH".

Now, of course, you can get it wrong! You can think you're on course, when you're actually dramatically off course. You're trespassing, to use older biblical language. You're walking off the path. You're no longer on course. That's the basis of a word that we can't use anymore again because of our biblical literacy and the fact that we've lost touch with this sense of knowing. In fact this word - many people treat this word almost like a comical word - sin. Sinning isn't just doing something very immoral. In the New Testament the word that translates [to] this is when you're shooting a bow and arrow. So, if you've done archery, you can't shoot for where your eye tells you to look because you'll actually miss the bullseye. You have to have a kind of faith to sense where you need to actually shoot. So you don't miss the mark.

So the idea here is [that] I'm trying to sense the course of things and, if I'm self deluded or illusory, I'm actually dramatically off course without realizing it.

That's the original meaning and so the idea is that human beings are thrown into this universe in which they have the option - because it's an open future - of participating in the creation of the future. But of course human beings sin. In the sense that they are self deceptive. They go off course. So notice what the Hebrews are doing. They're taking this movement from the "everyday world" to the "real world" and they're turning it into a historical story. The way you go from the false world to the real world is you start 'now' and you move towards the promised land. They understand it historically. But human beings sin: They make decisions that steer the course of history away from its culmination. And so the idea is [that] God has to intervene periodically. God has to redeem. God has to do something to wake people up. To remind them. To help them to sense how they've gone off course, and so that they can come back on course. And so what you have is you have - in the old testament - you have the creation of the prophetic tradition: prophets. Here's another thing that we've lost the sense of. A prophet is not somebody who tells the future like some sort of psychic. Prophecy isn't about telling you what's going to be happening 200 or 300 years from now. Prophecy means "a telling fourth". The job of the prophet is to wake you up right now to how you are off course.

So a better analogy isn't the psychic - So, when you go to the psychic and "oh you will meet a tall dark stranger" or some crap like that. That's not a good analogy for a prophet - a better [analogy for a] Prophet is when you and your loved one go into therapy and the therapist says something and it wakes you up to "Holy crap. This is how I'm going wrong. This is how I'm off course. This is how I need to get back on track." That's the job of a prophet. And what you have in the prophetic tradition is you have an increasing emphasis on the morality of human decision making. More and more - and again it's not perfect; there's all kinds of pre-axial stuff that's still woven in there and mixed up with it and mashed up with it - but you do have more and more this discussion, this exhortation to wake up to your moral responsibility for helping everybody to get back on track and to turn things

back towards the promised land. This idea of justice and righteousness and waking up so that we get back on track become endemic.

Now think about how much - and I've tried to show you through examples - how much this is just how you naturally think of yourself. You think of yourself as somebody who's on a journey. You're starting here and you're trying to make a better self, and you're trying to make the right decisions, and trying to steer things. You want your life to progress. You want your culture to progress. Try to think about how you would understand yourself, how you would judge yourself, and you couldn't make use of this notion of progress...? So what starts to happen is a commitment to more and more trying to cultivate the wisdom of deeply remembering God, which doesn't mean reciting beliefs. It means participating. Participating in the ongoing creation of the world. Shaping the future. Helping yourself, your neighbors and your society to progress where that progress is measured mostly in terms of moral improvement, Increasing justice, increasing flourishing, increasing sense of people living up to their promise.

And this is what I ask you: Do you feel like you're living up to your promise? Is it an important thing for you? If it is - and I feel it's probably the case that for many of you it is - that very way of thinking, that's part of the grammar that we have inherited from the Hebrews. It's part of the very way we think. It's part of the warp and woof of our cognition.

Now we're going to come back to this strand. We're going to come back and look at a particular way of understanding Kairos that became central in Christianity because what Christianity did is it made a really radical claim: It claimed that this Kairos was found in a particular person and what that's going to do is it's going to personalize all of this in a really dramatic way. But before we do that I want to switch back over to what's happening at a similar time in ancient Greece.

So as I mentioned, the psycho-technology of alphabetic literacy is taken to the Greeks but the Greeks do something that's very important and it helps to explain some of the differences we see in the Greek Axial revolution from the ancient Hebrew Axial revolution. Now the Greeks do something that again seems inconsequential now, but they add vowels to the alphabet. And it's like "oh WAW, so what?" Well the thing is, when you add vowels you

really again increase how easy it is to process information. So let's stop here because we need to do a bit of Cognitive Science because this ease of processing really matters. So I want to introduce you to an important idea from cognitive science. This is the idea of cognitive fluency.

We've got increasing experimental evidence for this basic kind of fact: when you increase the ease at which people can process information, regardless of what that information is, they come to believe it is more real, they have more confidence in it etc.. That can be something very simple. It can be as simple as changing the font contrast between the letters and the page. So, consider two individuals Tom and Susan. Tom is reading words in which the color contrast between the letters and the page isn't as good as the color contrast that Susan's reading. They're reading exactly the same thing. They can both clearly read it. It's just the font difference makes it easier for Susan than for Tom.

They read the same thing. If you ask both of them "well how true is what you read?" Susan's more likely to say "that was true!" She's more likely to have confidence in it regardless of the content. The fluency of your processing actually increases your confidence in it, your sense of how real the picture it's giving you is. Now it's not really easy in some simple sense because it has to do more with how well your brain is accessing information, applying it... It's very complicated. But what I'm telling you is when I do something that increases your cognitive fluency, your brain generates an enhanced sense that you're actually in touch with things. We'll talk about this later. That turns out to be a good policy your brain is using. It's a very good idea for your brain to try and use the fluency of its own processing as a measure of how much it's in touch with reality.

By the way, when you get a lot of fluency you of course are going to get into the Flow State. So when the Greeks introduced vowels they improved the fluency of alphabetic literacy. They ramp up how powerful it is. They also introduced something else. They introduced a standardised reading from left to right which you now take for granted. Many of you know that other languages go the other way. Hebrew's read this way for example. That has an impact on your cognition. First of all it's standardized - that improves the fluency. Why does it improve your fluency? When this is standard - if you

look at Egyptian hieroglyphs they can go up. They can go down. They can go this way. They can go that way - when you standardize things, that increases the fluency of the processing. So they ratchet up this power of literacy to enhance cognition.

They're also developing something else. So the Greeks don't form a unified nation state. They have individual city states that are in competition with each other and in Athens in particular - and Athens is going to be the hotbed of the axial revolution in Greece, although not the only place - in Athens you have, slowly, the emergence of democracy. Now, it's a particularly problematic form of democracy - it's direct democracy. We'll talk about stuff like that later. But what this does is this puts a premium on argumentation and debate. So, the Greeks start to speed up the axial revolution in their own cognition. They enhance the effects of alphabetic literacy. They enhance the use of reason and reflection and so they start to do things that, again, don't happen before. Lots of cultures were doing arithmetic. But the Greeks invent mathematics. They invent geometry. They start to create abstract symbol systems for their own sake. Now that's what's going on, what's basically being invented, in ancient Greece, is this capacity for rational argumentation. That's the psycho-technology. Again you think of this - now, I want to be clear here: I'm not claiming that other groups or people are irrational or [they] can't be reasonable. I'm not being ethnocentric - but you get the explicit training of rational argumentation as a core psycho-technology in ancient Greece. Now that is going to have very important consequences.

Now what's interesting is how this comes in to ancient Greece. I'm going to introduce you to two individuals who are sort of the epitome of the Axial Revolution in Greece: Pythagoras and Socrates. You know Pythagoras, of course because of an important mathematical theorem: the Pythagorean theorem. Now Pythagoras is a very interesting person because he belongs to - Cornford makes this argument very well - he belongs to a group of individuals that are just coming out of that dark age around 600 BCE. These individuals were called "The Divine Men" it's pretty clear that these men seem to represent a rediscovery of shamanic psycho-technologies. They seem to... they have a lot of associations with capacities for healing, for flying through the air, and so a lot of this is legendary. It's mythological. It's not literal, but Pythagoras is a real person. Now of course, there's lots and

lots of legendary material around him but the legend even points towards these important aspects. He seems to have gone through shamanic training, engaged in something called "The Thunder Stone Ceremony" which involved him isolating himself in a cave and going through some radical transformation and then coming out of it. He seems to have experienced soul flight because he talked about the capacity for the psyche to be liberated from the body. He was very tall and he dressed like a god but no one found it offensive for him to do so, at least not the people that followed him. He discovers the octave. He discovers that there's mathematical proportions in the world. He comes to this realization that the new psycho-technologies of rational reflection and mathematics give us access to abstract patterns that we are not directly aware of. We all take it for granted that we know what an octave is and we know that it can be expressed by ratios but that was his discovery. So what he does is he takes this idea about realizing, through music and math, these abstract patterns, and then he links them to the "project", the shamanic ability to engage in self transcendence.

He comes up with the idea that we're somehow trapped in this world, but we can learn to fly above it; we can fly free! Like the Shaman. But he's allied it explicitly to the Axial "project" of self transcendence, of getting in touch with the rationally realized patterns because that will liberate us. That will change and transform us. Pythagoras gives us a lot of the words that we take for granted. I said earlier that I didn't like calling the Pre-Axial world the "cosmos" because Pythagoras actually invents this word Cosmos. He's the first person to describe the universe as a cosmos and many of you probably treat those two terms as synonymous: Universe - the one verse - and Cosmos. They're not! Try to think of a word it's actually related to Cosmos that you're familiar with. So the word that might not come to mind is the word cosmetic. Cosmetics come from cosmos.

What did cosmetics do? They reveal the beauty of things - how beautiful and ordered they are. So Pythagoras has the idea that if we can use music and mathematical thinking and practices that engage in this altered state of consciousness and he's integrating them altogether, it's not quite clear how, but what we can do is we can transcend and see the world as beautiful.

And we're going to come back and talk about this: How when people have awakening experiences they suddenly experience the world as a cosmos, as radically beautiful. Now remember Pythagoras because he's going to have a huge influence on somebody we're going to talk about: Plato. But there's somebody who had an even greater influence on Plato and somebody who really epitomizes the Axial Revolution in ancient Greece. In fact he has a revolution named after him. This is called the Socratic revolution and the person we want to talk about is Socrates. I'm going to argue how Socrates epitomizes the Greek form of the Axial Revolution and then what we're gonna do is we're gonna see how Plato takes Socrates and Pythagoras and puts them together and how Socratic and Platonic your cognition is. How it's part of the grammar of how you think. But once again, even though that's the grammar of how we understand meaning and wisdom and what a "self" is and how we grow, how we self transcend, how we get in touch with reality... We are no longer in the world view of Pythagoras! Do we... Do you actually - I mean seriously - do you actually experience the universe as a cosmos.

We'll take a look at that the next time we're together. Thank you very much for your time.

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Episode 4: Socrates and the Quest for Wisdom

Welcome again to awakening from the meaning crisis. This is episode four. So last time we discussed the axial revolution and in particular how it moved into ancient Israel. We talked about the advent of the psycho-technology of time as cosmic history, as a narrative in which there is an open future and in which your actions - the moral quality of your actions - can determine that future in which you participate, along with God, in the creation of that

future. This brings with it the idea of progress, more progress, the increase in justice. And this is how we move from the last real world to the more real world. For the ancient Israelites it's understood as a journey through time and space. Historically, we talked about the kind of God that the God of the Bible is; how he is, in fact, the god of this open future. And particularly he intervenes at moments of KAIROS - turning points where he tries to bring people back on course.

We talked about the sense of faith as the sense of being on course; to be able to sense how history is flowing and unfolding; how you are participating in that story how you are shaping it and being shaped by it in a tightly reciprocal manner, and that SIN is the deviation from that and what is needed is to wake us back up to bring us back on course and we talked about how the prophets represented that and they represent, increasingly, that vision - that Axial vision of the moral redemption of history. We then turned to look at how the Axial revolution was coming into ancient Greece and in particular two figures. We're looking at the figures of Pythagoras and Socrates. Last time we talked about Pythagoras and how he represents an exaptation of that shamanic behavior of altering your state of consciousness, entering into something like soul flight, but how for Pythagoras that had been allied with the psycho-technology that was being emphasized in Greece: Rational argumentation to discovery of rational patterns in the world and Pythagoras of course is famous for discovering that music can be expressed mathematically: he is at least associated, his school, with things like the Pythagorean theorem; this idea that we can enhance our capacity to pick up on the real patterns in the world even if those are not readily apparent to us. And by coming into a direct awareness of those patterns, through our rational insight and faculties, we can transform ourselves.

And Pythagoras changes the shamanic soul flight into a release, a freedom from imprisonment in this world which he represented as being imprisoned in the body and we fly free and so soul flight has been turned into a radical kind of self transcendence in which we are liberating ourselves from the illusory world as we more and more conform to the rational patterns that dictate the structure of reality. The other person who is going to figure in is - in fact figures even more largely in the Axial revolution in ancient Greece - is the figure of Socrates. Socrates and Pythagoras are gonna be the two most

important influences on Plato and if you were to put Western civilization on to two feet, the one foot is the Bible the other foot is the works of Plato.

So Socrates is a very unusual figure. There are as many interpretations of Socrates as there are of people like Jesus. Even in his time there are many difference Socratic movements groups of people who claim to be adherents and disciples of Socrates. He is an enigmatic, interesting, provocative and maddeningly frustrating figure to try and get clear on. So I want it understood that when I'm talking about Socrates I'm talking about a particular interpretation that I share with other people. I think it can be well argued for. But, as I said, whether or not this was the full historical Socrates it's very hard to know and in some sense this isn't that relevant because it's the Socrates I'm going to talk about that has become part of the cognitive and existential grammar of the West.

So getting into the figure of Socrates is kind of interesting. A good way to start is to see how provocative a person he was... is to do his biography. So, as many of you probably know, ancient Greece was the world in which people believed they could speak to the God through oracles. The oracles were human, or otherwise natural phenomena, that represented how the gods were speaking to humanity. One of the most important oracles is at Delphi and I've been to Delphi. If you get a chance at some point in your life, go to Delphi. It will really put the zap on your brain because the way the landscape as organized, really does have a transformative impact on your consciousness and your sense of self and your sense of place in the world.

So the situation, the site of Delphi is itself very transformative. What would happen is a woman, Pythia, would sit in a cave or something similar to it - again the "cave". Always the caves! Like the association with shamanism. Remember that shamanism is associated with cave art; ritual practices taking place in caves like Pythagoras - so, she's in a cave, she's sitting on a tripod. There might be some intoxicating gases in there. She's eating perhaps eucalyptus leaves. She's probably going into some kind of psychedelic trance state - that seems plausible. And then what happens is people would - because that is a cross-cultural thing: We find that people are thought to have access to the gods by being able to enter into altered states of consciousness - So what would happen is people would come in, they would bring their

questions, they would pose questions to Pythia. She would then speak on behalf of the gods and then after speaking on behalf of the gods the people around her would... there would be males who would interpret what she had to say!

So, the thing about being an oracle is [that] if you want to stay in business, you don't want to give clear answers! So if I come to an oracle and I ask a specific question, I don't want to give a specific answer. I think there's a very good reason for that. I don't think that people actually can foresee the future in any kind of supernatural manner. So typically if you go to an oracle and say "Should I marry Cassandra?" You'll get an answer or something like: "Sometimes the Spring comes early!". Or "should I invest in this project?". You'll get an answer like "sometimes the squirrels do not gather too many nuts!". You don't know what to make of this. And it might provoke an insight in you, it might provoke a reflection in you. And whether or not events go one way or the other you can often retrospectively reinterpret them as having been consonant with the Delphic oracle. So the Oracle seems to be providing foresightful information, but usually of course it's not.

So, what happens is a bunch of Socrates's friends - he's already famous when we "meet" him in his biography - a bunch of Socrates' friends decide to go to the Oracle and ask the oracle a question about Socrates. So they make the trek to Delphi and in my mind I sort of picture this almost like half jokingly! That they want to see what kind of crazy answer they're going to get from the Oracle about Socrates. So they go all the way up to the Oracle and then they pose their question. And the question they pose [is] "Is there anyone wiser than Socrates?", and what they're looking for, or perhaps not what they're looking for, what they're expecting is some very cryptic, obscure answer. Like "the snow melts farther in the south!" or some bizarre answer. And instead they get this answer: "No! There's no human being wiser than Socrates!" Crystal clear Answer! And so you can imagine how shocked they are!!

So they travel back of course to relate this story to Socrates and here's something telling. First of all, that's just telling in and of itself, that the Delphic Oracle would give such a clear answer! Now it's a qualified answer: There's no 'human being' wiser than Socrates. But, when they go back to

Socrates, Socrates' response is also profound. Interesting. So if we're honest... If we're honest and we found out from some sacred authority that we are very wise, most of us would be very self-congratulatory. Like "yeah! I knew it!!". And how do I know that? Because one of the most persistent biases [we] have is that people believe they're above average intelligence. And of course most people must be wrong about that, because most people have, well, average intelligence! But if you ask anybody "is your intelligence average?" They will tell you "No, I have above average intelligence". More so of course even for ideas such as wisdom. But Socrates isn't self-congratulatory. He doesn't say "yep, I knew it all along! There's the confirmation I so want!". Now that's really telling in of itself because - to quote a friend of mine LEO FERRARO - we are entering the age of "confirmation porn" in which people are continuously seeking confirmation from their beliefs and part of what's going on to the meaning crisis, and the ever expansion of bullshit in our society, is precisely because we have technologically enhanced through social media our capacity for gratifying our bias for confirmation.

We'll talk about this later, but we all carry a terrific bias called the "confirmation bias" in which we seek information that confirms our beliefs and we tend to avoid information that challenges it. And part of what is going wrong right now in our culture is that through a lot of factors that are endemic to the meaning crisis we are accelerating and exacerbating our propensity for falling into the confirmation bias. And I think that's what my friend Leo means by "confirmation porn". We have a kind of pornography - if we take pornography to mean the gratuitous and unmorally justified satisfaction of a desire, then we are living in an age of confirmation porn.

Socrates is a corrective to that. Here is a great temptation. He is presented the word of God that he is wise - wiser than anyone else. And rather than accepting it and giving into that confirmation bias, his immediate response is to challenge it. The challenge is tricky for Socrates. Socrates is no atheist, although he's gonna be charged with atheism when he's put on trial, but he does believe in the gods. He's gonna do something very important about the gods. He's going to transform the Greek gods into moral exemplars. But what that means for Socrates is the gods can't lie. The gods can't lie. For Socrates, and this is one of the ways he's going to transform the

understanding of the gods and Plato along with him, the Greek gods as they are represented in standard Greek myths aren't very accurate portrayals because those gods lie and they cheat and they betray... Zeus cheats on his wife etc... But for Socrates, and this is part of the Axial revolution, the gods represent moral exemplars. They represent ways in which we can self transcend and morally improve. So for Socrates it's therefore axiomatic that the gods can't lie to him. So the gods are telling the truth. This wedding - and this is something we're going to come back to: the way the Greeks wed Divinity to reality, that truth and sacredness are bound up together - is gonna be really pivotal. Think about how much we separate those two in our culture. But for Socrates they are inter-penetrating. So the gods can't lie. They have to be disclosures of the truth. But on the other hand, Socrates has significant and profound self-knowledge. One of the things I have tattooed on my back is "Know Thyself". It was inscribed at the Delphic Oracle, but Socrates makes it his personal slogan. For life.

There's been some recent things written about this and I think they've largely reflected a misunderstanding of what Know thyself means... Know thyself doesn't mean "become aware of your biography". We all are prey to that and we have a culture that exacerbates that narcissism. We'd like to stroke the ego of our personal autobiography and store up treasured moments that we can point to [for] other people that indicate our uniqueness and our specialness and why the universe should specially take care of and pay attention to us.

That's not what "Know thyself" means. It doesn't mean that kind of stroking of your autobiographical ego. Know thyself is much more a kind of direct participatory knowing. It means understanding how you operate. It's not - if I were to use a literary analogy - it's not like your autobiography, it's more like your owner's manual. It's how do you operate. What are the principles. What are the powers, perils. What are the constraints that are operating within you. Socrates, as we'll see, thought that that kind of self knowledge was central. And this is the core of the axial revolution. The Axial revolution is this critical awareness and sense of responsibility of one's own cognition.

So, on one hand the gods can't lie when they say Socrates is the wisest human being. But on the other hand Socrates has deep self knowledge. He

has Socratic self knowledge in which he is convinced that he is not wise. And he is not willing to give up on either one of those. And that's a telling thing about him. That tells you something very central about him. He holds these two together: his existential self-knowledge and this disclosure from reality are going [to]... Neither one of them is going to be given a greater authority! They're going to be held together. So now Socrates faces a personal dilemma: a dilemma that goes to the core of who and what he is. How can it be that he is the wisest human being when he knows that he is not wise?

So this is a very deep dilemma that he set for himself. It's a kind of profound problem that he seeks to solve. And what that means is that Socrates starts on a quest. He starts on a quest of trying to determine how both of those things could be the case at the same time. Now the quest seems to have evolved very naturally into a way in which he interacted with those around him. What Socrates would do is he would go to people who claimed or [were] credited with being wise and he would ask them question. He invented, in fact, what has become known as the "Socratic method", also known as "Elenchus". The Socratic Method is a way of asking questions in order to try and draw somebody out.

We'll talk a little bit more about Elenchus in a minute but first I want to talk about the two types of people that we have good reason to believe Socrates was interacting [with] and what that can tell us about the Socratic notion of wisdom. And we're going to see how this Socratic notion of wisdom - this idea of self knowledge - is deeply bound up with how meaningful your life is. So, the two groups that Socrates, the two groups of people that were accredited as being wise, were "The philosophers" and "The Sophists" If you remember last time we talked about Pythagoras... Pythagoras actually invents the word "Philosophy". It comes from two Greek words: "Philia" and "Sophia".

This means "the friendship love of wisdom". So, Pythagoras creates a community around him. You create a community - distributed cognition - in which you interact with other people in order to try and pursue wisdom. A philosopher is someone who, in concert with others, is a lover of wisdom. So Socrates is interacting with the philosophers and in particular one group of

philosophers (The Natural Philosophers - written on board) that come before him. In fact Socrates is regarded as creating a revolution in philosophy precisely for how he differed from the natural philosophers. And he is also doing the Socratic method with the Sophists, and you can see that this also comes from Sophia: Wisdom. It's where we get the word "sophisticated" from. The Sophists are also people who claim to be wise.

Now the natural philosophers are very interesting. The natural philosophers seem to represent a fundamental change in human cognition. So I'm going to take, as an example, one of the natural philosophers who is considered to be the first example of it - Thales. Now, because these guys are just as we're coming out of the dark age and they pre-date Socrates sometimes by a hundred couple hundred years or thereabouts, a lot of what we have from them is very fragmentary. We don't have very much. In fact you can put most of Thales' philosophy into three lines; into three sentences. I once taught this to a course of mine and one of my students went out and made a T-shirt in which they'd put all of Daly's philosophy on one T-shirt because that's how fragmentary it is!

Let's talk about these three fragments because they reveal something very important. One is "All is the Moist", the next is "The Load-Stone Has Psyche" (and this is important because this would "Psyche" which we now pronounce psyche is going to be the basis of the idea of psychology as a discipline) and finally "Everything is filled with gods" which sounds very pre-axial... almost shamanic! Now, what you have to pay attention to here is not 'what' Thales is saying, but what he says reveals about the kind of thinking he is creating. What does he mean by this: "all is the moist"? Of course there's controversy about all of this because it's fragmentary, it's old. But given how other people in the ancient world, like Aristotle, followed up on this, a plausible interpretation is "everything is made out of water". Everything is made out of water. Now that's false! Everything isn't made out of water. It's not just scientifically false it's kind of metaphysically false. Everything can't be made out of water or we wouldn't be able to identify water on its own! But put that aside. Think about this: what surrounds Ancient Greece? Water. We dig into the ground, what will you hit? Water. What falls from the sky? Water. What does everything need in order to live? Water. What can take the shape of any container you put it in? Water. So

what I'm trying to get you to see is, although Thales' idea is false, it's highly rational. It's highly plausible. What he's doing is using his reason and his observation to come up with a plausible explanation of what the underlying substance is behind everything.

By the way, pay attention to this word (writes SUBSTANCE on the board)... this means "stands under". Another metaphor. It's related to lots of other words where we use "standing" to talk about... "understanding" for example! So, notice what he's doing here. He's not doing mythology. He's not generating a narrative about some divine agent. He's not saying this has happened because Zeus cheated on Hera and then Hera sought to... There is no story here! There's no mythological narrative. There's no divine agents involved. That's not how he's trying to explain or understand. Instead he's doing a rational analysis based on observation and he's trying to get at the underlying stuff that everything is made out of. Do you see what I'm showing you? What Thales is inventing - is there any other word for this? He's inventing how to think scientifically. How this happens is obscure. But that's what's happening. He's inventing the kind of thinking that we now - and I'm going to say it again - take it for granted as if it's natural. But he's inventing it!

What does this mean? "The Lodestone has Psyche"? So Lodestone is a natural form of magnet. What's interesting about magnets is that they can move themselves and they can move other things around them. The original meaning of this is, of course, breath or wind but what it ultimately refers to and came to refer to is anything that's living in the sense that it's self moving. That it can move itself and that it can therefore cause other things to move. So I can move myself and therefore I can make other things move. The magnet can move itself and it can make other things move. I'm aware of Psyche (Psuke) within me. I see the magnet doing something similar and therefore I conclude that magnet and I both share Psyche (Suki).

He's wrong! But that doesn't matter. This is a plausible, rational argument. Here he is trying to get at what we would now call the underlying force behind things. Please remember that by the way. That Psyche (Psuke) originally means your capacity for being able to move yourself and make other things move. You may ask "well why does that become the word for

mind?" Psychology/ mind/ psuke... because the mind is that part of you which you can most move. It is the most self moving part of you and it's where all of your capacity to move other things starts. If I'm going to move this marker, my mind first moves itself and that drives me to move the marker. But that way of even thinking about me, so that I can start a science of the psyche starts with Thales. And what's this: "Everything is filled with [gods]?" ...this seems so scientific, John! ...and then you're throwing this at me! The gods! "Isn't that a throwback to mythology?" I don't think so. I don't think so. Look what he's doing here (points at the first two Thales philosophies on the board). Now, I need to introduce a term - I promised to try and keep the technicalities to a minimum - but we need a term here. So "ontology" is the study of being; the structure of reality. Ontological analysis is when you use reasoning to try and get at the underlying structure of reality by getting at the underlying stuff and the underlying forces that are at work in it. So Thales is introducing the ontological analysis that drives the scientific revolution: what are scientists doing? They're trying to get at the underlying stuff... they're still trying to do it, right now! They're trying to get at the underlying forces. They're trying to see into the depths of reality. They're engaging in "Ontological Depth Perception". This doesn't mean... "Physical"...., this doesn't mean our normal perception into spatial depth. What I mean here is seeing with the mind into the depths of reality. "Ontological depth perception".

Now once you get that he's discovering this way - he's discovering, he's inventing this way of looking at the world that's going to bleed into right here right now - think about how powerful that way must be. Think of the power in that vision! He gets an access to the depths of reality and what is he saying? That provokes awe. That provokes wonder. That gives him a sense of connecting to what is most real. It helps him to make the most sense of things. And that's what it is to experience something as sacred. So this is powerful stuff.

Now, Socrates seems to have been influenced by a particular one of these natural philosophers called Anaxagoras who was in Athens just before Socrates. Anaxagoras declared that the sun wasn't a god, for example, that it was a hot rock and he got into a lot of trouble for things like this! Socrates seems to have enjoyed... More than enjoy! ...he seems to have been

impressed by the Natural Philosophers commitment to getting at the truth. But ultimately Socrates.... he rejects this not because he rejects reasoned, rational analysis - he's going to engage in that himself multiple times. Or argumentation his whole Socratic method, as we'll see, is all about argumentation. What does he reject about the natural philosophers? They don't help him with his axial project.

See the problem with the natural philosophers is they give you truth without transformation. They give you facts. They give you knowledge, but they do not indicate how you become wise. They do not indicate how you overcome self-deception. They do not indicate, as Socrates would say, "how to become a good person". Now it's interesting how much people say that even now, even today! Sometimes in clear ways that are helpful, sometimes in confused and mixed up ways which are unhelpful. But the idea that our scientific world view, while giving us all kinds of knowledge, does not in any way train us for wisdom, does not tell us how to become wise. Does not tell us how to transcend ourselves and become better people. This is a common complaint, and we'll come back to it, about the scientific world view.

Socrates sees it even then. So here you have truth, but no relevance. ("TRUTH WITHOUT RELEVANCE" written on the board.) The truths that are discovered are not existentially relevant. They don't matter. They don't enable the cultivation of wisdom, the transformation and transcendence of the self. Now, Socrates' is interacting with the Sophist, which is famous, is a lot more antagonistic. This, when he talks about his relation here, it's much more the language - or the tone, at least that's how I read it - of disappointment. He was expecting more, and he found less. Here, and it's not clear how much this is Socrates and how much this is Plato who's writing about Socrates, but here the relationship is much more antagonistic. Now who are the sophists? Well if you remember we talked about when the Axial Revolution is coming to Greece you get the emergence of democracy, and in Athens the democracy is direct democracy. Now before we get too far into this we don't want to over glamorize this. Yes Athens is the beginning of democracy. But let's remember, if I was a woman the last place I would want to do well in the ancient world is Ancient Athens! Ancient Athens treats its women horribly. Just horribly! Sparta treats its women better than Athens. Democracy is only for Athenian adult males. Women, foreigners, anybody

else - even if they're Greek - they're not considered to be worthy of participation in the Democratic process. And it's a direct democracy. Everybody files into the assembly and votes on everything.

What that means is, as I've already mentioned, your capacity for debate and argumentation is a route to power. This is why it developed so powerfully in ancient Athens. The better you are at arguing, the better you are at persuading other people, the more powerful and influential you will be.

What happens is a group of people invent a new psycho-technology. They invent rhetoric. They invent ways of picking up on how language and cognition interact. They find standardised skills that can be practiced and developed so that you can influence people... Increase the chance that your language will change their mind.

The sophist were only concerned with teaching the skills. They basically separated the technology from any kind of moral commitment. So for example, a particular Sophist might go in the morning to this aristocrat and help him argue for why Athens should increase the number of ships in its Navy and in the afternoon go to this aristocrat and help him craft an argument as to why Athens should decrease the number of ships in the Navy. The Sophists didn't care which was the case. What mattered was empowering the individual to win the argument. Now, how does this work and how can we relate it to our to our lives now? So basically a good way to think about this is the Sophists pick up on the fact that when we are communicating - we're going to talk about this a lot later as we go on - we are being driven by what we find salient and relevant, not just [by] what we find true or believed to be the case. Remember [that] with the 9 dot problem what stands out to us, what's relevant, shapes how we see things and how we understand them. So, let me give you a modern analog for how rhetoric works, a place where rhetoric is readily apparent. Advertising.

See, the point about advertisement is to make use of the way your brain will associate things, the way your brain finds certain things salient, make things seem highly relevant to you in order to manipulate your behavior. Now what's telling about this and this is the point about the Sophist is how much that can happen in a way that is disconnected from whether or not it's true. I mean you watch the beer commercial. And here it is, "here's really attractive

people. And they all get together and they're all having a great time and it's this beer and here's the beautiful attractive people..." Go into an actual bar... That's not like that! You're not going to see the (uurrgggggggggh noise), the kind of broken down lives. Drunk people!

Now here's the thing. You know that that's not true. You know that!! If you went into a bar and you actually saw something like that happening... If, when you washed your hair with shampoo you were suddenly in the shampoo commercial, you'd worry about your sanity! You know it's not true! It doesn't matter! It makes certain stimuli salient to you. And so you buy the beer! You buy the shampoo! This is what I mean when I say your beliefs aren't the only thing driving you. So this brings us to a notion I promised to come back to. And I want to use it technically. I'm not trying to be vulgar but this is important. This is the notion of "bullshit" and the classic work is by Harry Frankfurt on this. His essay "On Bullshit" is 20 years old now.

Because Frankfurt is very interested in talking about the difference between somebody being a bullshit artist and somebody being a liar because they aren't the same! They can overlap: a person can be both a liar and a bullshit artist. But let's talk about pure cases. How does the liar work? The liar depends on your commitment to the truth. The liar tells you something. I'll use "P" to represent some proposition: the liar says "P" to you, even though "NOT P" is the case because if he can convince you that "P" is the case you will change your behaviour because your behaviour is to some degree, significant degree, influenced by your commitment to the truth. If you believe "P" is true, that will change your behaviour. That's how lying works! Lying depends on the fact that, in general, people are committed to the truth because, in general, people want to be in touch with reality. That's not how bullshit works! See bullshit, unlike lying, works by making you disinterested, unconcerned with whether or not what is being said is true. When somebody is bullshitting you, they're trying to get you to not find important or, "central", how true the claim is. Instead they're working in terms of the rhetoric. They're trying to capture you in terms of how catchy it is! Like the advertiser. How salient it is, how much it grabs your attention.

So there was a famous example from this from The Simpsons. And The Simpsons has been on for a thousand years now, and I think it's still on! So this is from a long time ago and at the time it seemed so almost absurdly

ridiculous funny. But it turned out to be extremely, extremely prescient! Because the example is a political example. There are two aliens running for political office and they're giving a speech to Americans. And I mean no insult to Americans, but I think we're [all] aware of how what I'm going to say is relevant to American politics right now and the speech goes something like this: One of the aliens named Kang says "My fellow Americans, when I was young I dreamt of being a baseball! But now we must move forward not backwards, upwards twirling, twirling towards freedom!" And everybody cheers! Now it's meaningless! It doesn't mean anything! But he invokes youth, baseball. Moving forward, moving upward, twirling and freedom. And so if you're an American you get this rush. You get this rush. That rush is these are all salient things. They're highly relevant to you. You associate and identify with them. And so you're swept up you're caught up in it.

Now why does bullshit matter? Well part, as I said at the beginning, part of the way people articulate the meaning crisis is 'there's so much bullshit' and it seems to be increasing. We are separating relevance and salience from truth. But there is a deeper reason and I think this is part of why it matters to Socrates. Look, you can't - although we use this metaphor for self-deception, it's actually not a good metaphor - you can't lie to yourself! It makes no sense. Cognitive psychologists have been pointing - and philosophers - have been pointing this out. You can't know "NOT P" and then say to yourself "but P!", "But P!". The trouble is you know that this is not the case ["P"] and so simply stating this to yourself doesn't do anything. You can't lie to yourself because you're in possession of the truth. Did I just prove to you that self-deception is impossible. No, not at all. See, you can't lie to yourself, but here's what I would argue: You can bullshit yourself. Why? Because lying has to do with believing - I'm going to come back to this again and again. Look. Believing isn't something you directly do.

Here I'll show you. Pick a belief you would like to have. I would like to have the belief that everybody loves me. I don't believe that. But I would like to truly have that belief. So what should I do. I should just believe. "Believe". You see televangelists doing this; telling people "believe"! But you can't! You can hope that everybody loves you. You can wish that everybody loves you. But if I say "believe it", you can't do it. That's not how belief works. It's not a voluntary action. You can't lie to yourself.

See, self-deception works in a different way. You know what you can do? You can bullshit yourself. How can you bullshit yourself? Because what you can do is direct your attention. If I say pay attention to this finger you can and you can also choose to pay attention to something. Now attention - and we'll talk about this later and how central it is - there's two sides to attention. You can direct your attention, for example if I say: "your left big toe" you're paying attention to it, and suddenly it's salient to you. When you pay attention to something, it makes it more salient. It stands out for you. But you know what else? Attention can also not only be directed by you to make things more salient, your attention can be caught! [CLAP] a sudden noise, and you turn, and you attend to it. It was salient and it captures your attention. So not only can you direct your attention, your attention can be captured by what you find salient. Notice what this means you can do. You can direct your attention to something and make it more salient. And because it's more salient it will tend to capture your attention. And because you're paying attention to it you make it more salient which means it will more likely capture your attention. Do you see what's happening here? These two things feed on each other: I pay more attention to it. It becomes more salient. It becomes more salient. It gathers my attention. I pay more attention to it. I'm more likely to be attracted to it and it spins on itself in a self-organizing manner until... your attention is attached to something. It's super salient to you. It's highly relevant to you and you lose the capacity to notice other things. That's how you bullshit yourself. The salience and the catchyness of the stimulus has overtaken any concern you have for whether or not it's true or represents reality.

This is how you deceive yourself. So do you see - that's why Socrates is going to be so antagonistic towards the Sophists. They are the opposite - the opposite - of the Axial revolution. They are the opposite of that rational self-knowledge; the attempt to overcome self-deception. The Sophist are promoting bullshit and when you promote bullshit you not only promote the deception of others, you make yourself more vulnerable to self-deception. You fall more and more prey to self-deception.

So the natural philosophers are "truth without relevance". The Sophists, and their propensity for the promotion of bullshit, represent "relevance disconnected from truth". So notice here they have the power to transform

people, but they have disconnected it from the pursuit of the truth. These people can give us knowledge of the facts but do not facilitate self transformation. What Socrates wanted is he wanted both. He wanted individuals who knew how to pay attention in such a way that what they found salient helped them determine the truth and that the truth that they found help them to train their attention to find salience. Socrates wanted something like that. (DRAWS ENCOMPASING CIRCLE/CYCLE ON THE BOARD???)

So what he would do is he would go about questioning people. Maddening frustration. So Socrates would come up to somebody and say "well what are you doing here?", "Oh I'm in the marketplace!", "Well why are you in the marketplace?", "Well I'm purchasing something!", "Well why are you purchasing something?", "Well I want to get these goods!", "Well why do you want these goods?", "Because they'll make me happy"?! And then, then Socrates starts to "Oh, so you must know what happiness is?", "Well happiness is pleasure Socrates, I guess! And these things give me pleasure!". "But is it possible..." Socrates would ask "...to have pleasure and still find yourself in a horrible situation that you really dislike?". "Well of course, Socrates, that's possible!"

"Oh, so then happiness isn't pleasure! You're being coy with me! Tell me, tell me," Socrates would say "...what is happiness?", "Oh it's, you know, it's getting what's most important to you!", "Well that means that you have to have knowledge. Is it any kind of knowledge?", "Well no it's the knowledge of what's important!", "What's truly important? Or what you only think is important?", "I guess what's truly important, Socrates!", "OK, so, what's that knowledge of what's truly important called?", "I guess that would be wisdom, Socrates!", "Oh, so, in order to find happiness, you must have first cultivated wisdom! Tell me how you cultivate wisdom and what wisdom is....?" And the person goes "AAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!". They collapse! They get to this point where they can't answer! They fall into a state called Aporia. People compared it to being stung by a stingray, or falling under a magician spell! You don't know what's going on!

Now here's what... Now one thing you might say is "Well Socrates is just a skeptic. He's trying to show people that they don't know anything because he

wants to show that the gods are right, that nobody has any wisdom etc.."
That's too simple! I think something more sophisticated is going on with Socrates. Socrates is trying to get you to realize... He's incarnating the Axial revolution. He's trying to get you to realize how much each one of us, myself included, how much we're bullshitting ourselves all the time. Why? Because we pursue things, we find things salient to us, THERE: happiness, fame, it's salient to us and we're pursuing it... We're putting our efforts into it way before we understand it. Way before we grasp the truths of it. We are always making ourselves susceptible to bullshit because we are being driven by powerful motivations that are salient to us that are greatly in excess of our understanding of their truth or reality. We are always, all of us, bullshitting ourselves. And the point about [that]... what that does is that provokes a reaction in people. It goes one of two ways: people either go "AAAARGH" and they don't want to be shown that about themselves and they become angry at Socrates. Or, some people have an insight! They realize "Oh. Oh!!! I need to transform myself. I need to find a way to keep relevance and truth tracking each other. Enabling each other."

And when Socrates realized that he was having this effect on people he had his answer to his dilemma. He knew how it was that the gods were not lying and he was the wisest of human beings. His answer was the following: He knew what he did not know! And we all say "I know what I don't know. I made note of a lot of [things]..." No no no no! He knew in a way that allows you to directly, painfully confront your capacity for bullshiting yourself.

To really realize what you do not know is to realize "I am pursuing her and I don't know what's going on." "I'm pursuing that and I don't know what's going on." That's what he's talking about.

Now, many people think that Socrates just concluded that that's it: 'He didn't know anything!' No that's not what Socrates is talking about. Socrates does claim to know things. You can imagine how Socrates pisses people off. So he is put on trial. In ancient Athens there isn't a state that arrests you! One citizen accuses another, you're brought on trial, you're put in front of 500 men - it's always men, remember? ...very very very chauvinistic society - and then the accuser presents their case the defendant presents their case and then the jury votes on it!

So, Socrates was accused by people that he'd pissed off of atheism, which doesn't mean "not believing in gods" it just means teaching strange gods, because as I mentioned he was concerned to make the gods moral exemplars. Now when Socrates is on trial, it becomes clear that they will let him go if he agrees to stop doing this philosophy stuff that he's doing, stops pissing people off! And then he utters something that's very famous - and this is a statement of him deeply knowing something he says "The unexamined life is not worth living". A Life in which there is no effort made to put these two (Truth machinery and Relevance machinery) together, is a life that is not worth living because it is a life - to use our terms, that is awash in bullshit - that is beset by self-deception and self-destructive behavior. So Socrates knows what makes a life meaningful. There is a kind of wisdom. Wisdom is to keep your truth machinery and your relevance machinery tightly coupled together so that you don't bullshit yourself. Socrates famously claimed to know TA EROTIKA - we're going to have to talk about this later because it comes from "erotic" and, for most of us, all you hear when you hear erotic is sexual. That's not what Eros means. It's a much more broader term in ancient Greece. What Socrates means is he "knows how to love well"! That doesn't mean romantic love. What it means is Socrates knows what to care about.

He knows how to keep what he cares about (relevant/salient to him) with what's real (truth). He would do things like walk into the marketplace and say "look at all the things I don't need". He'd say "How much time did you spend on fixing your hair this morning?", "Oh, about 20 minutes!". "How much on fixing yourself?". Socrates knew what to find significant, what to find important, he knew how to properly care. He also compared himself to a midwife. He knew how to take that caring and that sense of what makes life meaningful - the cultivation of wisdom - and helped people draw out... Give birth to their better self. That's why he compared himself to a midwife. This is what he knew. Socrates knew how reason and love go together. You might find it entertaining to know that Frankfurt, who I mentioned a few minutes ago, wrote a book called "[The] Reasons of Love". What he also puts together; Reason and love. Things that we have been taught to keep as emphathetical to each other. For Socrates separating them - which our culture regularly and reliably does - is one of our greatest follies. They need

to be interdependent and intertwined with each other. We need to rationally know what we should most care about.

So Socrates is put on trial. He's found guilty. He just narrowly loses. So then after losing - and it looks like part of the reasons were political and he's pissed off the powerful and all kinds of things... he associated with people that turned out to be corrupt - but he loses by a very narrow margin. And then what happens is each side proposes a penalty. The accusers propose death. That Socrates should be killed. And then this tells you something about Socrates. Socrates says the following. Practicing philosophy has cost me. I have to constantly work at it. It's very demanding. I'm not wealthy. I'm dependent on other people. People attack me. It's been very risky. The worst penalty could be for me to continue doing philosophy and in order to make that even worse the government should give me free housing and free food for the rest of my life! So as you can imagine, this pisses everybody off, and Socrates is found, in a much greater vote, he's condemned to death. Now notice Socrates is so convinced that he has the right kind of "know thyself" - not autobiographical, but "this" (references board notes) that I've been talking about - he knows how he works and how to train it to transform it so that he cares well and reduces his capacity for self-deception. That he's willing to die for it! He finds that meaning so important that he's willing to die for it!

[He's] a very interesting figure for that reason. But there's also other important things we should know about Socrates. The shamanic is still in Socrates because he could do the following: He could stand in one place for 24 or even 48 hours meditating on his own thoughts. He was terrifically capable of controlling his body's physiological reactions. He could drink a lot without getting drunk. He could go into battle in winter without any shoes on his feet. He was famously brave. He had this divine voice! Whenever he was about to do something wrong, he'd hear this voice that would tell him "don't do it Socrates". So once again you still find the shamanic has been carried into the Socratic in really important ways. We're going to talk about later how those two are interwoven together.

Now, Socrates has many followers. But there's one person who was present at the trial, but wasn't present at his death. When he drinks the hemlock. And

you know what... I got to sit in the spot in Athens that corresponds to where Socrates was probably imprisoned. At least that's what they said! That person who was present at the trial and even offers to pay for Socrates' release but is ill and not present at his death is Plato. And Plato, as I foreshadowed, is going to take Pythagoras and Socrates and put them together and advance even more significantly the Axial Revolution in ancient Greece. Thank you very much for your time.

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Episode 5: Plato and the Cave

Welcome to the fifth episode of awakening from the meaning crisis. Last time we talked about how the Axial revolution came into Greece. We first reviewed Pythagoras and then we concentrated especially on the figure of Socrates and the Socratic revolution. And we saw again how issues of meaning, wisdom, self transcendence are so tightly bound up together. We took a look at Socrates and we took a look at how he has a particular conception of wisdom in which what we find salient or relevant is closely coupled to what we find true or real and those two things, those two concerns - what is transformative about us and what is true of the world - are meant to be held together. And this was pivotal in Socrates' method of trying to get people to realize how much all of us are so prone to having those two come uncoupled from each other and we become subject to bullshit and self-deception and that a life that is beset by self-destructive behavior is not a life that's worth living. That a way to afford human flourishing is by developing the skills, the wisdom, to keep those two tightly coupled together and Socrates was so convinced of how important this was, in fact, to making a life meaningful that he was prepared to die for it.

And as I mentioned there was somebody who was a follower of him who was at his trial, not present at his death, but was deeply traumatized and affected by his death. And this is of course Plato. Now if Socrates was controversial, Plato is beyond even that statement! Every year there are hundreds of books written about Plato. This is why Plato is one of the foundations, not only because of his ideas, but as we'll see there is an inexhaustibleness to Plato and his writing. We can come back to Plato! As a culture we come back at different times and see things we did not see before that are transformative and as individuals, myself personally, you can come back to Plato at different times of your life and Plato speaks to you in ways he did not speak before.

I want you to remember that because I'm going to try and suggest to you that that is a better model for what we mean by something being sacred than it being filled with some kind of supernatural presence. That what makes something sacred is that it's an inexhaustible font of insight and intelligibility that's transformative of us. That's certainly the way many people in the ancient world read Plato. They were deeply affected by him. I would go so far as to say that Platonism or Neo-Platonism, as Versluis and others argue, is the bedrock of Western spirituality. And we'll come back to that.

Now, Plato was traumatized by the death of Socrates. It's deeply I think disturbing to him. Why I think that is because he keeps coming back to it and trying to understand... He wanted to understand how is it that the city he loved, the city he belonged to, Athens, could have killed this man that he admired and loved so deeply? How is it that his beloved Athens killed his beloved Socrates? So where as Socrates had this dilemma given to him by the gods Plato has this dilemma given to him by the death of Socrates. Plato wanted to understand how people could be so foolish and so what he is going to do is he's going to take that to worlds mythology that we talked about: the lower less real world - and remember its mythological, it's not meant to be literally two worlds but he's going to take that two worlds mythology and he's going to do something with it very different than what the Hebrews did.

Remember the Hebrews turned it into "this is where... Things are fallen now, but we're moving towards a future; we're progressing towards a future." So

they give a historical answer to how we move from the world of illusion to the world of reality. Plato is not going to give a historical answer. He's going to give a scientific answer. Because Plato is deeply influenced by the natural philosophers that we talked about last time. And what Plato is in fact going to do is he's going to create the first psychological theory in history. With Plato you can really see the beginning not just of science but the beginning of cognitive science. Psychology as a discipline begins in a very important sense. And I don't mean this trivially like "oh yeah it started with that..." Plato's psychology is still currently relevant right now in important ways which we'll talk about.

So let's get into that because this is again going to take us into these interconnected issues of meaning, wisdom, self transcendence, altered states of consciousness etc. I'd hope to show you how Plato, in trying to answer the question of how Athens could have killed Socrates, is ultimately influence not just by Socrates but also by Pythagoras. We know that Plato spent some time with the Pythagorean community and he seems to have gone through some kind of training in that community.

So Plato develops a particular theory about why human beings do foolish things and there's different aspects of it but a good way to think about it is by relating it to something that we're all familiar with. This is the experience of inner conflict. Inner conflict is when you have two strong motives that seem to be working against each other and you can see how this is immediately going to be relevant to existential meaning - to meaning in life because very often we feel most distraught, most anxious, or the most sense of being stuck when we have such inner conflict. When we're divided against ourselves in an important way.

So here's a classic example. So I like chocolate. I more than like chocolate. Chocolate has a deep attraction for me! So, recently I lost about 20 pounds. So I went on a diet. Now dieting is one of the most unsuccessful things that human beings can do. The recidivism rate is 95%. Recidivism means that within a year ninety five percent of people who were on a diet are back to their pre-diet weight. So the diet industry has a 5 percent success rate even though it makes billions of dollars. I mean I wish I had that success rate for my job. I wish I only had to succeed at 5 percent and I was given millions of

dollars for that kind of work. You have to ask yourself "why does that work?" Well it works because of the problem. It's such a pressing problem that people will grasp and pay money and anything in the hopes that it might work because what's the problem? Well the problem is it goes like this... And we'll talk about the cognitive science about this. "I know I should lose weight. There is the evidence, it's clear [and] makes rational sense to me. I should lose weight. Yes yes. OK. I should lose weight." And then I go home and there sitting on the counter is some chocolate cake! And that doesn't quite capture it... It's not just sitting there. It's like (HUMMING NOISE) humming with its chocolaty goodness! ...And it's drawing me in... It's sort of (TRACTOR BEAM NOISE) ...And so you end up, often, just eating the chocolate cake!

Or another example you might be familiar with: procrastination. I know my students face this! "Yes. Yes. I have an essay due in two weeks. Two weeks! There it is. I should work on my essay tonight because if I start now I won't be rushed. I know if I'm not rushed I'll do a great job. I'll have more time to research. I'll be able to change my mind. I should start working on my essay tonight". Somebody calls up: "Want to go out for some drinks?"... "Yeah!!!" ...And you're gone and you procrastinate. So we are clearly beset by this inner conflict and Plato... Plato gets this great insight. He gets the insight that there seems to be a deep connection between inner conflict and self-deception; self-destructive self-deception. So Plato posits an idea that has become, again, so natural to us that we just say "Oh yeah of course!" But, again, he comes up with it! Plato comes up with the idea that we have different centers in the psyche and each center has a different cognitive relationship to the world and motivates us in different ways and he represented this mythologically. He said that there's a part of us that's like a man. I want to say something here right now because although Athenian democracy is horribly sexist and treats women horribly. So remember that context because what's intriguing is how much Plato was able to rise above that. Plato argues that women should rule as well as men; that women should be in the army as well as men. Now he doesn't perfectly free himself, of course, from sexism but given the context I think it's very admirable the degree to which he was able to do it.

Nevertheless he does use this idea of "a man" that's in your "head" and represents "reason" and that man is motivated by truth; [by] what's true. So he cares about truth and falsity. That's what he cares about, and scope - he can go into very long term goals. And he can deal with very abstract entities like your health or a essay. Very abstract entities. So this is "health" and "I should lose weight; It's gonna take me several months and I should do that because it's true that if I lose weight my health will improve". So why don't I just do it? Well, because opposed to it there's "a monster" and it's, sort of, in my stomach and genitals and it represents appetite. Now it does not work in terms of truth and falsity. It works in terms of pleasure and pain. [A] very different set of norms. Now there's nothing wrong with operating in terms of pleasure and pain. If you don't have a capacity to work in terms of pleasure and pain you're dead. So Plato doesn't think the appetites are evil. What he wants you to grasp is that they operate according to different principles than the man. OK so they presume long term goals? No, immediate! "When do you want the cake?" "I want it now. Now! I'm going to the party NOW." It works in terms of very superficial properties: "All I care about the cake is how it looks, it looks yummy!" I don't have some in-depth analysis... It's just "Aahhhmmmm" (gobble noise) "chocolate, sweet YUM!!" So, very superficial! Again, that's not necessarily bad! Often in life and death situations a superficial appraisal is exactly what you need. I don't need to know a great deal about the inner workings of the tiger. I just need to know "Oh crap! Deadly! Get out of here..."

Now, notice how these are opposite to each other! Now I put a space between here, obviously because I'm setting you up for a third thing that Plato talks about. But before I do I wanted you to notice what Plato is doing with Socrates here. So Socrates didn't really have a theory. He had a practice. Socrates' practice, if you remember last time, was to get people to realize how often what they find salient is rushing ahead of what they find truthful. Remember that? What Plato was saying is "that's not a coincidence. The reason why that happens is because we have different parts of the psyche that work this way". This (MONSTER) makes things salient to you. Really catchy. Motivates you urgently right now. This (MAN IN HEAD) is the part that you use to understand! And see here's what most of us face. This monster is constantly racing ahead of what we understand! Do you see?

What Plato is doing is he's explaining why we are so prone to bullshit! Why salience often exceeds understanding! We are perpetually vulnerable. Now we'll talk about why we have this.

Now, let's go back to the dieting example. What helps though? There's certain strategies you can use of course to improve... (How you frame things, and we'll talk about that later.) But typically what's one of the things that improves people's chances of losing weight? They join a group. Like Weight Watchers. Or they join a study group to avoid the procrastination. Why? Well here's an important thing. You are not just a biological creature. As I've been arguing throughout, you're also cultural. You have evolved across... You are the result of evolution that has crossed several species in which you come wired to learn about abstract symbol systems, use technologies (both physical and psycho-technologies). So you have a lot of powerful cultural, socio-cultural motivations.

So he compared this to a "lion" (between "man" and "monster"), because lions are social animals. Lions have been associated with honor because that's what this works in terms of. It works in terms of honor and shame. Honor is to be respected by those you consider your peers. To be shamed is when you feel that you have failed to be gained respect from your peers. We should not confuse shame and guilt. They are not synonyms. Guilt is when you feel that you have failed to meet your own ideal of who you should be. Shame is when you have lost the capacity to get respect from your peers. Now what's interesting is that, and this is Plato's point.... That this part of us can pursue intermediate scope. Because we're cooperating with other people, it doesn't operate just short term. But it doesn't quite operate abstract theoretical, it works within the socio-cultural domain. So it can pursue mid-term goals. Not just immediate goals, but not abstract symbolic goals, but socially agreed upon shared goals. And it works on the cultural aspects of things. Not their abstract meaning or they're superficial meaning but they're cultural. Their shared meaning. The way we can share it with other people.

Notice how much you want to share with other people your experience. I've been saying this for years... I still see people doing it, even people that I've talked to. People will reliably do this. They'll be eating something, they're trying it for the first time and they'll go "oh this tastes horrible, have some!"

They'll give it to somebody else because you want to have that - in addition to whatever immediate response you're having - you want there to be a shared cultural meaning to what's happening in your experience, and there's good reason for that because as I've been arguing throughout your connection to distributed cognition is one of the most powerful ways you increase your cognitive power over the world.

Now, he sort of represents this ("lion") as being like in the chest. And this has to do because we feel a lot of our social emotions and motivation in the chest: pride and honor and shame... Things like that. Now "this" is problematic for us. What should go "there" (between Reason and Appetite)? Because the Greek word doesn't have a direct English equivalent. Sometimes people put "emotion" there. That's not quite right. Sometimes people put the word "spirit" there. That's closer, but the problem with "Spirit" is it has all kinds of spooky associations with it. I'm not going to translate it. I'm just going to leave it as is. This is your THYMOS. This is the part of you That is motivated Socially.

So, Here's an interesting idea Plato has... There is a lot of potential conflict in this system. There's a lot of potential conflict in this system. What you want to do is get it properly ordered. When you don't order it, think about what this means... Salience and understanding and participation get out of sync with each other. And then we're subject to bullshitting; we're subject to self-deception. The more inner conflict we have, the more likely we are to engage in self-deception, because these two (HEAD AND MONSTER) are out of sync and the more likely we will become very egocentric. So when people are suffering, especially inner conflict anxiety, they tend to become more self-centered even selfish. Because when you are experiencing inner conflict you're getting a sort of threat signal, "things aren't right", and when people are under threat they tend to become very egocentric. Again that's adaptive.

Now, we're going to come back to this. But we want to do a little bit of cognitive science. "Why do we...? What? Why?" (MOCK QUESTIONING OF PROCESSES ON THE BOARD) OK... It makes sense that we have this (LION, IN THE MIDDLE) as a motivation because we're social creatures. One of our greatest adaptations is our ability to cooperate together. So, you

throw me into the African savannah on my own and (PFFFFFT SOUND) I'm dead soon because I don't have great claws, I don't have great teeth. I'm like... What a silly structure, right? I'm teetering around on two feet almost always losing my balance. I can't run quickly. Everybody can see me from a long distance because I'm towering above the grass. My throat and my vital organs are nicely exposed for any predator. This is a bad!! But you know what I can do? I can get together with a bunch of other human beings and we can get some pointy sticks and some dogs and then we can kill everything on the planet!

Hyperbolic Discounting / Temporal Discounting

Our ability to work together has always been adaptive. So we know why this (LION) is here. But why does this (MONSTER) have so much more power than this (MAN). Well, there's actually an important reason and this has to do with some work started by Ainslie and others on what's called

"Hyperbolic discounting" or "temporal discounting" and what easily and other people found is [that] this pattern of behavior exists across species. It's not just something that human beings engage in. You can find it across species. It's even more universal than something like flow. It's not just universal amongst human beings. It's universal across many species. So this is a deeply adaptive mechanism.

What does this mechanism look like? So this is called discounting (VERTICAL AXIS), and this is a little bit confusing. Discounting is how much you are reducing the salience of a stimulus. The more you discount the less salient something is, the less it stands out for you, the less it grabs your attention. This axis (HORIZONTAL) is time in a tense sense. This is the present (LEFT AT ORIGIN) and this is the future (EXTENDING OUT TO THE RIGHT).

So what I'm showing you is what's happening to discounting which means how much a stimulus is losing its salience. And this is what it looks like. This is what the curve looks like (DRAWS CURVE ON BOARD). So a present stimulus has a large degree of salience to it - Remember the monster? Something that's in the future, especially as it gets into the far future, much less salience to it. That's why the monster can override the man. But why? Why do we have this? Well this is actually very, very

adaptive. That's why it's a universal phenomena. How is it adaptive? So I want you to think about doing... you're about to do something here... I don't smoke - I do diet, but I don't smoke - but let's suppose I was doing this... Here's 'right now' and I decide to smoke a cigarette. And that could have one of two options: I get a cough here, or I don't get a cough there, or something like that... now notice - and I'm doing this very simplistically! I'm not saying that whenever you do something there's only two effects from it! I'm just doing it simplistically, in a very simple manner so you can understand the point. OK? Now, the probability of now happening is 100 percent because it's happening. The probability of each one of these happening (cough/no cough) is 50 percent. Now if it goes this way then there's two more effects, the probability of each one of these is twenty five... and so on... So do you see what's happening. As you move into the future the probability of any one of these events occurring is going down very fast.

Now here's the thing. This is this is actually adaptive. You should pay less attention to things that are less probable [of] happening. That actually makes good sense. The less probable something, an event, is the less attention you should give it. Imagine if you didn't have this! Imagine if you didn't screen off things that were low in probability. Think about how you would be overwhelmed by all the possibilities. So if I get out of bed I might twist my ankle slightly and that might slow me down getting to class. And if I slow down getting to class that might have an impact on my mark. And that might cause me to fail my course. And then if I fail my course that might disrupt my degree and that might cause me to fail in my career. And then I'm going to end up in Buffalo alone married to a lamp or something!!! Now that's ridiculous right? Now it's possible. It's not impossible! Except the last part! I can't really get married to a lamp.

In fact here's a hypothesis I have. (Notice the word I used please.) I think one of the things that goes wrong in people who experience generalized anxiety disorder is that this (HYPERBOLIC DISCOUNTING) is not working well enough: It's not screening off and making low salient, low probability events! So highly anxious people find things salient that they shouldn't. They find low probability things too salient. So this is really adaptive This is why you have it. But there's a problem with it. This is a

problem with any adaptive machine and you're going to see later why this is the case...

OK let's go back to the cigarette smoker... I smoke, and through a long chain (OF FORKING PROBABILITIES) this is me dying in Hamilton. This is the event of me dying in Hamilton. Lung cancer in my left lung. I'm not going to write this all out. This is me dying in Hamilton of cancer in my right lung. This is me dying in Toronto. Cancer left right. This is me dying in Burlington because... And so on.... There's all these different deaths. Now here's the thing. Each one of those deaths has a low probability of occurring. Do you see that? Each one of those deaths has a low probability of occurring. But here's the thing about me, and I bet you I share it with you, I don't want to just avoid death in Hamilton - although that would be a particularly bad death - I don't want to avoid just dying in Hamilton - I'm from Hamilton so I'm allowed to do that - I want to avoid death! I want to avoid all these deaths. Think carefully - and I'm using this very technically, but I'm speaking accurately - I want to avoid death in the abstract. I don't want to avoid this death or this death or this death or this death. I want to avoid all possible deaths. I want to avoid death in the abstract.

Now here's the thing... The chance of each one of these deaths is very low. But if you pull them together the chance that cigarette smoking will lead to a premature death is very very high. So what does that mean for me? The hyperbolic discounting blinds me to this because it's not very probable. Blinds me to this because it's not very probable blinds me to each one of these because each, individually, they're not very probable. But in blinding me to each you know it it blinds me to? What they share in common. It blinds me to what they all have in common and what they all have in common is a premature death. By blinding me to what they have in common - what they abstractly share - this adaptive machine actually has me take another puff on a cigarette and sets me on the course towards cancer or emphysema.

Do you see? Now please remember this. This is going to be a theme we're going to be coming back to again and again and again; I mentioned it before when I talked about Flow. The very machinery that makes you adaptive is the machinery that makes you prey to self deceptive self-destructive

behavior. Part of what meaning and wisdom have to do is they have to wrestle with that unavoidable reality. The unavoidable reality is [that] you can't you can't throw this away. You can't throw away this machinery because if you throw this adaptive machinery away you're doomed. You can't get out of bed because you're overwhelmed by crippling anxiety. You can't throw it away but you can't just let it run untutored because then you smoke the cigarette, you eat the cake, you go to the party and you harm yourself in a self-deceptive, self-destructive fashion.

So what do you need to do? Here's the monster. What you need, and what we developed, is we developed an ability - especially here [in the] frontal lobe area - to form abstract thought. To abstract what is in common in the distant future and symbolically represent it to ourselves. That's what the man does. The man can grasp the abstract thought of avoiding the premature death. But the man is so weak! The man's weak because you don't want him to be able to shut this off. You want him to be able to override it, but in a very minimal sense because that's so adaptive. So Plato is deeply Right! In fact I think Plato so deeply [that] that's why we keep discovering this division.

Optimization Strategy

Freud divides the psyche into these three things: a super ego, the ego the id. There is a movement in the 90s in neuroscience to talk about the reptilian brain, the mammal brain, and the neo-cor[tex]... We keep rediscovering this platonic division. But Plato had an interesting idea. He said "you know what, The man can learn." The man is capable of grasping theory, abstract symbolic representation of the case. And the Lion really isn't capable of theory but what the lion can do is the lion can be trained. You can use your reason to train your lion. How do you do this? Well this is where Socrates is so relevant. And this is why Plato writes dialogues. Because what Socrates did was he took reason into the social arena. Socrates goes into the marketplace and dialogues with people. There is this social interaction happening and the social interaction is being wed to rational reflection and to inspiring people to try and overcome self-deception. And so using a Socratic Method, the man can train the lion. And then the man and the lion together can tame the monster. Not kill it. But tame it. And what you want is you want that teaching of the man, the training of the lion and the taming of the

monster so that something happens. You reduce as much as possible the inner conflict. Plato describes wisdom as an internal Justice within the psyche in which the man has been taught, the line has been trained and the monster has been tamed so they can get along together as much as is possible.

This is what's known as an optimization strategy. If I let the monster rule, everything else shrinks to a minimum. What you want is you want the right coordination of the parts of the psyche so that each can live as much as it possibly can without putting the other two in danger. When you can get that inner harmony, that optimal relation, so each is living as much as it can without putting the other ones in danger, this mutuality of the most existence, for Plato, this is to experience a fullness of being. This is to be as fully alive as you possibly can be. It is also to experience a kind of peace because your inner conflict has dropped.

Reducing Inner Conflict

So this is very powerful. One of your meta-drives - in addition to all the drives people have - they want to have whatever they're having without inner conflict. They want to be at peace with themselves. This of course is a powerful meta-drive that you can tap into. Because if you have a strong drive within you to get this inner justice, to realize wisdom, to get this fullness of being, then I can appeal to it. I can appeal to it Socratically. But notice that this has an important component to it because as I reduce inner conflict my self-deception goes down. And as I reduce my inner conflict I'm less egocentric. Both of these things are making me more in touch with reality. So I'm reducing inner conflict, but the effect that's having is [that] I'm getting a clearer vision of reality because my self-deception and egocentrism is going down. Now that matters because, as we've seen before, you want to be in touch with reality. You have a meta-drive. Philosophers have various thought experiments for talking about this.

One I'll sometimes do with students as I'll say: "Imagine the following: you go home one day and your parents say 'come on, come here I want to show you something'. And you say 'what?' And they take you to this hallway that you've walked down a thousand times before. And they press on a part of the wall that for you has never meant anything and when they press a door opens

and there's a room in there and there's TV screens and there's videotape and there's pictures of you at all stages of your life. And then they say the following to you: 'Just before you were born, nine months before you were born, we were hired by the government to have you. This is part of an experiment. The government gave us scripts to memorize. And we did this as a part of a government experiment. We don't actually love you or care about you at all. We've just been following the script. Doing what we've been doing because the government has hired us to do this. But we're but we're obligated, now that you've turned 21 to tell you the truth! We don't care about you! Now, we still have to keep doing this when we leave the room. You can forget all about this if you want... And we'll just say what we've always said we'll tell you how much we love you. We'll make sure that your needs are met. Just know right now that none of that is how we truly feel, Okay?'"

Now I ask people "how would you feel?" And they'd go "well I'd be devastated!!" But I say "but nothing's changed! They're going to still say all the same words to you. They're still gonna treat you exactly the same way..." And what people say is "Well it's no longer real!"

Here's another thing I'll do with people, I'll say: "How many of you are in satisfying personal relationships?" Quite a few people put up their hands and then I'll say: "how many of you would want to know that your partner was cheating on you even if that meant the destruction of your relationship?" Almost everybody puts their hand up. They're willing to destroy this relationship, that's giving them so much happiness, because they don't want it to be fake. They want it to be real. And we'll talk later about why this need to be real is so important. But I want you to understand what Plato is talking about here. Notice that two of your most important meta-drives are being met in the Platonic model. You're reducing inner-conflict and you're becoming more in touch with reality. Now that feeds on itself in an important way. I get better at picking up on "real patterns" in the world. My skill at picking up on real patterns is improved because I get a clearer vision, I get better at tracking real patterns. But what does that mean? Well, as I start to get more inner peace, I start to be able to pick up on real patterns. I get the skill, the vision ability. But of course what I can do is I can apply that to

myself: Socratic self knowledge. As I get better at picking up on real patterns, I can apply that to myself. I can get better knowledge of myself.

As I get better knowledge of myself, I can better teach the man. To be a good teacher, you have to know your student better. As I get better knowledge of myself, I can teach the man, I can better train the lion, I can better tame the monster. So notice what's happening here: I improve a little bit; my skill at picking up on real patterns. I use that skill on myself to increase my self-knowledge and get better patterns, which means I reduce my inner conflict. As my inner conflict goes down, I get a clearer vision of reality. As I get a clearer vision of reality. I get better at picking up on real patterns, which means I improve myself knowledge, which means I reduce my inner-conflict... and you see what happens? This starts to spin like 'this' - These two sides feed into each other and reinforce each other and improve each other. And this is wonderful for you because you're becoming less inner-conflicted and you're coming more in contact with reality.

The Parable / Myth of the Cave

Plato has a famous story. A parable. A myth, in the sense that I'm talking about in this series. It's called "The Parable or the Myth of the Cave", and it's a way of talking about this - the relationship between these things. Notice two things here... You need to remember this! Notice how much self transformation and getting more in contact with the world are interconnected. This is participatory knowing! I'm not over here as an impartial passive observer, just forming true beliefs about this; I have to change myself in order to see the world and then the world changes and then that puts a demand on me to change myself. And as I change myself the world discloses itself in a new way. And so on and so forth. This is participatory knowing. I'm not just changing my mind. This is not just knowing with my mind, this is knowing with the very machinery of myself.

What's Plato's myth? Here is the surface (drawing on the board) ...pathway going down ...that leads into this inner cavern ...There's a fire here ...There's people chained to chairs so all they can do is look at the back of the cave ...Then there's other people walking in front of the fire and it's casting shadows onto the cave because of the firelight and they're hearing the echoes... And what Plato says is "people take the shadows and the echoes to

be the real things because they're chained. They're caught up". But what happens is an individual gets free! And what does that individual do? That individual turns and sees the fire. That allows them to realize that the shadows and the echoes aren't the real things. They're shadows and echoes! And what happens is the person's ability to notice the real patterns - as opposed to the merely correlational patterns - is changed. Remember we talked about that? People start to see... They start to realize "oh these are what real patterns feel like, as opposed to what I thought was real". You get the taste for reality developing, and that taste means they start to look around and explore! And then they realize there's a path there's light coming through it and then they start a journey upward. Now notice how this journey works. When they take a step forward, they're blinded by the light. And they have to wait. They have to wait for their eyes to adjust. The self has to be transformed. And then once the eyes have adjusted they can see how to go and then they take another step and then they're blinded again. And there's this slow process and Plato kept talking about... At various stages they have to stop because they're blinded and then they adjust and then they gain the ability to see where they couldn't see before. It's this participatory transformation I talked about, and eventually they come up here and they look around.

And what are they looking for? They want to see the source of the real light. The light that's allowing them to pick up on the real patterns. Where is this light that shows the reality of things coming from? And not only is it showing the reality of things, this light is the source of the life of things. Whereas this source? Of understanding and light? And they look around and of course they glimpse, because they can't stare at it directly, the Sun. And it's overwhelming. It's beyond their comprehension. But they see it and it fills them with a kind of awe. And of course what they do is they go back down into the tunnel rapidly, and they get here, and they try to tell their fellow prisoners what they saw. But of course they're stumbling around because their eyes don't work anymore in that darkness. And they're saying things that make absolutely no sense to these people. And so they ridicule them and if they could they would kill that individual. And of course this is an allusion to Socrates.

First of all notice that, contrary to what people think, "enlightened-ment" is not just an Eastern idea. This (Myth of the Cave) is a myth of enlightenment: of coming into the light. It's a myth of self-transcendence and self-transformation. It's a myth of coming - and I mean "myth" in the sense that we've been talking about - it's a parable of coming into greater and greater contact with reality. See, notice the story is "You pick up on real patterns that challenges you, it blinds you and then you transform to pick them up and then you're unable to move forward, then you confront those real patterns again... And you're doing that cycle that I talked about. There's a Greek word for this 'ascent' called "Anagoge". This is the "Anagogic", or the "Anagogical" aspect of Plato's idea.

Notice what he's doing... He's taking the movement between the illusory world and the real world and he's turning it into this account of how you can make your lives rationally more meaningful. You can become more fully alive and more at peace in conjunction, in concert with, you coming more and more in contact with the real patterns that make sense of reality. You can satisfy, in a mutually supporting fashion, your desire, your meta-drive for inner peace and your meta-drive to be in contact with reality. This is what Plato calls wisdom - a fullness of being. We become more and more real ourselves as we become more and more at peace so that we can more and more realize the real patterns. We conform ourselves more and more to reality... And you may say "this is kind of a crazy story!" Is it? Is it? ...because here's a story from 1999: There's all these people and they're trapped in a world of shadows and unreality. It's called "The Matrix" and they need to wake up and be welcomed to the real world and the character that's in there is "Neo" from Neoplatonism: the "new man". People flocked to that movie and all it is, is "this" (points at board and The Myth of the Cave) with some great martial arts and some interesting science fiction special effects!

This parable... This is what I mean about a myth! This isn't a story from the past. The reason why you go to The Matrix, and people still watch it and talk about it is because it's a myth. It sings to you. It speaks to you now because it talks about perennial problems that you face. Problems of the psyche being in conflict with each other. The problem of being caught up in illusion, out of touch with reality, and it presents the possibility of liberation and self-

transcendence and a fullness and enhanced meaning in life. It's a myth of wisdom that is perennially relevant because it's not about the past. It's about what's happening in you right here, right now.

I want you to notice a couple of things about this. I want you to notice, first, how reason and spirituality are not opposed to each other here. They're inseparably bound together. I want you to notice how Plato is putting Socrates - The Socratic project (because Socrates is how you get "the Man" to teach "the lion", how you get to realize your own foolishness) - with Pythagoras. Because here's the self-transcendence; the rising above yourself. The radical transformation of your consciousness and cognition that Pythagoras talked so much about. Now this is such intrancing and enriching and empowering myth - a perennial parable - that it's going to be a constant refrain throughout the West. People are going be coming back to it again and again and again.

I want to talk now more about the Pythagorean side of Plato just to bring out a few things. So, Plato talks about... He uses a term "idos", and that gets translated into the word "form", and when people hear the word form they hear "shape". It also gets translated into the word "idea", when they hear idea they think of "concept", or an idea in your head. That's not what Plato means. He's using that word, [and] It's much closer to our word like a "paradigm"... he's using a word to talk about the real patterns that we're discovering in reality. Now there's an interesting thing about these real patterns: They're both the access - the pathway we have to understanding something; the pathway we have for getting at the reality of something (because those are the real patterns), but they're not just the affordance of our knowing, the real patterns are also what make something be what it is.

Structural-Functional Organisation

This is work also from the psychology of concepts and how people understand things. We asked people what a bird is. They'll say the following. "Oh yeah well I know what a bird is, it has wings feathers, beak and it flies! There you go! That's a bird!". They give you what's called a 'feature list'. And then you take that... And then you can get involved in a very long process - which I think has largely been something of a mistake (we'll come back to this), No. Not totally (not a mistake) because it's important in science

- but I'm thinking that the way I understand something is by having a definition of it in terms of the correct features. Now there's a problem with this. Although people believe that this (feature list) is how they know what a bird is, they're mistaken in an important sense because I could satisfy this definition in the following way: I could put a couple of wings on this table, a bunch of feathers, a beak and then throw it all up in the air! I have wings, beak, feathers and flight! Do I have a bird? No, I don't! I have a bloody mess because what's missing is something more important. What's missing is the structural, functional organization... The way all those things hang together... The way they're structured together so that the bird functions as a whole. What's missing from this is the "Structural-Functional Organization" that makes the whole greater than the sum of its parts. The Germans have a great word for this - "Gestalt". In English we don't! The Greeks have a good word for this (S-FO): the word "logos", although a word that's being discussed a lot today. I think it needs to be discussed a little bit more carefully.

Now here's the thing I want you to realize. Remember we talked about how you pick up on real patterns, and a lot of those patterns you're not picking up an explicit sense [of]. You know what a bird is. You have some sense of the logos of [a bird]. But if I ask you "what is that logos? What is the structural-functional organization? And most of what makes a bird a bird is found in that logos. But if I ask you "what is the logos of a bird? How do these all structure together so they function as a whole in which the whole transcends simply an accumulation of it['s parts..]?" You can't tell me!! That's what the research shows in fact. You can't tell me! Your grasp is intuitive. So notice something very interesting here. You often have an intuitive grasp of the logos of things and the logos is "form" where form doesn't mean "shape", form means something more like "formula". It means the structural functional organization and that form, that logos, is not only how the thing is integrated together, it's how your mind can be integrated with it. Remember this logos, this real pattern, is not only how you know something but it's also the pattern that makes it be what it is.

So this is a very different idea of knowing. You saw it already in the myth of the Cave. But when I really know something I conform to it. I become like it in some important way. I get in my mind the same real pattern that's in the

thing because that real pattern is what allows me to come to know the thing and to enter into that reciprocal realization with it.

Now this is going to be an important idea. This is an idea that's going to be taken up by Plato's greatest disciple. Somebody we're gonna talk about next time when we're together and that's Aristotle. Thank you very much for your time.

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Episode 6: Aristotle, Kant, and Evolution

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. So last time we discussed the important and foundational work of Plato. The grammar of Western civilization is basically made up of the Bible and Plato. We'll keep coming back to both of those repeatedly in certain ways. And we talked about Plato's notion of wisdom and how it involved this process of aligning the psyche so as to reduce inner-conflict and reduce self-deception by bullshitting ourselves and how that enabled us to also achieve one of our meta-desires - the desire for inner peace, but how we could also align that reduction in self-deception with getting more in contact with what's real. And that as we practice tracking real patterns in the world we could then reflectively internalize that back on ourselves. And there was an intimate connection between how we knew the world and knew ourselves. And as we increased our ability to pick up on real patterns we could increase our self knowledge, reduce our self deception increase our contact with reality and that would flow in the process of Anagoge. And that would bring about the satisfaction of our second meta-desire which is to be in contact with wellness.

And so Plato has this idea of wisdom as this Anagogic process, and we talked about that in connection with his great parable, "The parable of the cave". I then pointed out that he had - just as Socrates was lucky to have a great disciple in Plato - Plato was lucky to have a great disciple in Aristotle. Aristotle is pivotal for us because he lays the foundation for further aspects of a scientific approach to wisdom and meaning and also for an important formulation of one of the ways in which we deeply connect the self to reality that we're going to talk about when we talk about world view [at-onement?].

So as I mentioned, Aristotle was a student of Plato. He studies with Plato for about 20 years and then at some point he breaks away from Plato, famously claiming "that while I love Plato, I love the truth more". Aristotle remained, and many people would argue this (Gerson for example and others), that Aristotle remains in some very important senses a Platonist. But there was an aspect of Plato's work that Aristotle thought was lacking. Plato did not really, adequately, account for change. So Aristotle was deeply influenced by Plato's account of what made something real for us. But he thought that Plato could not really explain change very well and he was going to invent some very important concepts that are going to become integral to [our] understanding of what it is to be meaningfully connected to reality.

Growth and Development

Now Aristotle is very influenced by his father who is a physician. He's much more of a biologist than a mathematician so while Plato is much more prone to using mathematical analogies, Aristotle is much more used to using biological analogies and the word that Aristotle uses for change is actually better translated as "growth" or "develop". Aristotle was really interested in how living things grow; how they develop. And that should pick up your ears right away because part of, I take it, what we often mean when we say we have a "meaningful life" is that we are "growing" or "developing". in fact people will often use the word growth as a way of indicating an improvement in the meaning of their life and in some sense the developing of wisdom. So Aristotle picks up on Plato's notion of the 'idos'. So if you remember last time we talked about this. We talked about, that a bird is much more than a set of its features. It's not just a beak. It's not just some feathers. It's this "gestalt". It's that structural functional organization such

that all the parts function together as a whole and so what you have is something that acts as a bird.

And that pattern, that "logos", that "Idos" is very hard, actually, to put into words. But it's very much what does two things for us: It's what makes a bird a bird. And it's also the pattern by which we come to know what a bird is - when we can grasp the structural functional organization (that Idos), then we understand what a bird is. Now Aristotle was very impressed by that, but he wanted to give it a more dynamical approach. He wanted to talk about it in terms of development. And so he was very interested, as I said, in how things grow. And he noted the role that form had in growth and development. So what he did was he first started with an analogy. So he would use the analogy of artifacts - human made things - and then use that to try and understand biological things. So, for example, I can have a block of wood and I can make it into a chair, or perhaps a table or if it's big enough amount of wood I can make it into a ship or a boat. And Aristotle asked "what makes the wood behave like a chair, as opposed to a table. Or to a ship?". And this is where we get the notion of "actuality" from. We often use the word actuality, in fact, as a way of talking about realness: "It's an 'actual' something" is way of saying "it's a 'real' something" as opposed to a fraud or a simulation. So, what makes a chair act like a chair? Why does the wood act like a chair here, act like a table here, and act like a ship here? And so Aristotle said "Well first of all this is important change, and it's a good analogy for development." When I'm making a chair, that's somehow analogous for how an organism is growing.

So what is it? What makes the wood act like a chair here and act like a table here? And his argument was "well it's the 'form'!" Again where this means "idos", not "shape"; although you can use shape as an analogy. This is the Structural Functional Organization. The wood is Structurally Functionally Organized in such a way that it will act like a chair. Whereas here it will act like a table and here it will act like a ship. Now, Aristotle's point is that it's not that "this" (THE WOOD ITSELF) doesn't play any role! But he invents this really important idea. He invents the idea that the wood is "Potential". These terms "actual" and "potential" actually come from Aristotle. We use them every day. We think they are just part of our natural grammar, but

they're actually an invention of Aristotle. We're gonna see how important they are.

So the idea is [that] wood is potentially a chair. Wood is potentially a table. Wood is potentially a ship. Now when that potential has a particular form given to it, then it starts acting like a chair. It starts acting like a table and acting like a ship and this is where we get the notion of "information" from. You put a form into something and you will actualize its potential, namely you will give it a Structural Functional Organization so it will start to act in a particular manner. Now that's really important!

And then what Aristotle argued is "well what you see in living things is that they are basically doing this for themselves. [So if you'll use...] I just mean this is an analogy: a living thing is like a chair that is making itself. A chair - imagine that a chair could somehow start to impose a structural functional organization on wood so that it started to turn itself into a chair...? That's what a living thing does! Food! Food is potential you. You put food into you, you inform it, there's a code in your DNA that ultimately puts a particular form in it that gives it a structural functional organization that becomes you. Now of course this unfolds across time. [It's not...] That doesn't happen like that (clicking fingers to demonstrate happening instantly) and that's why we see it as change and development. Now this is really important as we'll see because it's going to be foundational to understanding a lot about how you connect to the world.

Circular Explanations

So, how are we going to make use of this in talking about the way human beings are connected to reality? The way they develop and grow as cognitive agents? So what I want to do first is to step aside from Aristotle in the axial age and move into current cognitive science and talk about an important way of thinking about development and change. Especially the work of Alicia Juarrero that was directly and explicitly inspired by this Aristotleian framework. So when we talk about how things change, we often have a model that we inherited from the scientific revolution. A model we get from Newton. And this is a model that change occurs because of causal impact. So the standard thing [is]: "here is this marker... I press it.... Why did it move? It moved because I pushed it!". Seems so obvious and non-

controversial. Right? So we give an explanation: "what causes it to be, BECAUSE it was pushed." ...and the idea of "All change and development is: there is an event A and it somehow causes event B, causes event C. Event A precedes B makes B happen and then B precedes C, and B makes C happen. So as Newton was engaging in the scientific revolution this notion of how things happen was becoming prominent in him. And for the people that [were] going to take up the Newtonian world view. Now what was very interesting about that is that this (A->B->C) seemed to solve a lot of problems. And this was brought out by a famous philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who Alicia Jurado talks about. Kant was interested in "why was this Newtonian model becoming so successful?". The Aristotelian model had been around for thousands of years - why was Newton's model overtaking it so rapidly?

And what Kant said as well... This does something very wonderful for us because what it does is gives us a very simple account of how we explain things. I explain C by showing you how it was preceded by an event B that caused it, and how B was preceded by an event A that caused it. Very nice, linear, clean we're like "it seems that... Isn't that what's happening?" ...So obvious, right? And again remember, again and again, I've tried to show you [that] things that seem so obvious, so natural, are actually historical creations. You have to pay attention to how we got where we are. Now, why does this matter? Well, because this (A->B->C) prevents a kind of vacuous explanation that can occur. This prevents what are called "Circular Explanations". This line (causality) prevents circular explanations. A circular explanation is when you assume the very thing you're trying to explain in your explanation.

Here's a standard kind of model - people often use this without realizing - there's a triangle out here in the world (draws on board). The light comes in into my eye, it goes to nerve pulses, that goes into my consciousness, it's somehow projected onto an inner screen and then there's a triangle there and then there's a little man inside and he goes "triangle!". And we have updated versions of this, like the central executive and such. This is called a homuncular theory. Homunculus means "a little man". When you present it like that (diagrammatic form drawn on board) I hope you can all see why this is obviously useless because what you should then ask is Well how does a

little man see the little triangle inside. And then what you go is "well inside the little man's head there is an even smaller screen with a littler man Golden 'Triangle!!!'. But how does he see? "Triangle, Triangle...!" You see what this is? It's an infinite regress because you're actually using vision to try and explain vision. Please remember this notion of a homuncular fallacy, because that's what this is, because while it's easy to explain I need you to understand that we fall into it very often when we try and understand and explain ourselves.

That (homuncular illustration) is a circular explanation because you're using the very thing you're trying to explain in order to explain it. Kant said this Newtonian scheme ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$) is wonderful because if you stick to its grammar, if you stick to its rules, the cause has to be an independent event that precedes... then you don't fall into circular explanations. That's amazing.

Now, you've got some problems here (before/preceding " $A \rightarrow$ "): what started it all? Maybe God...? and then Kant says "no!" and he's got all his arguments, and I'm not going to get into that right now. Suffice it to say that this ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$) became a predominant way of trying to explain how things work. But then Kant encountered a very significant problem. And it's not a coincidence that it has to do with the kinds of things we were talking about with Aristotle. The kinds of things that can grow. Living things. Because Kant went out and he saw a tree! And this was very problematic for him because trees don't follow this model readily. Because... He was looking at it and he was saying "okay, well what's making the tree?" Well it's the sunlight! "Well how does the sunlight get in?" Through the leaves! "So... what's making the leaves?". Well, the tree! "So, the tree makes the leaves and the leaves make the tree! So the tree is making the tree!!" And he coined the term "Self-Organizing". The tree is Self-Organizing. Now the problem with that is living things make use of "Feedback Cycles". In a feedback cycle the output from the system feeds back into the system. The tree makes the leaves, that gathers energy that goes into the processes that makes the leaves. Living things are self organizing. They use feedback cycles but when I try and give an explanation of a feedback cycle, I fall into a circular explanation.

I fall into a circular explanation! So Kant came to a rather startling conclusion. He came to the conclusion that there could not be a science of living things! That biology was impossible. No Kant is a towering intellect, he's a genius. A philosophical genius. And so you can't just sort of dismiss that. "Well there obviously is biology. What an idiot Kant is!" ..No no!! You're the one who needs to step back and think: "Where's the mistake in the argument?"! Because if there is biology (and it's true that there is, and I agree that there is), and that living things use feedback cycles (which they necessarily do) they're self-organizing (which they necessarily are) and when I try and trace out the causation I get into circular explanation (which seems like a necessary thing) and circular explanations are vacuous and empty... Then where is Kant going wrong?

Reconciling Kant's Problem - Where is the Model Wrong

This is what Alisha Juarrero takes up and she said "actually for a very long time we had no way of solving this problem". And so there was a huge gap between our biology and our physics. Now again, why are we caring about this? Because we need to... If we're going to understand Aristotle, if we're going to deeply understand what we mean when we talk about that we are living things that grow and develop and that growth and development is integral to our meaning and our sense of who and what we are - our 'personal identity' - that if we cannot give an answer to this problem (issues / question on the board!), we can not understand, fundamentally, who and what 'we' are and what the hell we are talking about when we talk about how important growth and development are to us... Because that language will forever be separate from any kind of scientific understanding! So where's this going wrong? This (feedback cycle diagram) seems, just... "Living things are feedback cycles, self-organizing: they grow, they develop, they make themselves!

So, what has to go? Well, this (A->B->C)!!! Now, before you jump and say "But that's just... That's just what causation is!", think about the fact that we know, we actually know, that Newton was ultimately wrong! Newton doesn't work with relativity. Newton doesn't work at the quantum level. So we know that we shouldn't be absolutely committed to this view. Juarrero actually

makes use of an important idea from Aristotle to solve this problem. She's going use Aristotle in order to explain a new and powerful way of talking about growth and development and self organizing processes which is known as "Dynamical Systems Theory".

Causes and Constraints

So Juarrero first of all makes a distinction between "causes" and "constraints". So to get at that distinction, let's go back to what seems so obvious. OK.... Here's the marker... I push it! Why did it move? And immediately the Newtonian grammar just comes into place: "It moved because you pushed it!" And then you might step outside of physics and say "well, I wanted to push it!", but that's not what I'm asking! Because it could also just be that some other object bumped into this and it moved! Why else did it move? Okay, so think about what has to also be true in order for this to move. There has to be empty space. Relatively empty space in front of the marker. This (the surface - table) has to have a particular shape to it. This (the pen) has to have a particular shape to it. Those aren't events. Those are conditions. Causes are events that make things happen. Constraints aren't events, they're conditions! They don't make things happen, they make things possible. There's a big difference between a condition and an event. The Newtonian way of thinking has us so fixated on this (causes -> event -> happen), so fore-grounded on this that we're not seeing this (constraints -> conditions -> possible) anymore! But Aristotle, because of his Platonic view, actually considers this (Constraints flow) more important. Why? Because when I talk about a Structural, Functional Organization, when I talk about a pattern, I'm talking about this (Constraints flow). This is where you will find form. It is sometimes called the "Formal Cause". This is where you will find the Structural Functional Organization. Conditions are structurally, functionally organized such that motion for this is possible. Now this is important because this is, of course, actuality ("causes flow") and this is where we get potentiality when I shape possibility ("constraints flow"). That's what I mean when I say something is potential. I mean that possibility has been shaped. by constraints so that these events are more possible than these events.

Possible Fix Review

Okay so we're going to do more but let's stop here and let's see how this is already starting to solve the problem of talking about the tree and itself organization. So in a tree you've got a bunch of events happening. Biochemical events. What they're doing is they're actually causing a particular form, or formula, or structural functional organization. Now think about it... Why do trees grow the way they do? Why do they grow like 'this'? Why do they spread out their branches? Why do their leaves spread out? Because what they're trying to do is they're trying to change the possibility of a photon hitting a chlorophyll molecule. The structure of the tree shapes the possibility of the events. So the events cause this structure. They cause it. But this (form) then constrains the events. So look at me I'm a living thing. I've got a bunch of events happening in me. And that creates a structural functional organization. That organization creates an internal environment in which the probability of events is dramatically altered. So events that have very low probability of happening out there have a high probability of happening in here. And events that have a very high probability of happening out there have a very low probability of happening in here. And that's what it is to be a living thing. The events cause a structure - a structural functional organization, an idos, a form - and then that constrains the events. Now this is not a circular explanation because I'm talking about two very different kinds of things. I'm talking about actuality and potentiality.

The Relation to the Conservation of Mass and Energy

Now, it's important to realize that the discussion of possibility - many of you were saying "oh this is so abstract!" and "what does this..." - this is actually integral to science! Science depends on there being real potential; the potentiality is a real thing. So, here's the object moving around (back to demonstrations with the pen)... it's on the ground... Look at all this kinetic energy. Look at it moving (lifting the pen above head). Oh! It stopped. Did I destroy all that energy? Where did the kinetic energy go? You can't destroy energy! Well, the kinetic energy has become potential energy. If the principle of the conservation of mass and energy is real, then potentiality is real. Look at this... Look at something from Newton: force equals mass times acceleration ($F = MA$). Is that an event? Is it: "Oh! That's happening over there right now... does it happen every Tuesday at 4 o'clock? This isn't an

event. This is how things are shaped. It puts a limit on what's possible in the world. Talking about real potentiality is not talking fictional or abstract it's a way of talking that's integral to our current science.

Connection to the Theory of Darwinian Evolution

OK, we're still not done though because Juarroero points out that there are two kinds of constraints. So our explanations can become even more refined. There are constraints that make a form of event, a type of event more possible. She calls those "Enabling Constraints. And then there are constraints that reduce the possibilities, reduce the options for a system. These are the selected or "Selective Constraints". Now this is going give us a very powerful way of understanding development. Let's use it the way Juarroero does to talk about one of the most significant theories of development and change, one of the great hallmarks of science. In fact it's a foundational theory for the science of biology which of course is the theory of Natural Selection, the Theory of Darwinian Evolution. Because the theory of Darwinian Evolution is probably the first dynamical systems theory in science and it is a theory that is designed precisely to account for growth and development. Obviously not within an individual but across speciation.

Okay so let's take a look at the theory. So what you're looking for first of all is [that] there has to be a feedback cycle for any dynamical system theory because we're talking about a process that is self organizing. So what's the feedback cycle that evolution talks about? Of course, well it's sexual reproduction (writes this on the board). Where do goats come from? Other goats! Goats are produced. There's the product and then it feeds back into the system and becomes the producer. ...Makes more goats that make more goats that makes more goat. That's why we call it "re-"production. It's a feedback cycle. So what did Darwin realize? Well he realized that there were selective constraints operating on that. There were conditions in the environment that reduced the options for organisms. So what are those conditions? Scarcity of resources. So, I've been looking at some of the theories of early life and there's an argument by several biologists that there's no evolution for about, probably, 800 000 years or so because there's no scarcity of resources when life first evolves. So life is static because there's no scarcity of resources. Scarcity of resources means there's competition.

Scarcity of resources means not everything can live. And so that reduces the options for the system.

OK. So selection reducing options (writes this on the board). But that's not all that's going on. If that was the case, everything would just die!! Evolution would end and that can happen - Extinction events. But there's something else. There's enabling constraints that open up the system (writes this on the board). Open up the options. So, look around... Look at me, look at other people. There's variation (writes this on the board with enabling constraints). There's considerable variation. Variation increases the options (adds this to the board with the last). So look what's going on here. You've got this feedback cycle. As it's as it's cycling through, you've got the selective conditions reducing the options that are available and then the variation opening them up. You can think of it almost like an accordion model: the variation opens it up and then as it cycles, the selective constraint pushes it down. And then from there it opens up again and then it gets pushed back down and then it opens up again it gets pushed back down and as it cycles like this it's constantly changing, in a way, to be better fitted to the environment. That's evolution. It's a kind of circular... "Evolve" is related to words like revolve... This revolution with change.

The Virtual Engine

Now notice... what I'm trying to get you to see is - first all this is important! I mean I wish I was Charles Darwin! This is one of the great great theories! He gets to sail around the world and... What a life! He gets to sail around the world, go to some amazing places and then he comes back and makes a world changing theory! It's just, it's amazing! But notice how much this Darwinian theory that is at the foundation of biology, how much it is beholden to Aristotle. How much it depends on Aristotelian ideas. Now, Juarrero talks about this as a "Virtual Governor".

A governor is any device that limits what you can do on a system, like if you have a governor on a steam engine it sets the range, it limits the range at which you can cycle. She calls it a virtual Governor because it's not an actual machine. It's the shaping of possibility. She stops there and work that I've done with Leo Ferraro and Anderson Todd and Richard Wu, we think she should continue to finish the metaphor. This is a virtual generator ("enabling

constraints" part of the cycle; written on the board there) because it's a set of conditions that are generating options for a self-organizing system. And here's the idea: when you put a virtual governor systematically together with a virtual generator, such that you are systematically regulating a feedback cycle, this whole thing is a virtual engine because when you attach a governor to a generator you get a "virtual engine" (diagram with terms drawn on board).

So this is what a Dynamical System Theory is. A dynamical system theory is basically a theory that lays out the virtual engine. It shows you how there's a feedback cycle - and why that's not just random and chaotic - why it produces growth and development precisely because there's a systematic relationship between a set of enabling and selective constraints. Now all of this is very very Aristotelian.

So let's now take it back to Aristotle because Aristotle was interested... now, he doesn't use this (points out both diagrams on the board), he doesn't use the dynamical systems language. That's our language. But this language was directly inspired by, powered by, Aristotle so using it backwards to try and connect Aristotle to our current understanding, I do not think is anachronistic. So Aristotle is interested in our development. He's going to add something that was missing from the Socratic notion of wisdom. Remember the Socratic notion was trying to overcome self-deception. And then Plato adds a whole structural theory of the psyche to explain how we overcome self-deception - how we become wise and achieve wisdom. But what's missing, in the account of wisdom and meaning, according to Aristotle - if I can use this (board) language - is what's missing is an account of growth and development. How does wisdom develop? How does meaning develop? Well this is where we get something that we talk about and we use in our language, but we don't, I think, get the depth of what Aristotle is talking about...

Character

There's an aspect of who and what you are that's fundamentally connected to your projects of meaning and your project of wisdom. You often might have used this term, or related terms, but do you really know what you're talking about? And this is the notion of your "character". And first or your character

isn't your personality. Because if we're going to use these terms strictly, you're born with your personality. Personality is part of you, just your general constitution. It's what's given to you by the biology and the environment that you have no choice over. But your character is that aspect of you that you can cultivate. Now you can either cultivate it unconsciously, surreptitiously, indirectly, or you can cultivate it more explicitly.

But what is your character? When we say that somebody is acting out of character. We're usually making - and this is important - we're usually making either an existential or moral criticism of them. When we say "Peter's acting out of character", we often will mean something like he's normally honest. He's normally honest, he normally has the virtue of honest. (Notice the connection here by the way: "Virtue". And we've been talking about a "virtual" engine! That is NOT happenstance!) When you're talking about a virtue you're not talking about an event. You're talking about, again, a set of conditions that have been cultivated systematically in somebody. Now that points to something and when we're talking about character I'm going to suggest that what we're talking about is "what is the virtual engine on a person's development".

What system of constraints have you identified with, and what system of constraints have you internalized, that regulate your development? Let's ask a Socratic question: Let's do something that Socrates would do. We spend a lot of time on our appearance. We spend a lot of time on our status. How much time did you spend today on your character? How much? If it is the virtual engine that is regulating your growth and development, you should be, of course, spending a lot of time on your character! But are you? Now, Aristotle proposed ways of trying to cultivate your character. I would argue that his method, his famous method, of the Golden Mean is a way of trying to get you to set up conditions to cultivate your character.

So for example, what is courage (written on board)? We would all like to be more courageous, I take it! Well Aristotle proposed that it's the golden mean - not the 'average', that's a misunderstanding, because it's "golden" mean - between two things. Of course you can be a coward (written to the left of Courage), you can somehow be defective by having a deficiency. But you can also be foolhardy (written to the right of courage), just running into

traffic doesn't make you courageous. What you're always trying to do is you're trying to set up a system where you're paying attention [to] when you lack the enabling constraints - when you don't have enough generation. And also [to] conditions when you lack the selective constraints - when you're too broadly... you have too many options, that you're identifying as courage.

What you have to do is you have to train yourself to cultivate your character by engaging in practices that will slowly, over time, create a virtual engine because you ARE a self organizing process. You are the source of your actions that modify the environment that then feeds back into you. And changes you. And then you produce your actions and then the environment feeds back and changes you. Here's the question I ask you: Are you just letting that run? Or are you trying to rationally and reflectively cultivate your character, structure a virtual engine, so that that self-organizing process is growing and developing in an optimal fashion?

Living Up to Potential

Aristotle takes the question... and we use this! We even use - and I'm not saying we use it trivially, but we don't get the depth of what we're saying - one of the most trenchant criticisms we can make of ourselves, of other people is this (listen to my language. Listen to it!): "He's not living UP, "living up to" his potential." Part of what makes your life meaningful is that you have cultivated character that allows you to actualize your potential. You've created a virtual engine that regulates your development in a way in which you grow up. It's a constantly improving... it's... in which self organization has been regulated and shaped into self improvement so that your potential is fully realized. So Aristotle brings in this notion, then, of development and growth as part of what it means to have a meaningful life. He brings in a new aspect to the notion of wisdom. Wisdom is gaining the ability to cultivate virtues to create your "virtual engine", a set of virtues, that basically is regulating your growth and development so that you actualize your potential.

Again, think about it. What are you doing to cultivate your character? Because Aristotle points out there's a deep form of foolishness that comes from a lack of character. [He] calls it "Akrasia" which we poorly translate as 'weakness of the will' because we're all post Protestants and we think the will

is our central thing even though, increasingly, there's scientific evidence that the notion of will or willpower is a defunct idea, we should give it up! So what's Akrasia? Akrasia is when you know what the right thing to do is - you KNOW what the right thing to do is - and we talked about this, remember, with the chocolate cake. But you don't do the right thing. And here's where we can sort of put Aristotle and Plato together. Plato gives us the story about how we have to structure the psyche. But Aristotle gives us a much more penetrating analysis of what that structural functional organization is. Here is what Aristotle would say; why you're behaving foolishly: "Ignorance is when you do the wrong thing because you don't know. Part of what foolishness is, is when you know what the right thing is and you still do the wrong thing."

Here's Aristotle's answer: "you do the wrong thing because, although you have the right beliefs..." (notice, again, the impotence of belief here.) "...you don't have the right... you don't have sufficient character". You have not trained things. You've not trained skills. You've not trained sensitivities. You have not created a virtual engine that is regulating your development and growth such that you will live up to your potential; you will actualize yourself and do the right thing. So, we're starting to see, again, the deep grammar of what we talk about when we talk about "meaning". And we notice now that there's this developmental aspect to it.

What is it to 'live up to your potential'? I mean, that's a phrase we use! What is it you're saying when you say that about somebody? Why does it matter so much? So Aristotle would say.../.

Let's go back to the analogy - please always remember this analogy - let's go back to the analogy of a man-made thing. OK? How is it when we know when something has been well made? What makes something a good knife? Well, when it has a structural Functional Organization, that allows it to fulfill its "purpose". Knives are for cutting, if I've taken the potential in the metal and organized it the right way, structure the right way, it will actually function to cut very well! And noticed that this is a word (Purpose) that's also deeply associated with our sense of what it is to have meaning.

... So, Aristotle asks "Well what can we do with this analogy?" Human beings aren't made the way knives are made. We're self making. And here's

an important idea: We're self making. We're not just self organizing! The term that Francisco Varela and Evan Thompson have generated to talk about this is we are "Autopoetic", we are self-making things. So you're different from a tornado. A tornado is self organizing. But a tornado will move... Its behavior... It can be rapidly self-destructive. It will move into conditions that destroy it. You're self organized in such a way that you have a structural functional organization that allows you to seek out conditions. So the tornado does not seek out the conditions that will protect and promote its own self organization. It's not self making. You are self making.

What Does This Mean?

So here's the interesting thing - and this is a brilliant idea that Eric Perl brings out in his book Thinking being: "in living things, the purpose of the thing is it's structural functional organization. It's a it's a self making thing". So what your purpose, your function is, is to enhance your structural functional organization. It's like "Oh waw, that's... that's just the problem...", you'll say "...with philosophy! It is all so abstract!!! What does that mean specifically?" Well, for Aristotle it means 'paying attention to the fact that you are a rational, reflective, creature!' You're unlike a plant. A plant has this but all it basically does is actualize its ability to digest!

The "In-Formed" Hierarchy

So let's take a look at this (proceeds to write this on the board)... We have inorganic matter... And then it gets a particular [shape]; it's "informed". And that makes a living thing. And that... Living things can get a more complex structure that make them self-moving. That's what an animal is. An animal isn't a mammal. An animal is a self moving thing. And then some of those self-moving things have structural functional organizations - in here for example (tapping his head) - that take that self moving and really actualize it. Remember we talked about that the word "psyche" - where we get our word "psychology"/mind - originally met your capacity for self moving and we came to apply to the mind because the mind is that part of you that is the most self moving, the most self making. You're a mental thing, a psychological thing!

But, is that enough?. No! We're getting from Socrates and Plato and Aristotle [that] you can optimize that. You can take charge of that. You, unlike other organisms, you can do the Axial revolution on yourself. You're capable of cultivating your own character, rationally and deliberately. You can become a rational thing. To live up to your potential, is to make sure you have cultivated a character that takes you as high up this hierarchy (drawn on the board with all these terms ascending) as you can go. That's how you live up to your potential. Somebody who lived only as a plant would be a debauched, failed, degraded human being. Somebody that lived only as an animal un-reflectively, impulsively would be a debauched, failed human being.

But the argument continues! You say "Of course, of course (working up the board)." But all the way up here (top)? You must cultivate your character so that you, as much as possible, actualize your potential for being a rational, moral, human being. That's the hallmark for Aristotle. You become a good person if you actualize, if you inform your being, with a virtual engine that realizes those things that are distinctive of our humanity. What makes us different from the plants? The animals? The other creatures that just have minds? What makes us different? We understand that we have always, and still do understand ourselves, in contrast to the other things we find around ourselves. Why am I more valuable than this table? What is it? Why do I matter more? Because there are things that can be found in rational beings - things that we find intrinsically valuable and important - that cannot be found in merely mental things, and all the way down.

What are those characteristics that are unique to us? Well here is where Aristotle gives the Axial revolution answer: Your capacity for overcoming self-deception. Your capacity for cultivating your character. For realizing wisdom and for enhancing the structure of your psyche and your contact with reality. That's what "rational" means.

This sounds - if I hadn't said all of this - what I'm gonna say now would sound trite. Your purpose is to become as fully human as Possible! How are you cultivating your character to do so? This is what Aristotle is going to ask you again and again. How much of your life is dedicated to creating a virtual

engine that realizes your rational capacities. Those things that make you most human in contrast to all the other things around you.

So Aristotle has developed this very impressive theory of wisdom, of character, growth and development. One of the things we could use today is to go back and make use of this so we can reanimate, rejuvenate these terms that have become tired and superficial! We have no alternative terms for describing our lives... For the meaning in our life. We talk about purpose and living up to our potential and growth and development and we it's just "BLAA BLAA BLAA BLAAA", because we don't have any depth to these terms. One of the things we can use Aristotle to do, is to go back and deepen what those terms mean for us; rejuvenate what they mean for us.

But, I want to continue on and to talk about this development that's occurring in the axial revolution and I want to talk about how Aristotle helped further the historical process by which he contributed to our cultural grammar of what it is when we're talking about meaning, purpose, wisdom, self-transcendence and so what I want to look at next time when we're together is I want to look at Aristotle's account of a world view. And what a world view is. And why it matters so deeply to our self understanding and our existential meaning. Thank you very much for your time.

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Episode 7: Aristotle's World View and Erich Fromm

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. So last time we began our discussion of Aristotle and how he has contributed significantly to our understanding of meaning and wisdom. And we talked about how Aristotle

was centrally concerned with something that he thought Plato didn't give an adequate enough account of: change. But importantly Aristotle's term for change is properly understood in terms of growth and development. And we talked about how much your sense of growth and development is constitutive of finding your life to be meaningful. We talked about how Aristotle understood that development in terms of making use of Plato's idea of idos, form, the structural functional organization. And then what's happening in change and in development, is that something is being "informed". In particular something like wood is the potential to be a table or a chair and when it has the correct structural functional organization then the wood starts to act like a table or the wood starts to act like a chair. And that is then the idea that when you inform some potential it gets actualized into a particular thing and so change is the actualizing of potential via "in-formation" and then in order to understand that better we leapt ahead to look at a current account of growth and development that was directly inspired by Aristotle. We looked at Alicia Juarrero work and we went through the discussion of what a dynamical system is and how we can use it to understand growth and development in terms of the idea of a virtual engine. We then returned and used that language to better understand Aristotle's idea about wisdom as the cultivation of character where wisdom is to create a virtual engine. And there is a deep connection between being a virtual engine and the cultivation of virtues.

That wisdom is the cultivation of a virtual engine, a character that regulates your self-development, in fact your self-making, so that you can actualize your potential. You can live 'up' to your potential and what does living 'up' to that potential mean? It means, and we talked about [it], it means moving through that hierarchy that we talked about last time. The hierarchy of actualization from the mere plant to the animate thing to the mental thing to the rational thing. So to be wise, to live up to your potential, is to cultivate a character that most helps you realize your capacity for rational self reflection, your capacity to appropriate and take charge of your ability to engage in self actualization, self realization and to do so in such a way that fulfills the potential of your humanity that you most realize, reveal, actualize, the characteristics that make us uniquely human. And that foolishness is to have not properly cultivated your character, so even when

you have the correct set of beliefs, you believe that you should not do something, you will still fall prey to AKRASIA because you have not cultivated adequate enough Character.

Then I challenged you in two ways: I challenge you to try and reanimate and deepen these terms that we use every day to talk about how meaningful our lives are [in] terms of growth and development and actualizing ourselves and living up to our potential to deepen those terms by returning and reflecting upon them using Aristotle. But also a Socratic challenge via Aristotle. What are you doing to cultivate your character? How much time are you dedicating to it? Since it is now reasonable, given this argument that it plays a significant role in how meaningful your life is, how much time have you devoted? How much time do you regularly devote to it?

Rationality

Now as promised last time I want to turn to the other side of Aristotle's work and show in a further sense how he contributed to the Axial development of these ideas of meaning, wisdom, self transcendence, and of course Aristotle is understanding self transcendence as this living up to your potential, self-realisation, ascending through the hierarchy until you are a fully realized, fully rational human being. Now, Aristotle was interested in rationality for exactly this reason. He thought it was the way of defining human beings. Now his understanding is Axial. Rationality is what we've been talking about since the beginning of this series. The Axial revolution idea of second order thinking; you can step back and reflect on the ways in which your [are] self deceptive and you have a capacity for self correction and self transcendence. That's the hallmark of rationality. Please remember that. Because we have tended - and we'll see much later why - we've tended to reduce rationality to the idea of being logical. But that's not the core idea of rationality. The core idea of rationality is your capacity for reflectively realizing your capacities for self-deception and illusion and for self correction. And for Aristotle that self correction is a process of also realizing your potential through the cultivation of character.

But what is at the heart of rationality? Because, if we go back to the Platonic model, Aristotle has told us a bit about one side: character. This is - remember Plato talks about how you are aligning the psyche - but Plato also

talked about being in contact with reality. How did Aristotle develop this side (contact with reality) of the Platonic equation. This (character) is his way of trying to give a deeper analysis of structuring the psyche to reduce self-deception. What did he do to try and develop Plato's idea of being in contact with reality. Because if you remember, we also have this meta-drive, we need to be in contact with reality. I put it to you that that is in fact the core feature, or at least the core motivation of rationality. The core motivation of rationality is the desire to come into as deep a contact with reality as possible by those means that are as reliable as possible. So for Aristotle this brought him into a discussion about what it is to truly know something. To truly know something. And again he's going to be deeply influenced by Plato while of course making his own unique changes and challenges to Plato.

A Blueprint in the Mind

So, we have got a view in which we think, we largely conceive of, 'knowing' as being able to give a very accurate description of something. I 'know' what a chair is if I can really describe it very well to you. Now, there is a challenge to that if I were to ask you the following: "Who knows better what a chair is? Somebody who could describe a chair very well to you, or somebody who could actually make a chair?" And many people would say "well, the person who can describe it doesn't really understand..." and they'll probably struggle for words here and they'll use words taken from Aristotle without realizing "...they don't get the essence of a chair because if you can make a chair then you've grasped something more...". And this is again related to this notion, if you can cause a chair to 'be', if you can 'cause' it to 'be' (writes because on the board: be-cause), then you deeply understand what a chair is. So, Aristotle then asked "well what is it that the chair maker has that the accurate descriptor does not have? And again it goes back to what we saw before. When I gave you my description of the bird: it has wings and beaks and all this stuff... and I was lacking the idos. I was lacking the form, the structural functional organization. So Aristotle says "what the chair maker has that the good describer doesn't have, is the chair maker actually has in their mind the idos.

Think of it like an architect that has a blueprint. The architect has in their mind the structural functional organization that is actually going to be shared in the building. The architect 'has' the ideas. The chair maker has the idos in their mind and they can actualize, they can use that idos to actualize the potential in the wood to make the chair. So to 'know' something is to possess the same idos as it. Now, the architect, when he has the idos for the building, he doesn't have a material building in his mind! You couldn't go in [and] house is a family of five inside his mind! When we say that it has the same pattern, we don't mean it's actualizing the same matter as wood and metal in a building but the same form is there. So for Aristotle, when 'I know' something - and this is the original meaning of this word - there is "conformity"; I share the same form with it. So when I know some object or know some thing, my mind takes on the same structural functional organization as the thing such that if I could take that idos from my mind and actualize it in some potential, I could make an instance of the thing: I could cause it 'to be (points out be-cause on the board again)'.

The Difference between Knowing and Being

So, if you'll remember 'shape' is not the same thing as form, but we can use shape - as Aristotle does - as an analogy for form. So when I know the cup (for reference, a cup prop/actual cup being used), I could know it by standing away from it and describing it, trying to describe its shape - and I'm using shape as an analogy for form. Or I can actually conform (picks cup up) to the cup. I'm actually taking the same shape! And notice how this enables me to causally interact (points out be-cause on the board again) with the cup in a much more intimate and complex and sophisticated fashion. So when you know something, for Aristotle, your mind is in conformity with it. Now, that's really important because that means [in] Aristotle's theory of knowing there is no distinction - that is [that] we [would] typically have - between knowing and being.

The Conformity Theory

What do I mean by that? Again using the analogy, here's the modern view (cup at distance): I'm over here describing it; it's over there, independent. I'm over here describing it. Here's Aristotle's view (picks cup up): I'm actually changing my structure. This isn't just... I'm not just knowing and having

beliefs, I'm being changed (points out the physicality of his hand and the cup together). This is a change in my being, not just a change in my knowing. The conformity theory doesn't just change your beliefs it changes the very structure and functioning of your being.

So the conformity theory is a very different way of thinking about how we know things. So Charles Taylor, who I've mentioned before, Hubert Dreyfus and others, they talk about the Conformity Theory as a 'contact' epistemology. So to know something is to be in contact with it, is to actually participate in the same form as the thing. I'm going to come back to this sense of participatory knowing. Participatory knowing is when I shape myself in order to know the thing, and I know it by conforming to it. This is different from descriptive knowing where I stand apart and I generate propositions about the thing.

So, the conformity theory has this very powerful idea of an intimate connection between the mind and reality. And it's based on a very powerful idea and, as I mentioned, Aristotle is going through a significant revival in our understanding of living things. An understanding of mental things. We are increasingly coming to see that this kind of contact knowing, this participatory knowing, is much more central to how cognition works than we previously thought. We're going to come back to that a lot in this series. I just want you to take note of it now.

Notice how this... What we need to notice right now is how this theory of knowing, which is also a theory of being, satisfies that desire of being in contact with reality as opposed to being separate from it and merely pointing at it with my words or my propositions.

Making Sense of Things - Structural Functional Organisations (S.F.O)

All right, so if I'm in conformity with the world, that tells you something very interesting. The structural functional organization, my patterns of intelligibility (remember for Plato, intelligibility (and Aristotle) completely inherits this. I could say again, read Erik Perl's book on this), how I make sense of things, the pattern of intelligibility is the same pattern by which the thing is organized. So when I'm making sense of things, there's a structural

functional organization in my mind that is shared with the structural functional organization of what I'm making sense of [-]. But does that mean that everything I think is just true. No. Aristotle is a genius, he's probably a clear instance of what's been called a Universal Genius. We shouldn't dismiss what Aristotle says so easily. Aristotle literally writes the book on everything.

Say you're at a party with Aristotle. You say "Well, I'm interested in physics!" ...and then he'll [say] "hear, I wrote the book on this. This is called Physics. This is the book that started physics". "Oh, well I'm also interested in philosophy! I am interested in metaphysics". "Here's the book I wrote on metaphysics". "Well! I am interested in how animals move". "Here's my book I wrote on how animals move". "I'm interested in psychology". "Here's my book". "Dreams..." "Here's my book!" "How to write books". "Here's my book!". Aristotle is an astonishing intellect. So, what does he mean then?

Well what he means is, that after we've done all that Axial Age, second order thinking. After we've done all this Socratic and platonic argument and discussion and we've done this rational reflection - once we then get to that... IDOS! 'That' structural functional organization... we can be confident that what structural functional or organization we're finding, and how we make sense of things, is the same. Or to put it in a slogan "when we've made sense of things, the pattern in our mind is the same as the pattern in the world".

An Example of the Conformity Processes

So what are those processes? Aristotle, like everything he does, he tries to explicate a little bit more. So, think about this! Think about how you try and determine if something was real. If it really is the case. So let's say you're interested in Susan. And you're talking to your friend Tom. And Tom and Susan and yourself, you're at a party the previous night and Tom tells you "Oh Susan... I think Susan really likes you!" Now this is important to you because you really like Susan! You'd really like it if Susan liked you. This would be a good thing. But you don't want to leap into this because your heart has been broken before and you've acted foolishly and impulsively so you want to make sure. So you say "wait, wait. Come on Tom. I saw you last night you were really hammered. Like you were drunk. Pfff... I don't believe you!" And Tom says "no no no no. I heard this way before I was drunk I

heard this at the beginning. I heard Susan say this at the beginning." And then you say "come on Tom. There was so many people, it was so noisy. How can you be sure?" And Tom says "no no. This was in the kitchen. Susan was in the kitchen when I heard her say. It wasn't that noisy there!" And then you say "I don't know...." And then Tom says "yeah but Andrew and Jane also heard Susan say that". And you go "Oh wow. I think Susan likes me!" So you do these three tests! You make sure that the relevant organ of cognition, your - your attention, your memory, your brain - was functioning normally. Yes it is. It's functioning normally. OK. So I was sober. You make sure that the environment isn't creating distorting conditions - too much noise... No no it's an optimal environment! So, let's do this: Organ operating optimally. Environment optimal or really good. And then I look for "Did other people experience it?" Inter-subjective agreement. So, this is what you do!

You very carefully try to get your mind into an optimal state. You make sure the medium is the best. And you do a lot of inter-subjective discussion to make sure that you're in agreement with other people. So you do really deep philosophy: you argue and discuss, you enact like this Socratic thing. You really train your mind, you get the appropriate conditions. You do all this. You get you come to some agreement and then once you get there you can have significant confidence that you are in conformity with reality. That the pattern that's in your mind is the pattern that's in the world. Now, I point this out to you, not because I want to say that Aristotle is ultimately right because we're gonna see how that way of doing things was challenged, but I want to point out to you how you still do it now. There's something deeply plausible and practical in what Aristotle was saying! This is how you, on a day to day basis, try to make sure that you're in touch with things.

The Structural Functional Patterns When Making Sense of Things

So how are things? What is the structural functional pattern of the world when I'm making sense of thing? So Aristotle is also, as I said, considered [to be a] foundational figure in science. In fact for literally millennia, A Millennia, he is basically identical to science. Knowing Aristotle is to know science. He's building upon all the pre-Socratic philosophers before him. But

basically what he says is "OK how is the world organized? What is the structure of reality?" Well how does it look to us? What can we all agree on? OK. So, we're all stone cold sober. Clear Day. We can all talk. We can agree. And this is what - try to get back to Aristotle's time - this is how things seem to all of us. We're at the center. And this is something we're going to come back to because that's how your perceptual cognitive system seems to operate. You're at the center. Things are moving around us.

So he has a geo centric world view. The Earth is at the center. Well why did things move? Why are things moving? So he has the idea, again, that things move for the same reason you do. Remember Thales talked about that - the magnet is moving, your moving. When I lift on this (table) and it's pushing against me, that feels no different to me than when a person is pushing on me. It feels like the table is moving itself against me. Again, don't concentrate on whether or not this is true, concentrate on how much sense it makes. When I move the pen away from the earth, it looks like it moves itself to get back there, which looks exactly like I want to be over there and I move myself there, because I'm separated from where I want to be. So Aristotle's idea is that everything is made up of elements, basic elements like earth, water, air and fire. Things that have a lot of earth in them - like this marker - want to be where Earth naturally is. Earth is at the center. So as you move things away from the earth, things fall back towards it. Water is going to be on the surface. Fire moves up and air is above. So notice when I burn some wood how much sense this makes of it! Because when I burn the wood the fire comes up, the water that's evaporated spreads out as condensation, and then the ash, the earthen part falls down. So for Aristotle the Earth is at the center and this is the thing: everything is moving by a process of natural motion. Everything has an internal drive. Just like you. Everything is trying to get where it belongs. Everything has a natural place. So - and this is very important - everything is moving on purpose. Everything is trying to get where it belongs. So notice how meaningful this view of things is.

Everything is moving, just like you! You're doing things to get where you belong and where you are where you belong, then that's the fulfillment of your goals. That's what makes your life meaningful. So all of these things (on the board: Natural Motion -> Internal Drive), the whole [of] everything in this cosmos - and we remember we talked about that, we talked about

Pythagoras (a beautiful order) - everything in this cosmos is moving purposefully, meaningfully.

It's important that you resist the temptation here to be smug and say "wow what a silly idea! I mean...? Thinking the Earth is at the center? Is he a Luddite?" No, because the idea that the Earth is not at the center, the idea that the Earth is rotating was known in the ancient world. It was known by Aristarchus for example. The problem with this view is that there were great counter arguments about it. Look: if the Earth is rotating/ you think the Earth is rotating that means, if I'm on the earth and is rotating and I drop an object, as the object is dropping I'm moving forward with rotation; I end up 'here' (diagram being drawn on the board) and the object drops, should [that] then end up behind me? Because as I let go of it, I'm moving on the earth, it's rotating and it should fall behind me! So let's do it! Let's run the experiment. (Drops pen.) Oh it doesn't fall behind me! See, what you need to realize is that until you also have an idea of something like universal gravitation, and other ideas like inertial motion, the idea that the Earth is rotating actually doesn't make good sense of the phenomena! If it's rotating, why am I not feeling a breeze on my face constantly when I face one way rather than the other? So there was all kinds of arguments.

Ego-centric vs Conformity Theory of World Views

So, Aristotle has a sense that we can still appreciate. He has a sense of, "well, this (gesturing down) is how we get in contact with reality, and this (gesturing up and around) is the pattern that is making sense to me", and what I mean by that is, even though you and I are post-Descartes, post Newton, post Copernicus, we still move around the Earth as if it's at the center and that the Earth isn't moving and that objects fall directly down etc. etc.. So given that, given the tremendous plausibility of Aristotle's proposal, we can now put these two sides together. You've got the eg-centric world (written on the right of the board) - and by world I don't just mean the Earth, I mean the Cosmos - with the earth at the center and everything moved by natural motion. And then what we have over here is we have the conformity theory (written on the left of the board), 'Knowing', and I'm going to hyphenate these words because these are not separate for this theory the way they are for us: "Knowing-being" (a way of being and a way of knowing)

and what I want you to see is how much they mutually support each other. This is very plausible. That's why I told you that whole story about the person who knows how to make the chair. And once you admit that this is plausible, and you use Aristotle's test, it supports this view of things. Because if the conformity theory is right, and I do all of this rational reflection, this is the intelligible pattern that I see.

Now, I can look at this (left: ego-centric view) and say "this is the intelligible pattern and it's plausible! That makes sense of so many things" and that view that view of the world then lends evidence that I am in fact in conformity with reality. It provides evidence for the conformity theory. And notice these two things are now mutually supporting each other (drawn in a simple cycle). That's how you get a "World View": you have an account of the world, and you have an account of how you know the world that mutually support each other in very strong bonds of plausibility. Now that sets something out for us.... Notice that there is now a deep connection, a deep bonding as I say, between your understanding of your understanding and your understanding of the world!

The Agent and the Arena

So let's try and put this together. This (left: ego-centric) is a view of the world that totally makes sense of your actions. This is a world organized according to purpose, things are moving on purpose. Things are trying to get where they belong. The structure of the world is very, very similar to the structure of the meaningful structure of your experience. So this view, basically - if you'll allow me a term that I've crafted with Christopher Mastropietro and Filip Miscevic in our book - this basically makes the external world an "Arena". An Arena is a place that's organized such that you know how you can act in it. It makes sense to you. You know where things belong, what actions are appropriate, how to measure and calibrate your performance - and I don't mean just your physical performance, also your intellectual performance. If you are a football player and you go into a football arena, things are organized in such a way that you know intimately how to be involved and how to interact. You can conform (listen to my language) you can conform to that situation very powerfully.

The Co-Identity of this Existential Mode

This is how you become an "Agent". To be an Agent is to be capable of pursuing your goals. It's to be able to organize your cognition and your behavior so that your actions fit the situation. They fit the environment. So what you have, when you have a world view, is you've got this Agent and Arena coupling. Aristotle is explaining to you how you become an agent (how you know and structure yourself to act accordingly) and then he's telling you how the world is organized (cosmos) so that you can meaningfully interact within it. And these two (Agent and Arena), there's a process here of Co-Identification. The identity of this (Arena) is determined by and determines the identity of, this (Agent). And the identity of this (Agent) is determined by and determines this (Arena). So the professional football player is a particular kind of agent. They're a football player and they go into an Arena. The Arena allows them to be a football player. It affords them. Them being a football player makes sense of why this part of the world (the Arena) is structured the way it is. They Co-identify. The identity as an Arena and the identity as the agent Co-identify.

This is important! We need to stop here and take a little bit more care because I want to introduce an idea to you, this "Co-Identification" because this is something you're doing all the time. You're always assuming an identity. I'm doing it now. I'm assuming the identity of someone giving a talk and I'm assigning an identity to everything around me. Everything has the meaning of how it's facilitating and affording my talk and even you as the audience have been assigned a particular identity. I'm always assigning an arena and assuming agency, and they are co-defining together. That is an "Existential Mode", to use a term. This process by which you are co-identifying agency and arena so that they fit together and make sense of each other and you get a coherent and functioning world view... That's your existential mode. And of course it matters really greatly to you. We're going to come back to this later. This is an idea from Clifford Geertz. It was an idea that he used to talk about religion in general and we'll see about that later. But what I want to point out, because a similar idea was also proposed by other people like Buber and by Fromm, and although they also said there were important connections to religion they didn't they didn't identify just

with religion... Existential Modes, they are "Meta-Meaning" relations. What does that mean?

Worldview Attunement

If you do not have the Agent:Arena relationship, then none of your particular actions have meaning. If I put the tennis player into the football arena, it's absurd! It doesn't make any sense! Things aren't... the tennis player can do all they want and it doesn't make any sense. The environment is like "What? what's going on. That's absurd!" (Notice that word we're going to come back to it.) Unless the coupling works, your individual actions and projects of meaning don't work. It's a meta-meaning system because this mode makes possible an entire system of meanings. It means that the throwing [of] the ball has a meaning for the football player. The catching the ball, the running here... All of these different things take on their meaning because an Agent:Arena relationship has been set up. You're doing it right now. You have assumed a particular identity; you've assigned an identity to me and within that existential mode everything you're doing and I'm doing take on whatever meaning they have. This is very, very important: this idea of your existential mode being a meta-meaning relationship and that what it does is it's an instance - a particular way of enacting - this world view relationship. Geertz calls this (the full cycle drawn on the board of all of this), this thing we're seeing in Aristotle, the way you get this mutual support, mutual intelligibility - not as a static relation but as an unfolding process. He calls this "Worldview Attunement".

So one of the things that's really important to you is that your existential mode - the way in which you are creating co-identifications of Agent and Arena - actually fit into a process of Worldview Attunement. If you don't have a world view, with world view attunement, then ultimately you can't get this going. You will be like the tennis player trying to play tennis in the football arena. You will start to experience your existence as absurd. It won't make any sense to you. Now that matters because one of the ways in which the meaning crisis expresses itself is in people saying that they feel existence is absurd. People often express the opposite of absurdity when they articulate that they have a meta-meaning existential mode that affords a functioning

Worldview Attunement which gives them ways in which they are co-creating, with the world, the Agent:Arena relationship.

So, notice what this has done. What Aristotle has done here that's so powerful. He's given us a way, a language of articulating a connection between what we often don't see, a deep connection between, our projects of trying to intellectually understand the world and our existential projects of trying to feel like we fit in and belong in a meaningful fashion. That's what's so beautiful about Aristotle. He's given an integrated account of both of these. And for many of us today we don't find that clear, consonant connection. We have a scientific world view - a view of how things are, how we understand things given our science - but one of the most common complaints of that worldview is it gives us no existential guidance. It doesn't tell us how to make our lives meaningful.

Nomological Order

I wanted to propose to you a term for talking about this set of things where you have a worldview that is demonstrating, on an ongoing reliable fashion, worldview attunement and so that it is constantly affording existential modes in which Agent:Arena relationships are unfolding and blossoming naturally so that the person is not experiencing absurdity. And so the person is constantly experiencing a deep connectedness between their intellectual projects of making sense of the world and their existential projects of finding meaning and belonging and fitedness (placement) within it. I'm going to call that a "Nomological Order". Nomological Order comes from no "Nomos(*****)", Law. This is what makes the universe law-like, not just in our current sense of scientific law but in the sense that it is a cosmos for us. It's a cosmos in which there is deep convergence and consonance between our best attempts to scientifically explain the world and our deepest endeavours to existentially dwell within it. When we have that, when we have those two together, we have a Nomological Order. As the Nomological order breaks down, of course, then we start to confront absurdity and we start to lose a sense of how we fit in and how we belong.

So, Part of what we can take from.../ part of how we can understand the Axial-Age heritage..../ part of the way we can understand what [this] is telling us about meaning, is this idea of a Nomological Order. To have a

meaningful life is to have a life that is situated within a Nomological Order: an attuned world view that is reliably generating existential modes that are consonant with our best scientific understanding.

Buddhism the Axial Revolution in India

So I want to pause now in the discussion of the Axial-Age in Greece and in ancient Israel. We will return to ancient Israel after we complete our survey of the Axial Age. But I'd now like to move to another place that is an important locus of the Axial revolution that is having a significant impact on us today. This is something that I mentioned earlier on in this series. We're in the midst of what's been called the mindfulness revolution one of the ways in which people are responding to the meaning crisis is by an intense interest, both existentially and personally and scientifically, in the phenomena of mindfulness. That somehow mindfulness and the cultivation of mindfulness is a way of retrieving the project of cultivating wisdom and self transcendence and somehow deepening the meaning that we are finding in our lives. And of course when I talk about mindfulness, and mentioned things like meditation and contemplation, our thoughts should turn of course to India and the Axial revolution that was taking [place] there.

The particular form that revolution took that is impacting the Western meaning crisis, as I mentioned at the beginning of the series, was in the generation of Buddhism and the set of practices around it. Now this is a very complex topic. We're not going to do it all at once right now. It's going to unfold as we move through the series. But I want to talk about the Axial revolution in India. I want to talk about mindfulness and I want to talk about what it is as a psycho-technology, how it is associated with wisdom and self transcendence. And I want to begin the discussion of the nature of enlightenment and why enlightenment is largely a project of trying to deal with threats of meaning in one's life.

So, it's only analogous in this way, so don't draw too much [from this], but in the way Socrates was the embodiment of the Axial revolution in ancient Greece, I think you can see Siddhārtha Gautama as the embodiment of the axial revolution in India. As I mentioned, of course, the Axial revolution is being driven there by similar kinds of processes. There's coinage and there's alphabetic literacy and other things like this developing. But the specific

psycho-technologies that seem to have come to the fore, and the reasons for that are very complex - I would recommend taking a look at Karen Armstrong's book *The Great Transformation* because she tries to tease out "why did psycho-technologies of mindfulness become so prominent in ancient India? - and I'm not going to go into that history, but she gives a fairly coherent explanation about historical, cultural factors that generated it. What I want to do instead is start talking about Siddhārtha as a way of again giving us a doorway into the axial revolution in India.

So Siddhārtha... It's in all of these figures: Socrates and Siddhārtha... later when we talk about Jesus. I mean trying to talk about "well who... what's the historical...?" ...this is a quixotic endeavour! Trying to somehow peel away and separate them from their legacy is largely a project that you can only pursue to a certain degree. So I cannot, and I don't think anybody can say with certainty "this is what the historical Suharto was doing!" and I'm not going to endeavour to try and separate the myth - and I told you how I use the word myth - from the history. I'm going to let them still remain seamlessly together because that's precisely how they are making an impact on the West.

The Story of Siddhārtha

So the story goes like this... When Siddhārtha was born his father had all of the sages and wise men come to his birth and it was prophesied, foretold, in sort of an oracle fashion that the boy had one of two possible futures. One is he would be a great king. Or the other was he would enter religious life and be a really important religious figure. The king, being what all kings are, chose the former. He wanted his son, of course, to be a great king and he decided, in order to do this, he would try and remove all of the things that might trigger Siddhārtha from pursuing a religious life; a life devoted to the ideals of the Axial revolution. So what do you do if you do not want someone to go through the Axial revolution? Well, you try and give them all the benefits of the pre axial world. You try and give them all the benefits of power and prosperity. So the story goes that the king rigged things so that Suharto never saw anything distressing. He was always surrounded by beautiful women. The correct amount of food. Everything that he wanted. And we can just take that as it is, or we can step back and do something that

you should always do with things that have a mythological component. Remember myths are not irrelevant stories about the past, they're attempts to get you to engage, right now, with perennial ongoing patterns.

So I want to talk about what the palace represents. A good way of getting at this is Marcus Aurelius's famous quote that, and this is how it goes: "It is possible to be happy even in a palace." That tells you how much the Axial revolution is antithetical to palace life. A way of getting that is to get at a notion, which we're going to come back to later when we talk about stoics like Marcus Aurelius, drawn from Fromm, and this goes to this idea that I just explained to you - Existential Mode - that the palace represents a particular existential mode. It's a mythological way of trying to get you to experience, not just think about, but activate in your memory a particular existential mode.

Having and Needing

So, we're talking about the palace, because we're talking about Siddhārtha living in the palace. What does this represent? Fromm talks about two different existential modes that we all face. Again, perennial patterns.

They're organized around two different kinds of needs. They're "having needs" and "being needs". So of course this mode (having needs) is called "having mode". It's an existential mode. It's a way in which you make sense of the world and make sense of yourself in this process of Co-identification. This (being needs) is the "being mode".

So "having needs" are needs that are met by having something. These are needs that are met by categorizing things efficiently. Controlling them effectively. So my understanding of thing[s] is categorical. I put it in the correct category. Here's a cup. It's like all the other cups. It functions like another cup. I can replace it with a cup of this one gets damaged. It really improves my ability to control things. I have this categorical way of representing it and it's oriented towards me getting very effective, efficient control over things because I need to have water. I need to actually consume it! If I don't I die. So being able to categorize my world, manipulate it and control it so I get water is very important. That means I relate to things in what Buber, who I also mentioned, called an "I-it" fashion and "it" is an identity something has when it belongs to a category. And so what I'm

mostly relying on here is my intelligence, which is my ability to control and manipulate things, to achieve solving my problems. There is nothing wrong with the "having mode". You need to have water. You need to have food. You need to have oxygen.

The "Being mode" is different. The "being needs" are not met by having something. They're met by becoming something. So for example, you 'need' to become mature. Or Aristotle might say "you need to become virtuous". It's not met by having something. It's met by becoming; developing. These are developmental needs. Now according to Fromm, because of that, these are needs that have to do with a particular kind of meaning that you're creating for your existence. And so you're not relating to things categorically, but as Collingwood for example [would] say, relating to them "expressively". Let me show you what I mean with a concrete example. And we're going to come back to these kinds of examples when we talk again about the connections between love and Anagoge. When you're in love with somebody you are engaged in a "being need". You're trying to, if it's love as opposed to just desire or sex, you're trying to become something. And you're trying to afford them becoming something, you're trying to meet your needs of meaning and maturity, growth and development. That's why we pursue love. As apposed [to]... you know... And I'm not a prude! ...sometimes you just wanna have sex with people. That's not what I'm talking about! I'm talking about when you have said "no, what I want here is love".

Now, notice that... So I'm in love with this amazing woman, Sara. OK, and I'm in this relationship with her. This relationship of mutual development, mutual realisation. In fact that's a great way of thinking about love. Love is this process, like Anagoge, of reciprocal realization. I don't think of Sara categorically. Remember, how I thought of the cup? This is a good cup because it reminds me of all the other cups that I've ever seen and I know how to replace this if this one's damaged and I can control and manipulate it. If I was to say to Sara "you know why I'm with you? Because you remind me of every other woman I been with and I could easily replace you if I lose you and I know how to control them manipulate you", I have not made this relationship better! I've pretty much just destroyed it. OK? Because I don't interact with Sara from the having mode. I don't understand her (on screen correction for this) categorically, but expressively. I'm not trying to control

and manipulate, I'm trying to engage in a process of reciprocal realization. We're going to talk a lot about this when we talk about Narcisse. So, my relationship... I don't assume control or manipulator of an 'IT' thing. I have an "I-thou" relationship with Sara. And here I'm not trying to solve problems. I'm using my reason because I'm not about trying to get rid of my problems. I'm trying to make meaning.

To live in the palace is to try and live everything from the having mode. It's not that this is good and this is bad! Fromm's point is we get mixed up. We try to satisfy our being needs within the having mode. We suffer from "Modal Confusion". Think about how much our culture is organized around this because it serves a lot of market interests if I can confuse you, if I can get you to try and pursue your being needs within the having mode. "You need to be mature. Here's a car you can have". "You need to be in love. Here's lots of sex you can have". Notice how we talk about making love but having sex! Modal confusion. Deep existential confusion.

And what happens when you're mortally confused is that your need for maturity isn't being met by having the car, your need for love is not being met by having sex. So you pursue it more! Buy more cars! Purchase more sex. The more the corporate world, the market world, can get you to try to pursue your being needs from the having mode, the more they can induce modal confusion in you, the more they can sell to you. Being in the palace is a myth in a sense that I'm trying to teach you for modal confusion. It's a myth of trying to live your entire life within the having mode. But here's the thing, because the story continues, Siddhartha leaves the palace and he leaves the palace in a way that teaches us something about overcoming modal confusion. And in our next time together we're going to look at how Siddhartha left the palace. And we're going to look at "what does mindfulness have to do with that?" And "what does all of this have to do with wisdom and enlightenment?"

Thank you very much for your time.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

Episode 8: The Buddha and "Mindfulness"

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. So last time we took a look at the second half of Aristotle and his further developments of the Axial-ages understanding meaning and wisdom. We took a look more at what you might call the world side of things. And we took a look at Aristotle's world-view; the two components. His "conformity theory" which is important alternative understanding of knowledge, it's a contact epistemology, an intimate knowing and being with something and how plausible that contact epistemology actually is. And then we also looked at a plausible - it turned out to be false! - but a plausible model of the world that is very consonant and consistent with that conformity theory.

This is a geo-centric world that is moved by natural motion, it's a cosmos. And then we used that to discuss how the theory of the world and the theory of how we know the world and 'be' within the world are intimately connected and mutually supporting, and you get world view attunement, and how that creates existential modes in which we are co-identifying the agent and the arena and creating the meta-meaning, the relationship that makes all individual acts and events and situations and places meaningful for us and how important that consonance is between our existential mode and our intellectual understanding and why Aristotle is so prominent because of his capacity to create a worldview that lasts for a millennium and being so well attuned a world view.

We then paused from our discussion of the Axial Age in Greece and we moved to the Axial age in India for the explicit purpose of trying to discuss the impact of the mindfulness revolution and the part of the thesis of the series is 'the mindfulness revolution is a response to the meaning crisis in the West and the growing confluence between Buddhism and cognitive science is an attempt to address and provide solutions to the meaning crisis in the West'.

We started by looking at the figure who epitomizes the Axial revolution within ancient India, and that's Siddhartha Gautama. And we began by looking at his myth, his mythological biography, if you want to put it that way and I remind you again how I am using the word myth. And we began by taking a look at his early life within the palace. We stepped aside and examined the palace as a mythological representation of a particular existential mode. We talked about two different existential modes following the work of Fromm, there's also a convergent of work for Buber and other important thinkers. Stephen Batchelor is going to make use of this distinction etc..

Fromm talks about two modes - two existential modes. The "having" mode that's organized around meeting or having needs in which we perceive the world categorically. We want to manipulate it and solve our problems and control it. And the "Being" mode which is organized around our being needs. These are needs that are met by becoming something, mature,, virtuous love. And we then talked about the possibilities of modal confusion: being locked in the having mode and trying to meet your being needs within the having mode. So trying to meet you need for maturity by having a car or meeting your need for being in love by having lots of sex. And we talked about the fact that you can become enmeshed in modal confusion and how that becomes a vicious cycle because as you're being these are frustrated you pursue ever more the mis-framed projects that the modal confusion is giving you. You try more and more to have things as opposed to more and more become what you need to become.

And then I suggested to you that being in the palace is a mythological representation of this kind of modal confusion in which we are stuck in the having mode and of course this also had one important cultural point - and I did say at the beginning that we would talk about it, we would develop a way of talking about the connections between the meaning crisis and other crises we are facing - so issues about a market economy and a commodification of everything and everyone. By inducing modal confusion it is possible to sell you more and as your identity becomes more and more a political and economic thing and commodity, that should be categorically understood and manipulated, the more and more I can sell you things and sell you ideas and manipulate you accordingly. So this has important

ramifications for us now. That's why it's a myth. Because it has important ramifications for us right now.

But as I mentioned, Siddhartha does not stay in the palace. His curiosity becomes too great, and there are all kinds of variations on this story! And I don't think there is an absolute canonical way of saying it but he decides to leave the palace. He goes out in his chariot with his Charioteer Chandra and they are traveling around and he sees a sick person and he is distressed.

"What's wrong with that person?" He's... and Chandra says "my Lord! He's he's he's sick!" And Siddhartha said "What did he do to cause that?" And it's.. "Nothing!! It's just, it happens to everybody! Everybody gets sick at some point! It's just part of the way of things!". You can see this is the axial awakening. Remember the actual revolution is awakening about what's actually going on in the suffering in the world. And so Siddhartha is very distressed. [He says] "what? But, I could get sick too?" and Chandra said "Well of course! Of course.".

Part of the conceit of the myth is that Chandra is oblivious to Siddhartha's whole history which is of course unbelievable! But that's the point of a myth... To get you to realize things, not to convince you about historical truths. So, Siddhartha is distressed and he says "take me away from this, I don't want I don't want to see this anymore!". And so they drive. They drive along and they meet an old person. And Siddhartha says "stop, stop! Is this person sick as well?" "No my lord he's not sick. He's old!". "Old? What do you mean?", "Well this happens to everyone through the passage of time!", "You mean he didn't do anything in particular...?", "No! It wasn't any... It's not his fault! He just is... He's become old!". And now Siddhartha says "No! OK, let's go back to the palace, this is really bad!". So they're making their way back to the palace. He's trying to return to that self enclosure of the pure having mode. But that's the thing about confusion - once it starts to be dissipated you can't return to it! So he's trying to return and of course, he meets a funeral procession! There's a corpse. And Siddhartha said "is that person sick? Or are they old?". "No! That person's dead. They're dead! They're not alive anymore." "What? But why is that?", "Well my Lord it happens to everybody!"

Now, do you see what's happened here. The having mode has been completely undermined. It's been completely undermined. And since Siddhartha is experiencing an existential crisis because this is happening at the level of his existential mode. That's what it means when we talk about an existential crisis. So he says "Get me back to the palace absolutely now!!" And so now there's a mad dash. And as he's trying to get back to the palace and trying to enfold himself back into that world he meets one more thing - one more person actually. He meets a mendicant, he meets one of these people that has given up the having mode. They were called "renouncers" because they have renounced the world of the palace, of luxury. And there's a deep peace in this man's eyes. And the contrast - and think about how, again, this is not just a matter of belief. This is a matter... This is happening in his entire being; his entire being is resonating with this distress because it's the whole way in which he is coupled to the world that has been suddenly thrown into confusion. There's all of this happening, this deep dist[urbance], and the contrast with the peace that he sees in the man's eyes.... And he turns to Chandra and says "Who is this?" and Chandra said "it's a mendicant! It's a wandering person." And [what] that person of course represents is the introduction, not the intellectual introduction, but the direct confrontation with the being mode. This is a person who has realized peace. And Siddhartha feels that contrast poignantly, powerfully. Painfully. So he returns to the palace with these four signs burning in him. The illness, the old age. The death. But also this representative of the being mode. Somebody who has cultivated wisdom and peace. Found some kind of deep connectedness that is untouched by the vicissitudes of our mortality.

Disillusionment

But of course Siddhartha cannot find the peace he wants; he cannot get back to the palace. Think about the double senses of this word because it's really pertinent here. "Disillusionment". When we describe somebody as disillusioned, we're usually talking about a state in which they are perhaps moving towards despair. They're sad, they've experienced loss. It's a negative state. But notice at the heart of it is the loss of illusion. This is an axial age thing. He is "losing the illusion" of modal confusion and he's losing that sense of belonging that he had when he was in the palace. He doesn't belong there anymore.

He tries. He tries to make it work. We're going to talk about this later - we're gonna talk about this. Why is it after people have these kinds of awakening experiences, they feel that they need to transform their whole lives? That they can't go back? That there's something irreversible about it? This is something we're going to directly talk about. In fact we can we get a cognitive scientific purchase on that. But he can't go back. The disillusionment is too real. So he decides to leave and this is not an easy choice! He has a wife, he has a child and we may have, in fact, even ethically criticized him! ...he's abandoning his son, he's abandoning his wife. But there's a sense here that, and of course we should make moral reflection, we should make moral arguments, but, what the myth is saying is 'the moral life sits upon something deeper'! That carrying out your moral responsibilities while important, of course, can ultimately be rendered meaningless if you've lost meaning. Morality sits on, depends upon, your life being meaningful. And we're going to talk about this a lot later when we talk about the work of Susan Wolf and others. That meaning in life and the psychological work about this right now. Meaning in life is different from, and I would argue that this myth says is deeper than, simply leading a moral existence. See, there's something more to wisdom than just morality. See virtue is also about that meaningfulness, that meta-meaning. It's ultimately about being plugged into the cultivation of wisdom. Not just doing what is morally correct.

So Siddhārtha leaves the palace. He cuts his hair, leaves the palace, goes into the forest and he decides to follow the path of the renouncers and try to cultivate a solution to the fear and the turmoil that is still reverberating within him. So he pursues various... he meets up with various teachers and he pursues various things. But he gets into... he gets into another troubled spot because although he leaves the palace there's an important sense in which he hasn't left the having mood because he's still he's still carrying that confusion because what he's pursuing, is he's pursuing asceticism. He's trying to subject the body to tremendous trial and pain. Trying to bring it into complete submission. So he's practicing self-denial. You can see why this would make sense. The palace was all about self-indulgence, so surely the solution is self-denial! That seems reasonable! Think about how often WE do these swings between self-indulgence and self-denial.

So he starves himself to the point where you can see his spine from the front of his body because his belly is so withdrawn and gaunt it's pressing against the vertebrae of his back! He looks like some anaemic Specter in representations we have of him from that period. But it's not working! It's not working, because do you see what's still going wrong? Do you see it? Trying to annihilate the self is still thinking about having a self. He's still in the having mode; he's just transferred it from having bodily things to trying to have his self. Yes, he's trying to throw it away but he's still framing it in the having mode. He's still understanding the problem in the having mood. He's still modaly confused. Self-denial is as much an aspect of this confusion as self-indulgence because it's merely the negation of self-indulgence. It is not it's transcendence. When you negate something you are still framing it in the same way. So he's sitting on the banks of a river and he's fatiguing. And he hears a barge going down the river and there's a musician playing and the musician has his apprentice. And it's a lyre, or a stringed instrument of some kind. And he's saying to the apprentice "No no no no listen! Listen to me! Strings can't be too tight and they can't be too loose! Too tight is just as bad as too loose..." (And think about Aristotle. Think about Aristotle and the Golden Mean which doesn't mean just the middle point in some sort of average! And I say that because of how this has come to be understood.).

The Middle Path

This is when Siddhārtha discovers the middle path. It doesn't mean mean some compromising middling solution. It means a radical reformation. The middle path is to transcend the having mode by rejecting both self-indulgence and its negation self-denial. We're going to talk about this a lot more when we talk about optimization strategies. We talked about it, remember, when we talked about Flow. You're not trying to maximize, you're trying to optimize. You're trying to get the right connectedness. And see, that's what the being mode is all about. It's about being connected in the right way.

So Siddhartha has this realization. In the story the realization com[s when] he tumbles into the river and he's drowning and a little girl saves him which is, in the culture of the time, that is extremely demeaning for a man who was once a prince to be saved by a little girl. It points to the radicalness of the

change that's occurring for him. She gives him the equivalent of rice pudding (that's why on Bhodi-day Buddhists will often eat rice pudding to celebrate that fact.) So he realizes he must pursue the middle path. He must find a way of optimizing his cognition that allows him to transcend and rediscover this missing mode; the mode that he saw in the eyes of the mendicant. Now this is important, because this is the word for that kind of remembering: "Sati". It means to remember, to remind, not just like a fact. It means "to bring it to mind". So this is a modal memory. This is remembering a lost mode of being. This is not remembering a fact or event. This is remembering what it is like to be in the being mode. It is to recover a mode. It is a deep kind of restructuring of your being. It doesn't mean just simply remembering or reminding yourself.

It's like when you go back to a place that you haven't been for a while and you start to recover and remember an identity you used to have there. While you were away from the place you remember the facts and the event. But when you go there... "Ahh! Right! This is what it was like to be me at this time!" It's that kind of remembering. It's a modal memory. It has to do with that participatory knowing we were talking about. Siddhārtha is trying to remember (writes sati on the board) the being mode. It's in the eyes of the renouncer. Now why do I bring this word up and go on about this? Because this is the word that is translated today by this term: "Mindfulness". But I bet you when I say mindfulness, especially if you're in touch with this revolution that is sweeping our culture, you probably didn't think of remembering the being mode! Now there are some astute authors who describe it that way. Stephen Batchelor did in a beautiful little book called "Alone With Others" that I heartily recommend.

Siddhārtha is going to pick up on these psycho-technologies of mindfulness that he's learned from his teachers, but he found inadequate because he's going to transform them because he precisely wants to remember (indicates sati on the board), he wants to 'recover', it's a better word I would think, the being mode. Not as an intellectual idea, but as his very Agency and the very way in which the world is realised in conjunction and co-identification with that agency.

Waking Up

So, I want to stop now, this story. We're going to pick it up and how/ what Siddhartha does in order to bring about this recovery. But I'm going to give you one way of thinking about it that we're going to build towards. Another way in which you remember, in this sense of "sati" is when you wake up. Remember we talked about this as one of the metaphors, the myths that people use for talking about self-transcendence. There's enlightenment, there's waking up, there's going from being a child to an adult. We'll come back to these again and again.

But why... When I wake up, this is not like when I just remembered an event, like right now and I remember "oh yes, I know it's out in the hall..." When I wake up I recover my world and my identity. I deeply remember... and even look at what this word means. (Writes remember; "Re-Member" on the board.) To belong to. To be a member. I belong again to myself and to the world. That's what happens when I'm waking up. And Siddhārtha wants a mindfulness psycho-technology - in fact not just a psycho-technology, [but] a set of psycho-technologies - that are going to help him 'remember', 'recover' sati: The Being mode. He is going to awaken. And that's, in fact, what his title means. Buddha is not a name. Buddha is a title. It means the awakened one. But we need to talk about the cognitive science of mindfulness because we are here looking at Siddhārtha precisely because of the mindfulness revolution that's happening here and now today. And the mindfulness revolution is a response to the meaning crisis and we can see why it is! Even better if we re-situate it within Siddhārtha's myth because we see that he's cultivating mindfulness to cultivate awakening, because awakening is a way of responding to the meaning crisis. Hence the title of this series: "Awakening from the Meaning Crisis".

But, as a cognitive scientist I'm critical, [I'm] both appreciative of all of the scientific work that's being done on mindfulness, but I'm also critical of it. As a good scientist should be. So I want to talk a little bit about how we can understand and better formulate what mindfulness means. And this is based on work that I published in 2016 with Leo Ferrara on mindfulness. So again, why am I doing this? If we want to awaken from the meaning crisis, if we want to understand what Siddhārtha's awakening was, we've got to understand what mindfulness meant to him. And what it meant to him is precisely the set of psycho-technologies that brings about awakening. And

part of what I want to show is 'how can we get back to an understanding of mindfulness and it's constitutive psycho-technologies that will afford precisely that'.

How can we get a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes at work in mindfulness and how they can afford such important existential transformation? So if you ask people who are pursuing mindfulness practices (meditation, contemplation practices. I'll try and argue later why those shouldn't be treated as synonyms, for example, even though they often are), they'll give you a sort of standard understanding of what mindfulness is and what I want you to first note is how much it is not picking up on what we've already said about sati. So people will tell you that to be mindful, what you're trying to do is pay attention to the present moment in a non-judgmental fashion. Trying to learn how to... Notice: there's a hint! There's this hint of the being mode, remembering the being mode, it's still there! Because they'll say it's about "being present", they're invoking the being mode. But they're doing it in a way that, while helpful, is maybe misleading. Now, I want to make sure that you're understanding what I'm criticizing, what I'm not criticizing. In order to do that, let me tell you a little bit more....

I both studied mindfulness scientifically and do work on it; experiments and publish theoretical work on it. I also teach. I teach it as I mentioned. I teach meditative practices. I teach contemplative practices and I teach extracurricular Tai Chi Chuan, which is a form of moving mindfulness. So I am familiar with both the academic attempt to explain mindfulness and the pedagogical attempt to teach it. And I think it's important to have a foot in both of those worlds to realize a way in which you can become confused in your attempts to understand mindfulness.

The Language of Training and the Language of Explaining

We need to avoid confusion by making a distinction. We avoid Modal confusion by recovering the distinction between the having mode and the being mode. We can get deeply confused about mindfulness if we do not remember the distinction between the language of training and the language of explaining. This (training language) is the language I use when I'm

teaching people meditation and contemplation and Taichi. I use language that helps them acquire the skills. And this is language of imitation and involvement and I can depend on our presence together. I can depend on the pragmatics of the situation. I can depend on the fact that their goal is that they want to acquire the skill. And so I'll use language there that's appropriate for that. But if I were simply to use that language unquestioningly here (explaining language), I would make a mistake. Let me give you an example and I'm going to use an example from memory because of the connections I'm making between mindfulness and memory. One of the most powerful ways you can train your memory is to use what's known as the method of location, or the method of loci, if you want to sound more pretentious! So some of you might have watched the Sherlock series. Sherlock does this with his mind palace.

The Spatial Metaphor of Memory

So what you do is you memorize a space. You memorize the rooms so you can visualize them in your mind. And then if I want to remember a bunch of things, lets say I want to remember stuff associate with Socrates, that I have a figure of Socrates here (illustrating this on the board) and then I put a bunch of other images there in that location... and now I want to remember some stuff about Plato and I have some other things here some other images and I put a bunch of images... started with Plato, and so forth... And then what I do, in order to remember what I need to remember, I call this (mind palace "schematic" drawn on the board) up, I go into this room and I have all the images and they're all tightly associated together and I get all the information I need from Socrates and then I go, and then I move in my mind palace to where the Plato room is and I unfold it... And this is powerful.

The orators of the ancient world could use the method of location in order to memorize speeches that would last up to six hours! And we know that this is a very powerful mnemonic. You should, if you're a student/ you're studying, learn how to use this. It's not just how to become a sociopathic superhero detective. It is a good way to become a student. The method of locations. Now notice this. It is powerful language of training. It trains your memory well. Now, what you may do, and this would be a mistake, is you may think "this is how memory is organized". This is called "the spatial metaphor of

memory". You may think "oh well this is how memory is organized. All that all my memories for one thing are sort of stable things, like my image of Socrates, are in a stable location, and all the things that are associated in my memory are actually closer together in my memory. So the way memory works is I send in a little homunculus, a little memory guy, and he searches through the rooms until he finds the right room and then he goes in the room and everything's organized there and he finds what he needs. And then he brings it out. And then he passes it up to consciousness. 'AhhAHHHH...' and that's how I remember. Right?" And we talk about searching through our memory and retrieving from our memory. Here's the thing, and Eysenck and Keane pointed out this a long time ago, this spatial metaphor for memory is almost completely wrong. Your memory does not work this way.

It doesn't work this way. That's a mistake. Here, I'll show you. So tell me quickly other colors associate with blue... You'll say "Red, Green..." Tell me other words that rhyme with blue... "Shoe, new...". OK, so red is close to blue and shoe is close to blue, yes? That means what else is close? Shoe and red! So when I say shoe you should think of Red! Do you? Of course you don't! Here's another way in which your memory isn't laid out this way. You rapidly know when you don't know something. What's Meryl Streep's phone number? "I don't know!". Have you ever been in Bangkok. "No." What did "Bob" do? Did he get on some sort of hyperspace motorcycle inside your, like....? What did he...? Did he go to every place you've ever been? Is that Bangkok? Is that Bangkok? Is that Bangkok? No! He instantly knows! YOU instantly know that you weren't in Bangkok. He instantly knows that you don't have Meryl Streep's phone number. He doesn't search all the space. In fact it looks like he doesn't search it at all!

Reformulating Mindfulness

Memory is a lot more mysterious and it does not operate in the simplistic manner that the spatial metaphor says. That spatial metaphor is great for training your memory. It is great for training your memory but it is overly simplistic and gets you to mis-understand - listen to my language - how memory actually works. The language by which we train mindfulness should not be imported (*onscreen correction) UNcritically into our scientific attempts to explain it and understand it. Paying attention to the present

moment. First of all you have to know what it is to pay attention. I'm going to show you that that's way more problematic than you think [it is], because you're probably thinking it's operating according to another metaphor: shining a spotlight; I pay attention the way I shine a spotlight. What's the present moment? I mean when I'm 'training' you, Yeah! we can sort of just make it happen because we can rely on the content. But what's the present moment? Is it right here right now? That nanosecond? This second? The last five minutes? The last hour? What's the present moment? See, the word "present" doesn't have a particular meaning. It's called an "indexical". It's relative to what I'm cons[sidering]. What's here? What's now? You see, then people think "oh well, I can tell you what the present moment is! It's paying attention to the here and now!" ...that's useless! What's "here"? This spot I'm standing on? This room? This city of Toronto? This solar system? This universe out of all of the universes in the multiverse? What's "now"?

See, you're not explaining anything! That language helps train people. But it's overly simplistic and misleading when we're trying to understand. What we need to do is re-formulate mindfulness and we need to do it in order to recover what Siddhārtha was talking about. How can we understand mindfulness such that it can tell us how people can become awakened? That's what we need. That's how we have to re-formulate mindfulness.

So let's try and do that. And let's make use of some of the things we've already built upon here. We can bring in Plato to help us. And what a great ally that is to have. Because, do you remember what Plato pointed out? That our knowledge is not captured just by a list of features. Remember the bird isn't just the wings, the feathers, the beak, it's also the structural functional organization. The thing is, if you look at most people's definition of mindfulness, even in scientific articles, all they give you is a feature list. "(1)To be mindful is being present", which we've got to do something about because that's just language of training, it's not explanatory language. "(2)Not judging"...and [-] that's going to be a problem! "What do you mean not judging? I'm supposed to pay attention to my breath and not pay attention to my distractions! THAT'S a kind of judging! What do you mean not judging?" Well..... Right!!!! What does it mean? It's somehow supposed to bring about something like "(3)insight", and that's going to be important because insight, I'm going to argue, is on a continuum with

awakening. I'll tell you... I'll explain what that means. And it's supposed to " (4)Reduce your reactivity". You're supposed to become more equanimous. More balanced.

So, (going through the list again) mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment. Being present, paying attention to the present moment in a nonjudgmental fashion that's supposed to bring about insight. The form of meditation I teach, the Buddhist form, it's claimed it goes back to Siddhārtha, it's called Vipassana. Vipassana means Insight - obviously not just an intellectual insight, but an existential insight. It's supposed to reduce reactivity, what does that mean? Now that's a feature list! We're missing the idos. We're missing the structural functional organization that tells me how all of those things actually go together.

So this is what we need to do. We need to turn this feature list into a feature schema. We need to recover its missing structural functional organization and we need to re-interpret all of these things so we can actually explain their functionality. And we need to do that by tying them to independently constructed theory or theoretical claims within psychology. Look, we have people who are doing the psychology and the cognitive science of attention, of insight, of improved self-regulation. Let's pay attention - no pun intended! - to what they're telling us about how insight, attention, self-control operate. So, one of the things you do to turn a feature list into a feature schemas is you make some distinctions between the types of features.

States and Traits

So here's these core four that we keep seeing a lot: being present; I'm not judging or non-judging; insight; reduced reactivity. I've split them up like this (on the board) because there's a distinction here. These are states that I can get into. These are things I can do... So being present is something I can do. I can start it. I can stop it. We've got to come back to what it means. But we know it's an activity you're engaging in because it's constantly being disrupted while you're meditating and you're constantly having to engage in it again. And it's the same thing with not judging. Not judging is something you're doing. It's a weird kind of paradoxical 'not doing', but again you can start it. It can stop. You can restart it again.

But these, these are not things you're doing. These are results. So to use the language of psychology these are states (being present and not judging) you can get into but these are traits (insight and reduced reactivity) that you cultivate. You want to become more insightful. You want to become less reactive. So immediately we understand "oh wait. So these are things I do (being present and not judging), and these are traits (insight and being less reactive) that I'm supposed to be realize[ing] when I'm cultivating mindfulness!". Now questions immediately emerge! By making this distinction, I can ask this question: "How does being present cause insight?". Or "how does being present reduce reactivity? Why do...? How...? Does non-judging cause insight? Does not judging cause reduced reactivity? What's the causal relation?".

Notice that the feature list doesn't talk about this at all. It doesn't talk about how the features are causally related. It doesn't talk about how the states can cause the traits. But it also doesn't ask constitutive questions. Constitutive questions are "part-whole" relationships. What's, what's this (states relationship)? Is this a part of this? Is this a part of this? Are they both part of some whole? What's that? What's the structural relationship here? What about these (traits relationship)? Is this part of this? Is this part of this? Are they both part of some whole? See, the feature list does not have the idos, and by not having the idos, or not looking for the idos, it's not asking any of these questions. These causal and constitutive questions.

Now as we start to answer these questions and as we start to answer them with the language of explaining rather than the language of [training? uncorrected error], we will turn a feature list into a feature schema. We will start to get at the structural functional organization of mindfulness and we'll start to get a deeper understanding of it. And that will help us to see how it is that mindfulness can bring about the kind of radical transformations that were promised by Siddhārtha's realization.

Insight from the Right Kind of Concentration

So I'm going to focus on this one right now (Being Present -> Insight). And again, we'll start by talking about specific insights, but obviously we're not talking about, 'this insight' or 'that insight'. We're talking about a fundamental existential, modal kind of transformation. I've already said this

language ("Being Present") is useless. People say "OK well what I meant was something like 'concentration'". That can't be right! That's not good enough because if you take a look at Siddhārtha's attempt to explain it, he talks about 'right concentration'. That's why I have concentration here (points out a tattoo on his arm). If Siddhārtha is telling you that there's 'right concentration', what does that strongly mean? That there is 'wrong concentration'! Mindfulness isn't about concentration. It's about getting the right kind of concentration. What does that mean? Well all it means [IS] paying attention! OK... Again, You're using a particular model for attention. Let's talk about these two things (concentration and paying attention) a little bit and let's talk about [-] Siddhārtha [-] when he's hearing "not too tight, not too loose" for the strings.

First of all, let's work our way up phenomenologically... I want you to compare two ways of concentrating. (This is based on work done by Ellen Langer who wrote probably the first book on mindfulness in the West called "Mindfulness" in 1988, way before the mindfulness revolution took off. And there's a lot of questions about what's the relationship between her account of mindfulness and the Buddhists'... I'm not getting into that right now because that's not what I'm trying to establish. I'm just using her way of trying to get you to understand concentration.) OK, so we're going to do it right here right now. So I want you to concentrate on my finger. Concentrate on it. Concentrate. Concentrate. Concentrate on my finger... Concentrate! Don't let your mind wander. Concentrate. OK. So most of you found that unpleasant because - notice what the metaphor even says is what I'm doing - I'm concentrating, I'm making my mind into a tunnel and then I'm sort of taking it on something and trying to keep it there and not let it move. And the only training you were given was what I was doing: Yelling! Concentrate! Concentrate!

OK. Let's do something else. OK. Ready? I want you to look at my finger. I want you to notice that it's not actually perfectly straight it's bent a little bit and it's a little bit thicker at the bottom than at the top. And there are sort of multiple sections to it and it's a little bit red on ones[ide]... It's very different wasn't it? She calls that "soft vigilance", because what you're doing there is not 'GRRRRR' externally hardening your mind and sticking it on things. What you're doing is constantly trying to "Renew your Interest". And this is

a great word (interest). This comes from inter-essay/assay; to be within something. To be within something.

It's about that conformity that Aristotle was talking about. What you're doing is constantly exploring and opening it up. So we need a model of concentration that does this soft vigilance. It's constantly renewing your interest, getting you deeply involved with something because it's going to get you intimately in contact with it. So, what kind of attention are we talking about? We don't want "TOO HARD!" (SHOUTING) "Those are... The strings [are] too hard. Concentrate. Concentrate. Concentrate. ...strings are too hard, too tight!" (stops shouting and goes to the other extreme...) "Oh just do whatever you want." That's too loose! How can we [find the middle ground]? Notice how, when I had you sort of move over my finger, it's almost like a well tuned string! It's almost got this musicality of intelligibility to it!

Well, now you need to know [and] understand what's going on with attention, because what I want to show you is attention isn't a spotlight. It's a very complex optimisation process. It's really about tuning and getting between too tight and too loose and allow you to become intimately involved, conformed to, participating, 'inter-essay' with whatever you're paying attention to.

OK, so why do we like the spotlight metaphor? It's even in psy- you'll find it in psychology textbooks: "attention is like a spotlight!!!" Well, because one of the things that attention does is captured very well by the spotlight metaphor. Look when I shine a light on something, it makes that stand out! It makes it stand out because it's brighter. Remember when things stand out that's salience? It makes things more salient. That's what attention does. It makes things more salient. Attention is about... now we're getting somewhere! ...and that's what I was doing here (Langer's finger attention exercise), I was making things salient to you. Features of my finger more salient to you. What's wrong with the spotlight? Well what's wrong with the spotlight metaphor is, while it picks up on [the fact] that attention is about optimizing salience, it's missing so much of what that optimization actually is. And how it can be connected to insight. So some excellent work done by Christopher Mole - again, a very complex argument and I'm not going to try

and go through the whole thing - but try to get into an understanding that attention isn't something you directly do.

Let me try and give you a comparison here. Walk and practice (writes these on the board). See walking is something I can ask you to directly do. I can say "walk" and you walk! Start walking. Stop walking. Start walking again. Great. But if I say to you practice. Come on!! Practice!!! You should say to me "practice what??!". See, you practice something by optimizing how you're doing something else. If I'm practicing chess I'm not playing chess and doing some other thing "practicing"! To practice chess is to optimize how I play chess. To practice tennis is not to do tennis and some additional secret action. Practicing. What I'm doing when I'm practicing tennis is optimizing how I play tennis. Mole's point is you don't directly pay attention. But it's not obvious to you that that's the case because of both the prevalence of the metaphor and how skilled you are at paying attention. But this is how you pay attention. You pay attention by optimizing some other process.

That's why when I ask you to pay attention, I can be asking you to do many different things. I can ask you to pay attention and it means optimize your seeing so that it becomes looking and watching. I can ask you to pay attention and it means optimize your hearing so that it becomes listening. I can ask you to pay attention and that means doing the two together: optimizing your looking and you're listening so that they're coordinated well together. But notice if I say to you "I want you to pay attention but I don't want you to do that by optimizing or improving anything else you're doing. I don't want you to pay attention by improving you're looking or you're listening or you're remembering. I just want you to directly pay attention. Come on do it right now. Pay attention!!!" You don't know what to do! So you pay attention by optimizing other things you're doing.

Now, Mole talks about this as Cognitive Unison; when we're optimizing what we're trying to do is coordinate various processes so that they're sharing the same goal and working well together. Think about Plato's idea about getting various different systems to work well together.

So what we need to understand is "what is attention?". How is it optimizing, how is it integrating things together? How does that get improved in mindfulness practice and how does it bring about insight? Not just the

insight into this problem or this problem. But the insight, the systematic insight, that is awakening, that motivates and empowers people to radically transform themselves so that they can escape from modal confusion and other existential dilemmas. We'll take a look at that next time. Thank you very much for your time.

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Episode 9: Insight

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. So last time we continued looking through the myth of Siddhartha's awakening and we talked about him leaving the palace, the having mode, his attempt to rediscover, recover the being mode, and the difficulty he faced in pursuing self-denial as passionately as he had pursued self-indulgence and why this ultimately failed because it's still working within the same operation of trying to have a self. And then we looked at Siddhartha's commitment to the middle path, an attempt to overcome that through the cultivation of mindfulness and then we began our exploration of mindfulness. We first looked at what it meant, Sati and remember it's this deep remembering, this recovering of the being mode that leads to a fundamental transformation and alleviates the existential anxiety and distress that Siddhartha was experiencing and potentially is on offer for us. And then we started to take a look at 'that'; the practice of mindfulness and his attempt to address at least an individual or personal experience of a meaning crisis. And we were doing that because we were trying to investigate more broadly the mindfulness revolution and how that is a response to the meaning crisis within the West.

We began by noting that the study of mindfulness is misleading in some ways, the scientific study, because it begins with a feature list. And as we've

noted multiple times feature list leave out the idos, the structural functional organization. In order to do that, we brought out four central characteristics in the feature list: being present, not judging, insightfulness, and reduced reactivity or an increased equanimity. And then we noted that what we need to do is to make distinctions between the types of features, between those that are states that we can engage, in actions we can perform and traits we can cultivate. Once we did that, we opened up the possibility of asking causal questions. How can the practice of being present, for example, produce the trait of insightfulness? And then we also could ask constitutive questions. What's the relationship, the part-whole relationship for example, between being present and not judging?

That being said we then also noted that we have to replace the language of training with the language of explaining; they operate according to different principles and for different goals. And we began that by starting to ask "what does it mean to be present?" And then we talked about concentration. We talked about different senses of that and the kind of "soft-vigilance" that's actually conducive of insight, discussed by Ellen Langer and others. This kind of involvement that is very much about conforming to, the "inter-esse", becoming deeply interested, connected to, the structural functional organization of something. We noted that that took us into discussion of paying attention and all the while remembering this idea that we got from Siddhārtha Gautama's story about tuning – getting the right tuning – optimization, and we started to talk about attention and made the argument that attention is not very well served by the spotlight metaphor.

While that metaphor does give us the idea of attention altering salience, the metaphor misses a lot of what attention is doing. We began to investigate what's missing by making use of Christopher Mole's idea that attention is not a direct action performed by walking but it's something you do by modifying something else, by optimizing something else. That's why you could successfully pay attention by doing many disparate and different kinds of things. You can pay attention by optimizing you're seeing into looking, by optimizing your hearing into listening, by optimizing you're seeing and listening into a coordinated tracking of what somebody is saying like you're doing right now. All of those are different ways in which we're paying attention. So what we needed was an understanding of attention that could

capture the way it's an optimization strategy which lines up with this tuning idea and how such optimization might be linked to a response to existential modal confusion and the alleviation of the suffering found therein.

So I want to continue that discussion about attention and start to point towards what might be going on. If you remember, Mole talks about this idea of cognitive unison: getting a bunch of processes to share a goal, to be coordinated together in some fashion. Now he leaves it abstract like that and I think we should try and investigate a little bit more further, more concretely, what that might mean and there's a lot of – attention is one of the hottest areas in cognitive science right now. There's a lot of good work done by Frank Wu, by Sebastian Watzl, Christopher Mole... Many people are talking about this and I'm not pretending to canvass all of that rich and very fertile and very – like it's very creative, it's advancing. I'm not trying to do that. I'm trying to pick up on some key themes here because what we want to understand is how can mindfulness train attention so as to cause more insight, to make one more dispositionally capable of insight. Because all – after all and we've talked about this before, we're not talking – when we talk about wisdom, we're not talking about an individual insight. We're talking about a systematic set of insights that are mutually related to a fundamental transformation of the person's, as we said last time, existential mode.

So let's talk a little bit more again about what's missing from the model of attention. So, this cognitive unison - I think we can make use of another important cognitive scientist, philosopher scientist, who did work on attention and that's Michael Polanyi and he pointed out that attention has an important structure - and we've been trying to follow the platonic idea of turning the feature list into a feature schema, picking up on structures - and the way in order to bring out what Polanyi is talking about, I'm going to run through an experiment with you. It's an experiment you can sort of follow along with me. So, let me describe it to you first. I need you to get some object, like a pencil or a pen and we will call that your probe. Nothing untoward is meant by that that's just what it's called in psychology. It doesn't involve any aliens doing graphic things to your body or anything like that.

A Practical Psychological Experiment

So, what we're going to do is – let me describe it to you first. Okay, what I'm going to ask you to do is going to ask you to find some object that you could put it on a desk in front of you or hold in your hand and then you're going to do the following. Do not start yet because I want to describe it to you. I'm going to – I'm going to ask you to tap on the object as if you were blind and you're trying to figure out what the object is. Its shape, its structure, its weight, its density. "(tap tap tap...) Oh that's a cup, right?". That makes sense. Now, it's important while you – now you should close your eyes as you're doing this. I'm using touch because touch is slower than sight. And so you can become more aware of what's happening. Now, it's important while you do this, that you continue tapping.

So I'm going to ask you in a moment to close your eyes, start the tapping and then while you're doing it, continue the tapping as you are following my instructions. And this will –this will give you a sense of what you're doing. Okay so, what I want you to do is close your eyes. You start tapping on your object. Start tapping until you start to form an image of the object in your mind. Okay. So your eyes are closed, you're starting to get an image of what that object is in your mind. Okay. So right now you're aware, like you're focally aware – what you're focusing your awareness on is the object. I want you to keep tapping but I want you to shift your awareness into your probe, feel how your pencil or your pen is moving around, shifting. Okay, keep tapping and then I want you to shift your awareness into your fingers and feel how your fingers are moving around, shifting around.

Okay. Some of you may be able to pick up on the individual feelings that are occurring in your fingers. Now, go back, feel your fingers, your thumb and how they're moving. Now, feel how the probe is moving. And now, allow the tapping to reveal the object to you once again. So I've done this multiple, multiple times with people. And what's interesting is the following thing: most people find this very readily easy to do. And a couple of things, when you're initially tapping, for example, I was aware of my cup but then my awareness moves into my marker and then my awareness moves into my finger, and when my awareness is in my finger I'm not aware of the cup at all. Then I was able to reverse it. I go from being aware of my fingers to being aware of the probe to being aware of the cup. And you're saying

"what's all this about? What's going on?". Well, there's an important structure. Let's take a look at it step by step.

Breaking the Experiment Down - What's Going On?

So here's the cup or whatever your object was, and I'm tapping on it with my probe. Now here's the interesting thing. It's not like I was completely unaware of my probe because if I was completely unaware of it, then I couldn't manipulate it. But I wasn't actually aware of it, I was aware through it. I was aware through my probe of the cup. So, I'm aware through this (probe) and I'm aware of this (cup). So it's like my probe is transparent to me and I'll give - let me give you an analogy right now, where this (cup) is opaque. Here's the analogy - and we talked about this before, but let's do it again, and it's like my glasses are like my framing. My glasses are transparent to me in the sense that I'm looking through them, beyond them, by means of them. They're transparent to me. But what I can do is I can redirect my awareness, so that I'm now looking at my glasses rather than through them. So, my glasses have now become opaque to me. So, I can do a "transparency to opacity shift". Now, what does that ability to shift indicate?

Well, this is – this is part of Polanyi's idea. Here's my probe (drawn on the board), I'm aware through my probe. He has, what I call, a subsidiary or an implicit awareness because I'm aware through it – I'm not aware of it, I'm aware through it of my focal object, for example, my cup. And this I have a focal awareness or an explicit awareness. Now his point, which is really quite good is that attention is this kind of structuring phenomena. What it is, it's always attention as he says from-to it – that attention through subsidiary awareness into focal awareness. When I'm paying attention, I'm doing this. But here's the interesting thing, I was then able to step back and make this focal, and now it's my fingers that I am aware [of] – I'm aware through my fingers of my probe. And then I can even step back and be aware of my feelings, what some people would call sensations.

What the Spotlight Metaphor is Missing

So I can – I can keep stepping back and stepping back. So, I'm looking at the cup through my probe. Now I'm looking through my fingers at the probe, and now I'm looking through my feelings my fingers. And of course, the

whole time I was actually looking at the cup I was doing all of that: I was looking through my feelings through my fingers through my probe into the cup. And you see the spotlight metaphor is missing all of that layered, recursive, dynamic structuring that's going on. And notice you can move in both directions; you can do a transparency opacity shift, in which I step back more and more into my mind, or I can go the opposite way. I can do an opacity to transparency shift. That's when you went the opposite way; that's when you go from looking at your fingers to looking through your fingers at your probe and going from looking at your probe to looking through your probe to the cup. And your attention is doing that all the time, flowing in and out: doing a transparency and opacity shifting. Now, that's very important because that's an important – what you're seeing is how many different processes are being coordinated integrated together to optimize and prioritize, to use an important term from Watzl, this particular object or this particular scene or situation.

So, that's one way in which attention is operating. Now, for reasons I'm not quite sure of, I think it has to do something with we're using a visual metaphor in the way vision is oriented in our bodies, we tend to use an in-out metaphor for this. Like that's why I'm using stepping back and looking at as opposed to, like looking through. Notice also something that's really important for where - we're going to need this when we talk about Gnosis and participatory knowing - notice when I was, if you'll allow me, when I was knowing the cup through the probe, I'm indwelling the probe. It's not like I'm/ I'm participating in how the probe is being with respect to the cup. I'm sort of indwelling it. I'm not knowing the probe, I'm knowing through the probe. I'm "inter-esse". I'm so deeply interested that I'm actually integrated with it and threw it into the cup. The way my vision is integrated with these glass lenses so that I'm actually seeing through them and by means of them. And the point about this, and we've talked about this before of course, is this also works, not just with technology, but with psycho-technologies. We talked about this with second order thinking. You can so integrate literacy, for example, into your cognition that you don't look at literacy very much, you automatically look through it. And we'll come back to that.

The Psychology of CAT & HAT

All right, so this is... As I said this seems to be –people's talk about this metaphorically as moving in and out with their awareness. So one of the ways attentions work is it moves in and out. You can look through a lot of processing deeply out into the world or you can step back and look at a lot of processing and withdraw towards the center of your mind. There's another important axis upon which your attention is working and I can bring it out by a famous example. So you give this (writes on the board) to people and you ask them to read it and they say, what does it say? and they'll say "THE CAT". And they're like, "Oh yeah". All right. And then you point out to them that they're reading this as an H and they're reading this as an A, and these are exactly the same thing. Why are you reading one as an H and the other as an A? And so what they'll typically say to you, is "well because it fits in with this word as an H and it fits in with this word as an A."

So let's use language we've already developed. The letters are the features and the word is the "gestalt", the overall structure. Now notice here: you've got a problem. It's almost a pseudo-Zen problem. In order to read the words, I must read each individual letter, but in order to disambiguate each letter, I must have read the whole word. Therefore reading is impossible.

Now of course reading isn't impossible, which means something else has to change. What has to change is your model of attention. The search light metaphor – the spotlight metaphor – can't address that problem. Here's what your attention is actually doing. It's simultaneously going up from the features to the gestalt, the idios, the structural-functional whole... and it's going down from the gestalt, the words, to the individual letters, the features. It's simultaneously doing that. Your attention is also doing this: so not only is your attention flowing in and out, doing transparency opacity shifting, it's also flowing up and down between feature and gestalt. Your attention is doing all of that, it's doing it right now. And the spotlight metaphor doesn't capture any of that. And mindfulness has to do with making use of all of this complex, dynamical - remember what dynamical systems are - dynamical processing. These are dynamic, self organizing processes and they can be optimized. And mindfulness optimizes them in some way.

Scaling Up and Scaling Down

So, I'm going to put something up on the board. It looks like a graph but it's not a graph because it doesn't have absolute position. It's just a schema because it has relative position. So, when I move this way (draws a horizontal arrow indicating left to right) - like we're talking about when we're talking about Polanyi's work - I'm doing transparency to opacity shifting and going this way is to do transparency to opacity and to go this way (the direct opposite) is to do opacity to transparency. It's not an absolute; no position is transparent and the other is opaque. It's always the direction that matters. The more I move this way, the more I'm stepping back and looking at; the more I go this way, the more am in dwelling and looking out into the world.

Then we have this: I can be going down from the gestalt to the features (draws a vertical arrow to indicate top to bottom) using the word to decide the letters, for example, and I can be going up from the features to the gestalt. Nothing is inherently a feature, look: the letters are a feature in the word but the word is a feature in the sentence. Nothing is absolutely a feature, it's always relative. That's why I'm putting these double arrows. This isn't a Cartesian graph. Okay, this is not a Cartesian graph; this is a schema. But one thing you should know is that although I can describe, and you can understand these two axes independently, they're almost always operating in a highly dynamic integrated fashion. Very often, as I'm moving towards a gestalt – grabbing a bigger picture, I'm using that bigger pattern to look more deeply into the world. So, often I'm doing this (draws arrow from origin in a relative NE direction): I'm grabbing bigger patterns and I'm using those deeper patterns to look deeper into the world.

So when you find - this is what we do in science. For example, I find this and this and this, I get a pattern and then I find a way to integrate it together, and then I use that pattern to look more deeply in the world! This is what this is (writes $F=ma$ on the board). I found a pattern and it allows me to look more deeply into the world. I'm no longer looking at these individual things – force, mass, and acceleration. I've integrated them together and that allows me to look more deeply into the world. Often when we're stepping back and looking at our minds (draws an arrow in a relative SW direction), our

awareness processes within attention, we're also often breaking up gestalt into features. For example, you were breaking up your experience of your whole finger into individual sections of your finger when we were doing the experiment. You were breaking up the whole of the cup into individual moments of contact. So very often, [we have] these two to come together. Let's call this "scaling up" (NE direction arrow) of attention, and "scaling down" (SW direction arrow) of attention. So first of all, let's map these on to mindfulness practices, to make clear why we're doing this.

Scaling Up & Down with Mindfulness

So I teach my students Vipassana, [a] very traditional form of meditation. Notice what the word meditation means, it actually means moving towards the center. So we know it's going to have this aspect to it. So what do you do? Well typically you train people by telling them to pay attention to their breath. So first of all, what they're doing is paying attention not to the world, they're stepping back but they're not really paying attention to the breath! What you tell them is the following... (Again, language of explaining not the language of training; look at it much more fine grain.) You tell them to pay attention to the feelings and sensations that are being generated in their abdomen as they breathe. So as they inhale, they're feeling sensations in their abdomen and as they exhale.... And what they're doing is trying to do what I did with my finger. They're trying to maintain and renew their interest, constantly make it salient to themselves. Now notice what's happening. Normally, our embodied sensations – I'm not happy with that word for sort of philosophically important reasons but I don't have time to go into it right now - normally we don't pay attention so much to our sensations, we pay attention through our sensations to the world. So normally I'm not paying attention to my feelings, I'm paying attention through my feelings to the cup.

Meditation & Contemplation

With meditation, I'm stepping back and not looking through my sensations, I'm stepping back and looking at them. That's like: "I don't look through the way my mind is framing things... I'm looking 'at' the framing". I also do something else. I don't just look at it as one blob. I do something like observational analysis. I break the gestalt up into separate experiences. I'm

doing this (indicates down-scaling arrow from the origin). I'm stepping back and looking at, and I'm breaking the gestalt of my experience up into its features, its atomic features, if you'll allow me a metaphor that you shouldn't push too far. That's what you do in meditation. And we'll talk about why would you do this? Why would that matter? And importantly our question is why would that help cause insight? So that's meditation ("SW"). That's for Vipassana for example. I also teach my students a contemplative practice ("NE"). So the word "meditation" means to move towards the center. And that fits perfectly with Vipassana and this kind of thing.

"Contemplation": Now it bespeaks how overly simplified the West is in trying to understand this in that these terms are now treated as synonyms – contemplative practices, meditative practices. It's all the same thing. Aren't these just synonyms? They're not synonyms. And paying attention to their etymology will quickly reveal this. First of all the Latin etymology, this look what's in the center of this (contemplation) is Temple. It comes from a temple which actually comes from the Latin word for a part of the sky that you look up to to see the signs from the gods; to contemplate is to look up towards the divine. This also goes well, its convergent with – 'contemplatio' the Latin term was a translation of this Greek word 'theoria'. And theoria also originally doesn't mean generating a theory – a theory is a species of theoria because what I do with theoria is I try to see more deeply into reality. Do you see? Meditation is moving this way and contemplation is moving that way.

Meditation emphasizes scaling down; contemplation emphasizes scaling up. And I was taught both. In fact, I was taught three things in an integrated fashion: I was taught Vipassana, a scaling down strategy; I was taught Metta, a scaling up strategy and your scaling up with your sense of identity by the way, we'll talk/ will come back to that later; and then I was taught Tai Chi Chuan because Tai Chi Chuan is about moving right in and out. In and out, flowing between these inner and outer movements in a dynamic and optimizing fashion. Why teach me all these things together? Because it's actually a system of these psycho-technologies that will optimize your cognition for insight.

Back to the 9-Dot Problem

Okay, so do you remember we did the 9 dot problem? We talked about that. Remember the fact that you can misframe things. So let's do the 9 dot problem again. Join all 9 dots with four straight lines and people find it difficult. Why? Remember we talked about this, they automatically - listen to the words! - remember, they automatically and unconsciously project a square there. And then they automatically take this to be a connect the dot problems and so no non-dot terms are possible and therefore they can't get the solution. The solution is here's four straight lines – one, two ,three, four. The reason why people find that so difficult is "I have to break the square and I have to not treat it as a typical connect the dot problem". "I have to not treat it categorically", to use language you've heard already, because you don't do non dot terms, remember this. Now notice there's two moments to having an insight. I have to break up an inappropriate frame. What do I have to do? I have to break up the gestalt. And I also have to de-automatize my cognition. I have to make it not operate unconsciously and automatically.

Well, how do I do that? I take stuff that's normally happening unconsciously and I have to bring it back into consciousness. Yes? Does that makes sense? How do I do that? I do that by doing a transparency opacity shift. Normally, I'm automatically sensing through my probe. But I can shift my awareness and become aware of my probe. I can bring things back into awareness. So you de-automatize cognition by doing a transparency to opacity shift. So I break up the inappropriate frame (points to solved 9-dot on the board). And I de-automatize my cognition by scaling down. Now interestingly enough there is lots of work by Knoblich and other people showing that you can improve people's ability to solve insight problems if you get them to do what's called chunk decomposition and constraint relaxation. Chunk decomposition is just breaking up the gestalt. That's what chunk decomposition means. Constraint relaxation is basically de-automatizing your cognition, de-automatizing your cognition. Scaling down helps you to break up the chunks, break up the gestalt and helps you to de-automatize your cognition. But is that enough for insight? It's not enough!

Limitations of Breaking Frame

Yes I have to break up the inappropriate frame but I have to make an alternative and better frame. I have to – watch – I have to widen, widen my

field of awareness. I have to take stuff that was in the background and change its relevance. I have to look more deeply for deeper broader patterns that I have not considered before. What do I have to do? In order to make a new frame, I have to scale up. And we also have lots of independent evidence, having nothing to do with mindfulness meditation, that one of the ways you can improve people's ability to be insightful is that they get training – have training or practice or are naturally disposed to being able to scale up. If people can complete patterns in a kind of leaping that ***[[[CC Banner and Baker]]]]*** talked about and other people. We can scale up in that way if we – if we can take pictures that are out of focus and refocus them mentally so we can suddenly see what the picture is. Again and again and again when people can scale up better, they're better at solving insight problems. So both make you better. But there's a problem because both also make you worse.

Because if I – if I just scale up if I just maximize, like tightening a string, then of course I immediately project the square and then I'm locked. What, well, shouldn't I just scale down? Just meditate always – if I just keep breaking up gestalt, I'll never make the solution. I'll choke myself. That's what happens when people are choking. You get a way... Like, if you're sparring with somebody, a way to get them off is to compliment them. "That was a really good, like right hook you just threw!" Because then the person will start stepping back and looking at it and they'll get all screwed up. Because they'll break up the ability to generate the gestalt. So notice what I'm saying, stick with me because this is really sort of tricky. This (scaling down) can improve your chances for insight by breaking up a bad frame (9-dot). But it can also mess up your problem solving by causing you to choke. This (scaling up) can improve your ability for insight by causing you to make a better frame, but this can also cause you to leap into an inappropriate frame and be locked in fixation (9 dot).

So what should you do? You don't want the strings too tight; you don't want the strings too loose. And you don't want IT just half way. Well what you want to do is you want to train people in both of these skills and then train them to flow between them. It's called "opponent processing". So they're pulling and pushing on each other and so they're forced to coordinate and constantly get the right degree of attentional engagement that is most

dynamically fitted to the world. That's why the people who trained me trained me in all these things. That's why you shouldn't equate mindfulness just with meditation. It's not. So if you pay attention, for example, to the eight fold path you'll have people being trained in meditative practices, contemplative practices, practices in which you flow between the opposites until you learn like a martial art to get an apt and constantly adjusted fittedness, attentional fitness to the world.

Associated Mystical Experiences

Now this leads very naturally into talking about mystical experiences and the kinds of mystical experiences that people can have within their mindfulness practices. But before I do that let's gather. Notice what we've said here. We have an understanding of mindfulness. What's mindfulness doing?

Mindfulness is basically teaching us how to appropriate and train a flexibility of attentional scaling so that we can intervene effectively in how we are framing our problems and increase the chances of insight when insight is needed. Notice that this didn't really – what? – How is being present making you more insightful?

The Pure Consciousness Event

But I've given you a way of understanding being present that works. When I'm scaling down, I'm actually making my mind less representational, less inferential. I'm doing all of this work to become aware of and gain some mastery over my processes of problem framing and thereby training skills that will make me more insightful. What happens if you were just to scale down and practice scaling down and scaling down and scaling down and scaling down? Well you can actually get to one kind of important mystical experience. Forman calls this – and it's well attested – calls this the pure consciousness event the PCE – the pure consciousness event. It's a kind of mystical experience you can have after extensive mindfulness practice. I've experienced this. Let's do it.

So right now I'm looking at the world, and the thing you're doing when you're practicing meditation is you try and step back and look at the lens of your mind – if you'll allow me – and what happens is it's hard to maintain cause you have such deep developed habits of directing your attention back

out towards the world. Then you start thinking about got to do my laundry, got to do this and then what you have to do is you have to bring your attention back again. You have to do that, you have to recenter and step back and look at your mind rather than automatically looking through it and you keep practicing. And that's like "aaaaah!" and it's arduous but these like doing reps. That's meditation. Meditation is that you're building this ability to step back and look at your mind. And then what happens is, remember how we went back in layers? We went into the probe and then into our fingers and into the sensations. When I do this with people, it's often the people who've had some mindfulness training that can step back all the way into their sensations. That's not a coincidence.

So I stop – I start, now I'm looking at my mind. And then I start looking at the more subsidiary layers of my mind, the deeper layers by which I was looking at the upper layers and then I step back again, I step back again. So now I'm just looking at my consciousness. And eventually I step back and I'm not even conscious of anything. I'm not conscious of this sensation, I'm just conscious. It's what's called the Pure Consciousness Event. You're not conscious of anything. You're just fully present as consciousness. You don't – You're not aware of yourself. You're not looking through yourself machinery. You're not looking through your consciousness... you're not even looking through your mind you're just fully conscious – the pure consciousness event! This is the event that results from this (down scaling).

Resonant At-Onement

What about if you were to really – really scale up? We'll think about things that you might have heard associated with the Buddhist view. I see... I'm going to see everything is interconnected and everything is flowing impermanent. I'm going to create this overarching gestalt and the gestalt is going to be so overarching it's going to include and encompass me. I'm going to experience this resonant at-onement. And you already know what that's like because we've already talked about it. Think about that as just a super flow state in which I'm deeply at one with everything – super flow state. "Resonant at-onement".

I don't use atonement because that has a particular Christian meaning that I'm not trying to invoke here, at-onement. See this model of mindfulness

explains why people get into these kinds of mystical experiences. If they do a lot of meditative practices, they will get a pure consciousness event. If they do a lot of contemplative practices they will develop this empathetic, participatory, flowing, super-flowing, resonant at-onement. But remember what we want ultimately, is we want these two together (up and down scaling).

Non-Duality

There's a third state. And this is actually the state that matters. This is called the state of non-duality. So let me try and explain to you a way in which you can at least imagine you could get into it. It's a way I train people. Imagine that you're going to be cycling - scaling up and scaling down with your breath. So as you inhale you scale up and you do that sort of resonate at-onement. You're trying to be flowing at-onement with everything and then as you exhale you're doing the Vipassana. You're trying to step back as close as you can to the pure consciousness event. And you oscillate back and forth with the breath. You often have to do that for years. But what can happen, and there's other ways of getting into this state. This isn't exclusive. This is one way, the way I was taught. What can happen, is you can have the third kind of mystical experience. It's not the pure consciousness event; it's not resonant at-onement. It includes both and transcends both. It's both at the same time. Your awareness is deeply to the depths of your consciousness and deeply to the depths of reality. And it's completely at-one. It's just all at once.

This is a prajana state; a state of non-duality. This is one term for wisdom. This is kind of mystical experience. Now this is the state that's actually sought for, that non-duality because this is the state that should lead to a comprehensive capacity for insight. Because you're not going to have an insight about nine dots and four straight lines. You're going to have an insight into the fundamental – the guts, the grammar of the Agent:Arena relationship. You're pushing to the ground of the agent and you're pushing out to the circumference of the arena and you're pushing that machinery to optimize. So that you can see in as deeply integrated a fashion as possible that connectedness between the two.

So you have the capacity for an insight. Not into this problem or that problem, but an insight into your existential modes of being. This is how you

can 'remember' the being mode. You can have a fundamental insight into it. Now this is in fact of course what Siddhartha experienced. He'd been practicing the Vipassana and a contemplative practice called Metta, very deeply, very powerfully. And it looks like one of his great innovations was to conjoin the two together. He often talks about them. And what happened was a radical transformation. He experienced enlightenment - and we're going to talk about what that might mean. So after his enlightenment, after his awakening, he's walking down the road and people come up to him and his visage has changed! Think about what you – think about when you are watching – when you see somebody and you know they're in the flow state and they're flowing. You can – that grace and that energy and that the musicality of intelligibility that's playing across their face and their gestures and their motions. And you can't – you're... Most of it you're only picking up implicitly but you've got a sense "what's going –oh that's so beautiful, that so graceful, it's so much power..." and there's a charismatic... And you're just caught up in it. So these men are approaching Siddhartha and he's filled with that.

And so they say to him, "Are you a god?" Think about what conditions have to be like where that's a reasonable thing to ask of someone. And he answers very clearly, "No, I'm not." "Are you some kind of angelic messenger or being?" "No, I'm not." "Are you some kind of prophet?" "No I'm not." "Are you just a man?" "No I'm not." They're frustrated. "What are you then?" "I am awake." That's how he gets his title. He moves from talking about an identity he could have to a fundamental way of being – "I am awake". He has fully deeply – the depths I've tried to indicate here – "Sati"; remembered the being mode in a way that isn't an insight about this or that problem, but is a fundamental insight into what it is to be a human being. A systematic set of insights that optimizes your entire being. That triggers and empowers a fundamental transformative experience.

So, as a cognitive scientist, especially one who studies the connections between Buddhism and cognitive science, I've become very interested in these kinds of experiences that people have, and I have colleagues and collaborators who are also interested in it. Why do people pursue altered states of consciousness? Why is the mindfulness revolution, which is the pursuit of altered states of consciousness, so powerful? Why are we going

through the psychedelic revolution right now? Because unlike other therapeutic pharmaceuticals, psychedelics work exactly by bringing about an altered state of consciousness. Why is this so powerfully important? Why is it that we're not the only creatures, in fact, that pursue altered states of consciousness? It looks like the more intelligent a creature is, the more it will pursue altered states of consciousness. Caledonian crows will tumble down rooftops in order to make themselves dizzy. Which is a risky thing to do but they do it because they are enjoying the altered state of consciousness.

Why is it that these, that some of these altered states - mystical experiences, certain types of psychedelic experiences within a therapeutic context (we're going to talk about all of this) – can bring about and afford such powerful transformations? What is it that's going on there? And here's what's interesting, sometimes people will have a kind of altered state of consciousness that in my mind it recapitulate the axial revolution. Look, normally when you have an altered state of consciousness - let's pick up on Siddhartha's metaphor: awakening, wakening up. That's in contrast to being asleep to dreaming - so what happens in your typical state of altered state of consciousness, one that you experience every night, you're dreaming. And when you're in the dream state you think that that world is real. You interact with it as if real. But when you wake up you go, 'Oh that was just a dream that wasn't real. This is real. This.' Normally, when we come out of an altered state of consciousness, we point at it the finger of rejection and say that isn't real. "Oh I was drunk, that's not real". "Oh I was high, that's not real." But sometimes people have certain kinds of experiences - altered state of consciousness - in which exactly the opposite occurs.

Quantum Change Theory

They go into that state and they come back and they say, 'That was more real. That was really real. And this is less real.' You see how that's axial? That's like "wait!!! That higher, higher – why do we call it a higher state of consciousness? – that higher state of consciousness, 'that', I had access to the real world". And when I come back, like somebody in Plato's cave, I've come back out of the sunlight. This, I now realize, is only echoes and shadows. It's less real. In fact, and because of my desire to be in contact with

what's real, I'm going to change myself and I'm going to change my world to try and recapture Sati. SATI!!! 'To remember' what that's like (taps the top of two circles on the board (*Śūnyatā*)). "I want to live in greater contact with that 'really real'", and so they start to transform their whole lives and their whole self. The whole Agent:Arena relationship is completely and radically, radically, revolutionary restructured. This is known as "quantum change theory" – bad name, bad name, good theory.

People do this. This is, of course, very important for understanding what happened to people like Siddhartha. In fact, most of the world religions that emerge at the axial revolution are predicated on the idea that there are higher states of consciousness. That should empower, challenge and encourage us to engage in such quantum transformation. To go through these radical transformative experiences. It's obviously at the core of Buddhism. You experience Satora-Satori. You realize *Śūnyatā*. It's at the core of Vedanta. When I experience Moksha and release. It's at the core of Taoism, I realize the Tao.

Optimizing the Ability of Forging Transformation

So, how is it that these experiences have such authority? But it's not just that they're important historically... They're at the core of the world religions... And you say "Well, what about the Western [religions]?" Like Sufism within Islam and the Christian mystic tradition and Karbala... All of the wisdom – all of the world traditions point to these higher states of consciousness that can bring about these radical, modal transformations in our cognition and our very being. And that's important enough! But when you do surveys - if you look at some of the work that's been done - 30 to 40 percent of the population has experienced these events. And it's like flow – across cultures, language groups, socioeconomic status, gender... Pervasive, and universal. Not universal in the sense that everybody has it, but universal in the sense that [there] doesn't seem to be any type class or order of human beings that is not capable of experiencing it.

So both qualitatively, historically and quantitatively, scientifically, this is an important phenomena. And here's what's really important for our purposes. There's a deep connection – remember I said before – there's a deep connection between how often you flow and how meaningful you find your

life. That is also more radically the case for these states. People who have experienced these higher states of consciousness and undergone these quantum changes, these deep transformational experiences, reliably import – and there's good experimental evidence to support it – that they have had a significant increase in meaning in life. In fact, many people report these experiences as the most significant in their life and that a lot of the meaning of their life is hinged upon these transformations. There are deep connections between awakening and recovering meaning. There are deep connections between awakening and insight - as I've already indicated and we'll come back to see, there's a deep continuity between this kind of insight (9 dot), mystical experience and full blown awakening experience.

My lab, we've just finished running - with my associate Anderson Tod, my lab director lab manager Juensung Kim, all of my wonderful RA's (Research Assistants), and they'll show up in the acknowledgment – we just have submitted a paper because we ran an experiment. We did a massive Mechanical Turk survey trying to see if there was a relationship between if people have a mystical experience and how meaningful they find their lives. And there is, in fact, a significant relationship between mystical experience and if you have meaning in life. We did a more fine grained analysis and this is consonant with the work of Samantha Heintzelman and others – experimental work showing that it's something like a capacity for insight, making sense which is often called coherence in the literature, that seems to be what's doing all the heavy lifting. So it doesn't really matter – if you'll allow me – so much what the content of your mystical experience is. In fact, very often there's no content, they are ineffable.

But what seems to be happening is you're somehow optimizing your capacity for making sense, both inwardly and outwardly. It's like what's happening is some improved optimization of this of anagoge and people find that deeply meaningful. So there is good reason to believe –I'm not, I'm not advocating Buddhism here. Because I've already pointed out there are similar claims in all of the mystical traditions and I'm not claiming that those traditions are all identical. I'm not Aldous Huxley. But, there seems to be some deep truths here about the nature of attention, the nature of mindfulness, and the enhancement of the ability to enter into these higher states of consciousness that can significantly alleviate existential distress and

bring about a pervasive and profound kind of optimization of our insight and our capacity for finding our lives meaningful. And that would be - being able to do all of those things, right; alleviate the existential anxiety, create a systematic kind of insight, a transformation of agency and arena that recovers the being mode - [to] forge transformation – I mean isn't that the core of meaning. And the ability to do it, wouldn't that be the core of wisdom?

So what I want to do is I want to continue on and I want to explore this. What's going on with mystical experiences? What's going on with these higher states of consciousness? Why are psychedelics coming back into the center of the cognitive scientific investigation? We've got to talk about consciousness. We have got to talk about altered states of consciousness. We've got to talk about higher states of consciousness and transformative experience. And what is the knowing that's going on here. Because it's no knowing of words. There's no words, there's no content – Pure Consciousness Event – they're not conscious of anything. This is everything's the same, it's just there's the resonant at-onement, the flowing.

What kind of knowing is it? That's what we're going to take a look at next time. Thank you very much.

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Episode 10: Consciousness

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. The last time we were talking more about mindfulness and trying to get an account of how mindfulness can bring about an insight. Not just a single insight into a single problem, but a modal insight, a systematic insight that is fully transformative of the Agent and Arena relationship, and bring about the alleviation of existential distress, and the affordness of enhanced meaning. And we took a

look at that by getting into the machinery of attention, and seeing that attention involves two kinds of "attentional scaling". Attention in/evolves an ability to engage in a transparency-opacity shift, and also breaking up gestalt into features, scaling down - the kind of thing we can enhance in meditation.

But it also involves an ability to scale up. To move from featured to Gestalt and to go from looking at something to looking more deeply into reality. And that in mindfulness, in meditation we're practicing the scaling down to break inappropriate framing and scaling up to train making better framing, and that if we can optimize by learning how to fluently flow between the two - bringing in an aspect of fluency and flow that we've already talked about - then we could optimize our capacity for much more comprehensive insight and we could take it.../ If we could take it to the depths of our-self, like we do in the pure consciousness event and the depths of reality and the resonant 'at-onement', if we could integrate those, optimize between them, we could bring about Prajñā a kind of non-duality that would be potentially transformative of the whole Agent:Arena relationship, dissipate modal confusion, enhance meaning in life by bringing about one of the most powerful kinds of mystical experience give people a sense of enhanced reality that will challenge, encourage and empower them to transform all of their existence and bring about a tremendous increase in meaning in life.

[We] talked about some recent cognitive science including some of my own theoretical and experimental work that seems to be supporting the claim that these higher states of consciousness can bring about these quantum changes, these radical kinds of transformative experience.

So today I want to talk about that. I want to talk about [the] transformative experience and the pivotal and really brilliant work of L.A. Paul on the notion of Transformative Experience. But before I do that we have to step back and talk a little bit about altered states of consciousness. We have to talk a little bit about what we mean by an altered state of consciousness, what we mean by this kind of transformation. And that gets us into one of the most difficult problems. David Chalmers famously called it the Hard Problem of consciousness. Arthur Schopenhauer called it the world not trying to explain consciousness is like trying to explain God. It is one of the

hardest problems. I'm not going to endeavor to do all of that, although I'm going to try and make use of some of the work that myself and Anderson Todd and Richard Wu have put into trying to understand at least some of the important functions and properties of consciousness and why altered states of consciousness can be so affording of radical transformative experience.

So one way to do this is to look at two sort of questions we can ask ourselves. One is what is consciousness? How does something like consciousness emerge out of the brain? That's sort of the nature of consciousness. And a lot of people are doing a lot of work on that. And then we can also ask questions about what's the function of consciousness? What does consciousness do? Those aren't the same question. Because you may be surprised to hear that we don't have a consensus on what consciousness to justice does. Most people know that consciousness is a mystery. But most people don't realize that what consciousness does is also a mystery. I mean think about it this way: You love your consciousness. You identify with it. You don't just - and you don't know your consciousness the way you know other things. You know your consciousness by being conscious! Like if I ask you if you're conscious right now you are. How did you do that. You just are conscious. And you know that you're conscious knowing and being - remember Aristotle conformity? - are the same. You participate in your consciousness.

And what would you give it up for? What if I said to you "you could have unlimited power and wealth. All you have to sacrifice is any consciousness of it!" Would you take the deal? Of course not. But what does it do? Well you say "well it's Obvious!". No it's not obvious. Because you can do, and you [can] do most of your things, without consciousness. I have no understanding, no conscious awareness I should say - I have some scientific understanding - I have no conscious awareness of what my brain is doing that is allowing me to generate speech. Do you? You don't. This complex sophisticated thing that we still can't get artificial intelligence to do well. It's happening almost completely unconsciously.

What is Consciousness for and What Does it Do?

What's my consciousness for? What does it do? So, two really important questions. How does something as mysterious and strange arise out of matter

(That's the nature question)? And what does it do? Again I am not going to presume or dare to try and answer these comprehensively. I don't need that for what we're doing here because I'm not trying to solve the hard problem of consciousness. I'm trying to solve the hard problem of meaning. One hard problem at a time please. But what I want to do is show you how a convergence of work that - some of the best work that's being done on consciousness - points towards something that will tell us why altered states of consciousness can be so valuable to us. So what about - one of the best accounts for the function of consciousness is called the Global workspace theory.

So the idea is that your consciousness functions very much like the desktop of your computer. So here's the idea you have your desktop (draws image on the board) and then you have all your files. And what you can do is you can activate a file you can bring that information into the desktop and you can activate this file and bring it into the desktop and then these pieces of information can interact with each other and then you can broadcast back to any or all or just one file the changes you brought about. That's how your desktop works. That's how you use it. Well what's the analogy? The analogy is here's all of your unconscious processing in your brain and what you do is you retrieve it, bring it into a space - something like working memory - you activate it so that the pieces of information can interact with each other and then you broadcast it back to any and all of the existing files.

Why do you want to do that? Why do you do it on your computer? Well you don't want all of your files active at the same time because that's a disaster. You want to be able - and notice what's going on here... You want to be able to select certain pieces of information that are relevant, bring them together, transform them in a way that's relevant and then broadcast the changes back that are needed. So the global workspace theory says this is - and it's gaining a lot of empirical evidence to support it - says this is what consciousness is functioning to do. Now this is very general. So more specifically - and so this theory is associated with Baars and then there was a paper by Shanahan and Baars that more specifically tried to answer the question about "yeah, but why this machinery?" (pointing at 'desk top' schematic/drawing on the board). Baars also published an attempt to answer that question more specifically in the Cambridge Handbook of consciousness. What it comes

down to is the idea that what this architecture (schematics on board) is helping to do is to solve a problem that's called the "frame problem". Now I'm going to talk much later specifically what the frame problem is, so put a pin in it - we're going to come back to it. But the basic idea here is: What this is doing is helping you to zero in on relevant information. And that's very, very important because there are three areas in which this is a huge issue.

The Three Important Areas Being Worked With..

One is all of the information that's available to me right now - we're got to have to talk about this later, but technically, mathematically the amount of information that's available in this room is astronomically vast, and I can't... I can't make use of all of it. I get overwhelmed by it. So part of what I have to do is select out of all of that information what information I'm going to make use of. (2) I also have a huge amount of information in my memory. Overwhelming. It's vast, and possible ways it could be connected... I have to select from some of that. (3) And then I have to put those pieces of information together in all the ways I can put together the information and from out there and the information about here... All so vast and overwhelming. Later on I'm going to give you mathematical arguments about this. Right now I just need you to get it intuitively.

So what consciousness is doing is it's helping these problems. It's helping you zero in on the relevant information. The relevant information from out there, the relevant information from in here and the relevant information that will help put those pieces of information together for you in the way that it's needed. Just like you do that. You do that with your computer. You search through your memory, you select what's relevant, you bring it onto the desktop, you put it together in a relevant manner right and then you use it in a relevant way. But we can't use a homunculus explanation - there's no little man running inside! What's doing all of that in a self organizing fashion is your consciousness. This helps to explain why consciousness is so tightly associated with working memory, and working memory is so tightly associated with intelligence.

The Core Function

The core function of consciousness seems to be to help you realize, become aware of, actualize, put into action, 'Relevance': relevant information. We're going to come back to this in more depth. There's a more neuroscientific and psychological account by people like Bor and Seth. When we measure when people are conscious it seems to correlate with certain kinds of brain activity. What kind of brain [activity]? The brain activity that seems to be involved when people are chunking information or when they are restructuring it, like an insight. I've already showing you this. This ability to manipulate attention to afford insight. They're arguing that that's one of the key functions of conscious. But what does... what is all of that doing? It's the same thing right? The Bor and Seth model is basically saying the [that] function of consciousness is to give you a dynamic improvement in your ability to zero in on relevant information. One of the most prominent theories of the nature of consciousness right now is Tononi's is "Integrated Information Theory".

Integrated Information Theory

Now his theory is not about the function of consciousness it's about the nature of consciousness. But of course he's going to give a derived account of the function. What is consciousness according to him? It's how powerfully integrated pieces of information are. How much one piece of information in your brain is causally dependent on interacting and affecting other pieces of information in your brain. The more tightly the integration, the more powerful the processing, then what he would say is the more likely that complex, as he calls it because it's actually a complexification of information, is going to be affording consciousness. But then when you ask him "Well why is consciousness... Why...? 'That' might be what consciousness is...", I Think there's much more to consciousness, but for the sake of argument, "...that might be what consciousness is. But why is consciousness doing this massive complexification of information?" So he actually proposes something like a Turin test for consciousness. He says "you can test to see how conscious a system is by giving it anomalous pictures and figuring out if the pictures don't make good sense." Here, look, here's the idea: When I'm complexifying, when I'm doing this very dynamic integration of information, what that's tracking is how much I'm actually picking up on the patterns in the world; making sense of the world! The

reason why I'm doing this (IIT) is precisely because I'm trying to, as best I can, track the complexity of the world.

So what's the main function? Well, the main function of the Integrated Information is to allow you to determine if pieces of information are relevant to each other and relevant to you. What consciousness seems to be... Now let's be careful: what I'm not saying, I'm not saying that every instance of relevance realization is consciousness. What I'm arguing is that what consciousness seems to do is the following: It seems to be a way in which you can coordinate attention and other related abilities of awareness so as to optimize how insightfully you can make sense of your world. So that's why you need consciousness for complex situations that require insight for situations and problems that have a high degree of novelty or challenge in them. It's why you can reduce consciousness when the problem has become very well-defined for you, it doesn't have a high degree of novelty, it doesn't require insight.

Sizing Up

I don't know if this is a complete account of the function of consciousness but it explains something we've already noted. That when you have an insight what do you have? You have a flash. It's like you get a sudden brightening of consciousness. It explains why you might want to alter your state of consciousness because if I alter my state of consciousness I'm going to alter what I'm finding relevant and how it is standing out for me: how it is salient for me. Let's put a lot of this stuff together: the machinery we had about attention; stuff we've talked about about fluency; stuff we talked about salience, and notice of phenomena that Matson called "Sizing up". Right.

Part of what's happening, part of what consciousness is doing, is it's creating a salience landscape for me. What does that mean for me? Well, first of all I'm picking out, out of all of the things I could pick out - and when I say "I" don't mean "me", I mean "my consciousness", I'm picking out some features ("Featurization" written on the board). You are not paying attention to every piece of information in this room. You can't. It's overwhelmingly vast. But you pick out on some. And then what you do, also is you begin... so you've already selected and you start to prioritize it and you foreground ("foregrounding" written on the board) some of it. So for example,

presumably, I'm for grounded and what's around me is backgrounded. And of course we've already seen it's going both ways. Remember that right? And notice again what I'm looking at, what I'm looking through, and I'm taking the features and I'm starting to foreground them and then I'm going to gestalt those features. I'm going to "figure" (written on board) I'm going to create a figure. We use this language of "figuring out", figuring out, and making something... you're... I'm making it stand out even more (more salient to me) and I'm also configuring, con-figuring it together. So all the features, and then foregrounded, then this (cup) is getting configured (changes figure on board to "figuration"). This also is feeding back (Figuration -> Featurization). And then of course I'm "framing" problems ("framing" written on the board beyond feedback). I'm framing problems; we've been talking about that all through this series. So you've got a very complex dynamical system at work.

So what's happening right now is your consciousness is creating a salience landscape. Some things are rising up out of unintelligibility as features that are getting for grounded and configured. And then you're framing problems around them and then things are shifting and and your attention is shifting around. Other things are becoming sa[lient] and you've got this highly textured, highly flowing, salience landscape. That's what it's like to be here right now.

Now there's more going on of course, right? So part of what I'm doing, I get this salience landscape and my problem is around the cup, but I'm not quite sure, so I move around it. I try to get into an optimal position. If I get too close I lose too much of the gestalt, and if I get too far away I may see the whole thing but I'm losing the details. I need to get to the right place where I can metaphorically and also literally in this sense get what ***Marla Aponte*** Calls "An Optimal Grip" on it. So what I'm trying to do is I'm trying to get... I'm optimizing between gestalt and feature; between looking through and looking at; I'm optimizing within this whole sizing up. So I'm taking my salience landscape and I'm using it to get an optimal grip on things. Not maximal. And 'grip' is meant here as a metaphor. It's meant for my contact, my interactional contact. How can we understand what this optimal grip is doing? Look.... When I when I get the salience landscape (using the cup again) and I adjust, an affordance opens up.

What's an affordance? This is goes back to Gibson; the idea of visual perception is this active process of landscaping. The cup is graspable to me. That's not a property of the cup per-say because it's not graspable by a praying mantis. It's not a property just of my hand because I can't.... my hand alone can't grasp. An affordance is setting up a relationship of coordination between the constraints in the thing and the constraints in my hand so that I can engage in an interaction. So it's a way of co-identifying. The cup is... This thing is... It's been made salient to me. I've got now an optimal grip on it such that I can create affordances. So it is presenting itself to me and I am configuring myself to it. It is grasping all by me. And what... And this is Gibson's point: You don't really... You don't see colors and shapes... What you see are affordances. I see that this is walkable. That this is where I can place things. That this is movable.

What Consciousness is Doing, Down to the Depth Landscape

So, do you see? You get the basics. The salience landscape gets you in contact then you start the optimal gripping and the optimal gripping gets you into the creation of affordances where basically the agent and the arena are being co-identified. I'm a grasper and this is graspable. I am presenting myself to it and it is presenting itself to me. So you have consciousness is setting up a "salience landscape", but within this you're doing this process of "sizing up" and that produces a "Presence Landscape". You get a whole bunch of... A whole affordance network is laid out for you. But that's not enough. Remember we talked about with flow... You need to be able to track the differences between correlational patterns and causal patterns. As you interact with things your brain is figuring out the causal patterns as opposed to the merely correlational. This is the "Depth Landscape". This is your ability to figure out... You see kids doing this right... You got the two year old and they got this spoon and what do they... They pick up the spoon and they drop it on the floor. You pick it up they pick [it] and they BANG BANG BANG... and they do this over and over again. Why are they doing that? Because they're trying to use their salience landscape to generate affordances. The spoon is grasping all its throwable and it's droppable.

But why are they doing...? Why do they repeatedly grasp and throw and drop? Because they're trying to figure out the causal patterns around the spoon. They're transforming the salience landscape into a presence landscape and that into a depth landscape. They're getting a deep kind of understanding - not in words - but interactionally. Of the spoon. This is what consciousness is doing for you. It's doing it right now. It's laying out... It's.... All of this is a way in which consciousness is helping you zero in on relevant information. It's creating this textured salience landscape so that certain things stand out for you and other things don't as much. And it's constantly shifting dynamically. And then within that it's creating a presence landscape of how you and what's salient are being co-identified, coupled together into an agent and arena relationship and then it's also affording you. And that's dynamic because the affordances are constantly shifting. And then that's affording you 'tracking the causal patterns', getting into deeper contact with the guts of the world. That's what consciousness is doing.

So if I were to transform my consciousness, I'm going to be transforming all of this machinery. I'm going to be transforming my salience landscape, my presence landscape, my depth landscape. The patterns I'm going to track, the kind of agent I can be, the kind of arena I can be in are going to be radically transformed. And I won't have just a flash of insight like I do with a 9 dot problem. I will have a systematic... Look, an altered state of consciousness is not a... It's not an insight in consciousness it's an insight of consciousness. It's a radical transformation of all of your landscapes, not just this particular problem. Look, I'll try and show you what I mean by this; by a "systematic insight".

A Systematic Insight

So this goes back to childhood development. Pivotal work of Piaget in psychology. And this is picking up again on one of the metaphors we were using. We use "wisdom is like enlightenment", "wisdom is like waking up" and here's another one "Wisdom, like, as the child is to the adult, the adult is to the sage. Wisdom is like growing up". OK, so you take a four year old and you do this, you count out five candies: one two three four five. You need a four year old because they can count and they understand that five is more than four, it's less than six. You count it out right and then you count out five

more candies: one two three four five. You show them that like this (one line of candies more spread out than the other). And you say "which row do you want?" And they reliably... And you've counted. They know there's five here. They know that there's five here. But they confidently pick this row (the more spread out one) and here's the thing: all the kids do it and that mistake is related to a whole bunch of other kinds of mistakes they're making. They're not making just a single error.

Look, this is what made Piaget a great, great scientist... Why he's a pivotal figure in trying to understand development - and think about Aristotle and development. See there have been lots of IQ testing way before Piaget - people have been testing kids IQ for a while - and they had been throwing away the errors as garbage because what you paid attention to was what the kid got right. ("yeah... Success... And the Protestant work ethic... yeah, yeah...") Piaget had this insight and he'd say "but wait! Wait, wait! What if there's a pattern in the errors? If the errors are systematic and not random, then that would mean that there are constraints..." - remember constraints? - "...there are constraints operating in the child's cognition". And maybe we could understand... and think about Aristotle again... And biology, because Piaget was, guess what? ...A biologist! Maybe we could understand development in terms of how those constraints are shifting and how they're... how they're shaping the kid's sensory motor interaction with the world. And what he found was in fact that the errors are systematic. The kids are... all of the kids are making this kind of error and they're making a whole bunch of related errors. There's a whole system of errors. And so that points to some underlying set of constraints. Now what's going on? What's going on here (candies)? Why is the kid picking the lower row? Because it takes up more space. Think about everything we've talked about here. This variable (longer spread of candies] is super salient to them.

Their salience landscape is only picking up on that. Now you, I hope, don't fall prey to this because you're also picking up on another variable at the same time. You also make salient that the extra space is non-candy space and therefore is what? ...Not relevant. But the kid doesn't pick up on that. Their salience landscape is not sizing that up. And so they don't have the same affordance as you. Now notice this: You see through this illusion because you're salience landscape has been trained to pay attention to these multiple

variables at the same time. The way you size things up, integrate them in attention means you don't fall prey to this. Part of the way in which you become wiser than the child - you don't fall prey to self deceptive illusion - is because you've trained your salience landscape to zero in on the relative information in the relevant way. Now think about 'this' (super salience)... Remember we talked about salience and how when things are super salient to you that triggers bullshitting and self-deception. If I could change my salience landscape, I don't fall prey to this, I don't fall prey to the illusion and I wouldn't act foolishly.

Now, what I need you to understand is, here's a whole bunch of these errors that the kid is making (draws on the board). They form a system and they all have to deal with the fact that the salience landscape has not been sufficiently cultivated. So the kid might have an insight here, but it doesn't really matter because they're still going to be blocked in this problem and this problem and this problem. They're still going to be locked into a particular stage of development. But what if, and this is an idea that [I'm] working out in conjunction with Juensung Kim. What if you didn't have as a single insight? What if you had a systematic insight? An insight that changed the whole system. It wasn't an insight in your consciousness. It was an insight of your consciousness, in which you're changing your salience landscaping as opposed to just changing how you're framing a particular problem.

That's what the child does when it develops. It actually changes its salience landscaping so that this whole system of errors falls away and it starts to see through an illusion and into reality. Here's the thing you need to now think (writes Child -> Adult -> Sage on the board) and you've heard me say it: You have trained your salience landscape so that you do not fall prey to the systematic illusions of the four year old. Yes? Yes! But you know what? You are falling prey to a lot of systematic illusions you're not aware of because you can only become aware of them if you can transform your salience landscape, your presence landscape and your depth landscape to get in at what is actually most relevant systematically. Not here and here. All of us can have an insight here and here. But what it is... What is it to have a systematic improvement in insight? That's to be wise.

Your Significance Landscape

When you have salience systematically tracking presence in depth so that you can wisely zero in on the relevant information and make your life more meaningful... That's your "Significance Landscape". It protects you from bullshitting. It allows you to see through illusion and into reality. And it affords you having things more present to you. It would afford you to have a more comprehensive, flowing relationship with reality.

Altered states of consciousness have this potential. To create an insight of consciousness. Now they also have the potential to do the opposite. They have the potential to screw up your salience landscaping and make yourself more prone to bullshit! More prone to self deception. That's why most altered states of consciousness are rejected as being allusory and illusory. But why is it then, why is it then that certain altered states of consciousness have the opposite? Why is it that certain altered state of consciousness feel like this (board)? Like "Wait! It all makes sense now! I'm seeing through illusion into reality in a way I haven't before. Why is that altered state more real? The 'really real'...", As Plato was fond of saying "...and this, this every day is less real". Why do I feel like I woke up? That I became an adult to my previous form, that seemed to me like a child? What's going on?

So, let's set up the problem because getting clear about the problem is half the battle. Formulating a problem well is much, much of the important work at trying to bring a solution to it. So we know that many people experience, as I mentioned, these higher states of consciousness. And what... reliably - we'll talk about the phenomenological profile in a bit - but reliably what is characteristic of these states is that people find them to be really real and and in both directions: Arena and Agent. They say "wow that's the way the world really is". And they also say "this is who I really am". So much so that I'm going to transform my everyday experience so that it comes more consonant with that realness, that enhanced realness. So there's a mutual 'moreness', a mutual more-real-ness that happens in these higher states of consciousness and it's prescriptive, it demands change. It challenges people to change. It taps into those platonic meta-drives of getting your fullness of being, your real self and getting the fullness of contact reality. It switches those on and you go "I need to have that! I've got to try it. I'm willing to transform

everything in order to get back to that really real world and that really real self".

Ontonormativity

So I call this... So we have a higher state of consciousness. I call this the problem of the "Ontonormativity." Remember that "ontology" has to do with the structure of reality. Normative is when things are placing a demand on you to be better, to improve. So these higher states of consciousness are precisely 'experiences-higher' because they're challenging you to change because they're presenting you more-realness, and they're triggering those platonic meta-drives.

Now as I mentioned, these states are historically important and they're pervasive. So you can read Taylor's book "Waking from sleep". He has about one hundred and fifty interviews. You can read many of them. He presents a lot of first person narratives of these people and these experience[s]. You can take a look at Newberg's book "how enlightenment changes your brain". He did an online survey of fifteen hundred people in 2016. As I mentioned there's just larger general surveys of how often people have these kinds of experiences and they range in intensity but it's around 30 to 40 percent of the population. So we have to take these experiences seriously. We know that from the work at the Griffiths lab that what's happening in a subset of psychedelic experiences - so here's (drawing) all the psychedelic experiences; you have a subset of which people have a mystical experience; and some of those people, the mystical experience is deeply transformative - It triggers that kind of quantum change.

OK, so why is the Ontonormativity of higher states of consciousness problematic? Well here's why... The transformative experience that people undergo, the radical transformations they're willing to make, seems to be driven and justified by this (HSA -> Ontonormativity). They say/ ..."Why are you doing this?" [they say] "I'm doing this because I had this experience and it was more real and I've got to stay in touch with more real!" They justify this transformation... I mean, sorry... I don't mean to be reductive and I'm not being disrespectful but, you know, Buddhism and Taoism and Vedanta and the core of aspects of Judaism and the mystical traditions in Christianity and Islam come down to this claim: "I had this (HSC ->

Ontonormativity) and it justifies what I'm telling you. It explains and motivates the changes that I underwent". But why is that problematic? Look, because it's, like I said, it is in contrast to how we treat most of our altered states of consciousness. We go into dreaming, we come back and we say that's not real. We go into these, we come back and say that was more real and this is less real.

Dreams vs HSC

Now, let me try and explicate this problem further. Look, why do you reject your dreaming as unreal? Why? Because when you're in the dream it seems real! Because when you come out, that pattern, those things that happened in your dream don't cohere with the rest of your life. You've got this overall coherent picture of your life. Intelligibility - remember Plato. This overall picture makes the most sense of the most of your experience and if Plato's right the more intelligible something is the more real it is. This picture is more intelligible. It's more real. The dream is bizarre, it doesn't fit in. Ergo: less real!

So, realness is something like the pattern of intelligibility with the widest scope. Wide and rich coherence of content. It makes the most sense of the most of your experience. Puts together your beliefs and your memories. Etc.. But look what's happening in a higher state of consciousness. It's [the] exact reverse! You have this single experience. It doesn't cohere with the rest of your life, because that's why it challenges the rest of your life. It doesn't cohere with the rest of the life, it tells you that the rest of this is illusory and you need to change it! In fact, the difference is so great that instead of rejecting it you reject your everyday experience! So the thing that you use to reject the dream... So, look at the picture: "I use all of 'this' and I reject the dream. And then I have the higher state of consciousness - again a single thing - and I use this to reject all of 'this'! What's going on?

The higher state of consciousness is a temporary experience. It does not cohere with the rest of our experience. That's how and why it can challenge and demand such radical transformation of our everyday life, our everyday self. And here's what's even more, I don't know, perplexing! It does this without providing any new intelligible content. These experiences are traditionally ineffable. You can't put it into words. They are traditionally

trans-rational. You can't give any argument or explanation or justification. How is it that this temporary experience that you...? "Why? What was it? Describe the experience!" "I can't, I can't describe it!" "Well can you explain to me what...?" "I, no, I can't! I can't explain it". So there's no content, it's temporary and yet somehow it goes the exact opposite of most altered states of consciousness. These states, these so-called 'higher states' should be the ones we most reject. They're temporary. They challenge all of our intelligibility coherence. They don't produce any viable explanation. Any viable content and yet we promote them as the really-real and use them to reject our everyday experience. And that's the core of the axial revolution. This problem of the Ontonormativity of higher states of consciousness goes to the heart of the axial revolution and the way it is still informing our very cognitive grammar and our existential ways of being right here, right now.

That's the problem of the Ontonormativity of Higher States of Consciousness. Now, we know that there is a possibility that altered states of consciousness can bring about a developmental improvement. But but? How? How do we tie this (insight development) to this (HSC & Ontonormativity)? Can we give an adequate enough explanation of these higher states of consciousness? And we need to do one that will help to explain why triggering them can be so transformative. Because here's the thing: ***Aiden's***???? work shows: peoples lives do get better. They're not making it up. After they've had these these higher states of consciousness - this encounter with the really-real - their lives get better! By all kinds of important measures. Measures of meaning, relationship, problems... They get better!

What Do We Need to Address This Disparity?

OK so what do we need? We need... We have to solve this problem! We have to make some progress on it! We need actually two explanations that need to be integrated together. First of all I need a descriptive explanation. I need an account of the underlying processes; cognitive, brain processes - we'll talk about this - that explain the phenomenological, the experiential nature of these states. Why do people... like, when people describe what's happening in these states, why do... why does it have the features it has? It has to

explain why people feel it being more real. Why it feels that it justifies, empowers, and motivates them to undergo transformative experience.

Descriptive and Prescriptive Accounting for these Claims

But in addition to something that's a descriptive account, I need a prescriptive account. I mean the first account is going to be largely psychological. This is what's happening and this is why people are experiencing the way they're experiencing it. That's descriptively adequate. But prescriptively adequate has to show me this: Is it actually a legitimate thing? Do these states actually provide a rational justification and a guide for the transformations that people are claiming on their behalf? Are these states actually, philosophically justifiable? Or is their claim to Ontonormativity all just an illusion? Is it rationally justifiable? Now this prescriptive account must integrate with the mechanisms and processes of the descriptive account in order to be overall coherent. In order to give us the best explanation of how and why these states are operating.

The Descriptive Account: The Introduction to A Cognitive Scientific Approach

So, the descriptive account... the best way to do this is to do a cognitive scientific approach. Now at some point I'm going to teach you in this series how to do good cognitive science, but one of what we're doing in good cognitive science is we're plausibly trying to integrate different levels in our descriptive analysis. My descriptive account should give me a good account of the cognitive processes that are at work in the mind. It should give me a good account - and that's going to rely largely on psychology - it should also give me a good account of the information processes that are at work. That's going to rely on ideas drawn from artificial intelligence and machine learning because that's the project when we're trying to most understand and optimize information processing. It should also draw on neuroscientific accounts of what's happening in the brain. I need an account that simultaneously elucidates each one of these - the cognitive mechanisms; the machine learning mechanisms; and the neurological mechanisms - and does

that in an integrative, mutually informative fashion. I want a plausible integration. That's what I need for the good descriptive account.

That's what I'm going to give. I'm going to try and argue how we can understand why these higher states of consciousness are the way they are in terms of all of those: the cognitive, the machine learning, and the neuroscientific level. After I'm doing that I'm going to then endeavor to try and show you how those processes, the cognitive processes, the information processing processes, the neurological processes, actually provide a rational justification for the transformation that the people undertake. It's not the kind of justification you might be expecting!

What I'm going to argue for is that it is not that these states provide us with any special knowledge. Because these states are not about changing evidence, acquiring new evidence, the way science [does], and we should not use these higher states of consciousness as a way of challenging our scientific claims. And many people will do this.

But the mistake is to then think "well that's it! That's the sum total. We've shown that these higher states of consciousness don't generate reliable kinds of knowledge, so we should reject them is irrational!" No, because that's again to think that the whole point of your cognition and your rationality is to get better beliefs, and I've already been showing you through this series that there's much more to it. When the child no longer falls prey to the illusion, no new facts have been discovered! The child knew that there were five candies on top and below. No new facts. It's not like there's been a new scientific discovery about space or candies! What changed? What changed is not knowledge. What changed was wisdom. The child has learned to see through illusion and into reality. And what I want to pursue with you is this idea: That higher states of [consciousness/cognition?] are rational not because they provide us with new knowledge - Look! Look... People go into these states and they come out with exactly opposite conclusions. You can read... I've read so many of these reports! People go in and they have this higher state of consciousness and they said "oh! And i knew god!" People go and they have this higher state of conscience "and I knew there was no God!". Exactly the opposite. The content is diametrically opposite. People will say very metaphysical claims!

What's changing is not the content. Not this or that piece of knowledge. What's changing is your functioning. You're not gaining knowledge you're gaining wisdom. You're gaining skills and sensibilities and sensitivities of significance landscaping that radically transform your existential mode.

That is why, for example, that the Buddha famously refused to answer metaphysical questions about Nirvana, about enlightenment, because that's not the point. That's not what this is about. This is not about getting supra-scientific knowledge. This is about getting extraordinary wisdom and transformation. We're going to take a look more at trying to answer the problem of higher states of consciousness next time and we'll return also back to discussing more how the Buddha integrated that into trying to deal with some of the deepest problems that we face as entities that have to realize relevance; pursue salience; deal with existential anxiety; cultivate significance and meaning; try and overcome our illusions and delusions and find a fullness of being in an optimal grip on the world. Thank you very much for your time.

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Episode 11: Higher States of Consciousness, Part 1

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. Last time we were discussing the Axial age within ancient India. We were focusing in on a pivotal figure of Siddhārtha Gautama; The Buddha. And we had been talking about his particular story. We talked about the two modes of being that were being represented in his story of leaving the palace. The having mode and the Being mode. And we talked about modal confusion and about overcoming it. We followed him to where he's sitting under the Bodie tree and he achieves a deep kind of realization, a deep state of enlightenment. Along the way we had discussed what mindfulness is, how mindfulness operates through attentional scaling and how it can increase your cognitive flexibility, your capacity for insight. And then we were trying to draw this all together with some cognitive science - a discussion of "what is it to experience enlightenment?" Now I'm not offering, right now, a complete account or anything like a comprehensive theory of enlightenment. We're gonna be slowly working towards that as we move through this lecture series. But I do want to get into and continue the discussion of these higher states of consciousness.

So if you remember, they are very problematic but they're at the core of many of the Axial Age world religions and foundational philosophies. This is the idea that people have an alternative state of consciousness that they regard as somehow more real than their everyday state of consciousness. And that's problematic precisely because we tend to judge realness by how well we get an overall coherence in our intelligibility, how we're making sense of things. But in these altered states that are very different from our everyday consciousness and therefore do not cohere with it, people do the alternative. Instead of rejecting it the way we reject dreaming, for example, because it doesn't cohere with our everyday experience, people reject the everyday experience as illusory and they say that this state of consciousness somehow gives them an improved access to reality.

And as you remember, as we've been going through the Axial Age Revolution and the sense of wisdom and meaning that is attended upon it, this ability to transcend through illusion and get connected to what is more real is central to what wisdom means. And having some deep sense of connectedness to reality is also central to what it is to regard one's life as authentically meaningful in some fashion.

So that was the problem we had set up: the problem of higher states of consciousness. Now I want to start by talking about what it's like to give a theory that - we talked about this also last time - we want a theory that's both descriptively adequate and prescriptively adequate. A descriptive theory should tell me... give me a good explanation for why these higher states of consciousness have the experiential feel that they have and why they're able to produce these deep kinds of transformations because if you remember, what typically happens is, because people have sensed this deep connectedness to reality, and because being connected to reality is one of the fundamental ways in which we make our lives meaningful, people will radically transform their whole lives, their sense of self, their interpersonal relationship in order to maintain and enhance that connectedness to this deepened reality.

So we need to explain... give a descriptively adequate explanation and this has to work at multiple levels and this is where cognitive science is so important because of the way it tries to bridge between these various levels and disciplines. We need to give an account of the psychological processes, of the information processes, and ultimately the brain processes that are at work. Then we need a prescriptively adequate theory of higher states of consciousness. We need an account that explains why it might be considered rationally justifiable that these states authorize and legitimate such transformations. Can we see why these states should be listened to when they claim to give us access to a deeper reality?

Now, in order to carry out the first one, seeing what Siddhārtha was going through when he's achieving this higher state of consciousness, this awakened state. And if you remember last time we talked about how comprehensively extended this is, not only qualitatively through the world religions, but just quantitatively through the population. A 30 to 40 percent

of people report these awakening experiences and the resulting deep transformation. So in order to get to that let's talk about "what does it feel like to be in such a state?". And because we have these surveys and we have the work of Newberg and Taylor and we have lots of first person accounts, we can draw some general pictures of what's going on.

Breaking it Down Into Three

So there's three components we want to look at. We want to look at "how is the world being experienced?", "How is the self being experienced?" and "how is the relationship between the world and the self being experienced?". So let's start on the World side. So people report the following things: they report a tremendous sense of clarity. And this is both perceptual and cognitive. So the world seems extremely clear to them and makes sense to them in a way that it hasn't before. The perceptual part of that clarity is often experienced as bright. Things are shining. And that's the original meaning of glory for example. To go back to the Bible for example the term that is most often used to describe God is Glory which is not a moral term. It's a term about how 'shining' God is, how bright it is. Now you remember that's a feature that people also reliably report in the flow experience - that everything seems very vivid and bright and intense.

Clarity

Now what's interesting is that while people describe this clarity - and notice how this is gonna pick up on what we talked about when we talked about mindfulness - they talk about both an expansion of vision (so it's very comprehensive. They get almost like they're somehow aware of the whole of the world), but they also are aware of finite details. So this is captured for example in Blake's famous poem "To see the world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wild flower. To Hold infinity in the palm of your hand and to spend eternity in an hour". So you get this deep inter-penetration of sort of everything and the finite details. So you can see that, so, what you're getting is this massive expansion of that attentional scaling that we talked about, mindfulness enhancing, and thereby enhancing our capacity to break frame and make frame and get fundamental insight - and pay attention to the word insight - seeing into reality. So, overall there's an increased sense of making

sense of things. Making sense of things. So the world is both intricate and interesting in this extended and enhanced and shining way.

Beauty

So almost universally people describe this experience as "the world is beautiful". It's deeply beautiful to them and we'll come back at some point to talk about the connections between beauty and truth, particularly the work of Scarry about this. The world is very alive. It seems very alive during these experience because it's so pregnant with energy and significance. And all of "this", all of this comprehensiveness, we've got intricate detail, the shining, the beauty, the making sense all of this comes together in the notion of oneness. There is somehow an underlying oneness to everything. There's deep and profound integration which of course makes sense given that very often when we are explaining something we are finding what unifies and integrates them together.

Peace

What's happening on the side of the self? What's happening on the side of the self is people report a profound sense of peace, and this is not peace in an empty, just lack of conflict. It's very similar to what we talked about in Plato and you're probably seeing Plato's ideas about anagoge resonating with this. I hope you're seeing that. But remember in Plato that inter state of peace is one of inner harmony when all of the various components of your personality and your cognition are mutually, optimally, working together in concert. And this is the kind/ what people report. They often report that this is the greatest sense of peace they've ever experienced in their life. And if you remember in Plato this sense of peace is connected to and resonates with this enhanced sense of connectedness to reality. And interestingly enough that's what we're seeing in these descriptions.

Joy

People also describe experiencing profound joy. Now of course we've lost the sense of what this word means. And we've lost it precisely in words like "enjoyment" where enjoyment means having fun or pleasure. But Joy is not the experience of fun or pleasure, joy is the positive emotion you have when you experience a deep connection to what is good. So Joy is the experience

you have of this is really really good. Interestingly people often report a fundamental change in their sense of self and we're going to come back to this. They report two things: they'll often report that their normal sense of self has disappeared. They're egocentric, autobiographical sense of self has disappeared. And if you remember that's continuous with what we saw when people are in the flow state: they report that self-consciousness, that autobiographical narrative self is disappearing.

They often also report remembering, in the sense we talked about when we talked about Sati and remembering the being mode. They remember they say "I remember my true self; I remember who I really am!". So there is a profound connection inward to the core machinery of the self that is at one with a profound sense of connecting to the underlying pattern that governs, and makes intelligible, reality. People report that in this state they have a tremendous sense of energy and vitality. Again analogous to the flow state. And finally they report that they are going through - they often use this term - there is a tremendous sense of insight and understanding. Again, continuous with the flow state.

Now what about the relation (World <-> Self)? So this is deep connection. Profound connectedness. Deep at-onement. Again like the flow state, but even more. People feel so at-one that they start to feel that they are participating in the reality that they're connected to. They start to feel like they're sharing identity to it. And this way of thinking about this is when we talked about Aristotle's notion of the conformity theory of knowing. They feel so deeply conformed to this underlying reality, from the very core of their being, that they are experiencing an identification with it. But, this participatory knowing is so superlative and it's so profound and so transformative that, inevitably, people just say that the experience, that this connection, is ineffable. And we noted this well last time we were talking about [it]. How is it that these experiences that have no articulable, declarative content - because they're ineffable! You can't put them into words, you can't put them into propositional thought - nevertheless are considered so loaded with, so capable of bearing this signature of ultimate reality or realness for people?

So we need a descriptive theory that can account for all of these features. The features of how the world is experienced, how the self is experienced and the relation. Now what I've been showing you already of course is deep continuity with the flow experience. I'm not claiming it's a flow experience - it's more than that - but I'm showing you that there's continuity. Just like I showed you that there's continuity between the flow experience and the insight experience and that's why when people are having these higher states of consciousness they are also proposing a very profound insight. And notice how often when you have an insight it's also ineffable to you. You don't know how the insight arose or how it came to be, you just like aaah! I just see it.

Disruptive Strategies

Now, some other important things we should know about these states: These states are often preceded by "Disruptive Strategies". Disruptive strategies. These are strategies that are designed to disrupt your normal cognitive functioning and to alter your state of consciousness. So they can range from very long term strategies to very short term strategies. Long term strategies can be the ones we've already described, like Siddhārtha. Siddhārtha was engaged for six years [in] these practices, these mindfulness practices of meditation and contemplation and they bring about a very long term, incremental, but nevertheless also profound disruption in your normal state of consciousness and cognition. People also can pursue very short term disruptive strategies. These include things like fasting, sexual and sleep deprivation. If you remember we talked about how shamans will make use of these strategies in order to induce the shamanic state. They will expose themselves to drumming, chanting... All of these things disrupt your normal level of cognition and, of course, when we talked about this as well, people will make use of psychedelics precisely because of the way they are so deeply disruptive of your normal cognition and your normal state of consciousness.

(So what we know is that combinations. Wow. Sorry that's a little too strong... What we have, good...) Some initial good evidence is that combinations of these strategies can be very good. There was a recent experiment coming out of the Griffiths lab in 2018 in which people who

were practicing mindfulness and then took psychedelics tended to have a more enhanced experience than people who were just taking the psychedelics, for example. So you can combine the strategies together; they can be mutually supportive. Now what's important for this, as we'll come back and take a look at more carefully in a few minutes, is disruptive strategies are also central to setting up insight. And that should make sense to you given what we've talked about. You have to do a lot of breaking a frame, before you can open up the possibility of making an entirely new frame.

There was a recent experiment run by ***Yeayden et al***. 2017. They had 701 participants. 69% of them reported this, what I called "Ontonormativity"; this sense of the enhanced realness of their higher states of consciousness. And this was actually predictive of significant improvement across many dimensions of their life. There was significant improvement in family life, health, sense of purpose, spirituality and a release from the anxiety and fear of death. So the claim that these states do guide transformation has received empirical backing. Now ***Yeayden*** also brings out something important in that study that you don't see very well articulated in Newberg and in Taylor, and this is one of the disruptive strategies that people are often using and it bleeds into the phenomenology. By that I mean the experiential feel and structure of these experience. And this is the notion of De-centering.

De-Centering

So when people describe these experiences they shift from a very sort of first-person orientation and egocentric, to an allocentric. So they are not so egocentric. This is why this is called de-centering; they're speaking more from a third person perspective and allo-centric. So let me just give you a quick understanding of the difference between these terms. I can describe my motion egocentrically. Things that are in front of me, behind me, to the right of me, to the left of me. And that of course varies by how I am oriented because it is relative to me. But I can also describe my position allocentrically; I can say where I am relative to the North Pole for example right. So the first is a first-person, egocentric way of moving through the world. The second is an allocentric third person. Now extend that out.

People are much less egocentrically oriented when they're describing the experience of this state than they are normally. They're much more allocentrically oriented and that makes sense given how intensified the experience of reality is to them. It's like the salience of reality is finally capable of eclipsing the narcissistic glow of our own ego. And for a moment, at least, or for several moments, we get release! And this is an important idea: Nirvana means to blow out, to extinguish or the Vedanta term Moksha is release. We get a release from the imprisonment, the self idealization by the super salience and therefore the bullshitting of our own egocentric perspective. I mean do you not sometimes wish to be free from the prison cell of the super-salience of your own ego?

So, as I've been suggesting to you, these higher states of consciousness have a lot of features of insight. We've already talked about the insight.

Remember we did the 9 Dot problem for example. Those "aha" moments because you get, in that moment of insight, you get a flash of insight. You get sort of super-salience; things are making sense to you; you get insight; it's almost visual, into an underlying pattern; a unity a oneness that wasn't there before; your sense of what's relevant and important has been altered. And this ability to radically make sense, to find coherence, an underlying, intelligible integrative pattern... This, we now know from current work, is directly predictive of the experience of meaning in life. So Samantha Heintzelman, whose work I recommend to you. I also got to meet Samantha in person and got to talk to her about this. But what she has is good experimental evidence of the following: If you give people a bunch of scenes that make sense to them, that they can sort of determine an underlying pattern to, and then ask them how meaningful their lives are, they will rate their lives as more meaningful. The act - do you understand? - the act of making sense, of finding coherence, actually makes people experience their lives as more meaningful.

They're not being shown profound pictures or deeply dramatic or narrative scenes or emotionally... They're just showing some very basic pictures. But the act of making sense, of finding coherence, elevates the sense of how meaningful their lives are. So, let's start to put this together: if you were to have an insight, that would give you an even more sudden increase in your sense of meaning in life, and what if it's in flow? Well that's going to be even

more enhanced sense of meaning in life. And we already know that. The more often you have flow experiences, the more meaningful you find your life. And now what if it's beyond that? What if it's a higher state of consciousness that brings you this radical sense of deep intelligibility, not only of the world but of yourself in both directions at the same time? Well that is going to give you a profound sense of increased meaning in life.

Now if you get - try to put this together - if you get enhanced meaning in life coupled to an enhanced sense of understanding and that actually does guide you in improving your life, that is going to build a tremendous amount of confidence in you, that you've found a path towards self-transcendence and wisdom. We can start to understand some of the Buddha's confidence. Now what do we know about these flashes of insight?

Fluency

Well ***Tobilinski / Toplinski ***??? and Reber, in 2010 (This is a different Reber; not the implicit learning Reber.) talk about how insight is a "Fluency" Spike. Although it's related to flow it's not the same thing. Fluency is a general property of all of your cognitive processing. So how can we understand it? Well initially people thought that fluency was a sense of how easy it was to process things. So the basic idea is if I make it easier for you to process information, you will rate that information as better, more trustworthy, more believable, regardless of the actual semantic content.

So for example, compare this (black word 'fluency') to this (orange word 'fluency') - the contrast isn't as great and if I were to get you to read some text in black and the exact same text in the orange you will rate what you read in the black as better, you'll have more confidence in it, more likely to be true. The semantic content is exactly equal. It's because it's easier for you to process the black and white contrast than the orange on white contrast. Now it turns out it's not quite ease of processing just because simply repeating a stimulus doesn't trigger this sense of fluency. It's more like how accessible the information is; how applicable it is. I would argue that it's how well your system is zeroing in on the relevant information. How much has the information been formatted for you so that you can zero in on relevant information. A way of thinking about this, to help make sense of it, is our discussion of psycho-technologies: alphabetic literacy made your cognitive

processing more fluent and that improved your ability, your cognitive power, and by improving your cognitive power that gives you an enhanced sense of how real and important the information you're processing is.

So the idea here is, when you are fluent you are processing information very efficiently. When you have, according to ***Tobilinski***??? and Reber, when you have an insight experience, what you're getting is a sudden spike in fluency. You're getting a significant increase in how fluently you're processing and therefore you start to judge the information that you're processing there in as likely being more real. Now, is this an absolute perfect rule? No! But the fact that it's domain general. The fact that it seems to be part of our evolutionary heritage. And there's also some independent logical argumentation indicating that this fluency heuristic that your brain uses, is actually a very good strategy. It's very generally the case - not perfectly, not certainty - but very generally the case that in real world situations, if you are processing them very fluently, you are picking up on the real patterns. So insight is "zeroing" in.

And then we talked about flow as an insight cascade which is even more zeroing in, and it's coupled to implicit learning in which you're picking - remember ? - you're picking up on bigger patterns that you're not consciously aware of. You can't put them into declarative utterances. Do you see what's happening here? So in the higher states... As you start to move towards the higher state of consciousness like flow, you're getting this enhanced fluency so your brain is working very optimally and the implicit learning is picking up on very complex patterns and you're tending to zero in on the causal ones rather than the correlational ones. I'm using all of this machinery we've already discussed because as I mentioned in the flow state you're starting to get a lot of the features of the mystical experiences and ultimately those mystical experiences that can be transformative, thereby enhancing meaning in life and your sense of connectedness to realness.

You get the "at-onement" in the flow state, the radical loss of self-consciousness, you're not egocentric. Although you know there's tremendous energy it feels effortless to you. It's graceful, there's a super-salience. It's intrinsically rewarding. It's evolutionarily marked in. Its domain general and

universal... All this stuff we've talked about. This is all being triggered in the higher states of consciousness.

Continuity Hypothesis

So this leads to a hypothesis I want to present to you. This hypothesis is a "Continuity" hypothesis. Why are we doing this? Why are we doing this? We are doing this because we want a scientifically legitimate, scientifically plausible explanation of what's going on when somebody claims enlightenment. Like Siddhartha Gautama. When somebody claims radical self transcendence like Plato because we want something that gives a good explanation for what's actually happening and a good justification for why somebody should follow and be guided by these transformative experiences.

OK. So what's the continuity hypothesis? The continuity hypothesis is the idea... - so this is a hypothesis I'm giving you, although as I was doing research on this Newberg, independently from me - we haven't spoken - has also come up with a version of the continuity hypothesis. It's not as developed as the one I'm going to give you but it's completely consonant with it. So the idea is Fluency gets enhanced in Insight; Insight gets enhanced in flow. So you've seen all those arguments already and then the idea is, as I'm trying to show you, Flow experiences can be enhanced into mystical experiences. And then there are mystical experiences that can bring about a transformative experience. These are the higher states of consciousness in which people are willing to transform. We'll come back to the problem of transformative experience.

So the continuity hypothesis is basically the same machinery is being used but it is being exaptated - remember exaptation? It is being progressively exapted into more and more powerful processing that can afford, what I'm going, to argue a rationally justifiable guidance into the kinds of transformation that we are seeking when we are seeking to cultivate wisdom and enhance meaning in life. When we are seeking to awaken from the meaning crisis we are trying to invoke one of these awakening experiences. And remember that's what Buddha means the awakened one.

So, Newberg argues that if you have a lot of these kinds of experiences, what he calls little enlightenment experiences, or regular insights, that this will

eventually produce these kinds of experiences (Mystical Experiences). So this is not only a continuity hypothesis, this is a priming hypothesis. And I support that as well. The more you are practicing mindfulness, which we know is predictive of insight and flow (we know that mindfulness practices are predictive of mystical experiences. We know that they are connected to transformative experiences), the more you can prime this pump, the more you will be able to bring about this enhanced connectedness. This enhanced anagoge. So, this (I think) idea of the continuity hypothesis will help us to begin to explain what's going on in the higher states of consciousness and eventually use the very same machinery that we talk about in explaining it to justify it, to give a rational justification for it.

We know for example that in flow there has to be a relevant expertise. Remember we've talked about this. The flow state is when your skills - your expertise - can meet the demands of the situation. If you don't have the relevant skills you can't get into the flow state. So I can get into the flow state as a martial artist because I have cultivated the expertise. I can get in to a flow state while lecturing because I've been doing it for twenty four years. I have the relevant expertise. So what we might ask, and what you should ask me right now is "Well John, like what's flowing in these higher states of consciousness? What expertise are you using?". Well what I want to argue to you is it's a fundamental kind of expertise one that's central to your everyday experience of making sense of the world on a day to day basis.

So this ultimately goes back to work by Merleau Ponty especially in the book "The Phenomenology of Perception". But the people who I'm going to most often refer to the work of Hubert Dreyfus. Dreyfus is famous within cognitive science for bringing the work of Merleau Ponty and others into cognitive science and also the work of Dreyfus and Taylor. This is the Charles Taylor that we've already talked about with connection to the Axial Revolution in a book called *Retrieving Realism*.

Optimal Grip

So what process is being optimized here? Dreyfus and others talk about what they call "Optimal Grip". That's soooo... I mean, they meet it metaphorically because we're talking about cognition, but that is such a wonderfully felicitous term because again it harkens back to the Conformity Theory of

cognition, a Contact Epistemology, that of course Charles Taylor introduced us to. What did they mean by that? So part of this is the idea that when we're - let's talk about it first perceptually - when I'm trying to perceive an object, especially if I don't know what the object is initially, I don't remain static. I'm going to move around the object (cup again) until I get to a place that gets into a trade off relationship. Remember we've talked about these trade off relationships before. What trade off relationship [do] I want? Okay I want to get to a place where I can see as many details of the cup as possible, so that's sort of zooming in right? "Oh wow!!" But if I zoom in too much I lose on the other end. I don't get a sense of the Gestalt. Remember that? I don't get a sense of the overall thing.

So what I do is I move the cup around so that I get a place where I get the best optimization - for my needs! Because it's always relative to what I'm doing - I get a best optimization between the overall grasp of the cup, it's Gestalt, and a grasp of its details. So I'm trying to get a dynamic balance between them. That's why when you draw faces you draw them from the perspective of the optimal grip you have on them. You represent a face in such a way, you draw a face in such a way that you try to get as much of the whole, and as much as the detail together. You don't draw a face by drawing someone's eyes really in detail, and you don't draw a face by zooming out too far! You try and get exactly that right balance.

So, a lot of perception, and you're unaware of this because you learned how to do this when you were a young child, but think about for example, again, if you're learning a martial art. Just as an [example]... So when you're re-learning how to perceive your opponent, part of what you're trying to do is try to get an optimal grip on your opponent. So in Taichi for example we talk about Tiger Eyes. You don't want a hard focus on the person's face. One of the mistakes that many people make going into a confrontation is they hard focus on face or they hard focus on a weapon. We know this from psychological research by the way. You get people who have been held up... You know what they can give you an accurate description of? The gun!! Not the person who was holding them up because they hard focused. They lose that soft vigilance.

So what you want to do is you want to get at the right - and it takes practice, right? - you want to flow over the person. You don't want to be sort of flowing in a blurry fashion. You want to get this sense where you've got a sense of their whole body right. But you can zero in on details and then you also are trying to get an optimal grip on your own body. So for example you're going to take a stance, and the point about the stance is to try and give you an optimal sense... Give you an overall sense of... So now I'm aware of my whole body, but I'm also aware of it in connection to the details of where my fingers are, where my wrists are, what my joints are doing, and I'm taking a stance that I can ease[ily] - that's multi-apt - I can easily transform it into what I need to do. I get an optimal grip. You do this cognitively. Eleanor Rosch pointed this out in terms of the categories you use.

Categorizing

So you will describe things as a cat or a dog. That's how you'll usually talk about it. You usually won't go a level up and say "oh that's a mammal". So this creature's walking by on the road and somebody says "hey look at the mammal!" That would be weird, right? Now they might go down to another level like "there's the cocker spaniel!", but generally they are doing that because they have some intimate familiarity. Most of us would say "hey look at the dog!" Rosch calls this the "Basic level". Why do we default to the basic level in the way we talk about? Why is this a table? Why is this a marker? Why do we default to the basic level? Because it's how we get our cognitively optimal grip.

Cats and Dogs

You see there's two things I want to trade off in, when I'm categorizing things. Here's my category (draws on the board). I want as much similarity within the category as I can get. But I want as much difference between two categories, and those aren't a tradeoff because as I go higher up I get much more abstract and I lose the specific differences. When I go down here, I'm getting too specific. I'm losing the broad generality. We've talked about this before. You're always trying to balance between getting - remember? The higher the higher states of consciousness - as comprehensive and as detailed as you can. And those are always in a trade off relationship. So you talk about dogs and cats because that's your way of getting an optimal cognitive

grip on the world. Do you remember we did this? "THE CAT" (with the funny, identical H and A)? Remember we talked about how you're simultaneously going up to the Gestalt and down to the detail. You're optimally gripping between the Gestalt of the word and the features of the letter. And you're doing it right now. You've got a way of paying attention that allows you to read and you had to practice that optimal gripping.

Dating (Example)

You're going into a first date - what do you do? Well you're trying to get a sense of the person. Now here's where the term optimal grip is a little infelicitous but... So don't don't read anything... misread any sexual misconduct in my use of the term. I'm using it in the technical sense. But you're trying to get an optimal grip on the other person and it's very difficult. Notice how you're toggling your attention and your interaction and you know this because of the kinds of advice your friends give you. They'll say things, right... I happen to be straight so they will say to me, for example, you know: "Look into her eyes. But not too much!" "Smile. But not too much!" "Laugh. Not too often!" "Ask questions. But not too many!" "And mix it up between these strategies. But not chaotically!" ...and you're like sort of Uuuuuugh!!! And yet here's the thing: you do it. It works at least sometimes! You figure out, you find that sweet spot where you're getting the sense of the person, both as a whole. And in detail.

So I'm giving you multiple examples. You're always engaged because you're always trading between these tradeoffs. You're always optimally gripping. So you have to do this "domain General"! You have to do it in every domain: when you're swimming, going on a date, reading, looking at an object... you're trying to get an optimal grip. And you have practiced this skill so that you're extremely proficient. You do it without realizing it! Herbert Dreyfus', one of his favorite examples [is], "You know how close to stand to somebody!". How close should you stand to somebody? In order to get an optimal grip on the interaction? There is no algorithm!! It's like "always stand for inches!!" ...that's ridiculous! "Always stand one foot...". It depends on the context, it depends on the person. But you have that skill. Most of you are not socially awkward.

So, here's what I'm proposing to you: What if you didn't... What if you got into a flow state that wasn't... It isn't the flow state of doing a martial art; isn't the flow state of playing music, like a jazz or something. What if what you were getting into a flow state about was: Your ability to optimally grip the world. What if I made it really challenging by altering your state of consciousness, disrupting your normal framing and then opening up...

Because, now remember what's happening in this higher state - you're both opening up your attention and zeroing in... "To see the world in a grain of sand." What if you had this optimal grip, but it wouldn't be on just one object. It would be a dynamical, flowing, optimal grip on the world and yourself. The most comprehensive attempt to make sense. Not intellectually [or] theoretically, but optimally gripping reality. This deep conformity.

So what I'm proposing to you is that what's happening in a higher state of consciousness is that people are flowing in their capacity to cognitively, perceptually, and even with the very machinery of their self get an optimal grip on both The World and The Self (top of the board). And that's why this relation (The Relationship) is experienced as so intensely powerful and so intensely revealing.

Now, this would help to make sense of things because, again, if there is a deep continuity between the higher states of consciousness and things like flow and insight that would help to explain why the disruptive strategies are so important for getting into the higher states of consciousness. Because disruptive strategies are central, as I mentioned, to insight. You have to break up the bad framing. Now you can do that by using mindfulness and breaking frame. You also are naturally disposed to do this. Your mind wanders. Your mind distracts you from your task! And many of us find this annoying! It's like "Uuugh, why can't I keep my mind on something!?" But why is mind wandering so hard wired into us? And one of my former students and now colleague and good friend Zach Irving is becoming one of the world experts on mind wandering. I would point you to his work if you want to go into it in depth. What I would want to say for here, and I think Zach would agree with me on this, is that one of the things that mind wandering does is it enhances your capacity for insight because, by distracting you from how you framed a situation, it can help you return and break up that fixated frame.

And there's work by Siegel and others showing that moderate amounts of distraction actually enhance your cognitive flexibility.

The reason why we mind wander - amongst other reasons! I'm not saying it's the sole reason - but one of the things it does is it helps disrupt our framing so that we can break frame and make a new frame. That's often why, and this is why people have built a whole mythology around "incubation" ("Go and sleep on it" or "go for a walk" or "take a shower"), basically what you're doing is a disruptive strategy of distraction. As I mentioned you can more deliberately engage in a disruptive strategy through mindfulness practices. We know experimentally, that if you give a person problem and you introduce entropy, noise into the problem, a moderate amount, that can help them have an insight.

And we know for example that when your brain is engaging in insight there is good reason to believe as I've mentioned that there's a significant shift - we talked about this - between the left and the right hemisphere. That's an internal disruptive strategy. So your brain has all these strategies and you can learn some psycho-technologies that enhance all this powerful disruption. So, the disruptive machinery that's integral to insight can be exapted and enhanced to bring about a higher state of consciousness.

Deautomatization

So, what all of these disruptive strategies do with insight is what's called Deautomatization. So you remember with the nine dot problem you automatically - and remember this because we're going to need this when we talk about other things like stoicism - you automatically, unconsciously saw it as a square. You framed it in terms of the square. You automatically, unconsciously formulated it as a connect the problem and then that automatic framing blocks you from solving it. And in order to get out of that, you get have to deautomatize your cognition.

Now we talked about this when we talked about attentional scaling and mindfulness. I'm just reminding you that that's happening in these disruptive strategies is very significant deautomatization. Something else is going on with these disruptive strategies. What these disruptive strategies do is they increase the variation in your processing, often by introducing a lot of noise,

a lot of entropy into your processing. You're increasing the variation in what you're paying attention to. What processes you're activating in your brain. You're just increasing the variation. Now why is increasing variation good? Increasing variation is good because when I increase the variation, what I can do is get more awareness of what's invariant.

The more I vary what I'm doing, the more I become aware of what's not changing. So as I move around this object, lots of stuff is varying but its shape is remaining constant to me throughout the variation and that's why I think of the shape as more real - because it's "invariant" through all this variation. So when I increase the variance, I'm more able to pick up on what's invariant. The thing we need to know is that there are two kinds of invariance. Two kinds of things that are not changing in your attempts to get a grip on the world. There is good Invariants and bad Invariants (draws this on the board).

Good and Bad Invariance

What's good Invariants? By opening up the variation I pick up on bigger patterns that aren't changing that are real patterns in the world. This is what goes on in deep learning networks. You pick up on much more complex patterns of Invariants. You get more in contact with what's really going on. Again, think about what you do when you want to make sure what something is! You increase the variation - not only am I looking at it, I'm looking at it diff[erently], I'm touching it... I increase the variation to find out what's invariant because if I have increased variation and I find out what's invariant in it, that often tells me what's more real. That's good. Right? So, that can get me real patterns. But there's also about Invariants. Bad Invariants is like what's happening in when you're trying to solve the nine dot problem. You keep trying to solve it and you keep failing to solve it because there's something you need to change that you're not changing. Bad Invariants are ways in which you're formulating your problems, framing your experience, that's actually blocking you from solving your problem.

The Notice Invariants Heuristic

So, Kaplan and Simon in 1990 talked about a heuristic, a strategy we use called the "Notice Invariants Heuristic". This is the idea: across all of your

different problem formulations that are failing; "You keep doing 'this' and you keep doing... And I can't get it, I can't get it, I can't get it..." When you increase the variation you can then apply the Notice Invariance Heuristic: "What am I not changing in all of these failures? What am I not changing in all of my failed framings? Because very often what you're not changing is precisely what you need to change. And so the Notice Invariance Heuristic can help you break bad framing that has been causing your failure. Now this of course requires humility on your part [and] is why there's a deep connection between wisdom and humility, I would suggest. Paying attention, remembering your failures, such that you can apply this would be very helpful!

Now, let's talk about... this (bad invariants side) is one problem they were talking about - Kaplan and Simon. But what if I don't just have one error, here, but I have a whole system of errors? So very often, when you look at cognitive development, you take the 2 year old... sorry, 4 year old because they can count and you count out the five candies. They can count. They know that there are five here and there are five here. But they will reliably choose that row - five candies. Why? Because the amount of space taken up is super-salient to them, we've talked about this before, it misleads them. But they don't just make this error with candies they make this error systematically. They make this error all over the place in many different domains. It is a systematic error. So I can reliably predict that the four year old will not only be making this error, they'll be making errors about seriation; about trying to line objects up in terms of increasing height They'll have difficulties etc..

So it's not just one error. It's an entire system of errors. And the way you go through a developmental change - what kids do - is that they find a systematic pattern of errors and they find an insight that's not just about one problem but an insight that will apply systematically to all of those interconnected, interrelated errors. And when they have that systematically penetrative insight; when they've found that nexus of errors so they can massively intervene on themselves, then they go through a developmental change and they grow up, cognitively. They mature! And that is what can be going on in the Enlightenment experience. By opening up the variation massively, you can not only connect to what's more real and feel more

connected to The World - remember The World? - you can get below the ways in which you are being held back in your own development. You can zero in on the systematic errors and afford a radical developmental change: as the adult is to the child the sage is to the adult. You can go through, you can get one of the hallmarks of wisdom. What ***Maggie and Barbara*** called "Seeing through Illusion into what is real".

OK so we're still not done [with] this discussion because this is pivotal! Trying to understand these higher states of consciousness. It's pivotal to understanding the power, the legacy of the Axial Revolution and therefore what we need to salvage from it... We do not believe in its two world mythology, but we can not afford to abandon all of this powerful psycho-technology of intervention. Of self transformation of self transcendence of the cultivation of wisdom and ultimately the deep enhancement of meaning in life by bringing about a developmental harmony within and a powerful conformity and connectedness to the world without.

So next time I want to continue and complete the discussion about the higher state of consciousness. Thank you very much for your time.

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Ep. 12 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Higher States of Consciousness, Part 2

Welcome back to awakening from meaning crisis. So we have been engaged in a very long discussion because we're talking about a topic that is central about the possibility of Enlightenment, and to try and make that something plausibly accessible to us. Rather than something wrapped, and shrouded in mesmeric mystique. Instead we've been trying to understand this from a cognitive science perspective that could tell us why these higher states of consciousness might in fact provide a means for the radical self-transformation, self-transcendence, enhanced inner peace, and connectedness to reality that are the central legacy of the Axial Age revolution, and that are still needed today even if we no longer believe in the mythology of the Axial Age religions, and philosophies. How do we find a place to vouch-safe the value, the precious value, that these states can confer on lives in terms of meaning and transcendence, when we no longer can understand and articulate, and legitimate that in terms of a two worlds mythology?

So if you remember we have been discussing the properties of these higher states of consciousness. We had discussed what the world is like. It's a bright, both comprehensive and detailed, intricate and interesting, "the world in a grain of sand". It's highly intelligible, it's beautiful and behind it is a pervasive sense of oneness: the self that is resonating with that world in the higher state of consciousness is a self deeply at peace. Like in Plato's description of anagoge. It's experiencing joy, it's experiencing a kind of deep remembrance, "Sati" of the being mode, it's true and authentic self. It is losing its egocentrism. We talked about the connectedness between the self and the world as one, so intimate, so flowing so anagogic, that the sense of participation and conformity is achieving a sense of identity. Deep and profound. Being at one with the oneness. But that it is so profound that it is almost always described as ineffable.

We then took a look at what might be going on in these states because we're trying to, remember... we're trying to give a descriptively adequate and a prescriptively adequate account. We took a look at the Continuity Hypothesis, that they're the same machinery that's at work in our everyday experience of the fluency of reading into moments of insight, into the insight cascades of flow, and then being exapted even more into mystical experience, and then some of those mystical experiences bring about a quantum change. They bring about a deep transformative experience and I suggested to you, I proposed to you that what's going on in these higher states of consciousness is something like a state of flow, but that the skill, the expertise, that is flowing is not this particular skill of rock climbing or being a martial artist or playing jazz! It's this skill, the Domain General skill of getting an optimal grip on the world. And so what's happening is people are getting a flow state in their ability to optimally grip on the world.

This connection to the machinery of insight helps to explain why disruptive strategies are used in order to try and bring about the higher state of consciousness because disruptive strategies are so central to trying to create insight. They're both naturally disruptive strategies and you can acquire them through mindfulness psycho-technologies. We were examining what these disruptive strategies do. They massively increase variation in your processing and that reveals invariance. Both good invariance; you get to see more of the real patterns that are remaining unchanged through all the variation - that's what science does across all of their variations, we try to find the real patterns that are invariant and what science does is increase the variation! We run experiments; we increase the variation, we do all kinds of manipulations and increased variations to try and find what remains invariant because we take that [to] point out to us what is more real. That's what you're doing! But it also... So it's opening up the invariants of the world and you're using the flow states capacity for enhanced implicit processing, implicit learning of complex patterns, tracking of causal patterns to do that.

But, it's also picking up on the bad invariants. It's picking up on... It's helping to reveal all the ways in which you are systematically mis-framing so that like a child going through a developmental stage - and I would point you to the work of my former student, friend [and] colleague Juensung Kim for this idea of development as a systematic form of insight. Something that

he and I are working on together - like a child going through a developmental stage realizing, not just this error or that error, but a systematicity in the way that they're mis-framing reality and finding a nexus, a point, where the insight is not just an intervention in this problem, but in a whole class and type of problems. That developmental change of seeing through illusion and into reality that is so central to wisdom is also being afforded by these higher states of consciousness.

De-centering strategies - The Solomon Effect

What about the de-centering that's so central to both flow, mystical experiences and then ultimately to Higher states of consciousness? My colleague Igor Grossmann has produced quite a bit of good experimental evidence that such de-centering strategies - although this was prefigured in earlier work by the Berlin Paradigm - Igor Grossman has done some excellent work on showing that such de-centering strategies are very relevant for bringing about wisdom. He has worked on what he calls the Solomon effect. Let me describe it to you. You'll see why these disruptive, these de-centering strategies can be so powerful. Get people to find a problem that's very messy, problematic, and that they're stuck in. Usually it's an interpersonal problem because, as Sartre said, "Hell is other people"! (So is heaven by the way! He didn't say that but...) Our deepest and most pervasive problems are generally problems with other people. Why? Because the thing that is - I've mentioned this before - that is most predictive of how meaningful your life is, is your meaningful relationships to others. The problem is human beings are endlessly complex.

So you're describing this interpersonal problem and when people describe it, they are of course mesmerized by the mirage of their own egocentric perspective. They describe it without thought - default - from the first person perspective. And they remain stuck! Remember this notion of "stuckness"! We'll come back to it again when we talk about Gnosis and Gnosticism... Then you get the person to re-describe the same problem from the third person perspective. You get them to de-center. What will often happen is they will break frame. They will realize the way in which they have been blocked, systematically locked in not solving their problem. They'll often have a central insight into how to resolve their problem. This is why it's

called the "Solomon Effect" because it tends to make you more wise! Think about the radical de-centering that's going on in these awakening experiences; in these higher states of consciousness. Notice the systematicity of the error of egocentrism: It's not an error in this problem or this problem or this problem, it's a systematic error. That's why it's often described with metaphors of like "being asleep". Because when you wake up you have a systematic change in your consciousness.

So what's happening in these higher states of consciousness, in these awakening experiences, you're getting a transformation. An intervention in systematic error. You're seeing through illusion precisely because of the powerful de-centering that they are affording for you. Now that of course can be a powerfully traumatic experience. It can be a terrifying experience. Pursuing this in an auto-didactic fashion, like all auto-didactic - being completely self-taught - is very very dangerous! Autodidacts tend to get into echo-chambers, vicious circles of their own egocentric intunement and entrapment. The Buddha gives a wonderful parable about this. He says "this is how you catch a monkey. You put some pitch on a piece of wood and it looks like something very shiny and tasty - it's salient, it's attractive - and so the monkey grabs it with its hand and it gets stuck and then it uses its other hand to try and free itself. And it gets stuck. So it uses its right foot and then its left foot and then it puts its head in its mouth on and then it's completely trapped. And then the hunter comes and kills it." But de-centering can alleviate that.

But if you are still pursuing this as an isolated individual, as an autodidact, then think about how ill prepared, unskilled, untutored and egocentrically you're trying to confront this radical transformation. That is why I think it is a very poor idea for people to take psychedelics without having them placed within a Wisdom tradition in which they have a committed community that can give outside, de-centering and wise advice for how to process and handle these transformations. But once again I point you to an aspect of the meaning crisis. We have institutions of information. We have institutions of knowledge. We have traditions and we have respected experts who give us guidance. We do not have this for wisdom.

Now what is amazing of, course, is that some individuals like Siddhārtha are able to do it as individuals. I want to point out two things about that. They deserve our admiration for successfully doing it as individuals, even though the Buddha had training from other people all along the way. But we should not take from that some kind of promotion of our North American individualism because the Buddha made it very clear that the "Sanga" or the community was necessary for the cultivation of these transformative states.

Love

So, you've got this radical de-centering, it can afford wisdom and I want to try and show you how it's not just a **"perspectable knowing"**: It's not just a radical transformation in our salience landscape. This is a participatory change. This involves not just the machinery of cognition or the machinery of consciousness. This alters the machinery of the self. And therefore is also fundamentally a transformation of character. Participatory knowing is knowing by conforming. Well the radical at-oneness of these brings about a radical kind of participatory knowing. We'll come back to this when we return and talk about Plotinus. But, it's so beautiful precisely because the coupling is so profound and - think about... - you're getting reciprocal revelation: the World is revealing itself more deeply and the depts of yourself are being revealed in a coupled fashion. Well, that's love!

Love is mutually accelerating disclosure. If you want somebody... If you want to fall in love with somebody - although you shouldn't/ you can never sort of pursue it that way, I think - but what what happens is if you get two people mutually disclosing from each other in a couple fashion: I just, I honestly disclose something about myself and then you, in response, disclose and then I pick that up and disclose more, and then you disclose... That reciprocal, enhanced, mutual conforming engenders love. And love is something you know by participating in it. Like your culture and your language. This is knowing by loving.

Now what I want to suggest to you is that some recent cognitive science research can give us some understanding about why this de-centering and this transformation of this sense of self might be functional here. There's a lot of work I would recommend to you - the work of Sui and Humphrey from 2015 for example - showing that one of the functions of your 'self' - not

your mind but your 'self' - is to act as glue. This is a term they use; it's a metaphor. By making things relevant to my self, I can make them relevant to each other, and glue them together. And I'm always doing that; I'm simultaneously gluing things together as I'm gluing myself together. What the self is, is a powerful set of functions for integrating, actually complexifying processing. To say you have a self is to say you have a systematic set of functions that are integrating - not homogenizing - complexifying things together.

Now if you remember we talked about the work of Michael Anderson - exaptation. The exaptation of the tongue. Here's a proposal to you: this powerful machinery that is central to your cognitive agency, your ability to make sense of the world by gluing the world together as you're gluing yourself together... This powerful machinery of complexification, of information and information processing, can be exapted. What if you were to take all that machinery of integration that you're using to integrate your 'self', and you turned it onto the world? What if you took all of that capacity to glue things together and you exapted it on the world? That would mean that machinery that was normally self-focused about integrating the self and integrating its processing could be used to achieve a deeper integration of the world; to reveal deeper underlying patterns. Novak in 96 Claxton in 2000 both suggest, with argumentation and with phenomenological evidence, and many reports from people who undergo mystical experiences seem to corroborate this, that what seems to happen is all of the energy and machinery that has been bound up in our 'self' has been turned onto the world. That's why the world comes alive to us and we see so deeply into it.

Imagine the intimacy you have in your self-knowledge being turned on to the world! So all of that energy that's stored up in your ego-centric processing; all the time and the resource and all the "Who am I? What, what's going on? Oh how is it? Oh how is it? Well I'd rather...!?!?!" All that... ALL of that! Imagine if you could take that machine and say forget about John vaguely. Just for a while even. Turn it on... Turn all that massive machine onto the world. Radical radical de-centering, I proposed to you, is doing exactly that. All of the time and effort and processing and skill and memory and structures that we've built into our ego can be exapted to disclose the world. And that of course would be coupled with a radical sense

of moving into the being mode; in a radical sense of remembering who and what we really are.

So what I've tried to show you is we can understand the higher cognitive process at the psychological level in terms of this de-centering, the exaptation of the 'self' machinery, flowing optimal grip, enhanced awareness of invariance - both in the positive sense and in the ability that allows us to pick up on systematic error. We can see why this machinery is operating and producing the experiential profile it is producing.

The information processing level. Using machine learning as an analogy to help explain.

What about at the information processing level? I don't want to get very technical here, but this is the level at which we turn to work that's being done in machine learning, artificial intelligence, where people are actually trying to make machines that make sense of the world. And what kind of strategies do they come up with for trying to get the machines to be better learners? Well one interesting thing is precisely the use of disruptive strategies. So Woodward et al, In 2014, this is a direct quote from them... They entered (I'll give you the quote in secndond) they introduce randomization into a neural network.

A neural network is a very powerful and cutting edge form of artificial intelligence that, in some important ways, mimics how brains work. And when you're training these neural - you don't program, them you train them to learn for themselves! But very often what you have to do is you have to introduce noise, entropy, randomness into these networks. In fact he goes on to say that such randomness quote "Is essential aspect, an essential aspect of the self-optimisation process". You have to back to what.... These are not people doing psychology. These are not people trying to understand higher states of consciousness! What they're trying to do is they're trying to make neural networks that learn better, that can self-optimize. And what they do, what they say is 'essential' - that's the word he used - to this is disruption. Disruptive strategies. Why? See the problem with powerful machines is they pick up on patterns and you say "Well, but John! That's good! Isn't picking up patterns good?". Well, remember all the stuff we've talked about, about

when we've talked about implicit learning and picking up on only correlational patterns, not picking up on real patterns. See the problem you face is you're always sampling from the world. So here's your experience and then here's the world (draws on the board). And there's some pattern in your experience, and what you want to know is, [is] that pattern in the world or not?

Statistics and overfit

This is... We invented a whole discipline to deal with this! It's called statistics! All statistics is basically this problem. How do I know if the patterns in my sample are the same as the patterns in the world? How do I know that? So, for example, if I was in class at U of T (University of Toronto) and I, let's say it's even... a huge class: five hundred students! This is like 100! ...and I say "how many people here think that student tuition should be reduced or schools should be free?", and they all put up their hands! Should I then conclude: "Look the overwhelming majority of people think that student tuition should be reduced!". You'd say that's ridiculous. And this is what you should say because that is not a representative sample. The pattern there is all students. You need the sample to have the same patterns as the environment.

So why is that relevant to disruption? Very often what will happen with these neural networks is they will overfit to the data. They will too tightly pick up on the pattern in the sample, a pattern that does not generalize to the rest of the world. So let me give you a way of understanding this graphically. So very often we're - you've probably [been] taught this - you do a scatter plot, you point your point[s] (plots points on a graph on the board), and then you don't typically draw a line like this (squiggling through all the points) to try and capture the data! Instead what we typically do is a line of best fit which might not touch any of the data points. This is called data compression: the line of best fit. Why do we do that? We do that in science because what we're trying to find is the function that will generalize. That will go to all kinds of different contexts. That will not be true just of this sample, but will be true of the population. But what the networks do is they do this (squiggly line), they overfit to the data. They track a function that perfectly describes

the sample but does not generalize to the population. Precisely because they are so powerful, they over fit!

So what do you do? Well you can throw some noise into the system. You can turn off, you can do 'drop-out', you can turn off half of the nodes. You basically disrupt the processing a lot because what the disruption does is it prevents you from over fitting to the data and it actually allows you to compress. And what does the compression do? It allows you to find the real invariants! The real patterns that will generalize across all the varying contexts.

Now, of course, you don't want to underfit! If you under-fit then you're not picking up on any patterns at all. So, notice again [that] these systems have to toggle. They have to toggle back and forth. They have to disrupt! Very analogous to Breaking frame in order so they can make a better frame and they're trying to find that sweet spot between disruptive variation and compression to detect real patterns that allows them to become good learners. So what we know is that, again, you have to have disruptive strategies set within powerful pattern detection. That's exactly what we're seeing at work, as I mentioned to you, in these people that are pursuing these higher states of consciousness. It's also again why belonging to a tradition that can afford powerful pattern detection, introduce disruption when needed and guide you to help toggle to find the sweet spot is very very important.

If you want to be really good at jamming, and you... You have to have the requisite skill. Jamming without jazz just... Sorry, jamming without skill just gives you junk, it doesn't give you Jazz. So what's going on in the brain? Notice what I'm showing you here (graph on the board). The machines are doing the compression. That compression is... that toggling of attention that you see going on in the higher state of con[sciousness]... they're open... They're disrupting and then compressing and they're trying to find the huge invariant patterns but they're trying to break frame and they're doing stuff that seems, I think plausible to say, is analogous to what we see going on at the psychological level within people.

What about at the brain level? Well this is where we have to turn to Newberg because he's done most of the work on tracking brains as people are having these kinds of experiences. And what you see is, initially, you get increased

activity in the frontal area and the parietal area. These are the two areas, the frontal parietal connection, that is most associated with your general intelligence - your ability to make sense and get an optimal grip on the world because that's what your general intelligence is. So initially you see these areas get hyper active. And then you see the opposite. You see them hypo-active. So, a huge increase followed by a huge decrease. Now throughout, you have - throughout all of this, this is the frontal parietal (peak on the graph) - you have enhanced activity in the thalamus. This is the area of the brain that tries to integrate all kinds of different information together. The greater the shift. The greater the disruptive shift, the more powerful the awakening experience is. It's just like what's going on in insight. You initially bring all this machinery to bear to frame it. And then you have to massively disrupt it and break it. And then the system re-self-organizes. And that is precisely what's going on, I would suggest to you, in these experiences.

Psilocybin and the complexification. How it's affecting cognitive processes

So, what's happening in the brain, for example, in psychedelic experiences is you'll often see this kind of shift. What's important, and there's a bunch of people doing work on this: "Metastability". So what, for example, psilocybin does according to recent work done by Lauderdale is it increases meta-stability in the brain. So if you look at the work of Kelso, Tognoli and others what meta-stability is is a state in the brain that's doing this complexification I talked about.

So normally your brain is integrating things or segregating. Integrating differentiating. But in psilocybin, what you get is a state called mentastability where, and this is a state in which the brain is simultaneously integrating and segregating. It is massively complexifying. Please remember, complexification is with us when a system is both integrating and differentiating; when you went from being a zygote to being a biologically complex organism, your cells were differentiating into different types of cells: liver cells, eye cells, etc. but they were also integrating. You are complex because you're both highly integrated and highly differentiated. Complexification gives you emergent functions; it gives you new abilities.

You can do things as a person, a biological human being, that you couldn't do as a zygote, precisely because you're complex. Look, emergent functions [**come to attack??], because I'm highly differentiated I can do many different things, but because I'm highly integrated I don't fall apart as a system by doing these many different things. I get new emergent abilities. The way you grow and self-transcend as a system is by complexifying. Psilocybin, by putting you into metastability, helps your brain complexify and come up with emergent abilities. It allows you to "see the world (massive integration) in a grain of sand (assive differentiation).

So I think what we can see here is at least a highly plausible - and I'll come back to what I mean by that in just a minute - account at the psychological level, at the machine processing level and at the brain level of what is going on in these higher states of consciousness and why they are so powerfully optimizing your cognitive functionality. Once again, not to repeat this, but that of course has to be placed within the proper "sapiential" context. You need a tradition and institutions, a committed community of cultivating wisdom.

What about the prescriptive argument?

Now what about the prescriptive argument? I've laid a lot of the groundwork for this. Why should we listen to people who have been in this state? Why should this state serve as the justification for a transformation of your life? If someone comes up to you and says I want to transform you... I want you to transform your life according to X Y and Z, you need that claim justified! Not just described and explained, you need it justify! What would make it a good thing to do? Are these states actually good guides for transformation? Well, in order to do that I need to introduce a notion to you first. We're going to come back to this notion again when we talk about the nature of cognitive science. Although I've been exemplifying a lot of cognitive science to you throughout these previous videos. This is the notion of plausibility.

The notion of plausibility

We need to talk about this because plausibility is central to your notion of how real things are. Now there's two senses of the word plausible. One is a synonym for highly probable. That's not the sense I'm using. I'm using it in

the sense that Reicher and others made famous where this means "makes good sense"/ "stands to reason" / "should be taken seriously". Most of the time - and I'll make this point in detail in a few minutes - you can not base your actions on certainty, but you have to rely on plausibility. Now there's a lot of work on plausibility, and I'm just going to try to sketch to you what I think, with work I'm doing with Leo Ferraro and Anderson Todd, about trying to integrate work by Lombardi and Nashman and Sinatra from 2015, Kyle/Cobb/Carl 2006, Milgram 1997, Kitcher, Wrestler... Reicher I should say... There's just a lot of different work going into this.

Trustworthiness

Here's what I think it is to make something plausible. First of all it involves what Reicher calls trustworthiness. I think there is an important way in which trustworthiness comes about. You can see this in some of the work that ***Kyle/Cobb/Carl*** has done on explanations we prefer. We regard a particular proposal or a construct or some way of trying to model the world as trustworthy if it's been produced by many independent but converging lines of evidence. Let me give you a clear, concrete example. You will regard as more real information that comes through multiple senses as opposed to one sense. If I'm only seeing something, There's a good chance That it's an illusion or a delusion caused by the subjectivity of my seeing. But if I can see it and touch it and hear it And smell it, Then the chances that each one of those independent senses producing an illusion is radically diminished. The fact that they all are telling me the same thing, now that doesn't give me certainty, but it gives me trustworthiness.

It reduces the probability - that's what trustworthiness is - it reduces the probability that I am self-deceived. Now that's not the same thing as certainty because, unfortunately for example, there is a form of schizophrenia in which people not only hear voices but they see people attached to those voices and when they reach out to touch the person they get a tactile illusion. And it's very hard to convince those people that their illusions aren't real precisely because this is highly trustworthy. This is why science likes numbers. We like numbers because they allow us to converge the senses.

Look, you can see three (writes III on the board), you can touch three - one, two, three - you can hear three (claps 3 times). We like numbers not because we're fascists or something in science. We like numbers because numbers (quantification) help us to increase the trustworthiness of our information gathering. They allow us to reduce the chance that what we're getting, what we're measuring, what we're modeling, is being produced by self-deception.

Is that enough for plausibility? I don't think so. So we're converging to some processing state here, but we also want something to be the case because we're not just looking backwards into how we got there. We're also looking forward [to] what we can do with it. What we want is we want a model that we can now apply to many new domains. That will open up the world for us. That's multi-apt. This is like, again, taking a martial arts [stance]... I don't use "this" (fighting stance) but I'm taking this stance because I can quickly adapt it to many different situations: it's multi-apt, it's highly functional. So, why do I want this: when I can use the same model in many different places? This is, I would argue, what people mean when they say a theory or a model is elegant. You can use the same model. It's adaptive enough, it's multi app that you can use it in many different places and apply it. So you have convergence for trustworthiness, but you have elegance for power: for multi-aptness. For multi-apt application.

Balance between

Is that enough? No! I think this state has to be highly fluent to you. Remember we talked about this. This has to be one that you can use readily. Powerfully for yourself that you can internalize. When you have this: when you have fluency, convergence, elegance, you need one more thing: you need a balance between the convergence and the elegance. If I have a lot of convergence. Without much elegance that's triviality. Or trivial statements is not that they're false they're true but they're not powerful. They don't transform. Many times we reject things we don't take them seriously. They don't make good sense to us.

Is that enough? No! I think this state has to be highly fluent to you - remember we talked about this - this has to be one that you can use readily,

powerfully for yourself, that you can internalize. When you have this: when you have fluency, convergence, elegance, you need one more thing: you need a balance between the convergence and the elegance. If I have a lot of convergence without much elegance, that's triviality. The thing about trivial statements is not that they're false, they're true! But they're not powerful. They don't transform! Many times we reject things, we don't take them seriously, they don't make good sense to us, precisely because they're trivial.

What's the opposite? Very little convergence with a lot of promise of power. This is when things are far fetched. Conspiracy theories have this feature. If they were true they would explain so much. If we would just accept that the British Royal Family were lizard beings from outer space we could explain so much of their behaviour. But the problem is, although that would be a very powerful explanation, we have very little trustworthy evidence that that is in fact the case.

Finding the profound in the deep depths of this model

So what we want is, we want that - as Milgram says - our backward commitments, and our forward commitments... we only commit powerfully forward if we've got a lot of trust in the model that we've produced. When all of this is in place, I think we find what we're processing not only fluent, we find it highly plausible. When we have very deep convergence and very deep elegance and very efficient fluency, I think we then find the proposal profound.

So, you're saying "why are you going on about this?". Because what I'm trying to show you is what the brain is doing is a... that [it] is performing a kind of evaluation of the plausibility of its processing, when it's in a higher state of consciousness. See this model (drawn on the board so far)? What did we see? What did we see... We saw lots of things going into the higher state of consciousness. (Draws a further, updated model on the board) We saw de-automatization. We saw de-centering. All of these things are strategies for reducing bias. Reducing bias. These are all strategies for reducing bias: de-automatization, de-centering, fluency and processing. The state that you're in

is a state of flowing optimal grip. It's intrinsically valued. It's optimizing for processing.

And what's this affording? ...this state? Well you're finding a nexus for development. You're finding that systematic error. You're getting that complexification of your processing. You're getting emergent new functions. You're getting the exaptation of machinery - the insight machinery and the 'self-machinery' - into new abilities.

Do you see what I'm arguing? Your brain is in a state in which it's getting information that's saying this processing is deeply trustworthy (on the left), deeply powerful (on the right), deeply fluent (in the middle), therefore profoundly plausible. Plausibility is not certainty. But plausibility is what we have to rely on.

Science gives us self-correcting plausibility.

Plausibility is indispensable.

What do I mean by that? You can't get certainty for almost all of your processing. You have to rely on plausibility. All the time! [But] we say "but I can turn to science! Science will give me certainty." First of all pay attention to the history of science! When is it ever done that? Almost all of the theories that have been proposed in science have all ultimately turned out to be false in some significant or an important way. Science isn't believed in because it gives us certainty or facts. Science is believed in because it gives us self-correcting plausibility. Look... This is... What...? How do I decide what hypothesis to test? I don't test any hypothesis I come up with. I wonder if clipping my toenails will reduce famine in the Sahara? Let's test it out! I wonder if I gather enough frogs together, can I influence the Australian election? Let's test it out! Do you know how many hyp[otheses]....? And you say to me "that's..." What? "...Ridiculous. That's absurd!" What you're saying to me is those hypotheses don't make sense. They don't deserve to be taken seriously. What you're saying to me is "I reject them because they're implausible".

Now I go into my experiment... I'm going to run an experiment in science. What do I have to do? I have to control for alternative explanations. What we're always doing in science is inference to the best explanation. This goes

to the work of Peter Lipton and others. Here's some phenomena... What I do is I have some candidate explanations for what's causing the phenomenon. And then what I do is I put them into competition with each other. Which one of my hypotheses best explains it? And the one that best explains it is chosen as what's "real".

But "this" (on the board - all the 'explanations'), how do you make... How would you make this certain? The way you would make this deductibly certain is you would have to check all possible explanations. How many possible explanations are there? An infinite number. You can't ever make science certain because you're always doing this. This explanation is only as good as the competition it beats. In science, you advance by coming up with plausible alternative explanations that you beat with yours.

Science depends on plausibility judgments. It depends on plausibility judgments when we choose our hypothesis. It depends on plausibility judgments when we choose what variables we're going to control for in experiments. It depends on plausibility judgments once we're done and we have the data and we have to interpret it. What are the number of interpretations I can give for any data? Infinite in number! What do I do? I generate the most plausible interpretation. Before the experiment, during the experiment and after the experiment I'm relying on plausibility. Plausibility is indispensable. That's why your brain looks for it.

A summary of all of these elements

So, notice what we've got: this higher state of consciousness is an optimization of your processing. It brings about a state of high plausibility and it's relying on processes that are fundamental, because optimization has priority. I have to get my optimal grip before I can judge what it is. I have to zero in on the relevant information and have the right formulation of my problem before I can try and answer it. These higher states of consciousness - notice what I'm saying to you there - they have indispensability because they run in terms of your plausibility machinery. They are optimal in terms of getting the best possible functioning for you.

They are prior, because they are fundamental to any and all of your cognitive processing. Getting this optimal grip, toggling between tradeoffs, getting the

best relationship between generalizing and discriminating. All of these have priority. These are why these states are such good guides. Again, if they're set within a set of sapiential practices, set within a sapiential tradition.

Now, what... What I'm saying is, these higher states of consciousness are great guides on how to transform yourself. How to cultivate wisdom. How to see through self-deception. But, sometimes people come back from these states and they make pronouncements about the nature of the world.

Sometimes these are bizarre! People will come back from DMT (???) and tell them that hyperspace elves have told them that they should remain and forever inside their head or some bizarre stuff.

Here's the thing you should know about the propositions that people generate from this: [They] are largely useless! You can read these reports. People will have these higher states of consciousness and one group of people will come out and say "I know there is a god". Other people have these experiences and they come out and they're filled with joy they say "I know there is no God"! Diametrically opposite! Because this isn't about propositional knowing, this is about participatory transformation. This isn't about getting secret metaphysical knowledge. This is about getting wise practices, wise transformations.

Ultimately what we need to do is to take the wisdom from these higher states of consciousness and get it into rational discourse with an independently established - via our best science - metaphysics: the best science and philosophy. When we can put those two together, then we will have properly salvaged what these higher states of consciousness can afford for us. Do not confuse the rationality of wisdom with the rationality of knowledge.

So next time what I want to do is, now that we've got a preliminary account of what these higher states of consciousness, what these awakening, what the awakening of the Buddha might have been plausibly like, we can return to "what did he propose" specifically, thereby finishing off the axial revolution. Our discussion, I should say, of the Axial Revolution in India. And then we will return back to the Mediterranean world and look at what was happening there after Aristotle. Thank you very much for your time.

Episode 12 notes

Anagoge

Anagoge, sometimes spelled anagogy, is a Greek word suggesting a "climb" or "ascent" upwards. The anagogical is a method of mystical or spiritual interpretation of statements or events, especially scriptural exegesis, that detects allusions to the afterlife.

Sati

The Buddhist term translated into English as "mindfulness" originates in the Pali term sati and in its Sanskrit counterpart smṛti. ... The term sati also means "to remember". In the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* the term sati means to maintain awareness of reality, whereby the true nature of phenomena can be seen.

Juensung Kim

Igor Grossmann

The Berlin Wisdom Paradigm

The Berlin wisdom paradigm outlines a family of 5 criteria that define wisdom.

Sartre

Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre was a French philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, political activist, biographer, and literary critic. He was one of the key figures in the philosophy of existentialism and phenomenology, and one of the leading figures in 20th-century French philosophy and Marxism

Plotinus

Plotinus was a major Hellenistic philosopher who lived in Roman Egypt. In his philosophy, described in the *Enneads*, there are three principles: the One, the Intellect, and the Soul. His teacher was Ammonius Saccas, who was of the Platonic tradition.

Jie Sui

Glyn W. Humphrey

Sui and Humphrey

Michael L. Anderson

Joseph D Novak

Guy Claxton

Guy Claxton is Visiting Professor in Psychology and Education, and Director of the Research Programme on Culture and Learning in Organizations (CLIO), at the University of Bristol. He is the author of thirteen published books, including Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind.

Alexander Woodward

J. A. Scott Kelso

J. A. Scott Kelso is a neuroscientist, and Professor of Complex Systems and Brain Sciences, Professor of Psychology, Biological Sciences and Biomedical Science at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida and The University of Ulster in Derry, N. Ireland

Emmanuelle Tognoli

Research Professor - Complex Systems and Brain Sciences, Florida Atlantic University. Verified email at ccs.fau.edu

Stephen Reicher

Luigi Lombardi

Stanley Milgram

Stanley Milgram was an American social psychologist, best known for his controversial experiment on obedience conducted in the 1960s during his professorship at Yale. Milgram was influenced by the events of the Holocaust, especially the trial of Adolf Eichmann, in developing his experiments.

Philip Stuart Kitcher

Philip Stuart Kitcher is a British philosophy professor teaching at Columbia University who specialises in the philosophy of science, the philosophy of

biology, the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of literature, and, more recently, pragmatism.

Peter Lipton

Peter Lipton was the Hans Rausing Professor and Head of the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at Cambridge University, and a fellow of King's College, until his unexpected death in November 2007.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 13 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Buddhism and Parasitic Processing

Welcome back to awakening for the meaning crisis. So last time what we did is we finished up a cognitive scientific exploration of higher states of consciousness, awakening experiences, these kinds of mystical experiences that bring about massive transformation. We saw how we can give a psychologically adequate description of these processes that explain both the experiential profile that people are having and some of the features that they find there in. We were also able to talk about this at the level of machine learning and information processing and at the brain level. And what comes out of this is a picture of a state of consciousness that, in which we are getting a flow state that is improving our optimal grip on the world.

Optimizing our performance for making sense of things and enhancing our overall capacity for learning and problem solving. And we saw that that in fact provides a very good justification for these states being the guidance for the transformation of life in that what they do is they give a brain state that is highly optimized, processing things in a way that gives us a tremendous sense of a plausible grip on the world and that is making use processing that

is absolutely indispensable and foundational for us. It is... It has a kind of important priority in all of our processing.

And what I suggested from this is that, while it doesn't give us any good theories, in the sense of propositional claims about the metaphysical structure of reality, these states do justify the... their claim to give us guidance. So although they are not rational in the sense of providing good argument and evidence for beliefs, they are rational in the sense of wisdom in that they optimize some of our core processing for being in contact with reality in a way that is coupled optimally to our own processes of self transcendence. And the cultivation of wisdom.

Back to the Buddha and his awakening

So, The Buddha awakens! And that awakening gives him this state that is guiding him to a fundamental transformation in how he understands the world and how he understands not just intellectually, because that's what I've been contrasting here, but in a participatory fashion, in an existential fashion, himself in the world. We talked about how this is bringing about a "Sati" (a deep remembering) of the being mode, so that he is seeing through the frustrating futility of modal confusion. But there is more than [this] going on! This higher state of consciousness is not only helping him remember the being mode and helping him to transcend through systematic illusion and go through something deeply analogous to a developmental shift. We can also see it in terms... We can see what's going on in his claim to enlightenment and its relevance to the cultivation of wisdom and the enhancement of meaning, in terms of the pronouncements he made from this state.

Now, talking about this is very problematic because the attempts by the West to understand some of the central tenets of Buddhism have not had a very good history! I recommend to Stephen batchelor's book The Awakening of the West for how the West has systematically misunderstood. And Batchelor makes a current argument in a series of his books - I've got to meet Stephen at a conference and we had dinner together, I recommend all of his works very strongly and very highly to you - and so from his works and in discussion with him he argues that the West is still in the grip of a problematic way of trying to interpret Buddhism. So let's take a quick look at that and then we will return to what the central claims of Buddhism are

and I want to show you why even that way of putting it is perhaps perhaps incorrect.

The West's problematic way of trying to interpret Buddhism

So Batchelor, in one of his books "Alone With Others" and he follows it up with "Buddhism Without Beliefs" and then later on this is followed up by even a more radical "After Buddhism" in which he's taking the position of somebody who's post religious (very germane to many of us). But he does argue, and along with others, that we face an interpretation crisis when we're trying to understand Buddhism. We have two approaches that people give us for how we should try and interpret Buddhism. Of course this will not be relevant just to Buddhism, but for any position that exists in a different culture or history that we're trying to understand, be [it] Buddhism or Stoicism or Neo-Platonism for example.

Subjectivity verses Objectivity

So he says we are confronted with two different positions. One is the claim that you can only interpret Buddhism from within a tradition, and we have seen good reason why you might argue that. That this is... The kind of stuff we're talking about here (wisdom and self-transcendence), this is not largely a matter of altering your belief. This is about going through transformation in your perspective and participatory knowing. It's about fundamentally altering the Agent:Arena relationship, your existential modes etc.. And so if you are not engaged within the transformative practice, then of course you do not understand what Buddhism is. It has to, in that sense, be understood from within, and this is a general property wisdom per say. Wisdom is something that must be understood from within. The problem with that of course is It's myopic. There are very many Buddhist traditions and they are [all] relative to certain times and places in particular historical contexts, and to claim that that particular interpretation, that particular sect or tradition, is the sole pathway to understanding or interpreting Buddhism is of course myopic. It's narrow minded and often parochial. It claims things as fundamental which are often very contingent.

So, what's the alternative? The alternative is well... What the alternative says is that the problem with this (an internal interpretation) is, this is very "Subjective"! I don't know if that's exactly the right word, but the idea here is... This is... The problem with seeing things from the inside is that tends to be very subjective and of course that means you're not understanding the phenomena as it is, but you're only seeing it through your own particular bias. So the alternative, outside any tradition and this is typified in the academic study of Buddhism, for example like within religious studies or something like that. And then the main argument here is - and this will often happen! It's not always the case, but if you meet people in religious studies and you'll say "are you studying Buddhism?", they'll say "Yes, yes I'm studying Buddhism!" and then you'll ask them "Well what practices do you engage in?", they'll say "Oh no, no! I don't engage in any practices! That would be a mistake! If I got too involved, too close to this material, I would lose my objectivity! I would lose my ability to critically reflect on it, critically compare it to other traditions, other approaches". So the idea here is, what we will have is an "Objective" account.

Now, although Stephen doesn't mention this in his book, Batchelor... This - Stephen Batchelor doesn't mention it in his book - this is very reminiscent of the problem that Socrates faced because what we have (subjectivity) here is Transformative Relevance, and here (objectivity) we have some attempt to get at the truth. And like the Socratic project, I would put it to you and this is what I think Batchelor is saying, is that Buddhism is about both of these. It's about trying to find transformatively relevant truths. But that means we have to transcend both of these ways of interpreting Buddhism. So he points out that we have to get beyond both of these in some fashion.

How do we do this? Well he points out that we need to do this in a way that is going to be relevant to issues of meaning in our life. So this interpretation crisis, where we have these two competing and diametrically opposed ways of trying to interpret and import Buddhism, is actually interacting with the meaning crisis in society because we're not doing this just in some empty cultural vacuum, we are precisely interested - as I've been suggesting throughout this series of lectures - we're doing this precisely because we're deeply involved with the project of trying to recover how we can cultivate wisdom and enhance meaning in our lives in a cultural-historical context that

is not supportive, and is in fact often deleterious to, those existentially necessary endeavors.

Okay, so what do we do? We have to break out of all of this in some fashion. And what he does is he tries to see where these (within a tradition & outside any tradition) are both fixated. And what he argues is that this (within) will become myopic because it will get fixated on the particular propositions of a tradition. It will get fixated on beliefs and this is in fact what you study over here (outside) Objectively: you study of course the texts and the beliefs that have been propositionally rendered by a particular tradition. It's this belief fixation that needs to be broken through. This is why he entitles the book that came after "Alone With Others", "Buddhism Without Beliefs", because he tries to argue that part of what is preventing us from really getting both sides of Buddhism is that both of these are fixed, locked, like being locked inside the box in the 9-Dot Problem. I'm trying to understand Buddhism as a set of beliefs.

We have gotten so used to this way of thinking, and we'll see later why it is a post-Christian way of thinking, that these traditions for cult- these Axial Legacy traditions for cultivating wisdom and self-transcendence are to be understood as creeds - as systems of beliefs - that we now even will equate the word "belief" with these practices. We'll talk about it as a belief system. Or will you even use the word belief as a synonym for faith. Etc. So we have gotten so oriented towards this reduction of all of what we've been talking about here, all of this transformation process to the possession and the assertion of beliefs - and again we'll see historically why that's the case - that we can't break out of this.

Interestingly, although I won't be able to do it in this video, we're going to see that breaking out of trying to understand 'meaning' in terms of belief systems is also going to be needed to address the meaning crisis. I have been pointing you towards that repeatedly. Belief systems, namely ideologies, are attempts to create meaning. But they fail for the deep reason - and you've already seen a lot of argument and evidence for this - is that a lot of your 'meaning-making' machinery is not occurring at the level of your propositional knowledge, your beliefs and your assertions of which beliefs you adhere to.

The Four Noble Truths should be the Four Ennobling Truths or Provocations

So he proposes instead what we need to do is we need to look at Buddhism, ultimately, existentially. You remember 'existentially' has to do with these modes. He also invokes in, along with others, the distinction between the Being Mode and the Having Mode, and he proposes that Buddhism is remembering The Being Mode, and I've already talked about that in a previous video. And so he says "Look...! Traditionally what the Buddha said..." and now we're returning to what the Buddha said is, in order to try and get more of what his enlightenment was about... "...traditionally what the Buddha said is presented as the Four Noble Truths, and these are four statements or propositions that are usually presented to our ears as claims to be believed, and that what makes you a Buddhist is if you believe them.

The problem with this, of course, is that it is taking place at this very level (belief) that Batchelor argues we need to get beyond. It's not, of course, that people don't believe things within Buddhism! It's that what we've been talking about here - these processes of transformation - are taking place at the level of perspective (perspectible) knowing, at the level of transforming of states of consciousness, and at a participatory level transforming the fundamental machinery of the self, of the Agent:Arena relationship, and the modes of existence. So we need to understand these four noble truths as things that could help afford the kind of transformations we've been talking about. The point about these is not to believe them. The point about them is to get them to help you re-enact the Buddha's Enlightenment. If you're not doing that, if you cannot 'enact enlightenment' then you are not 'getting' The Four Noble Truths.

He proposes therefore, that we should not call them The Four Noble Truths, we should call them The Four Ennobling Truths. I then proposed to him in person that we shouldn't even call them truths anymore because truths, "truth" is a property of propositions. Actually, I said what you should call them is The Four Ennobling Provocations. You're trying to provoke people into change.

So let me try and go through the four noble truths, but restating them in turn as four ennobling, enabling - that means affording self-transcendence - provocations. By doing that I think we can get back to - if that's the right verb - what the Buddha was conveying about what's going on in enlightenment. What kind of transformation is being brought about by the awakening experience? And what is it alleviating? OK, so let's go through these one by one. Okay, so I'll present the standard way (left of board) of representing the truth and then the reformulation (right of board) in order to deal with Bachelor's, I think astute, criticism and in order to interconnect with all the argumentation we have been developing throughout this video series.

All is suffering

So the first one is typically stated as: "All is suffering" or "all of life is suffering".

Now that's... First of all, if that were the statement to be believed, it's false! Because suffering is a comparative term. And comparative terms can't be extended to everything. That would be like saying everything is tall. It doesn't make any sense. Things are only tall relative to other things being shorter. So first of all it doesn't really mean "all is", it's something more like "all is threatened by". Well what's the "all"? Does it mean everything in existence? Should we interpret it metaphysically? Well I mentioned last time that we should be careful about giving metaphysical interpretations to what people bring out of these awakening experiences. And the Buddha himself was famously reticent to give any metaphysical interpretations to his statement. So let's try and follow that.

In order to get at that, let's note what this word means (Suffering), because again we've tended to allow a word to go through a process of trivialization and reduction and we've lost part of the meaning. Let me give you, first of all, an analogy. OK, so the original meaning of this word is 'insane', but it has come to be synonymous with 'angry'. "I'm mad at Agnes", doesn't mean I'm 'insane', right? It means that I'm angry at Agnes. How did that happen? Well one of the ideas is anger is a state that can render you, if it becomes extreme, extreme anger can render you temporarily insane! And therefore temporarily mad. Anger is a cause, a pertinent cause of madness.

So, "Suffering": people usually hear "pain/ distress" when they hear the word suffering. That person is suffering. But that's not actually what the word means. To 'suffer' means to undergo. It means to lose Agency. So you can actually suffer Joy. You can have so much joy that you, sort of, have lost control of yourself! You can have so much pleasure, it is not oxymoronic to say "I'm suffering pleasure". It means I'm having so much pleasure that I've sort of lost control of the situation! Now, pain is a very powerful way of losing agency! Why? First of all it's highly disruptive and secondly pain is associated,, usually with damage and damage is a state in which we're often losing Agency. So don't hear just pain. The Buddha is not saying everything's painful. That's ridiculous. Because if everything was painful nothing would be painful. Even all of your experiences can be painful. [It] doesn't mean anything [in] particular. Because many of your experiences can't be painful in and of themselves. Because, again, this isn't an absolute kind of claim. Instead, pay attention to this connection (suffering <-> loss of agency) rather than this one (pain).

How we're actually threatened by Dukka - a potential loss of freedom - in cognitive processing terms.

Do you remember, last video gave a parable of this "suffering". It's the monkey that grabs the pitch and then tries to free itself and then the other hand gets stuck and both paws and head and then it gets killed. There is nothing in there of pain. Most of the Buddha's metaphors are not pain metaphors, they're entrapment metaphors: Being fettered, losing your freedom, losing your Agency. That's why the Buddha doesn't describe enlightenment in terms of relief. But he would famously say "just like wherever you dip into the ocean it has one taste: the taste of salt! No matter where you dip into my teaching, it has one taste: the taste of freedom". So, what he seems to be saying is that all of your life is threatened with the possibility of losing your freedom. So let's go from "all is suffering", to a "provocation": realize that all of your life is threatened with a loss of freedom, a loss of Agency. And there's a word for this kind of loss, that's often translated as suffering, which is "Dukkha". Dukkha, again, does not mean pain.

What does Dukkha mean? Well the etymology is: imagine you have a wheel, and it's off-center on its axis, so the axle is not properly going through the center of the wheel and as the wheel is turning it's destroying itself. There's a self destructiveness. Or you have, your arm is out of joint, it's disjointed like when Shakespeare says... Hamlet says that "time is out of joint". It's out of joint, and as you're moving your arm it's destroying itself. So it means like an empty gap that's sort of dirty, so that as things are moving within it they're destroying themsev[es]. So the idea of something that's engaged in a process of self-destruction, which of course is one of the powerful ways you can lose your Agency is through self-destructive processes, is what's going on here. So realize that all of your life is threatened, very really threatened, existentially threatened, by a capacity for self-destructive behavior. Self-deceptive, self-destructive behavior. So now you see what he's doing is situated very firmly within the Axial tradition.

So what does he mean here? How can we try and understand this a little bit better? So, this is work based on some stuff I've published with Leo Ferraro** and then I'll talk about some additional and important new work by Marc Lewis**. I want to try and trace a kind of pattern in your cognitive processing that can very often occur and the core of the argument I want to make is the very processes that make you adaptively intelligent - and we've been talking about this from the beginning - also make you vulnerable to self-deceptive self-destructive behavior.

The major negative feedback loop of "Parasitic Processing"

So let's say you encounter an event and you interpret the event as bad. OK... Now one of the adaptive machines you have is your brain immediately is trying to predict and anticipate other events like that. The point of you encountering something potentially even painful or distressing is not just to "URRGH", it's to make you sensitive in anticipating what's going to happen in the future. Your brain now tries to assess the probability of another event like this happening. Now, we'll get into this in more detail later, although we've talked a bit about it already with ideas about salience, is I can't take in all of the information available to me. If I was to try and calculate the actual probability of the event, I would have to track all the variables in my

environment. That's astronomically vast. Even a supercomputer cannot possibly do this. The thing is, when we do probability problems in school, we are given all the variables by stipulation but the real world doesn't work that way. The real world has an indefinitely large set of variables interacting in an indefinitely large number of ways.

So what do we do? Well we use what are called heuristics. We use shortcuts that try and help us cut through and zero in on the relevant data, the relevant information. As we've said before, zeroing in on relevant information is crucial. So one of the things we do is we use the representativeness heuristic. You judge how probable an event is by how prototypical it is, how salient it is, how much it stands out in your mind. And that will often interact with another heuristic: the availability heuristic. This is you judge how probable an event is by how easy you can remember a similar event occurring, or how easily you can imagine another event occurring. So these are actually very adaptive for you.

Now the problem is you're in a bad state because you've just had something bad happen to you and that triggers a thing called "Encoding Specificity". When you're sad it's very difficult for you to remember events in which you're happy. It's very easy for you to remember events in which you're sad. That's because your memory doesn't just store the facts, it stores all that perspectable, participatory knowing. It also stores the state you are in. This leads to very sort of paradoxical things. If you lose your keys when you're drunk one of the things you should do, if you want to get your keys back, is get drunk again because chances are it will improve your memory. If you're studying for a test and you have a headache and you take some aspirin when you're actually doing the test take the aspirin because it will improve your performance. There [are] classic experiments on this. In one experiment, you have a bunch of people learning a set of words, in the same room: group A and group B. And then in the second part of the experiment group A does it in the same room, Group B does it in a different room. That's the only difference in them. Group A will remember a significant greater number of words than group B just because they're in the same room. OK now this is very adaptive. You may say "that's crazy!" No it's not because your brain is trying to always fit you to the environment! So it doesn't just store

information, it stores how you were fitted to the environment or the context. It's very adaptive.

So now what's happening here? Well you're in a bad state so it's easy for you to remember bad things. That means it's easy for you to remember bad things and that means you judge the probability of bad things happening to be increasing. This bad thing just happen to you so it's very salient. That makes you judge that it's much more probable it's going to happen and these are reinforcing each other. Now all of this is interacting with what's called "The Confirmation Bias". We'll go over a lot more of this later when we talk about problem solving. What this is is an adaptive strategy you use where you tend to only look for information that supports your current belief. Because very often trying to find dis-confirmation takes too long and it's very difficult and complex. So we tend to look for what confirms.

So now the confirmation bias... Now as I'm going through my memory in my imagination, I will tend to look for things that confirm my forming judgment that this event is highly probable. Now all of this machinery can go awry. All of these heuristics will mislead you. It's because of this heuristic that people make mistakes when they take loved ones to the airport and things like that. Because we can imagine planes falling from the sky and when it does it's very representative for us. People describe it as a tragedy, it's in the news, and so we judge airplane crashes to be highly probable even though they're very low in probability. But then we turn and get into our automobile which is the North American death machine without paying any attention to it. So we misjudge probabilities because of these heuristics. We can't do without them! It's like when we talked about hyperbolic discounting. You can't do without them. They're adaptive. You need them.

Let's continue this. So these are all reinforcing each other, the confirmation bias... So now what do you do? You judge the probability to be great. OK? Now notice how most of this is happening automatically in a self organizing fashion. That's again, because, imagine if I had to do everything fully consciously? "OK, I'm going to pick up the cup. Now I need to start tensing my upper arm, my bicep, I need to start moving my..." If I have to move everything consciously, I couldn't pick up the cup! I need my cognition to be inherently self organizing. We've seen that throughout. The way in which

your processes need to be happening simultaneously bottom up and top down. Like when you're doing reading and you're reading both the letters and the words. Your cognition needs to be self organizing. It needs to be largely automatic. These are adaptively indispensable for you. OK so you judge the probability as great. Well what effect does that judgment have on you? It's not emotionally neutral! OK that makes you anxious. When your brain starts to conclude that the probability of negative events is high, you get anxiety. What does anxiety do to you? Well you lose cognitive flexibility. Your framing on things becomes very narrow, very rigid, very limited. What does that do? Well that reduces your ability to solve problems. Your ability to solve problems goes down. OK what does that do for you? As that goes down you start to make lots of mistakes and fail! What does that do? Well of course that increases your anxiety and that reinforces that bad events are happening to you.

What does all that do? Well all of this starts to gather in your mind as "I'm doomed"! You get fatalistic. Well if you're living in a fatalistic world, you're going to start interpreting more and more events, even neutral events, as bad and the whole thing starts to feed on itself ("Event/s interpreted as bad/wrong" flowchart containing all of this is shown on the screen). The very things that make you so intelligently adaptive; the fact that your cognition zeroes in on relevant information, makes it salient; the fact that it's so complex [and] capable of complexifying itself and organizing itself. The fact that it is trying to fit you to the environment and process information in a way that's doable within the real world. All these things that make you so adaptive, simultaneously make you vulnerable to self-deceptive self-destructive behavior. That's what it means to say "all of your life is threatened". Realize that all of your life is threatened by Dukkha.

It's not that everything you're doing is painful or distressing. That is ridiculous. That is a meaningless claim. It's that every process you're engaging, every time you're exercising your intelligent Agency, you're making yourself vulnerable to self-deceptive self-destructive processing. We called this in, when we published, "Parasitic Processing". It's not just about bad events. This is just one example. We get into all kinds of these spirals. We'll put up on this on the video a recent schema for what depression looks like that was released by some M.I.T. researchers. [It's] very complex like

this! We call this Parasitic Processing because it's like a parasite in that it takes up life within you, and it takes life away from you! It causes you to lose your agency. It causes you to suffer. And here's what's important. This capacity for your cognitive brain to be self organizing, heuristic using, complexify, to create complex systems and functions with emergent abilities, has a downside to it.

This is what... You know when you're in one of these spirals! You'll know it!! "Oh no! Here I go...! Oh no!!" Knowing it. What does it do for you? What does your belief do? It's like knowing you... knowing that I should go outside the square... "Think outside the box!!!!" It doesn't do anything!! Why? This is a complex, self-organising, adaptive system! If you try and intervene here the rest of the system reorganizes itself around your attempted intervention. It can adapt and preserve itself as you tried to destroy it. Why? Because it's making use of the very machinery by which You adapt, and make use of the things that are trying to destroy You!! That's how it works! No matter where I am, This is a perennial threat. No matter what I am doing, This is always liable to happen.

Now what's interesting, like as I said my colleague and good friend Mark Lewis... We're talking about comparing this to other work that he's recently been doing. So some of you may know Mark Lewis. I highly recommend you take a look at his work. Mark has been deeply influential in my own thinking... ideas about dynamical processing, self-organizing systems development. He is one of the foremost important neuroscientists about addiction and how addiction works in the world. I strongly recommend reading his book "Memoirs of an Addicted Brain".

So Mark was himself - I'm not disclosing anything confidential because it's right in the book - Mark was himself an addict in his youth and then he overcame his addiction then and he went into neuroscience to try and figure out why... What is addiction? How does it work? Now that's important because addiction is primarily the loss of Agency. It's not, I mean, addiction is distressing and painful... But when we're talking about somebody being addicted, the way we finally diagnose them is by how dysfunctional they've become. How much they lose their agency. So you are a videogame addict if you are playing video games to the point where you can not pursue the goals

you want to pursue in your life. You cannot establish and cultivate the relations you want to establish in your life. You cannot cultivate the kind of character or identity you aspire to. If the video gaming is robbing you of those Agentic processes then of course that is what we mean by addiction. Addiction is a loss of Agency.

Now, when you take a look at Marc's work, Marc challenges - Marc Lewis - he challenges...! I just saw him give a talk. I've been having lunch with him. But I also saw him have, just a really good talk at the Society for Psychology and Philosophy or Philosophy and Psychology - we'll get the order right! - just this past year and he was not the only person making this point, but he articulated it with his own particular explanation which is his.

What is the standard model of addiction?

So the point that many a people are making is [that] the standard model of addiction is incorrect. Fundamentally wrong! What's the standard model? The standard model is: we have a biophysical chemical dependency, and when the chemical is removed we get an overwhelming compulsion to have to seek out the chemical. And if we don't get the chemical then we suffer, similar to as if we were starving from a lack of food. And if we... and so that's what "addiction" is. Then the problem with this is it sounds very commonsensical, and the media likes it! It has the one unfortunate feature of being almost completely false! Because first of all you can get addicted to processes that have no biochemical basis, like gambling for example. Secondly, if the if the overwhelming compulsion model was correct you have a great deal of difficulty explaining some very, very pertinent facts. Most people spontaneously give up their addiction in their thirties. We of course get focused on the people who remain addicted and therefore we come to believe that addiction is an overwhelming compulsion. But if you actually track people, many people spontaneously stop being addicted.

Here's a great historical example: You have soldiers in Vietnam during the Vietnam War getting addicted to opioids. In Vietnam! "OH THE OPIOID CRISIS!!!" Not that it isn't a crisis, but we tend to think that certain chemicals are intrinsically addictive. So, they get addicted to heroin. When they return to the United States the vast majority of them spontaneously stop using the drug. "But, but why? ...chemical! Not in the body! What's

going on? Isn't there a biochemical lock and therefore a huge compulsion...?" Well think about it. Think about it in terms of existential learning. See when they were in Vietnam, they had a particular identity: they're a soldier (Agent). And they're in a particular Arena: war. They're in a particular existential mode. When they returned to the United States they become: a citizen (Agent) and a peaceful country (Arena). The relationship between the agent in the arena is what is fundamentally being altered in addiction.

Marc Lewis' model of Reciprocal Narrowing

So Marc proposes a model that he calls "Reciprocal Narrowing". So here's your Agent and here's the Arena (drawn on the board). And what happens is the drug use is associated with a particular Agent:Arena relationship. And what happens is - and we talked about this before. Remember, this is always co-identification; we're always assuming an identity and assigning identity in a code defining, interdependent manner. -What happens is, you start to lose a little bit of your cognitive flexibility, perhaps due to something like this (refers to previously mentioned negative feedback loop on the board). As you lose your cognitive flexibility, the number of options in the world starts to decline. As the number of options start to decline, you lose the variability for your Agency. As you get a tighter, narrower, less flexible cognitive Agency, the number of options in the world goes [down]. And what happens is these two things reciprocally narrow to where you have no options as to who you could be or how the world can be. And that's addiction. It is a learned - not propositionally learned - prospectably, participatory learning of a loss of agency.

I pointed out to Marc that if this is the case there must be an opposite. If there is a spiral down there must be a spiral up. And in personal communication just recently he said yes! Yes totally! And you know what that spiraling up would be. What would be the Agent:Arena relationship in which the Agency and the world are expanding? That's anagoge! That's the move towards enlightenment. What I want you to understand is Dukkha is these two things (both models on the board) because they're inerpenetrating. This loss of agency... Because this... This is your agency... As you're simultaneously doing parasitic processing within, you're doing reciprocal

narrowing without. Those are totally reinforcing each other. That's Dukkha! And no matter where you turn, this is always threatening.

You can't get free of that. You can't run away from it. You can't deny it. Remember the Buddha tried self-denial. This is like trying to hop over your shadow. You can't do it! Because it is endemic. All of this is endemic. This is the Agent:Arena relationship! You can't do away with this. This is indispensable to you being a person. This is self organizing, relevance realizing, complexifying processing! You can't get away from that because that is what makes you adaptive.

So what do you do? That's what The Buddha meant, when you realize that all of your life is threatened by Dukkha. He didn't mean believe that all of life is suffering.

So, what we need is... How do we address this? Well, once you realize it as a provocation... Once... I should like... The point is: you should feel threatened! You should feel threatened because if I can make you feel threatened by what I've just done here - how close and intimate this threat is to you - then you're starting to enact the process of moving towards enlightenment, rather than just asserting some propositions that are largely inert.

So, what is the standard way [of] presenting the second truth? "Suffering is caused by desire". And that gets you into all kinds of problems because then, well: "But don't I desire enlightenment?" "But then you should not desire to do anything...!" You can just get into all these weird loops, right?! A better way of thinking about it is: realize that Dukkha can be understood. Realize that Dukkha is caused by the way in which you can become attached, which doesn't mean that you just really like something. It means this sense of a narrowing of yourself and the world so that Agency and options are lost. The way the addict is attached to their drug, which is not a compulsive desire, although they will experience it that way... It is better understood as a Parasitic Processing that has led to a Reciprocal Narrowing, so that no alternatives are available to you.

The third: The traditional presentation is: "The Cessation of Suffering is Attainable."

But realize, a better way of putting that is: realize that you can recover your Agency. Because this narrowing down can also - you can use the same machinery to anagogically ascend out of the cave towards the sun of enlightenment. Realize that this machinery, this complex machinery, this dynamical system, can be adapted in a way that reduces your capacity for self-deception.

Why? How? How do I address this? By a psycho-technology. The Buddha offered a psycho technology of practices. You know how you deal with a complex dynamical system that is operating against you? By cultivating a counter-active dynamical system that is operating for you. You cultivate a dynamical system that doesn't intervene just here or here (in your complex cognitive machinery), one at a time, like your efforts. "I'll try this, oh that doesn't work! I'll try this..." ...because every time I intervene, it just reconfigures and I'm doing the same damn thing again! Here I am in this fourth relationship doing the same damn thing again, and I know I'm doing it! And yet when I try and not do it... I find myself doing it!! That will not work. That's why people end up in therapy!

But what if I could create a dynamical system that could interact/ intervene here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here... (in the machinery) simultaneously and in a coordinated fashion? What if I created a counteractive, dynamical system? And let it operate... And it didn't operate just at the level of my beliefs, but operated at the level of my state of consciousness and my traits of character?

The Eightfold Path

That's what the Buddha offered. He offered "The Eightfold Path". The Eightfold Path is a counteractive dynamical system that counteracts parasitic processing and does reciprocal opening, beyond the ego self and beyond the everyday world where it's represented by an eight spoked wheel. It's supposed to be a self-organising system that rolls itself in which each part is interdependent on all the other parts. You might have heard it. The Eightfold Path is to cultivate: Right Understanding, Right Thinking (there's various translations of this, sometimes Right Aspiration/ Right Thought), Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood and then Right Mindfulness and

Right Concentration. We already talked about this: saying there's Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration means there is incorrect...

One thing: This "Right" is not Moral Righteousness. This is right like right handedness. It means getting an optimal grip, because that's what my right hand is an expert in doing. It means getting an optimal grip. Notice this (Right Understanding and Right Thinking) is about your cognition. This (Right Speech, Action and Livelihood) is about your character, and this (Right Mindfulness and Concentration) is about your consciousness. And it deals with ethical aspects, existential aspects, sapiential aspects. It is the attempt to give you a counter-active dynamical system that can deal with Parasitic Processing and that can help you reverse the Reciprocal Narrowing until you get anagogic awakening. It takes you beyond the prison of the ego and the Everyday World.

So we see what's happening here? What I'm trying to show you is [that] this higher state of consciousness, this awakening, is set into a context of helping you do important transformations. It helps you to remember The Being Mode, to get out of Modal Confusion. It helps you counteract Parasitical Processing and Reciprocal Narrowing. It helps thereby to open you up to self-transcendence in a reliable and powerful way. This is what The Buddha was offering people. And I've tried to explain it to you in a way such that both you should feel threatened by what he is trying to provoke in you, and you should be encouraged. Both of these are enactment statements. You should be able to enact the threat and enact the courage: "en-couragement"; enacting the courage, [such] that you can respond to the parasitic processing and the reciprocal narrowing in your own life, to the modal confusion in your own life. Part of what we need to understand is how we can properly integrate this into what we have been learning about: Wisdom and Meaning, in the Mediterranean cultural historical context. And, how all of that can be integrated within a current scientific worldview.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Episode 13 notes

Author - [Stephen Batchelor](#)

Book - **The Awakening of the West** - [Buy here](#)

Book - **Alone With Others** - [Buy here](#)

Book - **Buddhism Without Beliefs** - [Buy here](#)

Book - **After Buddhism** - [Buy here](#)

Dukkha

Dukkha, (Pāli: “sorrow,” “suffering”), Sanskrit Duhkha, in Buddhist thought, the true nature of all existence. Much Buddhist doctrine is based on the fact of suffering; its reality, cause, and means of suppression formed the subject of the Buddha's first sermon (see Four Noble Truths).

Marc Lewis

Marc David Lewis is a developmental neuroscientist known for dynamic systems approaches to understanding the development of emotions and personality. He is currently a professor at the Radboud University in Nijmegen in the Netherlands.

Heuristics

A heuristic technique, or a heuristic (/hjʊəˈrɪstɪk/; Ancient Greek: εὕρισκω, heurískō, 'I find, discover'), is any approach to problem solving or self-discovery that employs a practical method that is not guaranteed to be optimal, perfect, or rational, but is nevertheless sufficient for reaching an immediate, short-term goal or approximation. Encoding Specificity Encoding specificity is a principle that states that human memories are more easily retrieved if external conditions (emotional cues) at the time of retrieval are similar to those in existence at the time the memory was stored.

The Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's prior beliefs or values.

M.I.T. schema on what depression looks like, including article.

Author - **Marc Lewis**

Book - **Memoirs of an Addicted Brain** - [Buy here](#)

Noble Eightfold Path

'The Noble Eightfold Path (Pali: ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga; Sanskrit: āryāṣṭāṅgamārga) is an early summary of the path of Buddhist practices leading to liberation from samsara, the painful cycle of rebirth.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 14 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Epicureans, Cynics, and Stoics

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. Last time we finished our look at the Axial Revolution in India. We took a look at what was going on in The Buddha's state of enlightenment. We took a look at some of the Cognitive Science in such awakening experiences. And then we moved to interpret following the sage advice of Batchelor. Some of the Buddha's pronouncements, trying to get beyond interpreting his pronouncements as propositions to be believed [and] instead understand them as provocations so that we may enact Enlightenment. And that means enacting the threat that we are facing, and then enacting the psycho-technologies that can respond to it. We took a look at this in terms of ideas of Parasitic Processing, Reciprocal Narrowing, Addiction and the opposite of anagogic acceleration, as opposed to Reciprocal Narrowing and creating a counter-active dynamical system. The counter-active system of the Eightfold Path for successfully dealing with Parasitic Processing. So we saw that these higher states of consciousness, these awakening experiences, can bring about transformations that alleviate modal confusion, parasitic processing, reciprocal narrowing, many of the ways in which we fundamentally lose our Agency in the world, in a self-deceptive and self-destructive manner.

Post Axial Revolution in the West - The Hellenistic Period

I'd now like to return back to what's happening after the Axial Revolution in the West. So Socrates was fortunate [that] he had a great disciple in Plato. Plato was fortunate in that he had a great disciple in Aristotle. Aristotle had a great disciple, but he was not so fortunate. Aristotle's great disciple is not himself a great philosopher, he is another kind of great. He is Alexander the Great and Alexander the Great is an example of the kind of thing that predates the axial revolution: the world conquer. Alexander creates an empire and takes the Greek way of thinking throughout most of the known world in a way that reestablishes, in perhaps a dangerous manner, the Pre-Axial World.

Alexander is so glorious that the line between being a human being and being a god is blurred. He creates a personal mythology in which he is a god man very much like the pharaohs of ancient Egypt which might perhaps explain why Alexander was so readily welcomed into the courts of Egypt. Either way, what happens is a twisting of the world because not only does Alexander represent a return to a pre-axial way of being, he also represents a fundamental disruption to the world in which people had found themselves. Let's compare the world of Aristotle to the world of Alexander.

Comparisons between the worlds of Aristotle and Alexander

Now in order to do that we have to understand that Alexander himself does not live very long: he dies in Babylon, that most ancient of cities, and it's not clear what he dies of at a young age of 33. He has a child but the child of course is too young and is therefore quickly killed and his major generals fight amongst themselves and they carve his empire up into four smaller empires that are perpetually at war with each other for about three hundred years. So this period is known as the Hellenistic Era. So, if you're alive at the time of Aristotle, chances are you live, if you're Greek, part of the Greek culture, you live in a Polis - this is where we get "cosmopolitan" from. It doesn't mean city, it means a city state. Like, for example, Athens and its surrounding agricultural supporting environment. Or Sparta.

Now you know many of the other citizens, you know them face to face. We mentioned the idea that, you know, Athens is developing democracy - remember when we discuss the Sophists and, at least for the adult males, and that's a significant defect in this society, but I've already gone into that - but you're participating in your government in a direct manner. You live close to, it's accessible to you, the seat of that government. You often know personally people involved in the government. Sometimes even the leaders themselves. Everybody around you speaks your language. Everybody around you has ancestors, like you yourself do, stretching back beyond memory who have lived in this place. Everybody around you has the same religion as you. Everybody has basically the same allegiances to this place. See, your Polis just isn't just where you lived. Your Polis is such a tight relationship between Agent and Arena that one of the greatest punishments you could suffer in this world - the world of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle - is to be ostracized, which is just - you're not killed, you're not imprisoned, you're not punished in any way - you're just told to leave the Polis! And for many people they would rather die or face imprisonment than be ostracized because the Polis was such an embedded existence for them. Their identity was so enmeshed in it. So see... Look how deeply connected you are to yourself, to your environment, to the people around you, to your government, to your culture, to your history. Alexander comes and smashes all of that. Greek culture is now distributed into Africa, the Levant, into Asia (Asia Minor [and] Asia proper), right down to, out to the borders of India. You have Greek kingdoms, Bactria [for example], that are integrating Greek culture with Buddhist Philosophy and religion in what is modern day Afghanistan.

Now what does this mean? Well this means, in the Hellenistic Era, people are being moved around and shuffled around and they belong to far flung empires. You are now probably thousands of miles away from the seat of government. You do not participate in that government, nor do you know, personally, most of the people or any of the people in it. The people around you might not have lived where you're living very long; you might not be living where you've been living very long. Your ancestors might have been from Athens and here you are dwelling in Asia Minor. The people around you speak different languages, worship different gods! Notice how all the

connections are being lost; you don't have a connection to a Polis, you don't have a connection to a shared linguistic group of any great extent, shared history, shared ancestry, shared religion. You're experiencing what Porteous and Smith and Brian Walsh called Domicide (we'll come back to this later when we talk about the meaning crisis today).

Alexander after Domicide: an age of anxiety

Domicide is the destruction of home. Now there's two ways in which Domicide can occur. One, of course, is physical destruction of your house, and that's important, but there's also Cultural Domicide in which you have a house, you have a dwelling, but it is not very much your home. Now we'll come back to this being "un-home" again when we talk about our current situation. But notice how often we will use the language of loss of home to describe our current situation where we often talk about how we now feel un-homed in the cosmos. So people are experiencing this radical sense of Domicide. They don't have deep connections to themselves, to each other, to their environment, to their history, to their cultural surroundings. They have very little political participation. They feel insignificant. You can go to sleep and you're part of the Ptolemaic empire and you wake up and you're part of the Seleucid Empire! So this is known as an Age of Anxiety: The Hellenistic Period. The art changes, it becomes much more frenetic, it becomes much more realistic. It becomes much more organized around extremes and tragedy. The confidence that we saw in the earlier periods, the periods of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, was gone! Greece itself has suffered a titanic civil war: The Peloponnesian War. Sparta defeats Athens, the home of Socrates and Plato; one of the places where Aristotle did most of his work! Sparta is very quickly itself defeated by Thebes. Thebes very quickly loses its hegemony. So, the Greek world loses, loses and loses until of course it's overwhelmed by Macedonia and Alexander.

So, whereas the Greek culture is spread throughout the world, it's also thinned. It loses its depth. So there is a change that starts to happen. You can see - as I said, in the art, the expression of this - you can see it in what starts to happen in religions: there's a lot of syncretism. People are trying to create religions that integrate different cultural deities together. A Greek deity, for example, and an Egyptian deity are integrated together and Props into

Serapis, or something like that. You also see the elevation of Mother Goddesses to pan-cultural importance, like the Mother Goddess Isis because, of course, when you feel Domicide, when you feel a loss of home, there is nothing that means home more to you than Mother. And if you don't have that with your physical mother, what you want is some Divine Mother that can make you feel at home no matter where you are in this fractured, domicile laden world. But philosophy also responds. The Axial Age has left a powerful legacy - Socrates, Plato and Aristotle - and that project does not come to an end, but it does undergo transformation in the face of The Hellenistic meaning crisis.

Epicurus, one of the great philosophers of the Hellenistic Period

Up until now the main thing that wisdom was trying to deal with was foolishness. And that's not abandoned, but that's now seen as insufficient. So one of the great philosophers of the Hellenistic Period is Epicurus. And Epicurus famously said "Call no man a philosopher who has not alleviated the suffering of others". So there is now a therapeutic aspect to wisdom. Wisdom is now importantly about dealing with the anxiety and suffering that people are experiencing in the Hellenistic Era. So a new model is created. So we've seen the idea of the Sage as somebody like Socrates who provokes the Axial Revolution, leads you out of the cave... All of these wonderful and powerful images and figures. But a new metaphor emerges: The philosopher is the physician of the soul. A philosopher is somebody who can cure you of existential suffering. This becomes crucial.

Now, many of these new philosophical schools - the Epicurean for example, and the Stoics - take it upon themselves to try to exemplify Socrates. They try to exemplify Socrates. The Epicureans do this in a very unique way. They do this in a - a useful way of analyzing their position is to take them up on their own metaphor: what is their diagnosis of the disease that is afflicting people? ...and what is their prognosis for the cure? Now the Epicureans are very relevant to us because they in some ways represent a very secular alternative in the midst of what was still a very religious world. And that is pertinent to us. So the Epicureans diagnose that our main problem is fear.

Distinctions between fear and anxiety

Now that's interesting, and there's something right about that. But we have to slow down first. And here's... in order to get closer about how we should try and appropriate what they're saying, the work of Paul Tillich here is especially useful, especially the work he does does in his masterpiece "The Courage To Be". Although he does not talk about the Epicureans very much, he concentrates on the Stoics as we will as well, he nevertheless brings up important distinctions. This is the distinction between "fear" and a word you heard me use more often which is "anxiety".

Now these terms are often used interchangeably and we often... and we also mix up the word anxiety with "eagerness". We'll say I'm so anxious to see you tonight. That's horrible! You shouldn't be anxious to see somebody! That's mean you're distressed and you are suffering a loss of agency and you have a nebulous sense of threat. That's "that person's terrifying"! What you mean is you are "eager to see them". So first of all give up that meaning of anxious. Secondly we use these terms interchangeably (fear and anxiety) and in everyday discourse that's probably all right because they do overlap in some ways, but they're important... It's important to at least talk about the polar differences between them. Fear is when you have an observable, direct threat. If a tiger comes into this room I experience fear because I have an observable threat. In a very important sense I Know What To Do. I may fail in doing it! But I know what to do. OK? Anxiety is different. Anxiety is when the threat is nebulous. You're not quite sure what the threat is and you're not sure what to do. You don't know what to do. So very often when you are suffering existential issues you experience anxiety. This is why this is the preferred term used by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Although Kirkegaard does use fear in one of his books, but that has more to do with something else.

The paradigm shift in strategies from seeking immortality to radically accepting mortality

So the Epicureans are often translated, I think correctly - I'm not talking about/ I'm not making a scholastic point - as talking about how we are suffering because we can't manage fear. I think a better way of understanding it, given this distinction and following on Tillich, is we suffer

because we can't manage our anxiety. Because the thing, the fears they talk about are not really things that are a clear threat where we clearly know what to do.

So, according to the Epicureans, basically we don't control our imagination and our thinking and so we suffer from anxieties that cripple our ability to get a grip on the world. So let me give you one: (on screen note: When John mentions the Epicureans, he often uses both "anxious" and "afraid" to mean "anxious") Many people are anxious about death. In fact, sort of prototypically, people will often say, well, they'll often use the existence of death as a way of talking about how their life is ultimately meaningless: "I'm going to die anyways. What does it matter? I'm going to die! And it's terrifying! I don't think... It's going to... It's, right... I'm just afraid of death!" We know that if you expose people to triggers about their own mortality, they become cognitively rigid, they go into something very much like this parasitic processing, they get locked down. Now there's a couple things you can do. You can pursue immortality and, of course, the religions of the ancient world and some versions of the modern world offer this! I have very little to say for this other than, as a cognitive scientist, I think that is an utterly doomed strategy. The evidence that your mind and your consciousness are completely dependent and emergent from your brain is overwhelming. And one thing is indisputable: your brain dies. And when your brain dies, your consciousness, your character, yourself die with it. I know that's even, I suppose, antithetical to what many Buddhists believe, but that's... that's irrelevant!

So I think the strategy of pursuing immortality is not going to work. It makes a fundamental confusion. It confuses something that's phenomenologically mysterious to you with making a conclusion. Look, I can't experience my own death. I can't imagine it because whenever I'm trying to imagine being dead I'm still consciously aware. And so death is like: "huuuuuuuh!" and therefore I conclude... well, there must be something about me that's immortal because it's inconceivable that I can't 'be' at some level..." But of course that's false! And that points to what the Epicureans talk about. They talk about: there's another strategy! Instead of trying to achieve immortality, can you radically accept your mortality. Because it's indisputable that you're going to die!

Now, how do you do that? Well first of all realize that you can't possibly be anxious about your death. Then you say "yes I am!" OK, well, give the Epicureans a chance! First of all, if what you mean by this (death) [is] your non-existence, and you say "oh I just I can't conceive of my non-existence!", well OK! This is a standard move by Epicurus. "Well what about all of the world before you were born? Do you have trouble conceiving of that?" -No! "Does it terrify you that you didn't exist then?" -No. So your non-existence isn't itself terrifying. And you say "AHHH, but it's, it's the loss!". "Well, the problem with that," the Epicureans would say, "is that's equivocal! Do you mean reduction, or do you to me... do you mean the absence?". And you mean "well, death is total loss!" and then they say "ah but you can't ever experience total loss". They famously said the following: "where I am, Death is not. Where death is, I am not". What that means is: if I am aware that I'm losing I'm still alive. And if I've lost everything I've lost awareness and I can't be aware that I've lost anything. So that can't be what it means! OK?

"So... It means partial loss!???" Ahhh... So what you're actually afraid of is losing some of your Agency. You're afraid of some of the reduction in your capacities as you're dying. But of course you're doing that all the time. So what is it you're actually afraid of? Well the Epicurean say "you are afraid of losing what's good". OK, well what does that mean? Here is where the Epicureans... they are sort of, very, very modern: They say "well good is ultimately something like pleasure" and they got associated with hedonism and that's not quite right. But, they don't mean pleasure in terms of bodily sensation. They mean "pay attention to those things that actually give you the most meaning". Oh, OK! Now, what is it that really gives you meaning? The things that we are most liable to lose, as we age or as we're sick - we're liable to lose our fame, we're liable to lose our fortune, we're liable to lose our wealth. That's scary. But then they say quite rightly "but those aren't the things that give you the most meaning in life".

What is it that gives you the most meaning in life? And here's where the Epicureans have a beautiful answer and they pick it up from Socrates: "The thing that gives you meaning is friendship". And they mean that very broadly. So they were unique in their community: they included women in their community, not primarily for sexual relations, but they considered that

the ability to obtain meaningful relationships was crucial. And with those... and, ok... meaningful relationships, not just the relationships, but being able to exercise philosophia: the pursuit of wisdom and self-transcendence. And their point is that as long as you are, that is always available to you. And that any of the pain you're suffering from the loss of any of the any of these things (fame, fortune, wealth) is ultimately manageable by you. You can learn to manage it. Now whether or not you ultimately agree with the Epicureans, do you see what they're doing here? They're refusing to accept "I'm afraid of death!" They're saying "wait wait wait wait. Are you... do you really want immortality?" What you're actually afraid of is losing your Agency which you've identified with these things, but that's not actually where your ultimate happiness lies. That as long as you have cognitive Agency, you can cultivate Philosophical friendships. And Epicurus did this right to his very last moment, even though suffering from some horrible stomach illness. So he exemplified what he's talking, about such that when you die it doesn't matter to you.

So his disciples practiced... they would... and Epicurus had other ways... He tried to get us to not be anxious about the gods. Famously crafting some of the first arguments that are used by modern day atheists against being concerned about the gods. I don't... I wouldn't say Epicurus was an atheist. He's a non-theist. He basically argues that the gods are irrelevant and therefore paying attention to them or being overly concerned with them, being anxious about them and their nebulous threat is not something you should rationally do. So, Epicurus' disciples would practice internalizing Epicurus. They would write his sentences on their household walls, on their household utensils. They would practice... They would form communities together where they would reinforce all of these practices where you constantly train in being able to accept your mortality.

Now, I think this is valuable to us and I think one of the things that any wisdom tradition should do is give us a way of responding to our mortality. I would recommend that that project hasn't stopped. I recommend Tillich's book "The Courage To Be" as a discussion about that from a more modern context. And as I said to you, we are not caught by the usual framing. Either you believe in an afterlife or your life, your current life is meaningless. Instead, the Epicureans say there is an alternative strategy. There is an

alternative therapy for dealing with the anxiety. And that is by learning how, not just learning beliefs, but learning how to live in the acceptance of your mortality.

Stoicism and its origins of modern forms of Cognitive Therapy

Now, while I think this is relevant, I don't think that their diagnosis is sufficient. I do not think that the meaning crisis of the Hellenistic Period was driven primarily, or solely, by a fear of mortality. Why? Because mortality has always been with us and always will be with us. I think they are right that periods of chaos and homicide exacerbate - we know this from mortality salience research. Things that are making us feel more vulnerable tend to make our mortality and our terror around it more salient to us. But I think there is another school that gets a better understanding of what was going on in the Hellenistic Period and gives a more comprehensive answer. And this is the Stoic school. Now Stoicism is very relevant because Stoicism is a direct and explicit ancestor to some of our current forms of psychotherapy. The current forms of psychotherapy that are the most evidence based for being effective - the cognitive therapies like cognitive therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, rational Emotive Therapy, etc. - directly come out of stoicism.

You read Aaron Beck's book, for example ,on cognitive therapy, he repeatedly states this and cites Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius and others. So, the way we are trying to deal with issues of anxiety - and, if you probably noticed, we have an anxiety depression crisis in our culture - is we are very much putting into practice things that originated with the Stoics. Not as much from the Epicureans. So that means the Stoics have a different diagnosis of the problem and a different prognosis for the answer. So what's their issue? They also believe we're suffering from a kind of anxiety. A kind of suffering of a loss of Agency, and the distress around that because that's, of course, what's shared by all of these schools: Confronting the Hellenistic crisis; meaning crisis; the crisis of homicide. But they have a different interpretation of it.

A history of Stoicism from Socrates through Antisthenes and Diogenes.

Now we have to do a bit of history. There's a little... There's quite a bit more history that comes out of... out... directly out of Socrates and flows into stoicism. I want to go over this a little bit carefully with you. So you have Socrates, and we know one of his greatest disciples is Plato, but he has another one, Antisthenes. Plato wrote dialogues because he was trying to get us to emulate and eventually internalize Socratic elenchus: that question and answer process that Socrates made famous. When Antisthenes was asked what he had learned from Socrates he argued... he didn't argue, he just simply stated! He didn't make an argument. He just simply stated that he learned how to converse with himself. That sounds like, well, "I talk to myself all day long"! OK, so that's exactly the thing. This doesn't mean you're 'internal, just talking to yourself... It doesn't (writes Rumination on the board), and the problem with that is that talking to yourself is often what goes seriously awry in anxiety and depression. This is what psychologists and psychotherapists mean by rumination; when that talking to yourself gets caught up in those parasitic processing spirals and it just spins out of control. Antisthenes means something else. He means he learned to do with himself what Socrates was able to do with him. He really learned how to internalize Socrates.

So although the Epicureans patterned themselves on Socrates, there they come out of Socrates. The Stoicism is really something close to being a religion that's trying to internalize Socrates, so that Socrates is basically - and I don't mean this disrespectfully, because the Stoics certainly wouldn't - Socrates is turned into a systematic set of psycho-technologies that you internalise into your metacognition. So, what became crucial for Plato, as we saw, was argumentation. But for Antisthenes the actual confrontation with Socrates was more important. Both Plato and Antisthenes are interested in the transformation that Socrates is affording.

Plato sees this happening through argumentation. Antesthenes sees it as happening through confrontation because... And you can see how they're both right, because in Socratic elenchus, Socrates comes up and he argues with you. But of course he's also confronting you. We talked about how he

was sort of slamming the Axial revolution into your face! So, Antesthenes has a follower, Diogenes, and Diogenes epitomizes this: This confrontation. And by looking at the kinds of confrontation we can start to see what the followers of Antesthenes are doing. So Diogenes basically does something analogous to provocative performance art. He gets in your face in a way that tries to provoke you to realizations. Those kinds of insights that will challenge you. He tries to basically create aporia in you, that shocked experience that you had when confronting Socrates that challenges you to radically transform your life. But instead of using argumentation and discussion, as Socrates did and Plato picked up on, they were really trying to hone in on how to try to be as provocative as possible.

So famously you know about one of these. It became a card in the Tarot and it became a album cover for Led Zeppelin. You have the man with the lamp, walking, wandering about: the hermit with the lamp! Well this is Diogenes. He walked into the marketplace carrying around a lamp and looking and looking and looking and looking and everybody said "well what are you looking for?" And then he just kept looking and looking... "What are you looking for? What are you... What is it? What is it?" And then he said "I'm looking for one honest man!" And then everybody gets got pissed off at him because they are so intrigued by all this looking and questing and then when it [be]comes something that, right... And they're pissed off because they know he's right because they're in the marketplace and everybody is lying and cheating and stealing. But they don't want to know that. They don't want to pay attention to that!

Now, that sound sort of 'yeah that's kind of cool and creative'! Yeah, but Diogenes does other things that you might not find so cool or courageous. Well, they're courageous, at least, but they're not... you don't find them cool! Diogenes also famously came into the center of the marketplace and masturbated in public! And most of... We're all going like "Ewww! EWWWW!" Right? How are these two things possibly related? Well here's how they're related. The group of people that start to take shape in this tradition are called the Cynics. It's not our modern meaning of the word, so I'm going to use a capital C because this just means, you know, being suspicious that everybody has an ulterior motive, or secret agenda. That's not

what is meant here. This means actually living like a dog, because Diogenes also famously lived outside of Athens in a barrel!

So let me tell you one more story and we will try to connect all of them. So Alexander, the future emperor of the world, on his ascendance into godhood comes to visit Diogenes. So you can imagine! Here is the whole, like, all of this entourage! And here comes Alexander to visit Diogenes and he comes up to Diogenes he says: "I can give you half of the world! What do you want?" And all Diogenes says is "could you move a little to the left, you're blocking my sunlight!". So why is he living in a barrel? Why is that his answer to Alexander? Why does he look for one honest man? Why does he masturbate [in public]? What is going on? Well, the Cynics had a particular understanding of The Hellenistic Domicide. They had the idea that what causes us to suffer is what we set our heart on. It's not just the particular that we set our heart on in our life, and we're afraid of losing it in death. We can set our heart on all kinds of things that ultimately will cause us to suffer.

Why? Well, their idea is when we set our hearts on the wrong things, those things will fail us, and that's how we suffer. You can see some similarities to some aspects of Buddhism and to some of the asceticism that the Buddha first practiced himself. So the Cynics came to the conclusion that what The Hellenistic Period was showing is that many of the things that we take for granted - and think about what that word means: we take them as being part of the structure of reality - are actually not fundamentally real. They don't have staying power. They're not permanent. They're actually manmade. They are historically, culturally, dependent and they are temporary. And when we set ourselves on these things the current of events can easily and readily wash them away. And then we are left bereft. Our hearts are torn from us. And that is how we experience homicide.

So, what should we do then? Well you should learn - not just acquire a set of beliefs; Diogenes isn't just believing things, he's living in a certain place, in a certain way - you should learn how to set your heart on the kinds of things that are not manmade, are not contingent, that will not be swept away by events. What are those kinds of things? Well one are the laws of the Natural World. So this is why Diogenes lives in a barrel! He wants to live as much as he can like an animal. In one sense! In another sense he doesn't want to live

like an animal at all. But he wants to live as much by natural law as opposed to manmade law. He doesn't want to be invested in manmade cultural institutions or practices, cultural, political value systems because those will end! And then if we have set our hearts upon them, our hearts will be broken. So you want to as much as you can live according to the patterns of nature, because those are not manmade and those will not disappear with the change in history or culture. Now if it was just that then, of course, Diogenes would just live like an animal! But the Cynics also said, in addition to natural law, there are moral laws.

Moral laws - Guilt verses Shame. Moral principles and purity codes.

There are moral laws as to what is a proper way to be a good human being. Now you may say "but isn't that all culturally relative?" And of course that's a big dispute. But one of the things that the Cynics did was to try and make a distinction between moral principles that are not culturally based and purity codes that are culturally historically based. And they are similar to each other in ways such that we can often confuse them together. So a good way of understanding this is in terms of more modern language of Guilt versus Shame. Now, again we use these terms interchangeably and we shouldn't because having a distinction between them is useful. Guilt is your distress at having realized [that] you [have] broken a moral principle. Shame is your distress at having violated a purity code. Let me give you an example: If, as I was delivering this video, there was some sort of malfunction in my clothing and my clothing suddenly fell down, I would be deeply embarrassed. I would experience shame. Why? Because I violated a code, a cultural code, which is [that] I'm supposed to be fully clothed in public discourse, and I am, right?! But if that happened, have I done anything immoral? Most of you would say "no, you didn't do anything immoral! You didn't do anything wrong!". So I don't feel guilt I feel shame.

Sometimes they can be against each other. You may be made to feel ashamed even though you're doing something that you believe, let's say in a justified way, is morally right! Many people who supported blacks during the Civil Rights Movement were subjected to terrific amounts of shaming, even though they didn't experience any guilt in what they were doing.

Now very often we confuse purity codes with moral codes. We confuse Purity Codes because we confuse our disgust reaction, that's often purity code based, with a moral judgment that should be based on reasoning and evidence. Please listen to me very carefully with what I want to say. First I'll give you something non-controversial: both of my parents are dead. But suppose they were alive: I don't want to see them having sex. I don't. I would go "EWWW!". Is that a moral argument? Of course not! There's nothing immoral with them having sex! That's why I'm here! In a similar way, and please hear what I'm saying, I might not want to see two men having sex. That doesn't mean that that is in any way a moral judgment on my part. But a lot of the ways we have persecuted gay people is because we have confused a purity code 'discuss' reaction with a legitimate moral argument. The people who started the process and we're still pulling them apart today, right now, right here right now, were the Cynics. What Diogenes was trying to do was

get you to pull apart the moral code from the purity code. He did nothing immoral by masturbating in public.

But although lots of people were doing stuff that was culturally acceptable in the marketplace, most of it was a moral. Do you see? Alexander comes to him and offers him power and fame, but those are all the things the Cynics say are no good because, if you set your hearts on them, those are manmade, human defined and therefore your heart will eventually be broken. Set your heart on what won't get broken.

So, the Cynics developed this very powerful, provocative way of enacting Socrates and trying to get us, the Cynics are trying to get us to realize what we're setting our heart on, and to pull apart our automatic disgust reactions from moral reflection on what we're doing.

Now Diogenes has a disciple Crates, and then Crates has a disciple Zeno. This is not the Zeno of Zeno's paradoxes. This is a different Zeno. Now, whereas the Cynics tended to be sort of hostile to Plato, because of his emphasis on argumentation, Zeno was deeply influenced by the Cynics, but he also really liked Plato! He saw that there was value in the argumentation and he realized that there's deep connections between your ability to rationally reflect and your ability to use your reason. So what he wanted to do was integrate the rational argumentation and reasoning of Plato with the provocative aspects of the Cynics. So he crafted a way of life that put the two together. And then he would walk up and down a stoa (this is a covered colonnade in Athens) teaching this new integration. That's where we get the name "Stoic" from. Stoic doesn't mean being, you know, "stiff upper lip and tolerating the decline of the British Empire" or stuff like that! It means something much more sophisticated.

So Zero's insight was "there's something deeply right about the Cynics, but they're getting something wrong!" They're concentrating too much on the product and not enough on the process. They're concentrating too much on what we're attaching our heart to, rather than the very process of attachment itself. Because, The Stoics said, "yes, particular cultures in history are variable, but being social isn't!" Human beings are inherently social! Yes, particular political, cultural and historical institutions and traditions are variable. But it is part of our humanity to be social. We shouldn't be leaving

the Polis! Because notice that Diogenes and Socrates have to actually enter the Polis to practice their philosophy! So, Zeno said, "it's not What you set your heart on. It's how you set your heart." And this is always a hallmark of rationality. One of the crucial - and this is like, even recent work on Rationality (Keith Stanovich and others): the hallmark of rationality is learning not to focus just on the products of your cognition, but find valuable, and pay attention to, the processes. What process? What is this process of setting your heart on? Well it's something we've already talked about! It's this process of co-identification.

It's the process by which the Agent:Arena relationship is setup. It's the process by which you're simultaneously assuming an identity and assigning an identity, and you're doing that all the time. Unconsciously.

Now the Stoics say "ah, that process of co-identification is where your identity is being formed. That's where your Agency is taking shape." But if you mindlessly co-identify, if you do it automatically and reactively, you will (if you'll allow me the acronym) you'll MAR that whole process. It'll be open to all kinds of distortion. Self-deception. Self-destruction. You can see here again the Axial Age ideas. So, what do we need to do? Well we need to pay attention to this process. We need to pay attention to how we're assuming and assigning identities. We need to do it in such a way that we can strengthen our Agency in the face of the threat of homicide. So what I want to explore with you next time is what did the Stoics actually advocate as practices. And how are these currently being taken up in our own psychotherapeutic endeavors to deal with our own version of Domicide and the meaning crisis. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Episode 14 notes

[Stephen Batchelor](#)

Stephen Batchelor is a British author and teacher, writing books and articles on Buddhist topics and leading meditation retreats throughout the world. He is a noted proponent of agnostic or secular Buddhism.

Authors - [J Porteous and Sandra Smith](#)

Book - Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home - [Buy here](#)

Ptolemaic Empire

The Ptolemaic Kingdom was a Hellenistic kingdom based in ancient Egypt. It was ruled by the Ptolemaic dynasty, which started with Ptolemy I Soter's accession after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC and which ended with the death of Cleopatra and the Roman conquest in 30 BC.

Seleucid Empire

The Seleucid Empire was a Hellenistic state ruled by the Seleucid dynasty which existed from 312 BC to 63 BC; Seleucus I Nicator founded it following the division of the Macedonian Empire vastly expanded by Alexander the Great.

The Peloponnesian War

The Peloponnesian War was an ancient Greek war fought by the Delian League led by Athens against the Peloponnesian League led by Sparta. Historians have traditionally divided the war into three phases.

Syncretism

Syncretism /'sɪŋkrətɪzəm/ is the combining of different beliefs, while blending practices of various schools of thought.

Author - Paul Tillich

Book - The Courage To Be - [Buy here](#)

Kierkegaard and Heidegger

Aaron Beck

Aaron Temkin Beck is an American psychiatrist who is professor emeritus in the department of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania. He is regarded as the father of both cognitive therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy

Epictetus

Epictetus was a Greek Stoic philosopher. He was born a slave at Hierapolis, Phrygia and lived in Rome until his banishment, when he went to Nicopolis

in northwestern Greece for the rest of his life. His teachings were written down and published by his pupil Arrian in his Discourses and Enchiridion

Marcus Aurelius

Marcus Aurelius was Roman emperor from 161 to 180 and a Stoic philosopher. He was the last of the rulers known as the Five Good Emperors, and the last emperor of the Pax Romana, an age of relative peace and stability for the Roman Empire. He served as Roman consul in 140, 145, and 161

Antisthenes

Antisthenes was a Greek philosopher and a pupil of Socrates. Antisthenes first learned rhetoric under Gorgias before becoming an ardent disciple of Socrates. He adopted and developed the ethical side of Socrates' teachings, advocating an ascetic life lived in accordance with virtue.

Elenchus

In a dialogue, elenchus is the "Socratic method" of questioning someone to test the cogency, consistency, and credibility of what he or she has said. Plural: elenchi. Adjective: elentic. Also known as the Socratic elenchus, Socratic method, or elenctic method.

Diogenes

Diogenes, also known as Diogenes the Cynic, was a Greek philosopher and one of the founders of Cynic philosophy. He was born in Sinope, an Ionian colony on the Black Sea, in 412 or 404 BC and died at Corinth in 323 BC. Diogenes was a controversial figure. Aporia as a Philosophical TermIn addition to describing genuine and feigned expressions of doubt, the word "aporia" is also used in a very different sense in the world of philosophy. As a philosophical term, aporia is used to describe a contradiction, paradox, or logical impasse in a text.

Cynicism

A member of a school of ancient Greek philosophers founded by Antisthenes, marked by an ostentatious contempt for ease and pleasure. The

movement flourished in the 3rd century BC and revived in the 1st century AD.

Cynicism is a school of thought of ancient Greek philosophy as practiced by the Cynics. For the Cynics, the purpose of life is to live in virtue, in agreement with nature

Crates of Thebes

Crates of Thebes was a Cynic philosopher. Crates gave away his money to live a life of poverty on the streets of Athens. He married Hipparchia of Maroneia who lived in the same manner that he did. Respected by the people of Athens, he is remembered for being the teacher of Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism

Zeno of Citium

Zeno of Citium was a Hellenistic philosopher of Phoenician origin from Citium, Cyprus. Zeno was the founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, which he taught in Athens from about 300 BC

Keith E. Stanovich

Keith E. Stanovich (Rationality) is Emeritus Professor of Applied Psychology and Human Development, University of Toronto and former Canada Research Chair of Applied Cognitive Science. His research areas are the psychology of reasoning and the psychology of reading.

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Ep. 15 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Marcus Aurelius and Jesus

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. So last time we finished up our look at what was going on in Buddhism and then we moved back to the West and we started to take a look at what was coming after the axial revolution. And we saw that Aristotle's disciple Alexander ushered in a period of turmoil and cultural anxiety; a period where many people were experiencing Domicide - a very wide manner, a deep and profound sense of loss of home, not of having a house or a dwelling, but that connectedness, that rootedness to one's culture, one's place, one's history, one's language group, one's religion, one's community, et cetera.

And we saw that what happens is a change in the cultivation of wisdom. Notice again, the deep connection between the cultivation of wisdom and the attempt to deal with enhancement of meaning or the response to a meaning crisis. What happens is a change in the notion of wisdom. And that wisdom now takes on a therapeutic dimension in which the philosopher is the physician of the soul and has to learn to hear anxiety. And then we learned how the Epicureans responded to this, how they diagnosed the problem, like a physician, and prescribed a response. They diagnosed the anxiety of the period of the Hellenistic Domicide as being caused by an anxiety about one's own mortality.

We took a look at that and we took a look at how they responded to that. They advocated giving up, I would argue the quixotic attempt to achieve immortality, and instead trying to come to an acceptance, a lived acceptance of one's mortality. And they did that by getting you to realise, by slowly getting you to realise. Getting clear about your nebulous anxiety that it's not about non-existence, it's not about experiencing total loss. It's about experiencing partial loss and then there's a remedy to experiencing partial loss, which is to set yourself upon those things that are actually constitutive of meaning - full happiness - and then realising, deeply realising and structuring your lives so that you will have those up until the moment of your death, which is philosophically informed friendship, meaningful relationships, and which we are afforded the cultivation of wisdom and self-transcendence.

Now, while I think mortality salience is definitely a part of the Hellenistic crisis, I don't think the Epicureans have a comprehensive understanding and

to get a more comprehensive understanding and diagnosis we turn to the Stoics. But in order to understand the Stoics, we have to understand the group that they developed out of, and those were the Cynics. And the cynics were not as impressed by Socrates's argumentation as Plato was. They were much more impressed by Socrates's capacity for confrontation and provocatively inducing aporia in people and they started to practice this and in doing so they started to force people to realise the distinction between moral codes and purity codes and to thereby pay more careful attention to what they're actually setting their hearts upon, so that their hearts would not be broken by being set on manmade impermanent, cultural systems and values.

Xeno the Cynic

Xeno, a Cynic, was deeply impressed by this, but he was also impressed by Plato's argumentation. He wanted to integrate the two together and he also had the fundamental insight that although particular cultures and historical institutions are contingent. Being social is not. We are inherently social in the depths of our humanity. So leaving the Polis was not actually an option, according to Xeno. Instead, what we have to do is realise that our issue isn't what we're setting our hearts upon, but how we're setting our hearts. Pay much more attention to the process, than the product.

So you can see how the Stoics are even picking up on something that's implicit in the Epicureans. The Epicureans aren't trying to change the world and eradicate death by bringing about immortality. The Epicureans are trying to get you to reframe having insight - not just an intellectual insight, but an existential insight - that changes the meaning of your mortality. And this was the core of the stoic insight.

Pay attention to how that existential meaning is being made. Pay attention to how that process of co-identification - the way we're assuming and assigning identities - is occurring, because that's where your 'self' and your identity and your agency are being forged. The problem is most of us let that process go by mindlessly, automatically and reactively, and so we MAR this process. We make it susceptible to distortion. And that distortion is going to be a distortion that affects the very machinery of our 'self', of our being in the world.

"PROSOCHE" and "PROCHIERON"

So what did the Stoics advocate that we need to do? Well, we need to bring this process of co-identification, of assuming various roles of our agency, assuming various identities and assigning various identities in the arena... We need to bring this whole co-determination, co-creation of agency and arena into our awareness. So they advocated "PROSOCHE" and "PROCHIERON". And you're going to see similarities here to what we saw in Buddhism, but also some differences.

So PROSOCHE is to pay attention. Now, obviously we're always paying attention, so that's useless advice! What they meant is "pay attention to how you're paying attention" pay attention to how you're judging, pay attention to this process. (Indicates "P.A.R." on the board.) Learn to see there's a difference between the meaning - and what I mean here, [is] the modal meaning, the existential mode you're in, I don't mean semantic meaning... learn to distinguish between the meaning and the event. (writes "Meaning" and "Event" on the board)

Let's stop here. Let's stop here. This is the core I, would argue, of all of our current psychotherapies that are cognitive psychotherapies. Learning to distinguish between the event and the meaning you give the event. Because this is happening (points to MAR on the board) - this is like, when I talked before, about your glasses, they're normally transparent - because we're almost always unconsciously framing events, the meaning and the event are fused together.

But here's the issue: they're not identical. Events are events. The meaning is the co-identification process that is taking place in response to the event. That could be a process of Parasitic Processing. That's not intrinsic to the event at all. In fact, the meaning isn't part of the event at all. And this is important because if you keep them fused, you will be confused. If the meaning and the event are fused, the only way you can alter the meaning is by altering the event.

The problem with that is, sometimes you can, but here's the thing, here's the thing that the Stoics are doing - and this is very much like what the Buddha was doing with trying to make you realise how threatened you are - you do

not have as much control as you think you do. Epictetus - one of the great stoic philosophers - starts his manual for living, basically his instruction manual on how to try and live a stoic life, would say, "You know, the core of wisdom, the core of wisdom is knowing what's in your control and what's not in your control and stop pretending that things are in your control that aren't".

Because most of the time, we do not exercise as much control over events as we like to believe. And we delude ourselves that we do precisely because if we lose control of the event, we will of course lose control of the meaning because we have fused the meaning and the event together. We are "confused". Existentially ConFused.

Fromm's being and having mode, inspired by the Stoics.

How can such a confusion occur to us? We've already talked about this. I mentioned Eric Fromm, when we talked about the being and the having mode. I mentioned at that time, and [that] we would come back to it, that Fromm was directly influenced by the Stoics. It's the Stoics who got us to realise - to use "Frommian" language - the distinction between the "having mode" and the "being mode".

The having mode is met by controlling things. And there are some things we literally have to control: water, food, air, shelter... But most of our most pertinent needs are not needs that are met by exercising control. They are needs that are met by enhancing meaning. We have to become. LOOK (writes on the board) The being mode is met by developing the Agent:Arena relationship; by becoming mature, which isn't just something that happens inside of me.

LOOK (gesturing to himself) when I become mature it isn't just that I'm changed inside, I also inhabit a different arena. And we recognise that socially. That's why we don't let little kids get married or drive cars or own guns - they're not allowed to move in a certain arena. Maturity is an Agent/Arena relationship. It is a particular existential meaning. But if you do not know how to separate the meaning from the events, you're liable to be very seriously modally confused such that you pursue maturity by trying to

have a car. You pursue being in love by having sex and controlling and manipulating. But it doesn't work because you really can't exercise as much control over the world as you need in order to stabilise the meaning.

Do you see how this is like the Cynics still? You're trying to control a world that is largely beyond your control. You're setting your hearts on things. And your heart's going to be broken. But it's not just about manmade things. Anything, anything can fall prey to this. You have to practice bringing into your awareness, in a way that is transformative and developmental, the distinction between events and the meaning of events, and realising this: you often act as if you have no control over the meaning, because you're ignorant of the processes, and it's transparent to you, and you focus on trying to control the event in which you often have much less control than you realise. This is what you should do: pull the two apart - the meaning and the event - and recalibrate your sense of control and identity, because you have actually way more control over this (indicates "meaning" on the board) than you realise or practice, and you have way less control over this (indicates "event" on the board) than you realise or practice. That's why the core of wisdom is knowing what's in our control versus what's not in our control.

PROCHIERON - Developmental self awareness & Marcus Aurelius' meditations

So how do you practice that? And how does your identity change as you do? Well, the practice is PROCHIERON (writes this on the board) . This means sort of "ready to hand". It means remembering, but in the sense of Sati, like mindfulness. It means "remembering in a way that brings things, brings skills and sensitivities and sensibilities to bear in an appropriate and effective manner". It means remembering in a modally existential sense. So you practice a bunch of psycho-technologies to try and get them so internalised that you can not know that there's a distinct - I know that I should go outside the nine dots - but I need to know how to actually separate these things.

So what do you do? Well, you engage in moment to moment practices. You can see this. A book where you can see somebody doing this. And the book has to be read properly because many people misread the book. This is the

Meditations by Marcus Aurelius. People read this book and they often think the point of the book is to believe the propositions he is proposing. The book is not written to you. It is not an attempt to create beliefs in you. Therefore using it as creating beliefs is mistaken. The book is written to whom, the book is written to himself. Marcus Aurelius is practicing what Pierre Hadot called Spiritual Exercises.

He is practicing psycho-technologies that are attempting to bring into awareness the co-identification process and co-transform the meaning of the world and the meaning of himself as distinct from attempting to control and manipulate the world by accruing power and fame. And this was a particularly difficult problem for Marcus Aurelius, precisely because he had power and fame. He was the emperor! Many people consider him - I do as well - the greatest of the Roman Emperors. He was the Roman Emperor of the Roman Empire when it was still in ascendance. Generally he's considered the last great emperor of that ascendance and the beginning of the decline is marked when his son assumes the throne.

The movie... well, in many ways I find [the] movie Gladiator does not represent Marcus Aurelius well at all! Marcus Aurelius said something that really brings out both of these points... the challenge he faced and not getting enmeshed, and power and fame. Because of the way power and fame fuse the meaning with the event, he famously said this: "it is possible to be happy, even in a palace". And now you can think of the Buddha leaving the palace. Marcus Aurelius, unlike the Buddha, unlike the Cynics, doesn't leave the palace. He learns how to be happy, even in a palace because he does not want to shirk his moral responsibilities.

So what are some of these practices you see him engaging in? One is a practice that Hadot calls "Objective Seeing". We're not quite happy with that term because of some of the associations with the word objective, but let us, let us go on... Aurelius says, "conceive of sex as the friction of two patches of skin and the production of a sticky fluid".

And you go, "Eww! That's kind of like Diogenes in the marketplace. It's eww!" Well what's he doing there? What's he doing? And why is he doing it? He's married. He has children. So he's not a prude. Right? In fact, he loved his wife quite deeply.

What's he doing? He's trying to get you to realise the event of sex as distinct from all of the meaning we pour into it. The event is friction between some patches of skin and the production of a sticky fluid. But, we pour all of this into it and there's all of this meaning, and he's not saying that meaning's wrong. That's not the point anymore than the being mode is good and the having mode is bad. He's not saying that. He's getting you to... he's getting himself to realise, to enact: "Wait!" There's a difference between the event and all of this meaning that I'm identifying with. All of this, all of [these] roles I'm assuming, all of the roles I'm assigning.

The Stoics would recommend get a cup that you're really attached to. A cup you really like. Start using it on a daily basis so that you really like it until it becomes very familiar and then smash it. Because then you'll remember the distinction between the meaning and the thing. And if you can practice it with something that ultimately isn't that much of an event, with little things, then you can learn to do it with larger things.

MORTALITY vs FATALITY - how to distinguish the difference.

This leads to a practice that many people find distasteful for the Stoics. It's called "PREMEDITATIO". (Writes this on the board) When you're kissing your child good night, say to yourself, "I may lose them to death tonight!". Because you have to learn to distinguish the meaning from the physics. You have tremendous control over the meaning that you and your son are making together. You have very little control over the physics of his mortality. Yes, you can do things to protect him and you should, but you can't move the universe.

Look, we have got to remember this better: "Sati". We have entire genres that distort and re-fuse together the meaning and the event. They are pervasive in our culture and I think they're much more pernicious than we realised. The ubiquitous evil is always the most dangerous, right? These are romantic comedies because romantic comedies teach us that the narrative meaning we are assigning to things is aligned with, consonance with, in concert with the way the world is unfolding.

So events will conspire to bring two people together. There will be difficulties, but the world will help them to realise until they finally end up together. Of course, we have tragedies to try and compensate that, but the romantic comedy teaches us the wrong [thing]. That's not how it works! I'm in love with an amazing woman. I admire her as a person. I'm just so deeply grateful to be in this relationship. And it's growing and growing. Right? And I and I'm all "this is fantastic!" and I stepped out into the street and I don't notice a truck coming and it kills me! It doesn't care about my happiness. It doesn't care about my narrative. It doesn't care about all of that meaning that I'm making with her. It's real that we're making this meaning. It's part of our being mode. But it's not the same as the events that I'm experiencing.

Distinguishing between mortality and fatality

See this leads to the Stoic's diagnosis. It's not mortality that makes us anxious. It's fatality (written on the board) . Now here's another instance - and this, I would recommend Vissor's book Beyond Fate. - where we've lost the meaning of a word because we associate that with mortality: something that's fatal is something that has caused death. [00:25:00] But that's not the root of the... death is not the root of this word. The root of this word is fate (written below fatality on the board).

Now there's two meanings to this. One is some sort of magical "things are predestined by some supernatural force". I'm not talking about that meaning of fate. I'm talking about the way things just are fated to happen. They're just rolling from their own causal necessity. And here's the point. When we fuse these together (points at meaning and event on the board) , we become subject to the fatality of all things (points at fatality on the board) .

Everything is fatal in that the meaning and the thing are not identical. And if we forget that we will suffer when they come apart.

Now I can explain to you the association; why is this (fatality) associated with death? Because death is where those (meaning and event) come apart. Death is where the events of the universe and all of your meaning and all of your narrative and all of your identity radically become unglued. Death is

"fatal". It reveals to you in the ultimate loss of agency that meaning and event are not identical.

The view from above - how high can one go?

What's another practice that the Stoics engage in? A practice they engaged in is called "the view from above". You can see Marcus Aurelius doing it in the meditations. He says, "Imagine that instead of..." - and think about the "Solomon Effect" that we talked about: moving from the first person perspective to the third person perspective. And there's all kinds of evidence about altering your level of construal, having these very powerful effects on your cognition and your sense of self. So you're viewing some situation and you're enmeshed in it. Now view it[as] "I'm higher up in space and time", and then higher up still in space...

So, not just here (gestures a small space in-front with hands) , but Oh, but what's [happening]? (gestures a large surrounding space) Situate this Event (points at Event on the board) , situate this event (the lecture) within all of Toronto. Oh. Now situated with all of Canada. Within the whole world. Within not just the whole world now, but the whole world through all of time. What happens when you do that? Don't just say it, try it sometime.

Visualise it. Imagine yourself doing it. What happens is the Agent:Arena is being altered and all of this machinery is coming into your awareness and your sense of self and your sense of what matters and what's important - what things mean - is being radically transformed. You'll become more liable to pursuing more longterm goals. You'll become more flexible. You become more capable of rational reflection, self transformation. This is all evidenced from construal level theory.

See, a bunch of practices that are designed to get you to bring into awareness this process of meaning making and to give you the discernment to pull apart the Meaning and the Event.

Applications in modern therapy

Most therapy is about getting people to see this perspectival change - perspectival knowing - and then to identify with it. [To] change their sense of self, their sense of control, so that they move off 'trying to so much

change the events that they can't control as much as they deeply, desperately, want to', to 'cognitively reframing the meaning'.

And again, this isn't just semantic meaning. This is the identity, your participatory meaning, your existential mode. And this takes tremendous practice. The last thing you'll see Marcus Aurelius doing - and even more Epictetus - is the practice of actually internalising Socrates. Like Antisthenes talked about at the very beginning of this whole tradition. It means trying to do with yourself, what Socrates had done with you.

You can see this again in modern cognitive behavioural practices. You get people to stop and be Socratic with themselves. So, 'this' person is depressed... remember I said, when Antisthenes was talking about conversing with himself, he wasn't talking about the way you ruminate. Cause when we ruminate, we're running things through our head. Like "everything I do is a failure" (Writes this on the board) . The therapist doesn't try and console the person and says like, "well, no, go out and get more success..." he doesn't give the American commercial response: "well go out and succeed more! Conquer the world..."! Good luck with that!

He says, well, she says. "Everything you do? Everything? Was you stating to me that that's a failure itself a failure?" "Well, no, not everything." "Did you get here successfully today?" "Well, yes I did." "What about clothing yourself?" "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah..." "So what do you mean by everything?" "I don't mean everything!" "What do you mean?"

Okay? And you realise a lot of this is because I'm letting 'this' (indicates "Everything i do is a failure" on the board) go by without having my own internal Socrates that stops me and says, "Oh wow, you're making such powerful claims! You must know and understand...!"! But you see you're bullshitting yourself. Because this ("Everything I do is a failure") is very salient to you, but it's way beyond your understanding because it's not representing, what you actually mean. This may be what you believe, but it can't be what you mean.

"Everybody hates me!" "Everybody? So everybody's out to get you?" "Well, no, not most people", "which people?" "Well, this person!" "They hate you? How do you know they hate you?" Well, they said that..." "is that enough for

hate...?" You can see Socrates here. "Is that what you mean by hate?" "Tell me what you mean by it...?"

You've got all these things salient in your mind and you're running them round and round and round, but you don't really understand the meaning and you're bullshitting yourself! Your motivation and your arousal is way ahead of your understanding. And most importantly, because of that, the Meaning and the Event are Confused together. And again, this is not just in your beliefs, this is in your very identity.

By doing all of this, you're going to transform your capacity for interacting with the world. You're going to not fall prey to the absurdity - and we're going to come back to absurdity again - that's inflicted on you by the fatality of all things. Because if you can discern - and this is one of the key things of wisdom, is discerning, not just in thought, but in perspective and in identity - the difference between the meaning and the events, and properly identify, by meaning, properly sensing and calibrating your sense of control then you will alter your sense of identity. How? And how could this possibly give an answer to the mortality of things that the Epicureans gave a direct answer to?

Well let's play with that a little bit. A kind of a bit of a view from above. Let's say I gave you immortality. You got it! What would you do with it? "Well, I'd do all the things I'd like to do" "Okay, great! What would you do?" "Well, you know, I'd have lots of sex and eat lots of chocolate..." "okay, how long?" "Probably not very long! I'd get bored!" "Then what do we do?" "uhh I'd pursue more meaningful things" "like what?" "like I've always, I've always wanted to learn archery. I take up archery and I'd com[pete]. Okay. Then I'd get really good at archery!" "Great. Then what?" "Well really good at basketball." "Yeah. And then what?" "Really good at uhhhhgh... hmmmm..."

There's a really good story by - uh... well, it's a chapter in a book, [A history of the world in ten and a half chapters] by Julian Barnes - where people go to heaven and what they're doing in heaven is they're given what they think is mortality and they practice! There's this one guy, he practices golf until he is getting a score of 18. And then he's sort of like, "okay, what do I do now? What are we doing?" And then he comes to sort of St. Peter, and he says "like, what's going on?" and [St. Peter] says "what's wrong? Aren't you doing everything you want?" "I am! But like, I get great at it! I get great at

everything!" And then St. Peter says "Well, yeah! So what?" ...he says "well... I got... I'm kinda done!" And then Saint Peter says "ah, now you get the point of heaven. The point of heaven isn't to live out immortality, it is to make you accept death."

Now, that's not classic Christian doctrine by any means. It's a great story. And it epitomises the stoic idea. As long as you are formulating your identity horizontally in terms of a narrative; of achieving an unending duration to your life, you're going to fail. But even if I gave it to you - and this is what people need to stop and think about - it would fail!

What you want what is that moment that that guy in heaven has, right? You want not a length of life, but a fullness, a depth. (draws x/y axis on the board) You want to have lived life as fully as possible. This is why Marcus Aurelius says, "everybody dies, but not everybody has lived". People quote that. And they think it's about sort of "Gusto" or something like this? That's not what [is] meant. This is the [axis] of fame and fortune (x axis) , the Having mode, and there's nothing wrong with it, but this (y axis) is the access of self-transcendence, the Being mode. What do you identify with? Is your identity here (x axis) ? Or do you identify here (y axis) ? And if you identify here (y axis) and you practice PROCHIERON and PROSOCHE, you can get this fullness of being. Remember? That's what Plato promised. You could come to a complete fullness, and even if it lasts a moment, that's enough. Because it's not based on duration. It's based on quality. If I have, if I can achieve that in this moment right here right now, then I'm done.

I'm done.

So the Stoics have an answer. An answer that in a somewhat watered down form is still very powerfully effective, at least in our therapeutic endeavours, which are becoming more and more central to many people's lives because of the meaning crisis. But a less watered down version is also existentially pertinent and relevant. We can come to realise that "I can exercise much more control over the meaning making such that I get the one thing that is always good to have, which is wisdom that can afford me an identity in the depths (indicates x axis on the board) , an ontological identity, rather [00:39:00] than a merely historical identity (y axis) . And that would be a fulfilled life. And that is actually what I want.

I'll speak personally now for a moment.

I mean, at a physiological level, of course, I avoid death. Like, I don't step into traffic and I'm enjoying my life, so I don't mean this in any morbid or depressive way, but I do not want to live forever.

Right? I do not want to live forever. I do not think that John Vervaeke should exist for all time. I think that would be an ontological mistake of astronomical proportions! In some ways I'm tired of life. I'm tired of the ways in which I've been foolish, the ways in which I have been immoral, let myself and other people down. And I have a strong sense of the inevitability of that and extending that through all of eternity strikes me as a horrible evil to inflict on reality. And some[thing] I, myself, do not want to bear.

But, have I seen glimpses of this (y-axis) ? Yes I have. And we know from when people have awakening experiences, that give them this, [then] they lose their fear of their mortality. They lose that existential anxiety. And if that's coupled to a fullness of being, that would be a way of responding to not only our mental health issues, but our existential distress about our own individual mortality.

So you can see with both the Epicureans and the Stoics that we have things analogous - different, but analogous - to the kinds of things we saw at work within Buddhism. And we can see that the West is building up this very powerful tradition in its own right. And one of the great things about Pierre Hadot's work and I recommend it very strongly to you, like "What is Ancient Philosophy?" Or "Philosophy as a way of life", is to remind us that we do not have to look to Asian history - Asian, not ancient. We do not have to look to the East for the psycho-technologies of self-transcendence and self-transformation. There is no reason not to! We should! But we should not do that because we believe there is nothing within the Western heritage that offers us a profound response to the quest for meaning, wisdom, self-transcendence and a response to existential anxiety. We have those things!

Now, one of the things that has been happening, and I think it is a good thing - although it is indicative of the increase of the meaning crisis in the West - is there has been a rediscovery of Stoicism, Platonism, et cetera... part of what we need to do - and that's what I've been trying to do with you - is

integrate that with our current cognitive science so that once again, we can learn how to - and I mean this in a deeply, spiritually deep way - salvage from our own tradition, the psycho-technologies and practices of wisdom and meaning making that we are going to need, but in a way that we can live within a scientific worldview.

So the Hellenistic period comes to an end with the advent of a return to a world empire which in very many ways is going to be informed by the Axial Revolution, but in very many ways also represents a return to a pre axial world. Namely a world in which, eventually, a man can be considered a God because he wields so much power - the Roman emperors - and power and prosperity are the primary ways in which wisdom is understood. But within that empire all of these philosophies will find home. And eventually, as we noted with Marcus Aurelius, even the emperor himself will be a proponent and an exemplar of the legacy of the Axial Revolution.

But something else is also happening with the advent of this Empire in the Mediterranean and we return back now, as I promised we would, to one of the areas in which the Axial Revolution had taken place. And this of course is ancient Israel. Because what's happening is, of course, Israel [has] now been conquered by a sequence of Empires and the most recent of course is the Roman Empire.

And I want to now speak of a religion that emerges at this time. It's not an Axial religion, but it is deeply informed by the Axial legacy. Particularly the ancient Israel legacy where the two worlds were understood, if you remember, in terms of moving from the land of slavery to the promised land, where the real world is the future, and God is this open creator and we're trying to sense Da'at, have faith in, participatory knowing of, involvement in the course of history. And sometimes we're distorted in that and we trespass. We fall off course and we have to be redeemed, we have to be brought back on course by prophets who speak God's attempt to get us back on track with making the future. This whole idea of co-creating with God the open future, such that we can bring about a promised land for human beings.

Jesus and the way

Now there is a person, a Jewish person who is born into that tradition and is responsible in ways that are very hard to determine historically for a radical transformation. And of course this is Jesus of Nazareth. And probably the most pretentious thing I'm going to do is trying to speak about Jesus of Nazareth. I mean, literally many millions of people believe he was God. Not metaphorically, not symbolically, but literally metaphysically. I am respectful of this fact. I don't agree with it, at least in very standard interpretations. My endeavour is to not try and give some final, complete version of this that would be hubris and arrogance. On my part. My endeavour is to try and explain what Jesus via Christianity did to that Israelite Axial legacy. Because that is what is relevant to what we are discussing here and now.

The battles, the interminable, and I think ultimately undecidable battles - even though many people claim to have reached the final conclusion about who Jesus was and what Jesus did - are not something I'm going to try and resolve here. We're even going to see when we take a look at the Gnostics that there is, right from the beginning, multiple competing interpretations and how that has had deep historical influence.

So if you remember, we used a Greek term from Paul Tillich - cause the new Testament, the part of the Bible that talks about Jesus and the advent of Christianity was actually written in Greek. So Tillich - the same Paul Tillich who wrote *The Courage To Be* - talked about *Kairos*. About that perspectival, participatory knowing. Knowing the fullness of time, knowing exactly the right time. [So some... that are going to...] The right timing to shift the course of events. What Pascal, when we come to Pascal, we'll talk about is "*The Spirit of Finesse*". [The right, you know, there's...] You're not yet in a romantic relationship with Susan aaaaaand you kiss her! And is it the right time? If you get the timing right, if the *Kairos* is right, then the course of your relationship is altered, transformed, and your identity and her identity changed.

Now, the Israelite conception was [that] this was for the whole nation and God would intervene, Kairotically, at moments in history. Christianity is going to propose this radical idea that God's creative *Logos*, the word he speaks through the profits that... - it's the same word by which he speaks

things into existence; the word that helps create history. The word that causes Kairos. Makes Kairos possible for us. So Logos doesn't mean just spoken words. It means like the intelligibility, the formative principle, the underlying structure. Christianity... it's in the gospel of John "Anarchaum Logos", "In the beginning was the Logos". - A passage actually, probably, lifted from stoicism!

But what is John appropriating it to say? He's saying that God's capacity for producing Kairos through Logos has been identified, or to use an older term "incarnated", in a particular individual. That Jesus of Nazareth is actually the ultimate Kairos. That all the other Kairos were pointing to him and are summed up in him. That he represents the ultimate turning point. And he represents it, not only historically, he represents it personally. Because he is a person, you can identify with him and that Kairos can come to take place in you personally. Just like Socrates personalises the axial revolution and brings it into a direct personal confrontation, the encounter with Jesus means that you too can experience a profoundly personal Kairos, which Jesus seems to have spoken about using a metaphor of being born again, about such a radical metanoia, a radical shifting. This is often translated as "conversion" until you read about that [word], right? But this word is much closer to "awakening".

NOIA means "noticing"; this is your perspectival awareness and "Meta" means "beyond". This means a "radical transformation in your salience landscape", a "radical transformation of what it's like to be you". It's this deeply perspectival and participatory transformation. And Jesus is saying he incarnates the principle by which you can intervene in your own personal history or by which maybe you want to say intervention can occur in your own personal history, such that this metanoia [will happen] - you will have a new mind, a new heart, a new modal existence. You will be born again.

What? What's going on in there? What was... what does this Kairos look like? What could possibly, so radically, transform my salience landscape, my sense of self, my processes of co-identification? What could bring that about? And now I'm going to say the word, and then you're going to laugh because it sounds is like a hallmark card. The Christian answer is Love! ...and now we all titter - hahaha! "That's so, that's so quaint! hahaha".

Love in three parts - Eros, Phylia and Agape

Love"! Sounds like, "Oh looove!!!". Okay!? The problem with that, as you've seen many times is that this word (love) is trivialised for us. We use one word to talk about so many different things. Like "I love peanut butter cookies". "I love Canada". "I love Sarah". "I love my son". "I love a really good game of tennis". Are those the same?

We're even confused about this. We think that love is an emotion. No, it's not. Love is a modal way of being. Love isn't a feeling and it is not an emotion. How do I know this? Because loving someone can be expressed by being sad when they're absent; being happy when they're present; being jealous when there's somebody else around; being angry when they're neglecting you. Love isn't a feeling. It isn't an emotion. It is a modal way of being. It is an Agent:Arena relationship.

And what Jesus seemed to be incarnating as a Kairos to change the history of the world and to offer you to change your own personal history is a different kind of love. This is Agape. We have to distinguish between three kinds of love: "Eros" "Phylia" and "Agape". See, Eros is the love that seeks to be one with something.

And that can be spiritual, like being one with nature, or it can be being one with a cookie by eating it. Of course, we come to think of Eros, erotically, right? Being one with somebody, by having sex with them. But remember, Socrates new/taught erotica, which wasn't just sex. Socrates knew what to care about.

This is Phylia (circles it on the board) . So this is the love that is satisfied through consummation. Phylia. This is the love that seeks cooperation. This is the love in which we experienced reciprocity. We would love the cookie because we can consume it. We love our friends because we are in reciprocity with them. What kind of love is this (indicates Agape on the board) ?

And this is what Jesus claimed was how God loved individuals. This is the love that a parent has for a child. This is not the love of consummation. You're not trying to consume the child. That's evil! And it's not friendship. You're not, like... when you bring a child home from the hospital - and I've

done this twice, right? - that's not your friend! It's not even a person!! You can't... it's like... it's basically a slug!!! But here's the astonishing thing: You, you love it. Not because of any way you can consume it or be one with it. Ewww! EWW! You don't love it because, "Hey, what do you know!! A great friendship!!" You love it. And we, right? You love it because by loving it, you turn a non-person into a person. It's the closest thing to a miracle, and that sounds Hackney, I know, but stop and think about this: you depend on Agape! It's because people loved you before you were a person that you have become the person you are. Love turns non-person animals into moral agent persons. It's like, like, like it's like somehow if I could just care about my sofa enough, it would turn into a Ferrari or something. It's that powerful.

And here's what Jesus was offering. That love can be exapted and made available for all. Here's what is on offer. Here's why Christianity will take the Roman empire, culturally. With Agape, Christianity can say to all of the non persons of the Roman empire, all the women, all the children, all the non-male citizens, all the sick, all the poor, all the widowed, [it] can take all of those non-persons and say, "we will turn you into persons. Persons that belong to the kingdom of God".

We'll take another look at this in more detail next time. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Episode 15 notes

Kairos

Kairos (Ancient Greek: καιρός) is an Ancient Greek word meaning the right, critical, or opportune moment.

Da'at

In the branch of Jewish mysticism known as Kabbalah, Da'at ("Knowledge", Hebrew: דעת ['daθaθ]) is the location (the mystical state) where all ten sefirot in the Tree of Life are united as one.

Metanoia

Change in one's way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion: what he demanded of people was metanoia, repentance, a complete change

of heart. Saul/St. Paul the Apostle, original name Saul of Tarsus, (born 4 bce?, Tarsus in Cilicia [now in Turkey]—died c. 62–64 ce, Rome [Italy]), one of the leaders of the first generation of Christians, often considered to be the most important person after Jesus in the history of Christianity.

St. Stephen

Stephen (c. AD 5 – c. AD 34) traditionally venerated as the protomartyr or first martyr of Christianity.

Sophrosyne

Sophrosyne is an ancient Greek concept of an ideal of excellence of character and soundness of mind, which when combined in one well-balanced individual leads to other qualities, such as temperance, moderation, prudence, purity, decorum, and self-control.

Gnosis

Knowledge of spiritual mysteries.

Akrasia

The state of mind in which someone acts against their better judgement through weakness of will. Immanuel Kant(1724–1804), German philosopher. In the Critique of Pure Reason (1781) he countered Hume's sceptical empiricism by arguing that any affirmation or denial regarding the ultimate nature of reality ('noumenon') makes no sense. All we can know are the objects of experience ('phenomena'), interpreted by space and time and ordered according to twelve key concepts. Kant's Critique of Practical Reason (1788) affirms the existence of an absolute moral law—the categorical imperative.

Albert Camus

Albert Camus was a French philosopher, author, and journalist. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature at the age of 44 in 1957, the second-youngest recipient in history. Camus was born in Algeria to French Pieds Noirs parents. His citizenship was French.

Neoplatonism

A philosophical and religious system developed by the followers of Plotinus in the 3rd century ad. Neoplatonism combined ideas from Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, and the Stoics with oriental mysticism. Predominant in pagan Europe until the early 6th century, it was a major influence on early Christian writers, on later medieval and Renaissance thought, and on Islamic philosophy. It envisages the human soul rising above the imperfect material world through virtue and contemplation towards knowledge of the transcendent One.

Gnosticism

A prominent heretical movement of the 2nd-century Christian Church, partly of pre-Christian origin. Gnostic doctrine taught that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit.

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Ep. 16 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Christianity and Agape

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. So last time we had begun to take a look at the transformation that was occurring in the Eastern Mediterranean around the time of the advent of what was going to become Christianity. Of course, this figures upon the person of Jesus of Nazareth, a very controversial figure to say the least. And as I said, I'm not going to endeavor to claim to give the absolute or exhaustive account of this extraordinary individual, but instead I'm going to try and do what I've done before, which is to show how what he did contributed to our understanding

of meaning and wisdom and how that eventually pushed the history that has led to the meaning crisis forward.

So we were talking about one of the core messages of Jesus. Jesus seems to have understood himself, or at least those around him understood him, as Kairos. If you remember, that's a turning point in the course of history. Because, as we spoke before the Israelites - and by this time they were known as the Jews - had developed the psycho-technology of understanding history as a cosmic narrative in which there are crucial turning points. And Jesus saw himself as such a Kairos. Whether or not he saw himself as the Kairos that was known as the Jewish Messiah is again controversial. I don't need that for the purposes of my argument. It seems, though, that he had a sense of himself as deeply participating in the way in which God was directing and involving himself in the course of history. If you remember the model of God we talked about, when we talked about the ancient Israelites, the God of the Exodus is a God who is creating into an open future, and that human beings participate in that creation by identifying with a particular course, Da'at, loving it, being shaped by it, as well as shaping [it]. Participating in its flow.

And Jesus of Nazareth saw himself as having an especially deep participation such that he felt himself to be at one with this God who is capable of altering the course of history and redeeming human beings. He seems to have understood this Kairos as having something to do with a profound way of understanding the participation in God which, we've talked about before, makes sense. We've talked about how this participatory knowing is a process in which you're coupled, right? You're neither making it or being made by it, but it's this reciprocal revelation in which you are making it and it is making you. The way you participate in your culture. The way you participate in your language. The way you participate in history. And you know this not by gathering beliefs, but the way in which your 'self' is fundamentally transformed. And so Jesus understood this participation, his participation in God as the disclosing of this profound kind of love.

And we began talking about this: the kinds of love that human beings experience and how love is something that deeply transforms who we are and our salience landscape, our character. We talked about [how] the Greeks

have three terms and it's helpful because, by this time, the new Testament is being written in Greek. It's helpful to understand these Greek terms. So there's Eros, which is the love of being one with something, right? And it can be just drinking water! So I become one with it. Then of course, it could become what has become more commonly known as becoming one with someone through sexual union, or erotic love. Then there's Phylia that's at the core Philosophyia; this is the love that is born out of cooperation. So Eros is consumptive - making one with -, Phylia is cooperation - we work together. We work together, and a lot of how we succeed as human beings is the way we work together.

But Jesus starts to emphasize a new kind of love: Agape. And this is not the love of consumption or cooperation. This is the love of creation. It's the love that God is demonstrating towards humanity in the way God is an ongoing creation of the open future. So God is creating the future. He's creating the historical process and course of that history that makes people possible. See, Agape is the kind of love that creates persons. So the main metaphor for Agape, if you remember, is the way a parent loves a child. You don't love a child because you want to consume it in some way, that's hideous and vicious! You don't love your child when you bring it home from the hospital because it's a great friend to you, It can cooperate! It can't do that at all! In fact, it's not even a person. It's not a morally, rationally reflective agent. In fact, it's exactly the opposite. You love it precisely because by loving that non-person, you turn it into a person. This is the powerful, creative... It's, it's a godlike ability that we have! By participating through love in another being, we can transform that being from a non-person into a person. A person that could enter into a community of persons and find meaning, fellowship, belonging.

So that radical transformative power of Agape, its ability to radically transform us and reorient us brings about a metanoia, a radical turning. This (Meta) means above and beyond. And this (noia) means your salience landscaping; how you are fundamentally, perspectively knowing the world. So metanoia: "I'm fundamentally turning, altering my whole field of consciousness, altering my whole orientation". And what's fundamentally happening in the metanoia of Agape is I'm having a personal Kairos. My personal course is being radically transformed. So Jesus is not only teaching

this, he is exemplifying it. He experiences himself as a Kairos and he's giving to people through Agape the possibility of experiencing their own personal Kairos.

See what happens in the experience that Jesus is pointing to, I believe, is we get a fundamental reorientation. For a very long time we are born out of, we are the receivers of Agape. It is only because you as an animal - 'cause that's what you are, before you're a person, a biological animal - it's only because you as an animal reviewed the Agapic love of others that you were actually transformed into a person. And what you actually do is you internalize other people and how they are aware of you. And that is how you gain your reflective rationality. That is how you gain your own understanding. You fundamentally gain your self-understanding, your sense of self and your ability to reflect on yourself by how you are reflected through other people. It's a fundamental thing to say and because it is so fundamental, and we can say it with few words, it can be trivialized, but we are in a very deep sense born out of an Agapic love that preceeds us. It's because of Agape, because of the way other people have devoted themselves and participated in you, that you went from a non-person into a person. That you got the ability - it's almost like other people are mirrors through which you come to see and realize yourself, that you got a sense of self, that you got the ability to reflect on yourself, that you got a sense of your own ownership.

There's nothing that in fact is more transformative for an adult than having a child. So from the child's perspective what's happening is [that] they are in a sense consuming the love that the adult is giving them. They're taking in this love and they are becoming one with it. You understand yourself and can reflect on yourself because of the way you have internalized other people's attention on you. But that's the child's perspective (the 'consumption' of love). So you can see for the child it's very egocentric, and Freud picked up on this! But I think he also twisted it! In this sense it's very... Our relationship to our parents - and please listen to this very carefully - is in that sense erotic, in the sense that we are consuming them. We are internalizing them. We are becoming one with them. Now I don't mean erotic in the sense that Freud ultimately meant, because Freud thought that all of that was always a sexual experience. I think that's too simplistic, but I think there is insight here. But take a look at this from the parent's perspective.

From the parent's perspective, the person giving Agape, it is not egocentric at all. In fact, there is nothing that will more challenge your egocentric orientation that everything is moving this way than having a child. If you're a good parent, and of course we all vary in how good we are as parents. I have been privileged to be a parent myself. But what happens is, you are no longer the center of your salience landscape. The child is, because the child is absolutely dependent upon you. Do you see? This is the metanoia of Agape. I mean the metaphor is turning, but the problem with that metaphor is [that] all 'turning' (demonstrated physically by turning on the spot while standing) is still egocentric. You have to think of the turning this way: The turning is "I go from being egocentric (pointing internally to himself) to being centered on someone else (pointing out and away from himself)". And what I'm actually centered on is I'm very, I'm centered on the process of creating a person, like God. But not egocentrically like "I'm a God!!!". It's like "I am participating in that Agapic process that made me". The Agape that precedes me, flows through me, and transforms me as I'm oriented. And what Jesus was offering, I believe, was he was offering a teaching so that all people could experience this. Not just individually, personally, with their own parents, but in terms of our relationship to God. We could all experience this fundamental turning, such that we become vessels through which Agape creates other human beings.

So what's going to happen of course, and you see this in the epistles of John, is the the Christian community starts to understand this capacity for radically transforming people so that they become conduits of this God-like creative process whereby non-persons are turned into persons. They're coming to understand [that] Agape itself is God. That's what God is. This is the..., So the Israelite notion of God creating open history becomes specified in the teachings of Jesus to the idea that God is Agape. God is this process that we participate in. And we put... Look, it made you, you didn't make it! You participate in Agape. It precedes you, it flows through you and you participate in it insofar as you help other people to come to personhood through you.

Now, this is a radical idea. As I mentioned last time, this is going to give the Christians a psycho-technology, a grammar, for how to transform perspectival and participatory knowing that is going to allow them to

conquer the Roman empire. I don't mean militarily of course. What I mean is, what Christians can do is they can offer all the non-persons of the Empire a process by which they become persons within a community of persons, enmeshed together in Agapic Love. So all the women, all the widows, all the sick, all the poor, all the non-male Roman citizens, all the weak, can come to Christianity and receive the opportunity and the community that supports this opportunity of a radical transformation. Now, we know that the community around - there's many different communities around Jesus, I should say! There's, just like around Socrates, there's many different Jesus movements - but this seems to be key idea and it seems that it carries with it some kind of notion of a sacrificial element to it. And again, there's a lot of controversy around this and we have to be careful not to read too much of Paul into this,, but we'll talk about Paul in a few minutes.

But Agape has a sacrificial element to it in that you give yourself, you "forgive", you give before the person earns. It's not Phylia. It is not reciprocity. It is not "you and I are working together, you have earned my trust and love". Phylia is great and it's important, right? And it's not Eros, "I love you because of how I can consume you and make you one with me". No, Agape has a sacrificial component to it because what I'm actually doing is I'm giving up, I'm making myself an affordance for your transformation from non-person into person.

So this is why Jesus emphasizes forgiveness as central to his message. And one of the things we should remember, and this is controversial to say, is Jesus does not anywhere in the gospels present himself as the means by which we obtained forgiveness from God. He often presents himself as a 'way' and things like that, and we'll talk about that. But when asked how to obtain forgiveness from God, this opportunity of radically transforming ourselves (Metanoia), Jesus' consistent message is "by forgiving other people". We experience Agape from God, the degree to which we give it to others. And this has been, of course, radically trivialized in our culture. We think of forgiveness largely as a matter of somebody feels sorry and we tell them it's okay. That's not the core idea of forgiveness. The core of the idea of forgiveness doesn't depend on your contrition. The degree to which you are trying to afford someone else growing into their personhood, and the degree to which you are making a sacrifice towards that, is already forgiveness.

Some forgiveness is when somebody has slighted us and the relationship has been damaged and we have to act [Agapically] in order to reestablish the relationship. But in a very real sense, all Agapic love is 'for-giving' love because it is giving 'before' the person that is receiving the love can in any way be said to have earned it. So this idea that we are sacrificially extending the capacity for individuals to redirect their own history experience, their own Kairos, was often captured by Jesus in famous language of being born again. You're dying and you're being born again: This radical transformation of your entire orientation, your entire way of being.

Now the tragedy that befalls the Jesus movements, at least some of them - because not all the movements care about this! This is again something that many people don't realize: there are many elements of the early followers of Jesus, communities that don't care about his death, they only care about his teaching. But of course Jesus does die and that has a profound effect on some of these movements. And again, this is hard to state anything clearly or anything that we could have any great confidence in, but somehow his death exemplifies the sacrificial forgiveness that is at the core of God as Agape. Somehow Jesus' death enables people to internalize that sacrificial love and empowers them to transform other human beings.

Saul

Now, of course, his resistance to the Jesus movements - and to Jesus, it's plausible, that his death was due to the fact that he was angering and upsetting a lot of people. We see this as something similar to what confronted Socrates. One of the people that seems to have been an early persecutor is a guy by the name of Saul. Now Saul is a very interesting person. He's both a Jew and a Roman citizen. At a time when these two groups of people are quite antagonistic towards each other. There had been, already, Wars between the Romans and the Jews. A new one was about to come to major Jewish revolts. So the relationship is a very tense one, filled with a lot of tension. And this is reflected within this person himself. He seems to have integrated these two disparate and warring aspects of his personality and his identity together around a commitment to law; organized rules of behavior and conduct. And he sees the Jesus movements, the followers of Jesus - They're not in fact, just to point out something, they are

not initially called the followers of Jesus, they are initially call the followers of "The Way" because Jesus had presented "a way". See the word Way is so wonderful because it doesn't just mean method. It's not just some procedures; it's also an affordance of how you're going to move into the future; it is a new orientation. So Jesus is The Way in which we can experience the Kairos of Metanoia and become Forgiving individuals who are constantly "for-giving" Agapically to others. And Paul, sorry, Saul seems to see these people, and their language of Agape and their adoration of Jesus as deeply threatening to his Jewish heritage and also to Roman order. And so he becomes involved in the persecution of the followers of The Way. And it's about at the time that he's involved in the persecution that they start being called, actually as an insult initially, "Christians", The Followers of Christ, which means The Anointed One. And so he's involved in persecuting them. He's there, the first time he's mentioned in the Bible, he is there when the first Christian is martyred: Stephen. Steven is talking about this message (The Way) and the crowd gets angered and they stone him and Saul gathers every[]- Saul basically holds everybody's coats so that they can more effectively stone Stephen to death.

So Saul becomes deeply involved in this and he gets, basically, a writ, a letter, an official letter to travel to Damascus and round up these so called Christians and bring them in for prosecution. And on the road he has what I think we could call a transformative experience. He relates it himself in a couple [of] places. It's also represented third person in The Book of Acts - and there's differences in it as there always is in something that has a mythological element to it, again where "myth" doesn't mean fable, where a myth means trying to present a profound pattern. But he is struck by a bright light. And, of course, this is the metaphor of enlightenment. And we know that transformative experiences often involve this experience of radical super-salience, often tremendous light, and he is struck to the ground by it. It's [an] overwhelming experience. And then a voice speaks to him and says, "Why? Saul? Why do you persecute me?" And Saul says, "Who are you Lord?" (Lord isn't a title for God. Lord is any one who has some important higher status than you.) And the experience carries with it that onto-normativity that we talked about: Saul has the sense that he's confronting

something more real than himself. "Who are you?" And the voice says, "I am Jesus who you persecute".

And that's all we need to talk about! I mean, Saul is blinded by this light and encountering this voice. And we can think about Plato's metaphor here of "as we encounter these things, we're often blinded by the light". But what we need to understand is [that] this engenders, in Saul, a deep, deep inner conflict. And in fact, when you read his biography, as I've already painted here (Jewish/Roman Combo), you can see that his experience of inner conflict is really profound. And this reminds us, again... It's analogous, but different, of Plato's concern with inner conflict: the way inner conflict reveals the psyche. But whereas Plato is going to develop a scientific theory of inner conflict, Saul is going to undergo a transformative experience because of this inner conflict. It is going to riven him to his core because how can it be that he hasn't had this transformative experience, this awakening experiences that's more real from the very being that he was persecuting. How can he reconcile these together? He's actually, he travels to Antioch and he actually gets taken in by the very people he was going to persecute. Do you see this? This is this forgiveness. The very people he was going to persecute take him in! So the people that he was going to destroy are actually responsible for his care and under their care his sight is restored.

What's all this pointing to? Again, it's pointing to [that] he's at war with Agape itself, and we all are! Like, we all are. We have a very tough time, and this is part of the message of Jesus and John and Paul, at least to my mind, we have a tough time acknowledging the reality of Agape. We like to create personal fables of how we are self-made and self-directed and self-secure and self-sustaining and Agape challenges that in a profound way. So Saul goes into the desert to reflect - and this is always a biblical, mythological paradigm for a process of undergoing radical reflection - and when he comes out, he has gone through a radical, transformative experience. He's had this higher state of consciousness, this visionary experience. He then experiences Agape from the very people he was persecuting. He goes into the desert and when he comes back, he's a new person. He's gone through a radical transformative experience. And we know that because he's changed his name. He changed his name from Saul to Paul, and he has a radical message. It's a powerful message. He comes to

present Agape in one of the most beautiful passages, [one of the most] famous passages, in the Bible! You've probably heard it at some point. It's often misread at weddings! People read this passage often at weddings and they, I think, are misinterpreting it because what Paul's talking about is an Agapic, spiritual kind of love. Now, there should definitely be that aspect in a romantic relationship, but I don't think romantic relationships typically are understood by most people as venues in which Agapic love is the primary focus.

Let me read the passage to you... So, Paul begins by saying: "and now I will show you the most excellent way." So he's showing you the most excellent way (indicates The Way on the board). This is, and notice the word 'excellent', the way in which we can most radically go through transformation and grow. "I'll show you the 'most excellent way'". Now he's not gonna make an argument like Plato. Instead what he's going to do is he's going to present everything from the framework of a participatory kind of knowing. That's how he begins: "If I...", so he's not making an argument. He's talking about what his very identity, how his identity is being informed and transformed by its conformity to Agapic love. "If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I'm only a resounding gong or a clang symbol. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains but have not love, I am nothing". Notice all the language here. This is participatory language. This is the language of knowing by identifying. "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames..." 'cos Christians are starting to be burned, right? "...but I have not love, I gain nothing". What is this language here? It's very radical. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast". Now, this of course is not romantic love because romantic love does experience envy and jealousy. "It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres".

Those are the features you need in order to help and afford someone coming into personhood. "Love never fails". Now we think, 'what are you talking about? I've been in so many relationships and they fail!' That's because you're thinking of this as romantic love. That love does fail. What he means

is Agape can't fail. We are always born from and always have to give birth to Agape, or personhood itself will disappear.

(continues reading) "But where there are prophecies, they will cease. Where there are tongues, they will be stilled. Where there is knowledge it will pass away". Now he's trying to get them to understand, like 'what? What? What are we talking about here?' (continues reading) "Before we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes..." - Perfection here meaning completion - "...the imperfect disappears."

And people are like, "what?"!! And so he gives a metaphor. One we've seen elsewhere: "...when I was a child, I talked like a child. I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me." Okay, so when you're a kid, you have a particular identity, you have particular salience landscape, right? And things really, really matter to you in a certain way. We talked about this when we talked about Sophrosyne. When you become an adult, your world becomes radically reoriented. What is salient and what is central to you is radically changed. So I hope for many of you as adults, your life is not primarily centered upon and oriented towards the super-salience of candy and toys. If you're really, really oriented towards candies and toys and playing, then of course you're not growing up as an adult. When we go through Agape, it is like the change in our salience landscape and our fundamental identity. How we participate in ourselves in the world is fundamentally transformed and that's what Paul is offering here.

Then he says... Look, you've got to know what this means: "Now we see but a poor reflection, as in a mirror. Then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love". Okay, so now it's like we're seeing a reflection. We're not in touch with reality. We're like the people in Plato's cave: we're looking at the shadows and the echo. We don't see things as they are. We're not in touch with reality. But with Agape, the most excellent way, we will come to know as we are known, right? He's talking about this participatory love.

Think about how, when you are dee[p]... and now, even use a romantic relationship, one with some significant depth. When you really love someone, how you know them to a degree to which they know you. It is

such a participatory way of knowing you. You get to be in touch with their reality in a way that somebody else doesn't. That's part of the bargain of a mature understanding of a romantic relationship, right? You give up the extensive erotic pursuit of many different partners in order that you can deeply know and be known by someone else. And that's like growing up! That's like going from being a child to a man.

So Paul is actually talking about 'there's a way of knowing' - and we're going to come back to this. The term that's being used there is Gnosis - that is bound up with Agape, this way of loving. See, so all these things: "God is Agape", "we forgive Agape", "we are forgiven by Agape", "we know as we are known", "we are participating in the becoming a person of others and then they are participating in ours". It's this powerful, new, whole new way of being and it has become so sentimentalized in our culture and so ossified and so below how we live. It's like the ground we're walking on and like the ground we walk on, we have contempt for it without realizing how much it holds everything up.

I'm not a Christian. I'm not advocating for Christianity. I'm trying to get you to understand how profound an expression of meaning, transcendence and Way to wisdom is being [offered] here. Now, there is a dark side to this, I think, and here's where I will probably part company with people who identify as Christians. See the difficulty with participatory knowing and this "Gnosis", this is - we'll talk more about this - this knowing by participation and going through radical Metanoic transformation; this Gnosis Agape that Paul talks so much about... There is a danger with it! There's a danger of misunderstanding.

So we have to go carefully here. Look, when I am knowing someone ([through a] participatory, Agapic relationship), my knowing of them and my knowing of myself are deeply... they're inseparably bound together. That's why Jesus will say, [for his part (quite inaudible?)], "this relationship he has to God is... I and the father are one", and Paul will say "it's not I who live but Christ who lives in me", right? This is knowing by this deep bonding of identity. You know, not by transforming your thoughts, or even your mind, you know by transforming yourself! But there's a danger to this. The danger is that any aspect of yourself that you do not properly understand, [that] has

not come into knowledge, can get projected onto what you love. This is the great danger, also, in the romantic relationship precisely because you are so bound to this person and your identity, a lot of what is unconscious in your identity can get projected onto that person. So see, this is why there's such a moral obligation on you when you enter into a romantic relationship to commit yourself to a process of self knowledge, in the Socratic sense, self-discovery, because the degree to which you are self ignorant is the degree to which that participatory known will be darkened and twisted into a projection of aspects of yourself.

And I think, to my mind for all of his astonishing spiritual brilliance, that's also happening in Paul. See the inner conflict in Paul was very profound. He comes up against the problem that many of us encounter. Aristotle talked about this with Akrasia and a weakness of the will. We know what we should do and we do the opposite of what we know is the right thing to do. I know what I should do. It's clear in my mind that this is what I should do and yet I do this (gesturing with left and right hand respectively). Somehow, even though knowing what I should do, I find myself almost as if I'm being pulled to do something else. And he describes it. Paul uses the language of somebody in the midst of a civil war who's standing sort of at the center of their Citadel and the outline provinces are in revolt! And he experiences this radical inner conflict. There's lots of different theories about what this is, what's he so conflicted about? But Paul comes up with a narrative - of course it's going to be a narrative, right? He's in the Israelite Jewish tradition - he comes up with a narrative for understanding this conflict. And it is the narrative that comes from a personalization of the notion of the movement from the two worlds as being, a liberation from an old place and a movement to a new place. The Exodus. Because Christianity is personalizing this. Paul experiences the Exodus personally. He experiences, 'there's two of him'. There's the old Saul, who wants to follow the way of the law, but [he] actually feels guilty and angry and feels disconnected from God and rejected by God. And then there's the new Paul, the Paul of love, who feels connected and he sees the old man and the new man. And what's happening is the new man is trying to be born from the old man.

And so we have picked... This has become endemic to our culture! This idea of the "old me" and the "new me"! We think, "Oh, this is just natural. I came

up with this!!!!" Such bullshit we tell ourselves at times! The old me and the new me. Paul understands this and he understands this tension between the old Saul that was committed to law and order and justice and punishment, and the new Paul who is participating in the liberation of love. And he's trying to understand: "why do I have this inner conflict?" Because he has personalized the God of history, he understands his inner conflict. And here's where I think the danger of projection is clear: He understands his inner conflict as reflecting an inner conflict in God! God was actually conflicted within himself.

It's a radical idea and we need to know this - not because, again, I'm trying to advocate for Christianity - because we have to understand Paul in order to understand Augustine, and in order to understand Luther. And we have to understand Augustine and Luther, if we're going to understand the Meaning Crisis.

So you've got this idea that God has two aspects to him or herself. One part is God represents law and justice and order. And insofar as God represents that, we stand in judgment. We have somehow failed. We have not lived up to the moral perfection that morality demands for us. Look, and Kant made a point about this: Morality demands nothing less than perfection from you. You have to be completely honest. You have to be completely courageous. And none of us can ever meet that standard.

Now, we need to balance that with compassion and love, but what Paul is saying is he is saying, "well, God is perfectly just!", and therefore we fail to meet that standard. And therefore, legally, we are condemned to death. But yet God isn't just a judge. God is also the Agopic parent that loves us. And so what he does is he takes the notion that Jesus' death was somehow sacrificial, because we've talked about how sacrifice is born up within Agopic love, and he gives in to this idea that Jesus sacrificed himself in order to satisfy God's demand for justice so that God was capable of really loving us. And how that redemption model works out, there's all kinds of theological battles about it. And whether or not we should understand it this way or that way is not relevant to our purposes. What's relevant is that within this astonishing foundational message, of Gnosis and Agape, there's also an attempt to project our, like... Sorry!!!! This sounds so radical and I

don't mean to make it sound ridiculous! I'm not! I'm trying to be respectful! But the idea that somehow the course of reality itself is enmeshed in a conflict between justice and Agape.

What that's going to mean is that people that experience deep inner conflict are going to find a welcoming home within the auspices of Christianity. Individuals who are riven by a sense of personal failure, of not living up to what they can and should be, that their personhood has been thwarted, they have not come into a fullness - a perfection, as Paul says - a completeness of their personhood, are going to be deeply attracted to the Christian message.

You are probably now seeing how this might be relevant to the Meaning Crisis. Because what happens if we still - because we are still participating in the waters of Christianity within our culture, even if we're not Christians, and most of us aren't anymore. How do we tap into all of this (indicates The Way, Metanoia, Gnosis Agape on the board)? The power of Agape; acknowledging its reality; the participatory Gnosis; the radical transformation; our own sense of not living up to the fullness of our personhood. What if we still experienced all of that, but we do not have the machinery of Christianity, with its metaphysics of cosmic redemption available to us? That could be a powerful experience of despair. I mean, Camus famously said, "My whole of my life, I've tried to figure out, how can I be a Saint without there being a God?" And he of course famously came to the conclusion that reality was radically absurd. We'll come back to that. So there is a price we pay, and this is not a statement of resentment, but there's a price. We pay for the gifts, to use a Christian word - the grace. That's what grace originally means. The gifts that Christianity has given us. It has given us expectations of love and transformation and growth into personhood and relief from inner conflict. Expectations that, I would say, are not well met in our post Christian worldview. So we carry the grammar of God, but we no longer believe any of the things we say with it - for many of us.

So what I'd like to do is try and now trace how Christianity, coming out of the Israelite Jewish heritage, and I've already sort of been giving/ making allusions of this, starts to intersect with the Axial Revolution that was

coming out of Greece. Because Christianity is going to take up into itself the Stoicism we've already talked about. Paul quotes stoicism in the Bible.

And as [Christianity] does that it's also going to come into conflict, not conflict - well, some conflict actually, to be honest - but it's going to come into confluence with that strain of the Axial Revolution spirituality that came out of Greece. It's going to come into connection with Neoplatonism. It's going to come into connection with Gnosticism. So next time, what I want to look at is I want to look at the Gnostics, these followers of Jesus - because of course it's controversial to call them Christians - who really centered in on this Gnosis Agape [with] what they were talking about, and the Neoplatonism. Because all of that is going to have an impact on the generation of more orders of Meaning. We'll review that again, but if you remember, we talked about how with Aristotle we had developed, in the West, a nomological order to Meaning. A way in which we could pursue worldview attunement. We're going to see that as Neoplatonism and Christianity come together, we're going to get two more orders of meaning emerging. An order by which we pursue the most excellent way, and an order by which this cosmic narrative history is enmeshed into the Western worldview. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Episode 16 notes

Kairos

Kairos (Ancient Greek: καιρός) is an Ancient Greek word meaning the right, critical, or opportune moment.

Da'at

In the branch of Jewish mysticism known as Kabbalah, Da'at ("Knowledge", Hebrew: דעת ['daʕaθ]) is the location (the mystical state) where all ten sefirot in the Tree of Life are united as one.

Metanoia

Change in one's way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion: what he demanded of people was metanoia, repentance, a complete change of heart.

Saul

St. Paul the Apostle, original name Saul of Tarsus, (born 4 bce?, Tarsus in Cilicia [now in Turkey]—died c. 62–64 ce, Rome [Italy]), one of the leaders of the first generation of Christians, often considered to be the most important person after Jesus in the history of Christianity.

St. Stephen

Stephen (c. AD 5 – c. AD 34) traditionally venerated as the protomartyr or first martyr of Christianity.

Sophrosyne

Sophrosyne is an ancient Greek concept of an ideal of excellence of character and soundness of mind, which when combined in one well-balanced individual leads to other qualities, such as temperance, moderation, prudence, purity, decorum, and self-control.

Gnosis

Knowledge of spiritual mysteries.

Akrasia

The state of mind in which someone acts against their better judgement through weakness of will. Immanuel Kant(1724–1804), German philosopher. In the Critique of Pure Reason (1781) he countered Hume's sceptical empiricism by arguing that any affirmation or denial regarding the ultimate nature of reality ('noumenon') makes no sense. All we can know are the objects of experience ('phenomena'), interpreted by space and time and ordered according to twelve key concepts. Kant's Critique of Practical Reason (1788) affirms the existence of an absolute moral law—the categorical imperative.

Albert Camus

Albert Camus was a French philosopher, author, and journalist. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature at the age of 44 in 1957, the second-youngest recipient in history. Camus was born in Algeria to French Pieds Noirs parents. His citizenship was French.

Neoplatonism

A philosophical and religious system developed by the followers of Plotinus in the 3rd century ad. Neoplatonism combined ideas from Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, and the Stoics with oriental mysticism. Predominant in pagan Europe until the early 6th century, it was a major influence on early Christian writers, on later medieval and Renaissance thought, and on Islamic philosophy. It envisages the human soul rising above the imperfect material world through virtue and contemplation towards knowledge of the transcendent One.

Gnosticism

A prominent heretical movement of the 2nd-century Christian Church, partly of pre-Christian origin. Gnostic doctrine taught that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit.

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Ep. 17 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Gnosis and Existential Inertia

Welcome back to Awakening From The Meaning Crisis. Last time we tried something somewhat pretentious - I hope it was still valuable! We endeavored to discuss the contributions to the notions of meaning and wisdom that were made by the advent of Christianity. In particular, we looked at Jesus of Nazareth and the exemplification of this participatory knowing in God's Agapic creativity, this for-giving of personhood to others. John's radical idea that God is, in fact, this Agape! That that is actually what

we've always been talking about when we've been talking about God. And then Paul's radical personalization of this and how the Metanoia of his own transformation is seen by him as a powerful instance of this Gnosis Agape. But how that also carried with it a potential dark side in which elements of our, of his identity get projected onto cosmic history, and the idea of inner conflict within history, within God, as being reflected of and reflected in his own inner conflict between the old Saul and the new Paul. And how much this Gnosis Participatory knowing is bound up with an exploration and an understanding of how our Agency can be fractured, how we can be at war with ourselves, how we can suffer. And I want to take this up because the notion of how we can suffer, how we can become at war with ourselves, how our Agency can be undermined and how much cosmic forces may be aligned with our suffering becomes a central idea amongst a group of people known [as], or at least called by their enemies, the Gnostics.

Now there's a lot of controversy about whether or not this is a useful theoretical construct. There might've been some Gnosis communities. It's more apt to think of Gnosticism as a style and a way of thinking, like Existentialism or Fundamentalism. You don't go to a "fundamentalist church". You belong to a branch of Christianity that might be fundamentalist. It's a way of orienting yourself that is not like belonging to a particular community, or a particular political or socioeconomic group. Nevertheless, this sense of inner conflict, this sense of losing Agency, this sense of the importance of Gnosis and Agape are all made central to this style, this movement.

Now, before I talk about them in particular, I want to reverse how I want to present this. What I want to do is instead of trying to historically teach you about them first, I want to try and make clear to you from the inside, so to speak, what Gnosis is and how you are probably at some point seeking it, or will be seeking it, or have sought it in your life. And then once we get this existential understanding of what Gnosis is, then through that lens, I think it is more appropriate to try and understand the historical figures. The Gnostics are sort of, I dunno what to say, "sexy", "hot" right now?!? A lot of conspiracy theories and Dan Brown kind of crap around all of this. And I think that's the wrong way! You don't really understand the Gnostics as a movement, unless you understand what Gnosis is itself. This is going to turn

out to be important because I think a way we can understand the Gnostics is they are the Axial Revolution within the Axial Revolution. They are the attempt to take the Axial Revolution to its culmination, to its rational culmination, and they are going to provide the undercurrent to Western Cultures' understanding of its spiritual history and direction.

So for a long time you won't hear me talk about the Gnostics because, like I did when I was talking about the Buddha's enlightenment, and we did a lot of cognitive science on higher States of consciousness, I want to try and do some significant cognitive science before we turn back to the history. So let's get, let's work our way into what this is... We've already got some sense of what this is. We've had a lot of discussion of Participatory Knowing and Perspectival Knowing, and Gnosis has both of those elements in it, of Transformative Experience. We're going to try and draw this all together. But let's work our way into this.

So we've talked about a Worldview. And a worldview is when you have a way... You have this deeply integrated, dynamically coupled way of seeing yourself, your Agency, and seeing the world as an Arena. You have this bi-directional modeling. It is simultaneously modeling the world to you and modeling you to shape the world. This mutual conformity, this reciprocal revelation. So that's a worldview. Now, this has happened to me, and I hope something similar has happened to you. Perhaps when you're reading a book, a novel, or - I'll use an example: I'm reading the works of a particular philosopher, let's say it's Spinoza. And I'll be reading and I'll... and Spinoza is a profound and deep thinker, and you spend a lot of time and you're reading the arguments and you're trying to understand... and you can come to follow the arguments. You can come to follow the inferences. You can even come to believe some of Spinoza's conclusions until you have a lot of beliefs - and they don't even have to be in co-??? [related] - they can be sort of systematically related together. But then something else happens. Sometimes. Not always. But it's happened to me [on] multiple occasions. And it's often what I'm trying to convey above and beyond what I'm saying when I'm teaching other people, when reading Spinoza - and there's, it's like (Clicks his fingers) there's this change!! I go from seeing what Spinoza is saying to seeing things the way Spinoza says.

Sensibility transcendence

Spinoza goes from something [like], you know: "Oh, I believe what Spinoza's saying 'there' and 'there', and 'there', and 'there' about the world and about what it is to be a human being...!" I go from that to actually seeing the world "Spinozistically". It's because Spinoza is now, to use a metaphor [of his], is now the lens by which I'm both seeing the world and myself. I am now living the world as if Spinoza was an adverb. I'm living the world "Spinozistically". I have the perspective of what it is like to see the world the way Spinoza did and what it is like to participate in that Worldview. You get this advent of the viability, the livability of a Worldview. James talks about that. He talks about the difference - William James, the great psychologist and philosopher - he talks about the difference between believing things and it actually being a live option to you.

So what happens there is, at least for some period of time, the Agent/ Arena relationship, the perspectival and the participatory knowing, are now conformed to - at least it seems to me to be that way - to what Spinoza had. Not just what Spinoza said, [but] who and what Spinoza was and what his world was to him has become available to me. Now that's important because that viability, that ability to enter into a particular Agent/ Arena configuration will help me to take the next step forward.

So John Wright talks a lot about "Sensibility Transcendence" (written on the board), and he talks about it - and this is based on the really important work of Iris Murdoch and just an absolute gem of a book called "The Sovereignty Of Good". If you read 10 books in your life, one of them should be The Sovereignty Of Good; your life will be less if you have not read it. - So Murdoch was trying to get beyond the rules and reasons for morality to something much more important. She was trying to get to that viability of morality. The way in which we pay attention in such a way that our Salience Landscape and the Agent/ Arena Relationship has transformed such that we do 'the Good'.

But... Let's use Murdoch's particular example. There's a mother-in-law; she has a son. The son is married to a woman and she doesn't like this woman. The Mother-in-law doesn't like the woman. It's obviously the mother-in-law to the daughter-in-law. She doesn't like this woman because she finds her

coarse, finds her loud. [She] finds her kind of uncouth [and] therefore beneath the elegance and dignity of her son. And then - and think about Agape and 'for-giving' here; think about Agape and for-giving - but what happens here, at some point Murdoch says, and it happens like an insight, it happens like when you come out of the nine dot problem: The mother-in-law realizes something. And Murdoch is clear about this: It's not a normal insight! In a normal insight we reframe how we're looking at something; I reframe how I look at the nine dots. But what's actually happening is the mother-in-law is having a bi-directional insight. She's not only reframing how she sees the world, she's reframing how she sees herself and these are happening in a completely interfused manner. This is a Participatory Change. Both the Agent and the Arena side of the relationship are being co-changed together.

So it's not a reframing of this or that. I often use this term, it's a "TRANSFRAMING" (written on the board). It's not a reframing of a particular problem. It's a transformation of the whole framing process: Both ends. Because what's happening is the mother-in-law is seeing the daughter-in-law not as coarse, but as spontaneous; not as uncouth, but sincere; not as lacking in elegance, but as possessing authenticity! And then she's simultaneously, in a code determining fashion, realizing that the way that she, the mother-in-law, has framed things, habitually, has been wrong! She's having what we've talked about before, that Systematic Insight, not just an insight here and here, but there's a whole system of errors that she's transforming. She's going through that kind of Developmental Transformation that we've talked about. Wright calls this Sensibility Transcendence. Because what's happening, simultaneously, is the daughter-in-law can be something that she couldn't be before and the mother-in-law is becoming somebody she couldn't become before; she couldn't be before. These two things are happening together. Her sensibility, her whole way of participating in a Worldview, an Agent/ Arena relationship is being transformed. And so both things are going through transcendence. Do you see this? Here's herself, and here's the daughter (drawing / writing on the board), the object of attention, and 'this' (Mother-in-law) is going through self-transcendence, but so is this (daughter), and that's happening in a

completely conjoined way (the inter-relationship between the two, individually transcending selves).

The mother-in-law is becoming what she couldn't be because of how she is opening up what the daughter-in-law can be, and precisely because she's coming to see, [to] have a radical insight into what the daughter-in-law could be. (Gesturing to the board for the following) Opening up that (daughter) she's opening up what she (her 'self' - the Mother-in-law) can be. It's again, this process, a participatory knowing, [a] reciprocal revelation. And there's mutually accelerating disclosure. There's knowing by loving; It's a Sensibility Transcendence. So, notice what's happening here: There's a way... You can see that I can... I can go through a process like this (Sensibility Transcendence) and enter into a Worldview, and of course that's what Christianity was offering! It was offering people that Metanoia of how they can go through this radical transformation in this way, opening up the world, opening up themselves, etc...

Flipping sensibility transcendence

Now, why is that important? Because now I want you to think of the opposite! Your inability to enter into or make viable to yourself a new way of being. Now in order to get to that, let me bring up, again, somebody we've spoken [about] before, Harry Frankfurt. (Remember he's the person who talked about bullshit.) Frankfurt also talks about how - [a] wonderful book: "The Reasons Of Love" and "The Importance Of What We Care About" - how much our reasoning depends on what we love, what we care about, how we're bound into an Agent/ Arena relationship. Now, Frankfurt brings up an important notion. He brings up a notion he calls - [and] I don't quite like this word, but to be fair to him, I can't think of a better one - he calls the "Unthinkable" (writes on the board). So let me give you an example of this: The way to think of the Unthinkable is, although you can make thoughts, images, propositions, run inferences, you can't actually make it viable. You can't go through the Sensibility Transcendence that would bring you into living that Worldview.

So here's my example. My oldest son currently lives with me. (And this has been such a blessing for me. I get to live with him and spend time with him as he's building his career.) Now, I can think this thought: "it would be great

if I kicked Jason out"! I can run this thought through my head because if I did, then the apartment would be clean. I'd have more money, I can draw... I can imagine what it would look like. I can run the thought, right? I can drive all the inferences. But what I can't do is actually make this a viable alternative for me. It's in that way, the thought, it's unthinkable to me. My love for my son doesn't mean I can't run these thoughts/ imagine these scenes/ draw out these inferences... I can do all of that. What I can't do is bring myself to live in that world. It's "unthinkable" to me. Perhaps a better way of thinking about it is [that] it's not viable to me. It's unlivable for me.

Now that's a good thing, right? So do you see how I have a way, a Sensibility Transcendence with my son, that means there's no effort on my part to treat him morally and I'm not trying to be self-congratulatory. What I'm trying to say is [that] doing that thing of kicking him out, which I think would ultimately be an immoral act, is not viable to me. So right now, this all sounds... this is all really great! But there's a way in which this can be twisted, and I want you to now think of the negative of it. What if you're stuck? You're stuck in a Worldview you don't want to be in. You want to go over there to that Worldview! But you can't. You can't go through the Sensibility Transcendence that will make that worldview viable to you, because... You can run inferences in your head... You can run [or] Imagine scenes... You can state things to yourself... You can make all kinds of affirmations... [but it] won't get you there! You're stuck! You can't go through that change. You experience a kind of existential inertia. People often enter therapy for exactly this reason. They can state who they want to be and what kind of world they want to be in. They can imagine it. They can make inferences of what it would be like if they were there. They can deeply want to be there! But they don't... They don't get there! They stay stuck!!

I want to stop getting in these horrible romantic relationships. I want to be in a relationship that is deep and profound. It would be so good. I can imagine myself there. I could see myself, but I can't get there. Every time I try to get there, I end up here again every time somehow, and I don't understand how, I don't understand how the way I'm caring about things, the way I'm participating in myself and my world is preventing me from making that way of life a viable option to me. I want to be there. Think about Paul and the old man in the new man. I wanna be there. I want to be that person living there,

but all my efforts to get there, circle me back to here. I just can't get out of this existential inertia. I don't know how to bring about the sensibility transcendence that's going to make that way, that person and that world viable to me. How do I get there? How do I get there? How do I stop suffering? So one thing that can happen to people is they can lose their agency. Remember, that's what suffering means because they are there, they're there, they're stuck like this. They're losing any sense of how to get to that other worldview, that other self, they're experiencing. Radical existential inertia.

You used to often talk, Carl Young used to talk about the primary thing that people would have to get to and have to express and why they would come into therapy was precisely because they felt stuck. It might not even be that there's particular concrete problems in their life. It might be that everything is actually going kind of well, but they're stuck. They're stuck. They're thwarted. They there, there is, there's a sense of they're not moving and they should be. And although they can talk and draw images and make inferences about how they should move and where they should move to, they don't have the participatory perspective of knowing. They don't know how to get there. They don't know how to engage in the sensibility transcendence. They don't know how to bring about the trans framing. And often they enter into therapy and therapy has an Adaptic element into it. The therapist is affording an [inaudible] transformation.

But in addition to being stocked because of existential inertia, there's another problem people face when they are seeking, when they need significant transformation. And this goes to the heart of one of the best books. I've already mentioned it before in this series. Um, and I think philosophy in the last 20 years, this is LA. Paul's work, a transformative experience because what LA Paul's work points to, it's a way in which these transformative experiences render us the possibility of such transformative experiences, render us kind of stupefied because what they have us do is confront a deep kind of existential ignorance that is endemic to these transformative experiences.

And it has to do again with this very perspectival and participatory knowing that I'm talking about. Okay? So she gives the example. She first starts with

a very trivial example just to, to, to warm you up to the thinking. She, she says, somebody offers you to taste this fruit that you've never tasted before. And the problem is people have very bi-modal reaction. They either say, wow, this food is so unlike any food I've ever tasted. It's so wonderful. I love it. Or they say, this food is so unlike any food I've ever tasted. I hate it. It tastes like vomit. And, and the thing is, you don't know which reaction you're going to have until you bite the fruit.

And she says, well, do you bite the fruit? And you may say, well, I don't know. The point is right, you bite the fruit or not, you'll typically say, well what does it matter? It's not a, there's nothing significantly at risk if I have the fruit. That's true, but what the fruit example points to is the following. There's a kind of knowing that is dependent on your state of being. This is your perspective knowing you don't know what it is like cause that's the core of you don't know what your salience landscape will be like when you eat this fruit until you have eaten the fruit. There's no way of knowing that ahead of time. You have to go through the experience to know what it is like to have the experience. You say, okay, I can sort of get that. So like this is kind of what she calls an epistemic transformation, but she says some of the times what we're confronting is something deeper where we're confronting a personal transformation, right?

This is where what's what's happening again is knowing not just by having a particular perspective. This is knowing by having the Agent:Arena relationship radically trans framed. You don't know what it's like to be that person in that world, right? Because you have to actually be changed and the world has to be changed in order for you to have that participatory knowing. So she talks about the fact that what she means by like a transformative experience is one in which you're going to undergo that change in perspective of knowing in that change in participatory note showed you, gives a good dog experiment to bring that out. First a thought experiment. She says, imagine the following. All right? She said, your friends come to you and they revealed a secret. They give you just in like in Dubin biteable evidence that they can do the following. They convince you that they can absolutely do the following. They can turn you into a vampire.

Do you do it?

Do you do you become a vampire? Now before you put this off, is still the point of a philosophical thought experience that is to play with something free from your own life so you can get clear about what it means. After we've played with it. We will go back to our lives. But here's the issue. You can't make any inferences about this cause you don't know what it's going to be like to be a vampire and you don't know who you're going to be when you're a vampire because your preferences, your character, everything is going to change. And your salients landscaping is going to radically change. You don't know what it's going to be like. So here's what you face. I don't know what I'm going to lose if I become a vampire. I don't know what I'm going to lose. Once I go through this change, I will have lost a way of being.

It will become unthinkable to me. I can't back to it, but I don't know what I'm going to lose until I go through it. So, Oh well then I shouldn't do it. Ah, but if I don't do it, I don't know what I'm missing. I don't know what I'm missing. There could be a way of being here that is amazing and wonderful. I don't know what I'm missing and I'm caught. I equally don't know what I'm going to lose and I don't know what I'm going, what I'm missing and I can't do any calculations. I don't know what my values are going to be are my values. Now the right set of values are my values. Then the right set of values is the kinds of experiences I'm having now or the like. There is no place above. I can make the comparison. I can't reason my way through it and now unlike the fruit example, everything is at risk. Both the agent and the arena are at risk and you go, okay, so what? I get it, who cares? I'm never going to be a vampire. That's not the point. The point is once you acknowledge the logic of the problem, this is what she now gets you to realize. You confront these EV in your life at multiple times. Here's an example, so relevant to everything we've been talking about with a golf bag.

Should you have a kid? Should you have a child? You see how it's exactly the same. You don't know what you're missing if you don't have a child, because you are going to, we've talked about this. You're going to become a different person with a different salience landscape, and until you have a child, you don't want a toy, so you don't know what you're missing. You also don't know what you're gonna lose. Oh, people will tell you, Oh blah, blah, blah, blah, but until you go through it, you don't know you're existentially

ignorant. Here's another one. Should I enter into a romantic relationship with that person?

You don't know. You don't know who you're going to be because if it's a real romantic relationship, it's going to change you. You don't know who you're going to be. You don't know what your silliest landscape is going to be until you're on the other side. You don't know what you're missing by not getting into the relationship, but you don't know what you're going to lose until when you get into it. So should you do it or not? We face irreversible change and yet we can't. There's no way to reason our way through it because on both sides of the transformation, we are confronted by radical ignorance. We don't know what we're missing and we don't know what we'll be losing. We don't know if we should stay here. We don't know if we should go there.

Now I've had the pleasure to talk to, to LA Paul, Lori about some of this and present a case to her, which I think she, there's some agreement about this. And I look forward to, we have some future work we're doing together. As I pointed out to Lori, that when, whenever we're going through any significant developmental change, like to use Paul's example, going from a child to an adult, the child doesn't know what they're going to lose when they lose their childhood innocence. When they become an adult, they don't know.

But as an adult, right? But the child also doesn't know what it's going to miss. What is missing if it doesn't become an adult and you think, Oh, that's ridiculous. No, it's not. Do you know how much people face difficulties? Precisely because they get transfixed by this. They, right. If I grow up, I'm going to, I might lose stuff, but if I don't grow up, I don't know what I'm missing. What should I do? What should I do? What should I do? Like if I choose this career, I lose all these wonderful potentially polities, but should I just keep all my possibilities open? Look at all my possibilities. But, but if I choose this, I'll lose and I, and some of those possibilities, I don't even know. But if I don't ever choose, what am I missing? I'll never know because I've never actually gotten into any particular career.

So we can be stupefied as we face the need for radical transformation. So people are not, they go into therapy, not only because they're stuck, they don't know how to transform. They're also stupefied. They don't know if they should. All right, I won't cause I might, Oh, what am I? Right. And this

is bound up with the aspect disguise that people get into when they're stuck and it shows this stupid vacation and the stuckness working together. Look, somebody comes in, they're doing therapeutic work with you. Right? Why are you here? I'm stuck. How are you stuck? Oh, well I'm so stubborn. Like I'm stubborn and I originally, Oh, and I went on. I need to get, I need to be more of like, Oh, okay. And then you talk to them and let's talk about other stuff. Come back and go. What do you like most about yourself? Oh, I'm persistent.

I don't give up.

And you see the very thing they're trying to change. It's the very thing about themselves that they don't want to let go of, that they're most identified with. I'm stubborn. I won't change my mind. What do you like about yourself? I'm persistent. I don't give up. I don't change my mind. They talk about the same thing, one under a negative aspect and one under a positive aspect and they don't realize it. They're stuck and they're stupefied. And when we're stuck and we're stupefied when we're stuck, we can't imagine how to make an alternative worldview significant. How to make it viable when we're stupefied. We can't imagine the alternative. We can't figuring out how to rationally make the choice. So we get this right and nurse HSA and indecision. We're stuck and we're stupefied and then we're trapped. We're existentially trapped. And then you can think about how that could mix. We mixed up with the stuff we talked about with the Buddha, the parasitic processing, the parasitic processing, the Bodel confusion. But we get stuck. How do you get out? What do you do in therapy? Because therapy works. What do you do? How do you, how do you get people out of being existentially trapped? Well, let's, let's go back to it. Let's try and work our way through it.

So what do some people do when they're considering whether or not they want to have a child? Well, some people just throw themselves into the Darwinian flow and just blow, right? But some people are like, Oh, should we have a child or not? Right? What do some people do? Well, I've noticed many people doing this and it's very interesting. They get a pack, they get a dog typically, and then they do kind of bizarre behaviors with the dog. They have pictures taken with the dog and they give the dog a bed and some toys

and write and write and say, Ooh. Right. And what they're doing right is they're doing something that's right. Kind of like having the child, should I enter into a romantic relationship with this person? This is advice. It was actually given to me when I was dating and I, I see people do go on a trip with them, go on a trip with them, live with them for seven days. It's kind of like living with them. It's kind of like being in a relationship with them. People say, Oh well yeah, I sort of get that. But even the things like the being of event, how do people do that? Well, they play role playing games and you say that's just fantasy. Okay, well pay attention to the way this is evolving in our culture.

So role playing games have moved into live action versions where you act out the role playing. And then this has evolved into a Norwegian, like not Norwegian and Scandinavian style, which is called Jeep forum. And in Jeep forum what you're doing is you're given a scenario to act out and the person that's plays the role of like the junk din masters, like a movie director, they will tell you to cut scenes or switch roles and here's the whole point of Jeep form you. You're trying to enact emotionally difficult situations. Why would you want to do that? What? What people are seeking in Jeep form is they're seeking a phenomenon called bleed. I want, I'm going to do this roleplaying and I'm getting this person or here's the director and they're doing stuff to mess up with my trans framing and my role playing because what I'm trying to do is get so that the line between my real life and what I'm doing in this psychodrama bleeds so that the line between the game and reality bleed into each other. Billers, I'm looking for bleed so that I can play seriously play with the possibilities.

Do you see what's happening here? People engage and we have to learn how to take this word seriously again. They engage in play. The whole point of a play, right? The whole point about play is it puts you in between here's the world you're in and here's the world you want to be in, and then there's this liminal zone where we can play. It's no coincidence that as organisms become more intelligent, more need needed meat, more in need of right developmental transformations, they also become much more playful. They need more and more play and play is not a frivolous thing. One of the disasters of our culture is we think of play as only about fun. We've trivialized it. A play can be fun. I don't think fun is what people are after in

Jeep form. It's not really fun that people are out after when they adopt the dog and treat it like a child. See, the word play doesn't have to be about fun because you can play music and it could be heartbreak music. It could be Mauler that you're playing in Tai Chi. You don't do Tai Chi. You play Tai Chi, and it's not about having fun. It's about a deep engagement with processes of transformation.

So the way to think about this is what are people doing in all these instances there? They're confronting the possibility of a transformative experience. And so what they do is they have an enactive analogy. This isn't an analogy of word or thought because that's not gonna work because this is about perspectival and participatory change. This is an analogy you enact. You go through the actions. Now this takes a lot of skill to create an enactive analogy. It creates a lot of skill. I got to get it right, right? If I'm doing the Jeep forum, I got to get it right, and that's what the director's there to help Mike meek do role reversal. Suddenly give me an object I got to use, right? The therapist will suddenly get you to talk to that. Pretend that that empty chair, that your mother's there and start talking right? And you got to get it right because the enactive analogy has to be similar enough to the world and the person you're trying to become in that world. It has to be similar enough that you can feel it. You can start to get the perspectival and participatory knowing, but it's still similar enough to this world that you can pull out if you need to and you got to get this. It's this delicate balancing act. It has to be relevantly similar to the world I want to go to, but still relevantly similar to the world that I'm in because I want to put myself into a place where I can play, whether it's with the two so that I can compare them together. This tray, this crates, this creates demands, I should say. It's a man's tremendous skill. Disability to come up with a opt. There's, there's a beauty and an elegance here, an apt metaphor that you can actually play within that you can participate in so that you can, ah, that's what it would be like. Ah, but I, but I, I still know who I am right now and I can feel and see and sense the two together. That's what you're doing in therapy.

One of the things we need to do. As you can probably see an implication of what I'm saying as part of addressing the meaning crisis is we have to recover play and I hope you now understand what I'm going to say and that is not meant to be disrespectful. One of the important things that religion

was was play. That's what ritual properly understood is people are playing serious play in order to try and put themselves into a liminal place, a place between two worlds, the normal world and the sacred world. They want to dwell within. They're playing there in order to see how and whether they should go through the change in world and self that the religion is demanding and affording. Now notice in order to make a worldview viable to me, I have to go through this self world sensibility transcendence, but you've seen that before. You've seen that before. This is anagoge. Anagoge is precisely to set things up so that as this, as this is transcending as its decline, as I'm coming more into contact with what's real, getting below the illusion, like Paul just seeing things in mirror or just shadows on the cave for player as that opens up, that affords me transforming, right? So sensibility transcendence is just I think anagoge and sensibility transcendence is how I entered into a worldview. So what I need is I need not only an enactive analogy, I need a way of enacting anagoge.

And that is also what religious ritual used to do for us. Religious ritual was a way of playing with enactive analogies so that I can compare so I could overcome the ignorance. I can, right? I can see isn't even the right verb. I can see B, these two worlds, these two ways of being, these two persons within those worlds. But ritual also was and acted at a gay, it was giving you the skills for knowing how to get unstuck, how to go through sensibility, transcendence, how to make that world for survival. So in therapy, you're often doing this. You're giving people an active analogy, okay? So you're having like, it's coming clear that you're stuck and it has to do with how you relate it to your mom. Okay? So pretend that your mom is in that chair. I know she's dead. Now forget that this isn't literal, but it's not fun. It's not frivolous. It's serious play. Pretend your mom is there and enact that. Get the analogy, talk to her. And then here I am, I'm a therapist. I'll give you ways of reframing her and reframing yourself. I'll help you to engage in anagogy. So you'll start to know how to go through the sensibility transcendence, and that's how you get out of being existentially trapped.

You have this ritual behavior. Again, like when I'm doing Tai Chi, like Tai Chi, right? These are all, this is enactive analogy. I'm doing these motions. This is how like if somebody, this is how single whopped is helping me actually enact what it would be like to be in a fight situation, but it's also

anagogic, right? The whole point about doing Tai Chi is it's also radically transforming. That's one way of understanding. She don't understand it as magical energy. Understand that X instead as its way of radically transforming how I'm experiencing myself in the world and Tai Chi, we talk about the two eyes. I have an eye that's looking out at the world and looking at myself and what I'm doing is I'm radically transforming them. I'm trying to bring about the knowhow of anagoge and I'm in acting. The analogy of fighting. It's a ritual. I'm seriously playing with an enactive analogy and enacting anagogic transformation. That's why it's a path of wisdom and a martial art. At the same time is he therapy? Real martial arts, martial arts that aren't just kicking punch but real martial arts. We're all doing this. That's why so many people in the meaning crisis are attracted to martial arts, are attracted to things like Jeep form. They're hungry. That's why they go into therapy. They are hungry. They are hungry for ways of dealing with being existentially trapped.

So people are looking for ways of transforming, not just their cognition, their beliefs, but perspectively transforming their consciousness and a participatory fashion, transforming their character, what they identify with and how they, that identification enables them to inhabit an Agent:Arena relationship. We're close to telling you what gnosis is. So in gnosis what I'm trying to do, it's bringing about an altered state of consciousness

cause that it's going to put me into the flow state. It's got the possibility of giving me a higher state of consciousness, a mystical experience that's transformative. And then what I'm doing is I'm setting this within a ritual context where I'm at, I'm feeling enactive analogy and I'm doing enactive anagoge. I'm doing serious play and I have the flexibility, the cognitive flexibility. This is how the psychedelics can be immeshed, why psychedelics can improve therapy so much because the psychedelics give you the cognitive flexibility in the flow state and the possibility even of a higher state of consciousness that then empowers this process to get you free from existential entrapment. This is why you give people right psychedelics and you put them through the therapeutic process. And you can get them free from post traumatic stress disorder.

Okay, so now what's gnosis? This is gnosis. Gnosis is to have a set of psychotechnologies that create a ritual context like Jeepform, like martial arts, like therapy that allows us to overcome being existentially stuck, existentially stupefied. And that is being powered by an altered state of consciousness that's induced by chanting, sleep deprivation, psychedelics. And what this does, what gnosis does is it frees me from being existentially trapped. It's this combination, this integration of psychotechnologies that activate and transform perspectival and participatory knowing and give us a sense of a greater reality that we want to live within and thereby liberates us from being existentially trapped and heals us from our fractured suffering, our fragmented agency, our broken world. That's gnosis. So what I want to look at next time is how gnosis was taken up within a movement within the same time period is early Christianity. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Episode 17 notes

Existentialism

A philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will.

Fundamentalism

A form of a religion, especially Islam or Protestant Christianity, that upholds belief in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture

Spinoza

(Other names: Benedictus de Spinoza)

Spinoza, Baruch (1632–77), Dutch philosopher, of Portuguese-Jewish descent; also called Benedict de Spinoza. Spinoza espoused a pantheistic system, seeing 'God or nature' as a single infinite substance, with mind and matter being two incommensurable ways of conceiving the one reality.

Pantheism

A doctrine which identifies God with the universe, or regards the universe as a manifestation of God. Pantheism was popularized in Western culture as a

theology and philosophy based on the work of the 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, in particular, his book Ethics ([Buy here](#)). A pantheistic stance was also taken in the 16th century by philosopher and cosmologist Giordano Bruno.

William James

William James (January 11, 1842 – August 26, 1910) was an American philosopher and psychologist, and the first educator to offer a psychology course in the United States. James is considered to be a leading thinker of the late nineteenth century, one of the most influential philosophers of the United States, and the "Father of American psychology"

Author - **John Wright(Philosophy)**

Article - [Transcendence Without Reality](#)

Iris Murdoch

Dame Jean Iris Murdoch DBE 15 July 1919 – 8 February 1999) was an Irish and British novelist and philosopher.

Book mentioned - The Sovereignty of God - [Buy here](#)

Harry Frankfurt

Harry Gordon Frankfurt (born May 29, 1929) is an American philosopher. He is professor emeritus of philosophy at Princeton University, where he taught from 1990 until 2002, and previously taught at Yale University, Rockefeller University, and Ohio State University.

1 - On Bullshit - Book mentioned - [Buy here](#)

2 - The Reasons of Love - Book - [Buy here](#)

3 - The Importance of What We Care About - Book - [Buy here](#)

Carl Jung

Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology. Jung's work was influential in the fields of psychiatry, anthropology, archaeology, literature, philosophy, and religious studies. Jung

worked as a research scientist at the famous Burghölzli hospital, under Eugen Bleuler

L. A. Paul

Laurie Ann Paul is a professor of philosophy and cognitive science at Yale University. She previously taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Arizona. She is best known for her research on the counterfactual analysis of causation and the concept of "transformative experience."

Book - A Transformative Experience - [Buy here](#)

Gedanken experiment

A thought experiment considers a hypothesis, theory, or principle for the purpose of thinking through its consequences. Johann Witt-Hansen established that Hans Christian Ørsted was the first to use the German term Gedankenexperiment circa 1812.

JEEPFORM

Jeepform is a label used for contained, experimental and sometimes controversial roleplaying games in the freeform tradition, as designed by the larpwright group Vi åker jeep. Many jeepform games are documented by manuals, allowing them to be re-run at the convenience of the reader

Mahler

Gustav Mahler (German: ['ma:le]; 7 July 1860 – 18 May 1911) was an Austro-Bohemian Romantic composer, and one of the leading conductors of his generation. As a composer he acted as a bridge between the 19th century Austro-German tradition and the modernism of the early 20th century.

Anagoge

St Paul, "mirror" reference

Qi

In traditional Chinese culture, *qi* or *ch'i* (/tʃi:/ CHEE simplified Chinese: 气; traditional Chinese: 氣; pinyin: qì About this soundqì) is believed to be a

vital force forming part of any living entity.

ASC

Altered State of Consciousness

HSC

Higher State of Consciousness

Other helpful resources about this episode:

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Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 18 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Plotinus and Neoplatonism

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. So last time we were taking a look at a group of people. As I said before, the Gnostic shouldn't be understood as forming like their own community or group. Although there might have been some Gnostic churches, we should think of them more like we think of existentialism or fundamentalism. You can be a fundamentalist Christian or Muslim or Jew, et cetera. It's more about a style, a way of being, a way of understanding and interpreting, and that it was pervasive during the same period as early Christianity and the two are interacting with each other. In fact, as we'll see, many Gnostics thought of themselves as Christians.

So we were taking a look at how to go about interpreting gnosticism. Why are we doing this? We're doing this because I'm presenting the Gnostic movement as the axial revolution within the axial revolution. It's taking the revolution to its culmination in many important ways that I think have direct relevance for us today. In order to do that, I'm presenting to you something like the cognitive science of what gnosis actually is. And in order to do that,

we've been making use of some important work by Harry Frankfurt and LA Paul.

The basic idea is that we can talk about people being existentially trapped and that that is a result of them being existentially stuck there. They have inertia. They do not know how to engage the anagoge in order to make a worldview viable to them. And they are existentially indecisive. They are existentially stupefied because they are facing a deep transformative experience and they don't know how to reason their way through it. They don't know if they should do it. And that existential entrapment can be very, very damaging. It can fragment your world and tear apart your agency. And so people can suffer from this in a profound way, which means gnosticism as Hans Jonas and other people have seen is directly relevant to a lot of the modern confrontation with meaninglessness and nihilism because in the meaning crisis, people also similarly feel deeply, existentially trapped.

So what is needed, I argued is a recovery of serious play through the engagement in ritual behavior. This ritual play allows us, affords an individual to engage in active analogy so that they can get into that liminal state in which they can in a perspectival and participatory manner bridge in a very apt way between the world and the self that they are now and the world and the self they want to viably become.

That enacted ritual should also afford anagoge. It should afford the transframing, the reciprocal anagogic process by which self and world are transformed such that we can go through the sensibility transcendence, which will make a worldview viable to us. That combination, that ritual combination of enacted analogy and enactive anagoge is empowered by the cognitive flexibility brought on by an altered state of consciousness, hopefully a higher state of consciousness that gives us a sense of the increased realness. The more realness of the world that we are trying to move into. So that higher state of consciousness, as we've talked about before, motivates us to go through this radical transformative experience.

Now, of course, there are dangers associated with all of this. When we are engaging in these kinds of radical transformation of our salience landscape, when we are putting ourselves and our world at risk, when we are inducing altered states of consciousness, there is a significant chance that we will fall

prey to parasitic processing to bullshitting ourselves, to deceiving ourselves. And therefore it is very important, and this is also part of what is going on with gnosticism, to build up a community, a shared mythology, a shared set of psychotechnological practices, a shared social network of distributed cognition to provide sapiential feedback, guidance correction and encouragement for people when they are endeavoring to go through the kind of transformation that will release them from this existential entrapment.

So you have some higher state of consciousness, hopefully that has some aspects of being a higher state of consciousness. And that is going to be set within a ritual framing that I've been talking about. And then you want that, in turn, set within an important sapiential and supportive community that is teaching you all kinds of the relevant skills by which one can bring wisdom, the ability to overcome self-deceptive self-destructive behavior, to bear upon this transformation. When all of that is the case, this is what gnosis is, it's this kind of deeply transformative, deep perspectival participatory knowing that is ritually enframed and embedded within a sapiential and supportive community.

So what we have going on here is a project that was addressing the domocide that was still in existence, persisting from the Hellenistic domocide that we've spoken about. Also, as I mentioned, one of the reasons why Christianity took root. 'Cause while the Roman empire offered a sociopolitical solution to some of the problems in the ancient world, it didn't have a viable answer on its own to the meaning crisis, the domocide of the Hellenistic period. Things like stoicism had been generated. But Christianity is a significant response. And at the same time, this movement, this Gnostic movement arises.

Now, these Gnostics, many of them, not all of them, saw themselves as Christians. They interpreted Jesus as somebody who had brought them gnosis. And for them, the important thing was not to believe in Jesus, but as much as possible to become like Jesus, to go through the kind of radical transformation to be at one with God, the way Jesus was. Now, whether or not we believe in that particular mythology, two things we need to note for our purposes in this course, we need to note that Gnosticism and Christianity are deeply talking to each other and informing each other, even though in

many ways they'll have an oppositional relationship. We're going to see that both Gnosticism and Christianity are also in a very important dance and intermeshment with Neoplatonism.

Now, many people, and I put it out with the examples of Jeepform and therapy and martial arts, right? Many people are seeking gnosis today. Because gnosis is the kind of thing you need in order to bring about a release from the existential entrapment that we're finding in the meaning crisis.

Now, what's interesting about the Gnostics is they create a mythology for all of this. Because if you just read their stuff, it's like, man, it's like, if you were strung out on an incredible acid trip and everybody was speaking in reverse, it is so hard. Their stuff is so bizarre and weird and strange. But I think if you pay attention to some of the main themes of the mythology, you can see how it is a mythological scaffolding for bringing about gnosis.

A book I would recommend to you is April DeConick's book, the Gnostic New Age. In that, she does some good work at bringing out some of the central themes of this movement. And she also points out how much Gnosticism is prevalent in our culture today mythologically. And you may say, what do you mean by that? Well many movies and she shows this in the book actually have a Gnostic theme. The mythology of the movie, and movies are where we go to play with a lot of our mythology, actually are pretty clear versions of this Gnostic mythology.

So what is this mythology? So the Gnostics have an idea and you can see part of it comes from Plato. There's an influence from Plato. So if you remember, Plato has this idea about the everyday world is a world like the shadows and the echoes. These things are not fully real. This table, this wall, this pen, they're in a profound sense images, right? They participate in the forms. You remember those patterns of intelligibility and realness. So Plato had a problem, which is the forms are basically eternal. So you think of something like, you know, E equals MC squared, right? That's not an event. It's sort of timeless and spaceless. And then how do these eternal forms, how do they express themselves in the temporal things, the things that are changing here? So basically how do time and eternity intersect?

And so Plato proposed a mythological answer. He proposed there was a figure. He called the figure the craftsmen, the Demiurgas, the Demiurge. And what the Demiurge is he can sort of become aware of these because he's a rational agent. And what he does is he shapes things in space and time in order to make the world of becoming have some reality to it. And so it has some important similarities to the eternal world. And that means that by paying attention to temporal events, we can become aware of these eternal principles, sort of what science does right now. Now, whether all of that is true, I think in an important sense it's not true, there's a mythological point here. Plato is trying to understand mythologically the relationship. He's trying to give us a way in imagery and story of understanding the relationship between eternity and time.

Now, the Gnostics were influenced by this, but they took this notion and they did something very interesting to it because they said the temporal world, the everyday world we're in, is a world of very significant suffering. So remember they're there after the Hellenistic domocide. They are during a period both where the Hellenistic domocide is still in existence and the Roman empire has caused massive pain and suffering throughout the world. So they're looking at the everyday world and they're seeing all this suffering. They're feeling deeply trapped within it, existentially trapped in the way we've been talking about. So for them that was very clear evidence that whoever had created this world was either stupid or evil or both. They were looking around the world and saying, look at how much we suffer. Look at how much pain we're in. Look at how much we're trapped. And therefore whatever is creating the structures that we're living in is both stupid and evil. So they, in Plato, the Demiurge is basically a benevolent being. But in here the Demiurge very often becomes something like an evil overlord.

Now what's going on here? Well, what they're trying to do is articulate again, the sense of being trapped and that the socioeconomic, sociocultural, political-economic structures that they find themselves in are actually thwarting them. And now when I say it that way, it's like, Oh, maybe that's a mythological way of talking about something that you might be experiencing. You're experiencing existential entrapment. And then when you look out at the patterns of your culture, the patterns—the market patterns, the political patterns, you don't feel like they are shaping a world

that is going to help alleviate your entrapment. Instead you feel that they are stupid and evil. And I know from a lot of the research we did for the book on zombies with the work I did with Chris and Filip, more and more people view their myths, their deeply repeated cultural, political, socioeconomic patterns, not as helping them, but as thwarting their efforts to be free from their existential entrapment, adding to their fragmentation and their suffering.

So whether or not we believe in the Gnostics supernaturalistic way of talking about this, which I don't, we can nevertheless understand what they are articulating. We have this existential entrapment and we have sociopolitical, sociocultural patterns that are designed to further that entrapment, further our self-deception, further our self-destruction, keep us enmeshed in modal confusion or keep us awashed in parasitic processing, keeping us trapped, stuck and stupefied. So for the Gnostics, they needed to try and link this to existing mythologies. And here's where they did something that is radical.

They identified all the existing gods, whether it's the God of the Jews or the God of the Romans. Instead of seeing these gods as divine beings, they saw these gods as basically the guards of our prison. So they see everything else that people had thought of as previously sacred, all the gods, as actually things imprisoning us. Even Paul was talking about this in the Bible where he talks about powers and principalities that keep us imprisoned.

Now I want you to stop and pause because this is a radical idea. This is an idea that there has been something common to all of these gods that must now be challenged. So up until now, the relationship between us and them was one of servitude, often bordering on notions of slavery. We were the slaves or the servants of the gods. The Gnostics want to invert that. They want to tell you that instead of worshiping these gods, instead of idealizing these gods, instead of giving in to these powers and principalities, these patterns that are pervasive and profound in the way they entrap us, instead of thinking how we should serve and fit into them... Think of this again, remember the axial revolution? Don't try and fit into the everyday world; you want to transcend it. Instead of serving and fitting in, we have to transcend them all. They are not divine. They are our prison guards. They may be powerful, but instead what we need to realize is that there is

something in us. They thought of it as a divine spark that will actually carry us above to the God beyond all gods, which sounds like a contradiction because of course that's what they're trying to get at.

The idea here can be expressed using some of the Christian mythology that they were quite willing to—Well, it depends who you're talking to. If you're an Orthodox Christian and you see the Gnostics as perverting your mythology; if you're a Gnostics, you see yourself as disclosing by transformation what's actually available in the mythology. So for the Gnostics, this God is the God of the Old Testament, evil, jealous, vindictive, who threatens and, and bullies people, authorizes genocide, shows favoritism for no moral reason, is just—And I mean, think about it, he says, the God of the old testament, "I'm a jealous God. Don't you dare worship anybody other than me. And if you do, I'll kill you and I'll kill your kids and I'll kill your kids' kids and all this horrific stuff." And then that God is compared to the God of the New Testament. The God of agape, the God of light and love. And the idea is that God is the God beyond all gods does not want our worship, wants us to reunite with him. He wants us or she wants us to fully participate. I have to say, he and she, specifically for the Gnostics, one of the things they also challenged was the difference between the genders in the ancient world. They're famous for that, in thinking women are as equally capable of a spiritual life as men.

So we are radically not at home because this, our capacity for agapic love means we have a Gnostic potential. We have the power, the potential to remember to know that we belong here. We can sense that we don't belong here. We can sense that we belong somewhere else. We know there's something fundamentally wrong here. And then the idea is this God beyond all gods. This absolute fullness of being sends individuals down into the world of suffering to bring us the gnosis. To bring us this kind of transformative knowledge that will set us free. And what the Gnostic Christians did is they said Jesus was this individual. So the Gnostics don't put a huge emphasis on the person of Jesus and his crucifixion. Instead, the teachings of Jesus are much more important to them because what is going to happen here is Jesus is going to bring us the way of knowing gnosis of agape so that we can free ourselves from this.

So the Gnostics therefore don't see the purpose of Christianity as doctrine or dogma. The purpose of it is to give us a mythology that will free us from our existential suffering and allow us to experience this transcendence of the gods. Now this inversion, this radical inversion. This is what I mean, it's the culmination. It's the axial revolution that is finally applied to even to the whole mythological framework of the ancient world. And what it means is that the Gnostics have a very, and this is one of the things that their critics often leveled against them. The Gnostics keep churning out new gospels and new stories and new myths. Because for them it's not about having a final Orthodox story, a final Orthodox set of principles, it's about having engaged in, participated in our process of creating the enactive analogies, the enacted anagoge. That's what matters. That's what actually matters.

Now, this idea that spirituality is ultimately about transcending the gods rather than serving the gods is very, it's very both pertinent to us today and very radical for its time. Because you have basically the challenging of a, not even a belief, it was just an unquestioned presupposition that our relationship to the gods was one of servitude and slavery getting transformed into—no, no. The center, the core of spirituality is not worship. The core of spirituality is self-transcendence. Healing and freeing people from existential entrapment and their suffering. And that our mythology and our practices should always be in service of us reuniting to who and what we are.

Now we love this story. Notice how, first of all, it's still got all the platonic elements here are the people trapped in the cave. They're bound. They get the secret, the knowledge that frees them so that they can return to and see the light. Right? But of course for Plato, you come back down into the cave. For the Gnostics, you try to spread the message to as many people as you can. So it has the Platonism.

It, of course, has a way of connecting that Platonism to Christianity by re-interpreting Jesus as the embodiment of gnosis rather than as a sacrifice in whom we should have faith. Jesus is a teacher who provides us with something like what the Shaman did and what our therapist does, provides us with the keys to unlocking, right? Unlocking all the ways in which these patterns, these sociocultural, political, economic patterns, ways of thinking and being are just permeated into layers of our psyche and ways of being in

the world that they just exacerbate our suffering, our existential entrapment and the way it is fragmenting our world and ripping apart our agency.

So we longed for that. Now this was Hans Jonas's great insight. We longed for that now. So we go to movies that show this, right? So DeConick goes through several movies that are basically modern portrayals of this Gnostic mythology, of course, famously. And it brings both, it brings all of these elements in the Christian, the platonic, and the Gnostic. Of course, this is the matrix because the matrix is this: You're entrapped in a world of illusion. There are evil overlords who are trying to keep you entrapped. So you don't ever discover who you truly are, right? But remember there's a scene in the movie? You know, like a splinter in your mind that there is something wrong and you don't belong, right? That's the matrix. Or you can see a movie starring Jim Carrey, the Truman story. Notice, of course, the play on words there? True man. Truman discovering who you really are and he grows up in a world within overlord that has manufactured it to keep him from ever actually getting his true agency, finding true love, et cetera. And what he has to do is get the knowledge in order to get beyond this God. We keep telling this story because it's a myth because it keeps pointing us to patterns that are pervasive and profound and powerful and we can't quite articulate them and we can't quite know them. But the myth, at least, gives us a moment of, at least, narrative and symbolic recognition of our suffering.

So the Gnostics are offering a radical form of the axial revolution. Now it carries with it a dark side. It keeps showing you with all of this stuff that the light side and the dark side of Christianity, right? And you probably could see how there's a Gnostic element also within Star Wars. You're trapped within the empire with the evil overlord, the emperor, and you have to get free. And you need to have the knowledge of the Force that will set you free and blah, blah, blah, blah. Like we love this and we keep wanting to do it. That's great.

What's the dark side of the Gnostic vision? The dark side of the Gnostic vision is it can, it doesn't have to and many of them, in many of the original Gnostic writers that I've read, it's not the case, but it can do this. This is ultimately a conspiracy theory. This is a grand conspiracy theory that behind —Look, one of the reasons why this is comforting is, behind all the apparent

chaos and suffering, there actually is some evil overlord. I mean, one of the things that would make evil so much more tractable for us is if it was ensconced within an individual, but this is the ultimate conspiracy theory.

There's a whole system that is keeping you from realizing the truth and who you truly are. The true man that you are and how you belong elsewhere and living another way. And now you say, Oh, well, conspiracy. Well, stop and think. Look, what are the Gnostics saying? This evil overlord. Some of them say, not all of them, it's the same as the God of the old Testament. Who are the people that worship the God of the old Testament? The Jews. Here's an idea that's now being sewn into Western culture. The Jews are part of a conspiracy to keep us from realizing our true heritage. That is going to turn out to be an extraordinarily dangerous and bloodthirsty idea. Nazism is a twisted, and other people have pointed this out, Nazism is not primarily a political or even a socioeconomic movement. Nazism is a twisted Gnostic response of the meaning crisis that was being magnified in the Weimar Republic of Germany.

So there is a dark side to Gnosticism. So we should have an ambivalent attitude towards it. In order to understand it, we must think of how we can extricate gnosis from Gnosticism. How can we salvage gnosis from Gnosticism? Just like, how can we salvage the agape from Christianity? How can we salvage wisdom from the ancient nomological order?

So on one side, you can see the dangers. Why did this happen? It's a long, complicated story. But part of the problem, part of the reason is the emerging Orthodox church. It wasn't even an Orthodox church at that time. It called itself the Apostolic Church, the church that thought Jesus was absolutely unique. And the point was to worship him. And that faith is what was crucial. Faith in the sense of believing in him as a sacrifice, persecuted. And I mean that literally persecuted. The Gnostic form of Christianity and drove it underground. And as underground, it became enmeshed with any type of group that was trying to challenge the established order. And that's how it tends to surface again in Nazism. We'll see that there are more things that feed into Nazism, but that's all we need for right now.

Gnosticism, of course, is also deeply influential in some very important people. So here are three people we're going to start talking about more and

more. You've already heard me talk about Tillich. Tillich is one of the great theologians. Tillich talks about the meaning crisis in a classic book, that I highly recommend to you, called *The Courage To Be*. And he talks about that the response to that is a way of discovering, and it's clear because of how he talks about symbols and he talks about transformation, although he does not use the term, but he's talking about gnosis. He's talking about that the response to the meaning crisis is the gnosis of the God beyond the God of theism. That what we need to do is discover the God, who of course is not a God, because it's the God beyond the God of theism. As the meaning crisis destroys the mythology of the theistic mythology of God, can we discover, rediscover sacredness in a way that liberates us from our existential suffering? This is the core. Now, Tillich thought that Christianity could play a significant role in that. And one of my friends and colleagues, Jonathan Pageau thinks that Christianity will in fact, go through this kind of self-transformation so that it can move beyond the meaning crisis. I'm not convinced of this, but I do respect these points.

Many of you have heard me already mentioned Jung. Jung basically was deeply—Jung is to Gnosticism what cognitive behavioral therapy is to stoicism. Jung is basically a transformation into psychotherapeutic context, the Gnostic mythology. And you should understand why that is not a coincidence. The Gnostic mythology is a way of giving us a scaffolding for enactive analogy, enacted anagoge, which, of course, are so central to therapeutic processes.

The person you haven't heard me mention and I'll talk about more later, is Corbin. Corbin was very much about trying to recover this kind of knowing because his great concern was that we had lost this kind of knowing and therefore we had lost our capacity for the transformation and the liberation that it can bring about. And we can get trapped in these historical patterns that fragment our world and tear apart our agency. So because they represent the radicalization of the axial revolution, there is much to learn from Gnosticism. But I do not, I am not advocating and attempt to resurrect it or bring it back. What we need to do is understand and that's what these individuals represent. And notice that at least one of them was one of the most courageous opponents of the Nazis. Tillich was the first non-Jewish

academic to be fired from the Nazis because from the very beginning and consistently he identified them and resisted them.

So keep this whole framework in mind. Can we salvage from gnosticism gnosis and some of its radical message about how we can reconfigure how we can have a non-theistic, non-supernaturalistic understanding of sacredness? Can we do that and avoid the conspiratorial way of thinking that can be so damaging and has been? See, one of the things that Gnosticism can quickly ally into is that those utopian, they're so enticing, right? Those utopian ideologies that give you the great conspiracy theory and tell you that you belong to the chosen few, the chosen race or the chosen class, right? And that violence is acceptable because the system is evil and must be destroyed.

I point you to the work of Chris Hedges because he's criticized both sides. He wrote a book, *American Fascists* about Fundamentalist Christianity and it's pervasive portrayal of a grand conspiracy. But he also wrote a book on the new atheists and how they also represent a utopic perfectionism that sanctions violence. And if you don't believe me, take a look at Hitchens and Harris and the proposals for nuclear first strikes against the Islamic world, et cetera.

So I'm suggesting to you, and I'm trying to give you an argument for it, how we should have an ambivalent attitude towards Gnosticism. Let's put it back in the historical picture. 'Cause I told you about the three that are crucial and how they're intermeshed with each other. We have the emerging Christianity. We've seen this by taking a look at Jesus and John and Paul. And we've seen how it's interacting with Gnosticism. We've already seen how Gnosticism is influenced and influencing Platonism and in particular I want to look at Neo-platonism because it is also deeply enmeshed with Christianity. This triangle is going to be necessary for understanding the final elements of the orders of meaning, the grammar, as I've put it before, of meaning. We've got the nomological order.

What is Neo-platonism? By the way, Neo-platonism is also why the main character in *The Matrix* is called Neo, for Neo-platonism and he's often referred to as The One because The One is the central thing within Neo-

platonism. Again, there's a reason why all of these mythological patterns keep being so attractive to us.

So Plotinus. Let me give you an analogy. I think this is a helpful analogy. Scientists right now are trying to integrate quantum mechanics and relativity, the two great theories. And if they come up with it, they'll have the grand unified theory. Einstein tried and failed. Many people think they've had the answer and then it collapses. By analogy, Plotinus is the grand unified field theory of ancient spirituality because what does he do? Well, he takes Plato's spirituality. He takes the whole idea of anagoge from Plato. He takes Aristotle's theory, the whole Aristotle worldview, the theory of knowing, the theory of the structure of the world. We've talked about that. And he takes from the Stoics, that whole therapeutic project. Overcoming modal confusion. And what he does is he integrates them together. He integrates them together in powerful way. How does he do that?

Well, he talks about, first of all, he says—well, you can start anywhere. You can start in any one of these places and Plotinus's writing and then get to the other two. It is such a powerfully integrated system. And when you're reading Plotinus, you're not just reading an argument, you're also undergoing a spiritual exercise that is trying to transform your state of consciousness in your cognition. So what's the main theory here? Let's start here. So if you remember we have Aristotle's conformity theory. We know something, remember this, by conforming to it, by sharing the same structural functional organization with it. And then Plotinus says, Oh, wait a sec. Aristotle also has sort of levels of being. And we talked about this. We talked about at the lowest level, there's pure potentiality and at the highest level there's pure actuality. And we don't need to get into the metaphysics. But here's the idea. There are levels of reality, levels of realness. As we know, and this doesn't mean intellectual, this is participatory, this is very much like gnosis. And he's in discussion with gnosis. We know that Plotinus has Gnostic students. He's also critical of them, but this is not just intellectual knowing. This is deeply participatory knowing. As we make these—and listen to my language—as we make these levels of reality viable to us as they become livable to us, we conform to them and we change. And this is Eric Perl's brilliant idea. All of his stuff is so good. As we conform and make this level of reality real to us, we're conforming to it and we're also moving to a higher level of the

self. As we conform, we're also altering, and this is the anagoge of Plato, we're altering what level the self is at. And of course, as we alter the level that the self is at, we're more capable of living in that higher level of reality. What this does for us is it helps us deeply remember the Being mode, who we really are.

Let me try and put this all together with an example. What is it that makes something real? And think about this. Think about Socrates here, right? Socrates, what do you mean by real? We care about whether or not things are real. Like it really matters to us—look at the word 'really.' It really matters to us. And yet what is it that makes something real? How much time have you put into that? Because if you are driven by a pursuit of realness and you don't understand what it is, if it's something you're pursuing and you don't understand, remember what that is? That's the gap of bullshit.

So what makes something real? And notice for Plotinus and again, Eric Perl, especially in his book, *Thinking Being*, just a fantastically brilliant book, can't recommend it enough. It's not what makes something real, it's how do we also sense it as real? So it's both what structurally, functionally organizes it to be real, two sides of the worldview, and how do we sense it? How does it make us be able to sense it as real? And here's the answer. And it in some sense it's basic, but in other sense it's profound. What makes something real is how one it is. How integrated it is. How much it is structurally, functionally organized. So we treat the object as more real than the shadows because it's more structurally, functionally organized. That's talking about the object. What is it to understand something? Well, here's a bunch of separate things and when I understand them, I find how they're all one. How they can all be integrated together. When I understand some thing, I understand how all of its parts are integrated together. And then what we do is, "Okay, these things have been integrated here." And then, "Oh and I can integrate these here and I can..." And, "This is more real. What's one behind all of these various things?" And then I can, of course, find what's underneath all of this and what's underneath this and what's underneath this. Things become more real to us as we integrate them together. And they're more real as things as they are integrated together.

So as we try and find the deeper underlying principles that integrate things together, we become more integrated together and we become more real. We are realized. [-] We're getting to what's more real. And we, as we become more integrated, more actualized, are becoming more real. I'm becoming more integrated. And you can see this in Plato's *anagoge*, right? The inner conflict within me is being reduced. I'm becoming more real as I'm becoming more integrated. And that is allowing me to make viable and real these more integrated, deeper levels of reality. And then the whole thing spins anagogically.

And what I have is I move from where things are only potential, they don't have much form, like in Aristotle, all the way up to as having the greatest structural functional organization they can. And all of this isn't just, it's not just a theory, it's a change in my existential mode. I am becoming more real. That's why I use the word realization. It's simultaneously a making more real of the world and me and becoming more aware of what's more real. But what is it? What's down here or up? Depending on which way you want to draw these lines. What's here? Well, it's gotta be the principle that makes everything else real, that integrates everything together. It can't in any way be multiple.

So Plotinus calls this The One. He doesn't mean the single. This is that by which reality is realized and our mind realizes reality. Plotinus uses the metaphor of light. Just like light is itself invisible and makes everything seeable, The One is not anything we can ever know. You can't know The One because it is that by which everything is knowing. It is that by which everything is. So how do you ever reunite with it if you can't know it? If it is beyond all possible thought, because thought breaks things apart. If it's beyond all possible, how do you know it?

You can't know it. You can't have it. You can't have it even in thought. You can't have it even in the most beautiful theory. You can't have it. You can only be it. You can only have gnosis of The One by being one. So at the pit, at the height of Plotinus's system is a higher state of consciousness, an awakening experience. But notice it's completely integrated with the best science and the best scientific psychotherapy of the time. There is no deep division in Plotinus between spirituality, science, and therapy. They are all

beautifully, mutually supporting, interwoven, enmeshed together. It's the culmination of everything from the Greek axial age.

Next time I want to talk about how all of these currents, Christianity, Gnosticism, and Neoplatonism are going to be taken up by Augustine. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Episode 18 notes

Hans Jonas

Hans Jonas was a German-born American Jewish philosopher, from 1955 to 1976 the Alvin Johnson Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York City

Book mentioned - The Gnostic Religion - [Buy here](#)

Nihilism

The rejection of all religious and moral principles, in the belief that life is meaningless. Philosophy the belief that nothing in the world has a real existence. SapientialRelating to wisdom.

April Deconick

April D. DeConick is the Isla Carroll and Percy E. Turner Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Rice University in Houston, Texas. She came to Rice University as a full professor in 2006, after receiving tenure at Illinois Wesleyan University in 2004. DeConick is the author of several books in the field of Early Christian Studies and is best known for her work on the Gospel of Thomas and ancient Gnosticism.

Book mentioned - The Gnostic New Age - [Buy here](#)

Demiurge

In the Platonic, Neopythagorean, Middle Platonic, and Neoplatonic schools of philosophy, the demiurge (/dəmī.ərdʒ/) is an artisan-like figure responsible for fashioning and maintaining the physical universe.

Book mentioned - **Zombies in Western Culture: A Twenty First Century Crisis** - [Buy here](#)

Authors: John Vervaeke, Christopher Mastropietro, Filip Miscevic

Hans Jonas

Hans Jonas (/'jōnæs/; German: ['jo:nas]; 10 May 1903 – 5 February 1993) was a German-born American Jewish philosopher, from 1955 to 1976 the Alvin Johnson Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York City.

Book mentioned - The Courage to Be - [Buy here](#)

Paul Tillich

Paul Johannes Tillich (August 20, 1886 – October 22, 1965) was a German-American Christian existentialist philosopher and Lutheran Protestant theologian who is widely regarded as one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century.

Jonathan Pageau

Jung

Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology. Jung's work was influential in the fields of psychiatry, anthropology, archaeology, literature, philosophy, and religious studies. Jung worked as a research scientist at the famous Burghölzli hospital, under Eugen Bleuler.

Chris Hedges

Christopher Lynn Hedges (born September 18, 1956) is an American Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Presbyterian minister, New York Times best selling author and television host.

Book - American Fascists - [Buy here](#)

Book - I Don't Believe in Atheists - [Buy here](#)

Hitchens

Christopher Eric Hitchens (13 April 1949 – 15 December 2011) was an English-American intellectual, polemicist, and socio-political critic who

expressed himself as an author, orator, essayist, journalist, and columnist. Hitchens was the author, co-author, editor, or co-editor of over 30 books, including five collections of essays on culture, politics, and literature.

Harris

Samuel Benjamin Harris is an American author, neuroscientist, and podcast host. His work touches on a wide range of topics, including rationality, religion, ethics, free will, neuroscience, meditation, psychedelics, philosophy of mind, politics, terrorism, and artificial intelligence.

Plotinus

Plotinus was a major Hellenistic philosopher who lived in Roman Egypt. In his philosophy, described in the Enneads, there are three principles: the One, the Intellect, and the Soul. His teacher was Ammonius Saccas, who was of the Platonic tradition.

Eric Perl

Eric D. Perl is a Professor of Philosophy in the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts at Loyola Marymount University.

Book mentioned - PLOTINUS Ennead V.1: On the Three Primary Levels of Reality - [Buy here](#)

Book mentioned - Thinking, Being - [Buy here](#)

"The One"

Plotinus' description of the base of all knowing.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

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Ep. 19 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Augustine and Aquinas

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. Last time we were talking about this interaction and confluence between nascent Christianity, the transformation that's undergoing the Platonic tradition in Neoplatonism and Gnosticism. We had ended up by talking about Plotinus and how he brings about this grand unification of the best science of the time - Aristotle - the best therapy of the time - Stoicism - and the best spirituality of the time - Platonism - and this is done all in a way that powerfully integrates mystical experience, achieving higher States of consciousness and rational argumentation. Things that we now experience as diametrically opposed: science and spirituality; reason and transformation; therapy and realness.

All of these things were not [opposed then], they were instead powerfully, mutually supportive. Now Plotinus is around 270 or so of the common era. And after him, of course, the Roman Empire starts to go into decline and we're seeing the end of the Ancient World. And there is a figure there, a towering figure, who basically brings this configuration, this triangle that I've mentioned of (draws the triangle from the last lecture on the board again) Christianity, Neoplatonism and Gnosticism together. He's deeply influenced by all of them, although he will eventually give priority to Christianity, and that's Augustine.

Augustine

So Augustine is a Roman and he's alive in the fourth century into the beginnings of the fifth century as the Roman empire is entering its final stages. So, as you can imagine, that impending collapse is bringing with it a very dark vision of the world. And for that reason, Augustine is attracted to Manichaeism. Now this is a religion that was started by Mani from Persia and many people argue that it is a Gnostic religion. Some people disagree with applying the term Gnostics to it. Again, it doesn't matter! It seems to have picked up on a lot of the same kinds of ideas about a machinery in which we are enmeshed as creatures of light, and that light has to be liberated by a special kind of Gnosis and Augustine is deeply attracted to

this religion. He's attracted to this religion precisely because it has Gnostic components in it and therefore promises to address his own personal loss of Agency, which I'll talk about momentarily, but also to address what is becoming more and more, salient to people of Augustine's time, which is a world that is darkening around them. He's influenced by that, which means ideas of evil and evil powers and structures in the world are very salient to Augustine.

He also deeply suffers, as I mentioned, personally! He is riven with inner conflict. To put it, I think in terms that would make sense to us today, Augustine is a sex addict. He is deeply addicted to sexual behavior. He described it this way and I think this is a particularly apt way of describing his addiction: He said, "I was always licking the open sore of lust!" which gives you a very telling image of a compelling desire and something disgusting and degrading. And it's also exacerbating and making worse, the very affliction that you're suffering. So he suffers tremendous self-loading because of this, tremendous loss of Agency. And he struggles to try and find a way of getting free from his own personal, inner conflict and degradation. And also providing an answer to the evil that he sees in the world. He writes the first autobiography in the history of the West, "The Confessions", and in there, he relates an experience which deeply affected him. I would say it came close to traumatising him. So when he was young, he relates this story, he and some of his friends broke into a courtyard and stole some fruit. And you're thinking... most of us would think, "yeah, you know, a young adolescent performing a misdemeanour act of minor theft, stealing some fruit who cares...?".

But this is Augustine. He's already enmeshed in a Manichaean worldview. He's already deeply, he's becoming aware as an adolescent of how powerful his drives can be. And what affected Augustine about this, very profoundly, is he said he did not want the fruit! He did not desire the fruit. He wasn't really trying to impress his friends - he wasn't desiring that! He came away with a very strong experience - it's almost like a reverse of a higher state of consciousness - he came away with a very strong experience that he stole the fruit simply because it was the wrong thing to do! That he wanted to do this! There was something in him that was dragging him down! And this is, again, why this worldview appealed to him. There was... there's these... it's like

again, Manichaeism is very much like the Star Wars mythology of the light and the dark side: there is a dark side and it's drawing people down and it's the side of desire and anger and destruction. And Augustine sees this alive within his own body and his sexual addiction. So he travels around the world. He teaches rhetoric and he becomes, eventually, connected and familiar with philosophy and something happens to him that's quite profound: he reads the work of Plotinus.

Augustine finds the love within reason

He reads the work of Plotinus. He has very high opinion of Plotinus. He later writes "in Plotinus, Plato lived again", and he writes very glowingly of the Platonists. And in Plato - and especially in Plotinus - Augustine sees a different way. He gets a worldview other than the Manichaean worldview, he gets the Neoplatonic worldview, and he gets it. I mean this in the Gnosis sense: HE GETS IT (Real emphasis on this)! Augustine has a mystical experience while reading Plotinus. He has that ascent up to "the One". He rises through the levels of reality and levels of his self and he has this mystical experience, but he can't hold it! He can't stay there! The darkness in him has so much gravity [it] pulls him back down and pulls him back towards that world of lust and addiction, that reciprocal narrowing that Mark Lewis talks about so powerfully. And he wonders, "why is the gravity pulling me? Why is the darkness that pulls me down, why is it so powerful? Is there anything that can overpower it and pull me up?". He says, "I get what Plotinus is talking about, but the evil within me, it's too strong! The darkness pulls me down too much!". He'll later come to say that this is like a whole in being, and it's just sucking the light away.

And so he hasn't - what some people have reported having after they have some mystical experiences - he has a rebound effect of despair. It's like if I was to show you a beautiful place, this beautiful beach, and when you stepped on to the beach, you finally felt at peace, like the peace you've sought all your life, and there's beauty around you and you feel alive and vital. But you can't stay! You can't... somehow you just can't hold [on], and you're drawn away and you can't stay there! Now the place you're in, the darkness and the squalor that you're in, is so much worse because you have been in the light and you were incapable of staying there. So he's falling into

despair and he's at his mother's house and his mother is a Christian, Monica, and he's in the backyard, like the courtyard, and he's listening and he hears a child's voice say, "take it! Pick up and read", and there's a Bible there, or an early version of a Bible, and he picks it up just where it is and he happens to, of course, read the work of Paul.

And in Paul he finds an affinity, a deep affinity, that kindred spirit, because in Paul he sees that same inner conflict, that same tortured inner conflict, and he sees a Worldview that makes sense of that inner conflict. And Augustine has this insight. He says- ...Look, pay attention to Ploti-nus, pay attention to Plato. What are they saying? Plato and Plotinus are ultimately saying we're driven by two powerful loves. We're driven by the love of becoming one within and becoming one with what is most real. It is what's driving all of our reason, [all of our reason] is love. A love that... A love for what's true, a Love for what's good, a love for what is beautiful. And then he says, "at the heart of reason is love and what's damaged in me is my capacity to love, not my capacity to reason! That's why I have this sexual addiction. My capacity for love has been thwarted and twisted by my sexuality. So I need something that can heal..." remember the Gnosis, the healing, "...I need to be healed!". There's a love that is within reason that can help you grow beyond reason, to what reason always sought.

A healing synthesis to grow in love

How do we grow in love? Well, Agape! That's what the Christian message is. Agape, by participating in Agape, we grow in love. We grow in the love that is driving us to becoming persons, fully realised persons. So Augustine says Neoplatonism needs Christianity and the healing and the response to evil that Gnosticism was looking for can actually be found in Christianity. And so he synthesises them all together. Notice what we now have. Let's put this together, very care-fully, in Augustine. And notice the way he's putting it. He's not putting it out there as a theory, he's writing an autobiography, he's talking about it in a Perspectival and Participatory way. He writes the first autobiography, The Confessions. This is not a dry academic treatise, this is an existential manual [showing] how you can also go through the process that he has gone through. It is Gnosis through and through.

So from Plotinus what do we have? Well Plotinus (writes Plotinus on the board) has already given us - because part of Plotinus is the Aristotelian Worldview (writes Aristotelian Worldview on the board, off of Plotinus) [and] that's the Nomological Order we talked about, right (writes Nomological Order underneath Aristotelian Worldview) ? The conformity theory, right? The Geocentric worldview; the two things in attunement. This is the best science account of the structure of reality and how reality is known. From Plotinus himself, we get now what I'm going to call the Normative Order (writes Normative Order off of Plotinus and beside Aristotelian Worldview) . Plotinus gave us an account of how we can move in a coordinated fashion up the levels of reality, up the levels of consciousness, up the levels of the self, from what is less real to what is more real (illustrated on the board again with the ladder diagram, writing less real at the bottom and more real at the top) .

What's Augustine going to do with that? Well look: what's less real, what's down here has less oneness, less integration. It makes less sense. Look, when I destroy something, what do I do? (Mimes tearing a book apart into pieces) I take away its structural functional organization. I make it more disordered. As I go downward things are fragmenting, having less and less form, less and less Idos. They're less and less intelligible. They're less and less understandable. This (bottom of the ladder) becomes more and more pure chaos (writes Pure Chaos at the bottom of the ladder) . I'm losing truth. I'm losing goodness. I'm losing beauty. I'm losing what makes things to Be and what makes them to be sensible and intelligible. This is evil (Writes Evil underneath Pure Chaos) .

Down here is... that's the hole, that's the tear in being, towards which things can fall. But I can also move up to what's more true, more good, more real. And of course, what Plotinus knows is that this is driven by a love. A love of knowing what is real and simultaneously becoming what is more real. So for Augustine this, of course (writes Good at the top of the ladder) - and Plato even called it, if you remember, The Good. This is the Normative Order.

The narrative order of Christianity

The Nomological Order tells you how things are structured. The Normative Order tells you how you can become better, how you can deal with evil and

how you can increase realness, meaning, in your life. Augustine takes that (Nomological Order) and, as I've shown you, he says, "wait...!" -the thing about Aristotle is, you know what? Everything was moving to get where it belongs! But that's all it is in Aristotle! But I think Augustine is basically saying that "every-thing is moving in a way, in order to try and move us away from evil towards goodness". And so he says, "I think Christianity puts these two together!" (links the two Orders together on the board) . The world, everything, is moving on purpose, and the purpose is to try and afford realisation (ges-tures 'up' the ladder diagram) , both cognitive and in the world; things are becoming more real, we're becoming more real, we're realising that. And then he says, "and you know what? All of this is driven by love and about the transformation that happens in me, the Gnosis Agape. That's the Narrative Or-der of Christianity (Writes Narrative Order on the board beside the other two Orders) .

There's this great Narrative. There's this great story about the course of history. And the course of history is a course of moving towards a final consummation, the Promised Land. And that is the history of God's Love, of God's Agape, of God intervening and creating the open future. But that Agape isn't just a historical force. It's also a Normative force in me! It's also leading me upward towards The Good. What Augustine does is he says "Christianity can put all of these things together! The world is organised this way (Nomological Order) so that it moves through his-tory this way (Narrative Order) , so that all of us can self-transcend this way (Normative Order) . All three Orders come together in a mutually supporting fashion.

How these three orders relate to modern cognitive science

Now we know from current cognitive science that the three components of meaning that people talk about, the things that contribute to meaning in life - and this is Heintzelman's work and others - are a sense of coherence (COHERENCE written on the board) - I'll explain what this means in a minute, a sense of significance (SIGNIFICANCE written on the board) , and a sense of purpose (PURPOSE written on the board) . I got to talk to Samantha Heintzelman about this! The more coherent, the more intelligible, the more things fit together for you, the more real they are, the more

meaningful you find your life. Well that's the Nomological Order: how things fit together and make sense in a Coherent fashion. What about Significance? Significance is this (draws an arrow to indicate the ladder diagram of the Normative Order) : how valuable, how deep in reality, how good are the elements of your life? That's the normative order. Purpose... (draws an arrow to the Narrative Order) ? Does your life have a direction? Is it moving in a course? That's the Narrative Order. Human beings want things to make sense. They need a Nomological Order, and Augustine says, "I have this! It's the Aristotelian World[view] and I can give a Christian explanation of that". They want things to be significant. They want to satisfy the Anagogic drives of inner peace and contact with reality. And Augustine says, "I can tell you that because I can tell you how to put reason and Agape together". That's what Christianity does. And people want things to have a purpose. They want there to be a story. Christianity is offering the ultimate story. Augustine puts it all together! And he puts it all together as the Roman Empire is literally collapsing. He's in Hippo in North Africa when the barbarians are literally at the gate laying siege to the city.

Into the medieval worldview

And he's basically laying the foundations for what's going to come next. He's laying foundations for the Medieval worldview. But what do we have from this? What we have - and we'll come back to the cognitive science - what we have is a very long and powerful history that tells us how our culture has articulated the Axial Revolution. How it has given a grammar, a way of understanding, what the axial revolution has given us. It has given us a system for interpreting and inhabiting a worldview in which meaning and wisdom, as understood by the Axial Revolution, have been developed and have been articulated in a sophisticated and compelling fashion. Meaning is to have a Nomological Order that connects us to what is real. It is to have a Normative Order that connects us, not intellectually, but existentially to what is Good so that we can become better. Meaning is to have a Narrative Order that tells us how we can move forward through history, both collective and individual history.

Why don't we have this beautiful synthesis of meaning today?

But what I've tried to show you is that these are not three separate things. They're like the three dimensions of a space, the space of meaning! They're the three axes of the space of meaning. This is a beautiful synthesis. It's the culmination of tremendous amount[s] of historical development. It's profound and it's not just an intellectual thing. It is some, as I've tried to show you, it is simultaneously a scientific thing, a spiritual thing, a therapeutic thing, an existential thing. This is why this is going to last a thousand years! Because it is such a powerful and enriching vision.

Imagine, if you could... what if I could offer this to you and make it deeply historically, scientifically and intellectually viable for you? What if I could offer to you a worldview that had the deepest scientific legitimacy totally integrated with their most profound spirituality - no antagonism, no irrationality in it - conjoined seamlessly with a personal project of therapy, of therapeutic change and healing and sapiential education, the cultivation of genuine wisdom and self transcendence, in community with yourself, your world, your culture, and other people. Would you not want this? So here's the question you now have to ask yourself: why don't you have it? Because we know from the science (taps Coherence, Significance and Purpose on the board) , that's what you want! We know from the history that that's what our culture has [*coughs] ...our foundational culture from the Axial Revolution built for us. Why don't we have it?

Is it irredeemably lost? When we lost the Gnostic Mythology, when we lost the Axial My-thology, the two worlds mythology, when we lost the mythology of Christian... did we, are we now bereft forever? So part of the way I can start to answer that question, the short answer for a long series of arguments that are forthcoming is no! I think there is a response. That's why this series is entitled "Awakening from the Meaning Crisis", not "despairing because of the meaning crisis"! But we're only halfway through! We're only halfway through posing the problem! We have to, we need to understand we're getting an understanding of this meaning and this wisdom. We're getting how it was articulated and developed and woven into our cultural framework, our cognitive machinery, the very grammar of our existential modes! But we still don't know why does it all fall apart? How does it all come apart? And where does that leave us? We need a better understanding of the genealogy now of the crisis, now that we have a better understanding

of the nature of the meaning that was lost. We need to understand, we need to understand the process of loss.

The great schism - Christianity splits

As I said, this world is the world that Augustine bestows, and this is what you need to understand: there is tremendous loss when the Roman Empire collapses! It's not as great as the Bronze Age collapse, but its major! So there's... But it's only in the West, by the way, not in the East! The Byzantine Empire survives, but nevertheless, there's a traumatic loss - Traumatic, not dramatic - a traumatic loss of cities, literacy, trade, commerce. The standard of living that was lost in the Roman Empire is not recovered again until 1750 in London, England. It takes that long for that standard of living to be recovered again! So this is very traumatic. But the heritage given by Augustine is so powerful that it serves as - and I'm using this word very carefully now, I hope you understand - it serves as a home for people throughout all of this turbulent turmoil. But some things start to happen that start to pull that apart! This sacred canopy starts to be torn apart and can no longer shelter us from our terrors and our despair. So one of the first things is, in 1054, there's a division - and I'm not going to go into it [all]; part of it has to do with that the Roman Empire in the West collapses, but it doesn't collapse in the East. The East is Greek speaking; the West is Latin speaking. That in addition to Augustine, the East is deeply influenced by Dionysus, Pseudo-Dionysus. Also the case in the West! But there is a lot of cultural, historical, socioeconomic differences in how Christianity was understood and they split apart! That's what's called the great Schism.

So Christianity splits between an Eastern Orthodox and what's going to be called a Catholic version of Christianity. This of course weakens Christianity. It also has an impact on it: by separating itself from the East, Christianity loses some of the connection that leads to Christianity in the West, [in] Western Europe. Christianity loses some of its deeper connections to that Neoplatonic mystical the-ology. That starts to have an impact! The West starts to become less and less Platonic and more and more Aristotelian. Now as always, this starts what a change in Psycho-Technology. So Ivan Illich has done some work looking at the work of Hugh of St Victor, who was around from 1096 to 1141, and what he points out - and Chetham (?)

talks about this in his books! Chatham also refers, as Corbin does too, Corbin talks about this. Corbin does too, Corbin talks about this! Chetham talks about this, refers to the work of Krantz and others, trying to summarise a lot of this. What's happening is there's a shift in reading - how people read! And it's after the schism. (*Krantz, Corbin, Chatham*)

So before that, and this is something I can speak to from first person, before that reading is done, largely aloud; people read aloud! They read the Bible, for example, because that's mostly the only thing that can be read! And some of the church fathers, people like Augustine for example, they read aloud. Reading is often done communally. First of all, you're embedded in a cultural context, you're embedded in a sapiential community. You read aloud, and more than you read aloud, you're reciting. So let's try and get something in your experience that might bring this out. Think of the difference between reading a poem and reciting a poem - and it's no coincidence, by the way, that when Gabriel spoke to Mohammad, he told him to recite not to write! What happens when you... (breaks chain of thought into an anecdote) I was - something wonderful - last Saturday was my birthday and so it was a surprise party. my partner organised a wonderful party for me, and I'd always said that, instead of gifts, I would prefer it if people brought one of their favourite pieces of poetry and read it a lot. So it was a poetry party and people read it aloud. And there's such a difference between reading a poem silently and reading it aloud because [of] the intonation and the sharing it with others makes it very different! What was a particularly beautiful [thing] is my girlfriend actually - she's a gifted singer - she actually sang her version of the poem by Robert Frost. It's a famous one about the two roads diverge, and I took the road less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.

But when somebody is singing a song, singing a poem - and most songs are poems if you think about it - it is appealing to you! Not just propositionally - it's not just that kind of knowing; it's not just trying to create beliefs in you! First of all, by reciting the poem, you... and trying to communicate it to others, you have to bring in all your know-how of communication, being able to share with other people. You have to... all your ways of paying attention [are] much more embodied. There's a Per-spectival stuff: What does it feel like? What is it like to be here, in this space, in this context with

these people uttering these words? And with that, it has the potential to be Participatory because people are like, “these are poems that have changed [me]!”. [They] have made a difference to their identity. They know these poems, not the way you know the words on the back of your cereal box, they know these poems because of the way in which they have been changed by them; their very sense of identity has been altered by [them].

See, so when people were reading then, they're reading the Bible, they're reciting it. They're reciting it communally. They're also doing something [else] - and I do this practice now and other people do - It's called Lectio Divina (Writes this on the Board) as the book “Sacred Reading” is shown on screen). It's a way of reading a text in which you are not speaking]... The point is not to have the propositions and to speak. It is to let the text, as much as possible, speak to you! It is to engage with the text in a meditative, mindful fashion, opening yourself up to the possibility of it transforming you. It is much more like going to listen to a piece of music and having prepared yourself, prepared [your] receptivity to have a profound aesthetic experience. It's analogous to that. You're reading and you're reciting in such a way that you're trying to open yourself up to this text speaking to you. People that are religious will often talk about this as if God is present in the text and speaking to them through the text.

This is how people were reading. It's a form of reading that is ontologically remedial; it's designed to heal you transform you. It's designed to trigger, activate and educate your procedural, Perspectival and Participatory knowing, not just give you propositions. It's about helping you, in your reading, [to] remember the Being mode and not just Have beliefs and propositions. But people start to read differently, shortly thereafter! What's happening is people are shifting from... (Writes Avicenna on the board) So, Avicenna - which is an Anglicised form of Ibn Sina, who's a great Persian Philosopher - he was, up until this time, the dominant interpreter of that era, of that Augustinian worldview, that whole Augustinian way. And he gives priority to the Neoplatonic... -and Corbin is going to make a lot of the fact that Persian philosophy was always trying to keep the Neoplatonic and Gnostic elements of spirituality alive. Persia has played a much greater role in World history and cultural history than we have properly given credit to in the so-called West. But he gets replaced by Averroes and Averroes is more

purely, Aristotelian. And what that really means is a shift to giving exclusive priority to definitions - (writes Priority of Definitions on the board), remember Aristotle tried to understand essences: the Idos as essences and essences as definitions. And that's very problematic as many things don't have definitions! - but definitions and propositions (writes Propositions with Priority of Definitions).

A new model for thought: the extensive self to the in-tensive self

So people now start to read silently to themselves and what they're trying [to do], what they give priority to, is coherence within a language rather than transformation within themselves in the world. So what matters is how the various symbols - and I don't mean that in a spiritual sense - the various propositional terms and logical connectives fit together coherently. So, a new model for thought emerges. See the old model was "thought is a conforming to the world", and then we get this articulated and developed and expanded into this whole process of Gnosis and Anagoge and self-transformation, that model of knowing that's also a way of Being, that's also a way of Becoming. That's being taken away and it's being replaced by a different model.

Thought, knowing, is to have coherent propositional language. Thinking is to have a coherent set of propositions in your head. So Kranz talks about, "we shift from the extensive self, the self that is trans-projectively connected to the world, that understands itself in terms of its conformity to the world, to an intensive self". This is a self that's inside my head. It's inside my beliefs. My 'self' is primarily the way I talk to myself by affirming my beliefs through propositional language. So people start to think that the primary way in which we know things is to get as much coherence within our inner language, than instead of conformity in our outer existential modes.

Now, why would people make this shift? People make this shift because the world is starting to open up again. People are starting to get interested in Knowing the world scientifically. We're getting it... And it's gonna... it's just slowly beginning here! But we're going to get the move towards the value of having cl[ear] - and by the way, I believe in this value! I'm a scientist, right?! - the value of logically coherent, well organised propositional theories. The

power of this is being discovered. So when I can read in this other way, I can empower my argumentative skills tremendously. What I'm losing is I'm losing reading as a psycho-technology of psycho-spiritual, existential transformation. Reading is now becoming the consumption of propositions and their structuring in logical coherency.

Love moves the will

Why? Well, as I said, there's the beginning of this reorientation towards the external world. And it's being driven by the fact that Aristotle is coming into prominence because he's being rediscovered. So because of the crusades there is a rediscovery of the works of Aristotle that had largely been lost to Western Europe. And in Aristotle there is a problem for Christianity, there's a problem for Christiani-ty. The problem is we have a figure that can't be ignored! Aristotle is part of that whole ancient world that Augustine gave us. He's the author of the Nomological order that Augustine has baptised with Christianity's approval. So Aristotle can't be ignored, but Aristotle describes a world that does not have a lot of the Christian mythology attached to it and offers explanations for things that Chris-tianity makes no effort to explain. So there is this tremendous attraction to the power, the new ex-planatory power provided by Aristotle and the model he gives up - getting clear definitions and clear syllogistic inferences and building up a very clear picture is enmeshed with this new way of reading and this new way of experiencing Knowing and experiencing oneself primarily inside one's head, in-side one's language.

So Aristotle can't be ignored or rejected because of his eminent authority. But neither can he simply be assimilated into the Christian worldview because he talks about and explains things and does things in a manner that you don't find in the Bible. So more and more people are reading in this new way. They're starting to emulate the new Aristotelian science. But this is starting to cause a crisis within Christianity. And so there's an individual who arises, who sees the looming threat that this poses. Who sees two things happening. There's a change in the psycho-technology of reading, and there is a change in how people are starting to look at the world. Both of these changes are associated with the difficulty of assimilating the rediscovered Aristotle into a Christian worldview, but Thomas Aquinas takes up the task

of solving this problem. He's going to be a pivotal figure precisely for that reason. Now, again, Thomas Aquinas: [voluminous] writing!! And there's a whole group of people, both theologians and philosophers to mystic[s], and there's all kinds of controversy around how Aristotelian Aquinas is, how Platonic he is. I'm going to, again, try to present the way I think he was historically taken up and basically understood.

So for Aquinas, how do we salvage both the Christian worldview and the new science of the rediscovered Aristotle? Well, he does something really brilliant! He goes to the fundamental grammar of all of us. What's the fundamental grammar of this? It's the mythology of the two worlds: the Axial revolution is, there's two worlds! There's the real world and the illusionary world. And that has been a constant throughout all of this. And he comes up with a way of trying to assimilate it. So we have the two worlds: here's the - in Plato, in the Platonic and even in the Augustinian - here's the everyday world (draws a box), and then here is the real world (draws another box above the first). But what Aquinas does is he changes that. He says this world is real too (draws an arrow to point at The Every Day box)! There is real knowledge of this world possible (labels the above arrow with this). This is knowledge that we can get through reason and science (writes Reason and Science below Real Knowledge from above). So reason and science study this world, This world (knocks the table and the wall), and they can discover real truths about that through reason, through science.

But, this world up here (the Real World) is still somehow more real. How do we do that? Well, he invents a distinction that we tend to anachronistically push back on people before - and there are definitely precursors in Pseudo-Dionysius and Augustine - but the idea is this (the Every Day world) is the natural world that can be studied by reason and by science. This (Real) is the world above the natural world. What's the word for above? Super. So this is the super-natural world, and this is not a world that can be studied by science or reason. This is a world that is only accessible by faith. So there's now... the two worlds have been made. Fundamentally two separate kinds of worlds, and there isn't a continuum between them now. There isn't a way of moving through them by love and reason united together. What now happens is the following, and what's going to happen is the notion of faith is going to

be changed too. Reason it's down here and love is up here (writes both of these on the board, Reason below Love). And the idea for Aquinas, is that Love moves the Will. See in Plotinus and even in Augustine, love moves reason. But for Aquinas, love moves the will. Love moves the will to assert things that it can't know through reason. So love now becomes, sorry faith now becomes the act of wilful assertion (writes Wilful Assertion off of Faith & Love). Now to be fair to Aquinas, this is not wilful in the sense of my will. This is a will that is being driven by the Love of God.

But nevertheless, what's now happening is Love and Reason are being pulled apart. Faith is going from this participation in the flow of the course of history to the assertion of propositions, the assertion of statements, giving a creed. And more fundamentally, Science and Spirituality are now being divorced from each other in a profound way, such that if it's scientific, it's not spiritual.

And if it's spiritual, It's not scientific. And if you're talking... -and you can see the beginnings of romanticism: if it has to do with love then it has nothing to do with reason. And if it has anything to do with reason then it has nothing to do with love! ...and all of these things are now being pulled apart.

Now he is, Aquinas is a wonderful man, a wonderful writer. He is trying to save the Axial Worldview by reformulating its fundamental grammar of two worlds into a formulation that is now becoming familiar to you. But here's the danger - and this is not a danger that Aquinas foresees: as this (Reason and Science of the Every Day World) becomes more and more successful and we less and less find our assertions, our will being driven by love, but just by willpower alone, this world (the Real World) becomes less and less real to us, the supernatural world. And if there is no supernatural world, If it's no longer - and listen to my language - if it's no longer viable to us, we can think about it and imagine it, but if it's no longer liveable to us, then the whole Axial World mythology, the whole Axial World grammar, that grammar that gave us the grammar of meaning and wisdom and self-transcendence, that huge heritage is now threatened to fall apart. We'll start looking at that next time together. Thank you for your time and attention.

Episode 19 notes

Manichaeism

Manichaeism was a major religion founded in the 3rd century AD by the Persian prophet Mani in the Sasanian Empire. Manichaeism taught an elaborate dualistic cosmology describing the struggle between a good, spiritual world of light, and an evil, material world of darkness.

Mani

Mani, of Iranian origin, was the prophet and the founder of Manichaeism, a religion of late antiquity strongly influenced by Gnosticism which was widespread but no longer prevalent by name. Mani was born in or near Seleucia-Ctesiphon in Babylonia, at the time still part of the Parthian Empire.

Book mentioned - **The Confessions** - [Buy here](#)

Author - St Augustine

Book mentioned - **Memoirs of an Addicted Brain** - [Buy here](#)

Author - Mark Lewis

Samantha J. Heintzelman

"I am a personality and social psychologist interested in studying the experience of meaning in life and subjective well-being." - [Citations](#)

Hippo

Hippo Regius is the ancient name of the modern city of Annaba, Algeria. It historically served as an important city for the Phoenicians, Berbers, Romans, and Vandals. Hippo was the capital city of the Vandal Kingdom from 435–439 C.E. until it was shifted to Carthage following the Vandal Capture of Carthage.

Dionysus

a Greek god, son of Zeus and Semele; his worship entered Greece from Thrace c. 1000 bc. Originally a god of the fertility of nature, associated with

wild and ecstatic religious rites, in later traditions he is a god of wine who loosens inhibitions and inspires creativity in music and poetry. Also called Bacchus.

Ivan Illich

Ivan Dominic Illich (/ɪ'vɑ:n 'ɪlɪtʃ/; 4 September 1926 – 2 December 2002) was a Roman Catholic priest, theologian, philosopher, and social critic.

Hugh of Saint Victor

Hugh of Saint Victor, was a Saxon canon regular and a leading theologian and writer on mystical theology.

Lectio Divina - Written on the board as a book is shown on the screen

In Western Christianity (such as Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, or Anglicanism) Lectio Divina (Latin for "Divine Reading") is a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God's word.

Book mentioned - Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina - [Buy here](#)

Author - **Michael Casey**

Avicenna

Ibn Sina, also known as Abu Ali Sina, Pur Sina, and often known in the West as Avicenna, was a Persian polymath who is regarded as one of the most significant physicians, astronomers, thinkers and writers of the Islamic Golden Age, and the father of early modern medicine.

Averroes

Ibn Rushd, often Latinized as Averroes, was a Muslim Andalusian polymath and jurist who wrote about many subjects, including philosophy, theology, medicine, astronomy, physics, psychology, mathematics, Islamic jurisprudence and law, and linguistics.

Syllogism

A syllogism is a kind of logical argument that applies deductive reasoning to arrive at a conclusion based on two or more propositions that are asserted or assumed to be true. In a form, defined by Aristotle, from the combination of a general statement and a specific statement, a conclusion is deduced

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas was an Italian Dominican friar, philosopher, Catholic priest, and Doctor of the Church. An immensely influential philosopher, theologian, and jurist in the tradition of scholasticism, he is also known within the latter as the Doctor Angelicus and the Doctor Communis.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 20 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Death of the Universe

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. So last time we took a look at how Augustine drew all of this development, this very complex, sophisticated articulation of the Axial Revolution, drew it all together into a Nomological Order that brought with it the best of Aristotelian science, a Normative Order that brought with it the best of Platonic spirituality, a Narrative Order that brought with it the best of the Christian process of moving through history. And of course along for the ride come some of the best psychotherapeutic techniques available from the ancient world. All of this was integrated together. These three orders that articulate the space of how we're connected to ourselves, to each other and to the world. The normal logical, the normative and the narrative (Illustrated on the board in 3D with each label emphasising the 3 axis; x, y & z). We saw, however, that

while this does address the fundamental axes of meaning, even as it's understood by our best current cognitive science, this historical legacy starts to come under threat. Initially it comes under threat in, again, a way that doesn't seem very threatening. People are just changing how they're using the psycho-technology of reading. They're going from a Lexio Divina - a participatory perspectival transformative form of recitation - into a silent consumptive model where I'm trying to consume information. And what knowledge [becomes] is an inner coherence between my propositions rather than a transformative conformity to the world.

And that of course is born out of a, slowly at first, but an accelerating rediscovery of the Aristotelian Corpus and the best science of the ancient world. And there's the threat of 'how do we incorporate this authoritative figure into the world view that was bequeath to us by Augustine?', and that challenge is taken up by Aquinas. And Aquinas does this, and it's hard to see how else it could have been done, by returning to the fundamental grammar of the Axial Revolution - the Two Worlds Mythology - and reconfiguring it into two real worlds: A Natural World, understood by reason, and a Supernatural World understood by faith. And faith is now understood as how Love transforms the Will, and the Will is primarily how I assert certain propositions to be true. And as I mentioned, that separation, while it solves the problem at the time brings with it the threat that as the supernatural world becomes non-viable to us, we will lose the axial revolution's heritage, we will separate Love from Reason, and Spirituality from Science in a particularly pernicious and dangerous fashion.

I want to keep going. And if, for those of you who want to pursue this in more depth, I can recommend to you the book "After God" by Mark Taylor; a tremendous influence on my thinking, and I think it articulates a lot of what I'm going to be talking about in a very clear and perspicacious manner. But some things are happening, there's immediate consequences, people [are] picking up on Aquinas and responding to it, and we can see it in two figures, deeply influenced by Aquinas and they represent two particular lines of development that are going to influence each other. One is Meister Eckhart (written on the board), and the other is William of Ockham (also written on the board), which is where we get "Ockham's Razor" from, a thing that is often invoked by various Skeptards (!?) without a full

understanding of what Ockham meant by it. Ockham certainly didn't mean it to be used how it's often used by people, in a dismissive fashion. So Eckhart represents a pivotal exemplary, maybe even a culminating figure of a group of people within Germany - and Germany is going to be central to all of this from now on, and that is of course going to be a dangerous precedent to set for Germany! But Eckhart represents a group that are called the Rhineland Mystics (written on the board) and others who bring about a transformation in the understanding of human spirituality. They bring about a change in the Normative Order.

So Aquinas basically changes the Nomological order. He separates it into these two worlds, and now there's a chasm between them (draws the schematic of the two worlds on the board, one above the other). There's a chasm between these worlds. You can't lift reason up to here (draws an arrow from the lower box to the upper box). Reason has no home here (circles upper box). So a different meaning of spirituality now tends to be emphasised in the Rhineland mystics. Now, they're deeply influenced by Neoplatonism! Eckhart, I think is, influenced in some way by the whole Neoplatonic undercurrent within Christianity. There's of course the background history! it's still there of the Gnostics. There has been a... the last crusade is actually not against the Arabs in the middle East. It is against the Cathars in Southern France and the Cathars are, well, I would say it - some people would argue, but many people would agree with me - the catheters are a Gnostic revival, a huge revival of Gnosticism. So there's a huge Gnostic revival. And of course there's a Neoplatonic tradition. Eckhart picks this up and others, the other Rhineland mystics, and what they do is they bring about a re-understanding of the normative order. And it changes from being the Neoplatonic Anagoge, and it changes from being that whole conformity, that whole ascent in self-transcendence. Self-transcendence disappears from spirituality as does the connection between spirituality and wisdom, where wisdom is understood as your capacity for educating yourself in self-transcendence to improve your meaning in life.

Now, what happens is instead of an ascent upward, there's more [a] 'God's descent downward into you' and there's important precedents for this in the ancient world. There's the theurgy, precedent within the ancient world, but that being said, nevertheless, there's a fundamental difference here. Aquinas

had talked about 'Love driving the Will' in faith, and the Rhineland Mystics, they're going to replace this ascent spirituality with a descent spirituality. And what they're going to do is they're going to say, "look, what Love is... it's not that 'love moves the will', 'love is a way in which the will moves'". That's an important change! It's not that love moves the will. It's that the way the will moves, Is love! Specifically when the will negates itself. That's love. So they pick up on - and that's why I emphasised it earlier on in this series - they pick up on the sacrificial aspect of love. That to love is to sacrifice yourself. So how is the Will moving in order to be loving? Well, the Will is negating itself.

You see, when my will is self-centred and it's egocentric, that of course is the opposite of Agape. I have to sacrifice this - and we talked about this - I have to sacrifice (gestures from within himself, out), I have to negate my wilful self-assertion in order to become a conduit for Agape. Or as Eckhart would say, "to make a space so that God can come to dwell within me" (Gestures out to within himself). The idea is that what spirituality is about is it's about the Will negating its own self-assertion and making a space in which God's will, is not being resisted. So here's the idea (proceeds to gesticulate opposing inward and outward forces): God's Will is this Agapic love and we are resisting that! And what we need to do is we have to stop resisting; we have to negate our own self-assertion, the way we're expressing ourselves, to press outward, and we have to make a space so that God can flow in. Now, what this does is, it makes self negotiation and inner conflict central to spirituality.

God's Will

So, what had been incidental and contingent in Paul and Augustine, the fact that they have inner conflict, it becomes much more valorised in this new spirituality! I have to be in perpetual conflict with myself. I have to be negating the self so that eventually I empty myself. Now, there are [and] I don't want to misrepresent - Eckhart is one of my favourite authors! There's beautiful wisdom about how to overcome one's attachment to one's thinking and one's self image that are drawn from the Neoplatonic heritage and of great value in Eckhart - but nevertheless, this model of spirituality being, ultimately, a battle of wills - your will against itself - and so it's not against

God's will becomes a central idea for what's going on in the spirituality of the time. Now that's overlapping with a new, emerging, worldview (draws an arrow down, out of Ockham). So Ockham come sees God's will as his primary faculty. Now some of you may be saying, "well, why do we have to talk all this 'God' talk?"! Look, you have to understand how this 'God grammar' developed and how it has woven its way into the very grammar of our culture and our cognition. Whether or not you believe in a God or not is actually quite irrelevant to what I'm talking about right now. The fact is people have, and they have sewn in ways of thinking and being into your heritage.

So for Ockham, unlike for Augustine and I would say the whole Neoplatonic tradition, it's not god's reason, his intelligibility that is the source of his being, for Ockham it's his will. And you can see how this lines up, these two sides! Because Aquinas has made Will the faculty of access to the supernatural, the faculty of Will becomes central to your spirituality and to God here. Now, what does that mean? Why does that matter? Why would he say that? Because he sees... See, again, here's the change: It's not God Agapic love that is his creativity, God's Will is the source of his ability. God speaks the world into existence. This is an act of assertion. God asserts the world when he creates it. And you say, "okay, so what!". So remember, your model of God - whether or not you believe in God's irrelevant - your model of God has a tremendous influence on how you understand yourself and reality. God's will supersede his reason. Now that's very, very important. It means that God is not bound by rationality. He's not bound by how things cohere in a rational fashion. Reason is not in any way central to God. That's why the rational... the ascent (gestures up through the normative order diagram) through reason is gone. That means that any order that we find in existence is arbitrarily imposed on it by God's will. God speaks it. It's an act of will. He's not bound by any rational principles of organization. It is just raw power and fiat on his part. You say, "okay. So what, what does that have to do...?". Well, as I forewarned, your model of how God is, is a paradigmatic model of how you understand yourself to be. Again, this is regardless of whether or not you believe in God right now.

So Ockham concludes that we are like God! We don't find an order in the [universe]! Look, you look at... here's my desk, here's a book, here's a book,

here's a book, here's a book. These are all books. They all belong to the category of 'books', right? That's part of what they are. They're books! And Ockham says, "no, they're not!". Whatever order or pattern you find in there you're making it by how you're speaking about it! This is called Nominalism. The way God speaks and wills whatever order there is, we're making whatever patterns we find by how we're speaking about them. They're not actually there. This isn't really a book! There's nothing in reality that groups these together. It is only in my mind, by using the term, that groups them together. Now, because it's automatic for me, I can't help but see this as a book, but the problem is: there is no universal "book-ness", forgive the language! I'm Speaking, and by using language, language gathers things together and the mind forms these patterns in the order, but all that's really out there are raw individuals. All that's really there are raw individuals and perhaps causal relations between them.

So notice what's happening: I'm reading and I'm now reading inside my head. Knowledge is just how all the different signs of language cohere together and whatever order there is is only in here (gestures to inside his head). It's in here, it's in how I'm using the language. It's all inside the language. There's nothing out there in the world. The world is now, in a very real sense, absurd! It is not in itself inherently intelligible. It's only intelligible in so far as I speak about it, or in so far as God speaks it into existence. Now notice what this is doing! This is creating a radical... The supernatural world... It's now not a source of reason and rational order! Now all of this is slowly unfolding (gestures to the board and the breakdown from Aquinas). Spirituality is being changed, the self negation of will! The world is being changed! It's the Nominal World in which what's out there are raw individuals and whatever pattern or order comes from how we speak about them.

The forced changes brought on by the Black Death

While all of that is taking shape something disastrous happens. Ockham is just, I think, just dead! Overlapping with some of the later Rhineland Mystics. But what happens is, well most people think it is, but what happens is the Black Death, we think it's the bubonic plague. Most people think it is. And this is a disaster! It lays waste to a third of Europe's population. So in

the Bible, the end of the world is predicted by the four horsemen of the apocalypse: death, war, pestilence, famine. All these things start happening! There's the Bubonic plague: Massive pestilence. There's famine because there's an extended wet period and the crops are dying. There's huge war: a hundred year war; the crusades; there's the battle against the Cathars, as I mentioned, and what happens is the church creates the first secret police! The church creates the Holy Inquisition to try and root out the last of the Cathars! So there's Gnostic revival and the Holy Inquisition is created to find the Cathars that have escaped, to find the heretics and bring them to trial. Imagine how this feels! [It's] analogous to the Hellenistic Domecide! People are dying. Villages are going out of existence. Social order is being radically disrupted. There's war. And then the church is not helping you. It's actually sending out people to try and find if you're a heretic.

So first of all, people's confidence in the Worldview that they had been born into is being radically undermined. They literally think it's the end of the world! Most of the institutions and social structures are broken or at least put under significant strain. Something else happens that's really important. Of course, there's a disruption in social order, people move around and, more importantly, there's a labor shortage. So many people die, there's a labor shortage! And because some of the order has broken down, people are free to move around more than they were; [to] leave the land. It's a bit like the bronze age collapse at the end of the Roman empire, people can now engage in some experimentation. And what does this mean? Well, it means that there's a labor shortage and there's more freedom of geographical (gestures laterally) motion and social change (gestures vertically). People start to be able to sell their labor for more money, and even to sell their labor!! They start to be able to change their status through their own efforts. Before, you were locked into quite a rigid social structure, a feudal structure. But now you, because of the chaos around you, you can actually make a difference to your own life through your own effort. And strangely enough, all of this is forms a weird kind of consistency. The world actually isn't fundamentally ordered (points at Black Death on the board)! The order is just given by God and it could just be removed! And then the true chaos of things is revealed. We impose an order like God does, and by my willpower, I can change my status. I can make myself into something different. So what's happening here

is a new view in which reality is primarily being seen as a chaotic backdrop against which a battle of wills is occurring. And God is starting to less and less be a source of rational order and more and more to be a source of arbitrary power.

Secularism incorporated

Now many historians are u[nited] - of course, some disagree - that the Black Plague also opens up new social experimentation. People start to, as I say, sell their labor, start to become more entrepreneurial, are willing to move around more, and you get a rise of commercialism. Commercialism starts to ascend. Now commercialism is really, really powerful. You can make use of disparity in demand to accrue wealth. So I've got a lot of wool here. "How much do you want for my wool?" "Not very much. I got a lot of wool too."! I'm going to go sail, or travel over here (moves to the other side of the stage) ... "Do you have any wool?" "No!" "What will you give me for this wool?" "Lots of gold!!!" "Oh, okay. Wow!!" ... I go back here. You know what I can buy with this gold? More wool! I can go back here and I can get wealthy and look what's happening here (gestures a trade cycle in the air between buying and selling wool). I'm doing it through my own effort. [It] has nothing to do with the church. [It] has nothing to do with the aristocracy, [it] has nothing to do with raising grain, farming the land, NOTHING!!!! This is like magic!!!

Now there's problems, of course, with that! One of the problems is political: the aristocracy is in the way and so this emerging middle class is going to more and more challenged the aristocracy. But also the problem with trade, especially by sea is your ship sinks! So, what do you do? Well, first of all, you're going to create some new institutions. You're going to create banks, money to lend you so you can finance such expeditions. You're going to create insurance companies in case your ship sinks. Now you're going to do something really important. What are you going to do is say, "look, I'm not going to take all the individual risks...!" What I'm going to do is I'm going to get a bunch of my, a bunch of friends or people together. And like the way the church is the body of Christ, the body, "Corpus", I'm going to make one body out of all these people. I'm going to "incorporate", I'm going to create a "corporation". And what we're going to do is we're going to have "shares in the risk". We'll "share" the risk. We'll have "shares" in the corporation. And

when we get a profit, we will "divide the profit in the end", we will have "dividends". We'll create corporations and financial institutions. And then what we'll start to do is put pressure on the government, the State, to not just be working for the church and for the aristocracy. One of the things the State is going to start doing is it's going to start protecting contracts and enforcing rules on these social institutions. And you get the emergence of Corporate Capitalism and the Corporate State. Now that's important because it means that now people have a place in which they can look for power - the ability to change their life - and for norms to govern their behaviour that have nothing to do with the church or the aristocracy. Now that's very important already, because what that means is people are creating a Secular alternative. Now they're not setting out to do that, but that's what they're doing! They're creating a Secular alternative, a Secular source of power and wealth and prestige. And they're beginning to secularise the state in order to safeguard those secular endeavours! And think about it: The Supernatural World is largely irrelevant to all of these Secular projects.

Commercialism driven psycho-technology update

Now this commercialism in trade also means something else really important: I've got to get better at my psycho-technologies because I need to process information a lot better. So, what I'm going to do is I'm going to import a new psycho-technology! Always the new cycle of technologies - look for it! What happens is people are replacing Roman numerals with the Hindu-Arabic numerals. You know these! You take (draws a circle with two lines vertically and horizontally through it and illustrates Hindu-Arabic numerals), like, "one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, zero", right? The Hindu-Arabic numerals! Have you ever done calculations with Roman numerals? It's cumbersome and long and slow and stupid! This (Hindu-Arabic system) speeds [things] up, it empowers you, it's a psycho-technology that makes your ability to process and calculate information way faster. And of course [it] comes through the Arab world because of increased trade, but also because of the crusades, et cetera... What also comes in his algebra: the use of letters to represent variables rather than numbers. What comes in is this "Zero". And with that, almost immediately, the ability to use negative numbers, because sometime when you're running your business, you're running in a deficit, you're running in debt. Notice what's happening:

you're getting a powerful upsurge in the kind of mathematical psycho-technology that is available for people.

What else are people going to do? Well, they're going to improve their celestial navigation because if I can sail the waters faster and better, there's less chance I will lose all of my profits when my ship sinks! Well, how can I [do that]? Well, I'm going to more carefully observe the stars and I'm going to apply this new way of thinking, this Aristotelian, logical, coherent, propositional way of thinking, and I'm going to use the new math and the new algebra... So I've got this new way of thinking, I've got the new psycho-technology. I'm going to put them together and observe the heaven's way more carefully. And something that had been known for a while [is] going to become much more prominent: The heavens don't behave in this nice orderly fashion, the way Aristotle and Ptolemy said they do. For example, if you look at Mars in the heavens, Mars will do this over time. It goes (draws a loop-the-loop line on the board "weeeeeeee-ooop"!). it's called the Retrograde of Mars. It's because of where the Martian and Terran orbits intersect and don't! Like... They don't intersect, but like when the Earth passes by Mars, that's what I meant. And as you get this way more careful observation, this Aristotelian, propositional, inferential way of thinking - trying to get clear definitions - and that's allied to this new math - mathematical psycho-technology - people start to discover how chaotic the heavens actually are!

And of course, what they try to do is they start trying to fiddle with the system! So the Earth's at the centre (draws a solar system diagram) and stuff's going around it, but on these spheres, there's other things spinning in opposite directions (adds moon orbits to the diagram) and you get all [these] epicycles and it gets convoluted and complex. And then Copernicus comes along and says - and this is really crucial what he act[ually says], the way he actually says it - he says, "the math is better if you put the sun at the centre". Now notice, we talked about this before! Aristarchus had said the Sun could be at the centre and there was all these arguments against it. And Copernicus doesn't have any answer to any of those arguments. But he doesn't need them now because people are committed to this new way of thinking. They're committed to this new mathematical psycho-technology. They're committed to this new Aristotelian way of thinking. And if it makes the math better,

that's good enough! ...and we all talk about this, "So yes, the Copernican revolution! Haa haa haa", we titter over our coffee and tea.... Look, you have to understand what this means. You have to really get it.

Let's go back. You're using this Aristotelian way of thinking, right? Remember, what was Aristotle's marks of how you determined if things were real? Is the organ, [the] relevant organ functioning? Yes. Is the medium not distorting the information? Yes. Do other people after rational discussion agree with you? Yes. Remember? We did the example [about] If you hear somebody, or somebody says, "Oh, I heard that Susan said she loved you at the party!". This is how you determine if things are real. Watch this: it's morning. We are all stone cold, sober, [we] all have perfect. 20, 20 vision - I don't, but let's say we all do. We all watch the sun rise in the East, pass overhead and sink in the West. We all agree that that's what we all see. We talk about it. We argue about it. We come to an agreement and we're all wrong! The air is clear. We're stone, cold, sober. Our eyes are working perfectly. We rationally discuss it. We all agree and we're all wrong. It's an illusion. Now, here's the thing that should immediately occur - put yourself back there: If that's an illusion, what else isn't an illusion? How do you know any of this is real? Because all you have - be honest - all you have is, "Oh, well, my mind and my senses are working normally. Everything seems clear. There's no distorting fog or no... and people agree with me. That's what they see!" That's what most of your sense of realness is based on! That's why Aristotle's view was so powerful. And yet what Copernicus is saying is "that can all be satisfied and it's still not real, because the math says it isn't real". And that also, all of a sudden, means all of this (gestures around the room), all of this experience, all of it, isn't real! Remember we had the theory that we were in touch with the world, we're in conformity with the world? That's gone!

Now what's happened is the following: here's the world out here (draws a circle on the right) and here's our mind (writes Mind on the left) and in between is this barrier, experience (draws two vertical lines wider than the circle's diameter). Your sense experience isn't you being in-touch with the world - notice I'm using a sense term (in Touch) - it's not putting me in-touch with the world. It's actually a vail between me and the world! The only thing that cuts through all of this illusion, this is very narrow channel of math

(draws a tiny channel through the barrier and writes Math in it). Everything else is il[usion]... All of a sudden, you are mostly out of touch with the world. This is terrifying. It's terrifying. So you've got all this chaos going on around you, and then you've got this view that suddenly says to you, "well, how do you know this isn't an illusion? How do you know that this table is here? How do you know that your mother actually loved you?". You really have to go back... you see, this is... we're protected! We're protected by our loss of Participatory Knowing and Perspectival Knowing. We assert merrily in our minds, the proposition, "Yes. Yes. The earth is not at the centre, blah, blah, blah..." But we don't actually translate that existentially into "what does that mean, prospectively?"! What does that mean about your participation in reality? Put yourself back into what would be happening for you to just learn this for the first time and you can see the terror! We're becoming radically disconnected from the world. You can see the influence of Ockham here (indicates the barrier). We're trapped behind our experiences. [Our experience is] now just something that we're talking about, but it's not what really is the case.

Galileo's abstractions kill the universe

Now, Galileo comes along and says, "ah, but I've got an answer to Ockham." This is what Copernicus is showing, that this is what this new scientific way where I put Aristotelian logic and I put the new math together and I put careful observation together... What it's telling me is that the math - yes, Spoken language and sense experience? can't trust those! - the math?

Mathematics is the language of the Universe. He's very influenced by that old Platonic view about abstract mathematical things being what's real. Now what Galileo does is he starts to put that new way of thinking about math, that new way of observing, that new way of reasoning, into practice. He does something really unusual. So of course math up until that time had been, and still primarily was, understood via geometry. So the quintessential math text is Euclid's Elements. Math and geometry are pretty much synonymous. Now there's arithmetic and calculation, and we already talked about those new mathematical tools, but Galileo does something really, really interesting. He starts using the geometry in a completely abstract fashion, because look: my sense experiences can't be trusted! The way I'm thinking of things doesn't have to in any way look like what it's representing. There doesn't have to be

any sensual, no sensual, no experiential similarity between my thoughts and the world.

Let me show you what I mean. Here's a triangle (draws a right-angle triangle); I'm going to use geometry. And he's using it to represent the relationship between, [for example], distance (writes d on the y axis) and time (writes t on the x axis), and that gives me speed (writes s on the hypotenuse). Now there's nothing "triangular" about speed! He's using the geometry to represent abstract mathematical relations. These have nothing to do with how I'm actually experiencing the world. There's no conformity between this and the way the world is in my experience. So he starts to use math in a purely abstract, symbolic way. So he starts to observe things, like he sees a chandelier swinging in a church and he measures it by tracking with his pulse, he's rolling balls down inclined planes... and what does he... what comes out of all of this? Well, Galileo kills the universe because what Galileo realises, is inertial motion. Things don't move because there's an inner drive and they're trying to get where they belong. That's a purposeful, Narrative way of understanding the world. Things don't move for that reason. Things move because they've been hit by a purely random, arbitrary, external force. And they will continue moving like that until another random external force [influences them]. Before Galileo, everything is alive.

Everything is driving, trying to get where it belongs, to make the universal a more beautiful and ordered place. After Galileo, everything is dead! There is no inner life to matter. Nothing is moving on purpose at all. Now that is really important because before Galileo you were like everything else because you act on purpose and so does everything else! When Galileo kills the universe, you're now a little Island of purpose in a vast desert of purposelessness. You're alone. You're an ontological cast away, all by yourself. You're weird and strange and you don't belong. And the universe is an indifferent machine.

Notice what this does!! Look at this. And we talked about it again - pay attention to the words you're using - "Oh yes. inertial motion...". What's at the heart of inertia? "Inert"! Inert: dead, lifeless, not capable of moving itself! And what happens is Galileo starts to understand matter differently. In the old world view, matter was the potential for information. But now matter goes to being that which resists. Matter resists my will. It's defined in terms

of my resistance. Why is that so important? Why do I want matter to be inert and resisting me? Look, it's actually a beneficial thing. If the world is resisting me, because what everybody is telling me is, "Oh, it's all chaos..." and I'm deceiving myself, I'm creating all these illusions. The only hope I have is if the world pushes back on me, if the world resists my will.

Everything is defined in terms of will and the resistance to will. So now what you have is you have this lifeless universe and a battle between isolated wills, largely creating illusions and this vast, inert, will-less, but nevertheless resistant, machinery of the universe.

The metaphysical disappearance of evil

It has another function: By making matter an actual substance, rather than the potential for information, Galileo removes there being any basis for evil. Before, we had a cosmological explanation for evil. Evil was a hole in being, pure potential, pure chaos. There is no such thing now. Matter is just this resistant, inert stuff which means we've lost something, and it's telling to us; we don't really have a way, really, of talking about evil! We don't have a metaphysics of what evil is. We think of evil as just excessive immorality, but what is evil? Well, people used to have a very coherent and sophisticated answer to that. Now they either say, "well, ultimately there is no such thing", or "I don't know", or "it's just a way of talking about, great immorality".

Now Galileo gives us the scientific method. Notice how it's a legacy from the Axial Revolution. The scientific method is a way for overcoming our wilful generation of illusion and self deception. The whole point of the scientific method is to get the resistance of the world, the inert purposeless world to resist our purposes and our will to show us how we are deceiving ourselves. Now that means that you're going to give huge priority to the scientific method and to the math.

Objectivity and Subjectivity

So what Galileo is going to say is, "look, the mathematical properties are the real properties of the thing". The length of this (indicates the desk), and its mass, anything that I can measure mathematically about this is going to be real. It's going to be 'in' the object, as we will come to say; it's going to be objective (writes Objective on the board). The mathematical properties are objective. Those are real. So, where are all these other properties? What

about all the things I can't measure mathematically? What about how sweet the honey is? How beautiful the sunset is, how meaningful these words are, where is all that meaning? Where's all that meaning? Well, that's non mathematical, so it's not in the world. It must be inside that "Mind"! Remember, we've developed the mind as this internal chamber that manipulates language and propositions. Inside there, inside, trapped inside your mind: that's where all the meaning is! That's where all the value is! That's where all the beauty is! All of that non-mathematical stuff: That's subjective (writes Subjective on the board). Only in the mind. It's an [illusion]. You experience the illusion of it being in the world. The world is not meaningful. The world is not purposeful. The world is not filled with beauty. The world is not filled with truth. The world is not filled with goodness. The world is not even filled with chairs, cups, tables... because those are not mathematical entities! Those are all illusions created by your meaning making mind in its wilful self deception: the way it asserts itself on the world.

Notice what's happening: The orders are breaking down. See, one of the great strengths of the Aristotelian worldview was that your view of knowledge and your view of the world mutually supported each other. But the great weakness of that [as] a worldview is as one starts to unravel, so does the other! And the unraveling accelerates: as the Aristotelian world breaks down, the Aristotelian theory of knowing breaks down (illustrates on the board as a cycle). And as that breaks down the Aristotelian model of the [World breaks down], and then this (cycle) starts to spin very fast and in an accelerating fashion.

Notice where we are already! We're disconnected from the world. We're trapped inside our heads. We've lost Perspectival and Participatory Knowing. Self-transcendence. All the meaning. All the beauty. All that that was out in the world. That's all gone. It's all trapped inside of our heads. All that's out there is a purposeless, inert, chaotic absurdity! And all that's here within me is inner conflict and a battle of wills with other human beings. It's no wonder that many people were experiencing this as a trauma. Now here's the thing: none of us are immune to this trauma. We just don't think about it anymore. Or what we do is we'll wake up at 3:00 AM in the morning, laying on our bed, and think these thoughts and realise how disconnected we are from

reality, how we believe in a scientific worldview in which our meaning and purpose, our Self and the objects we interact with - the tables and chairs and cars and everything of that ilk - is all ultimately not real. And all the purposes we're striving for are not real. All the meaning we're making is not real. And then fundamentally I'm not real. You are not real. I mean, do you ever wake at three and think, "I'm just a very complex pattern of atoms. That's all that's really there. Everything else is just an illusion and everything that I'm doing, I'm doing for things that aren't real for a self that isn't real in a universe that doesn't give a damn about me, is completely indifferent!"? It's not that it hates me. It's completely inert and indifferent to me.

There are individuals who are going to be affected by Ockham and the Rhineland Mystics and the rise of the new science, and [who] are going to try and reconfigure Christianity to deal with this crisis that is emerging. And so as the scientific revolution is picking up steam, as the commercial and corporate revolutions are picking up steam, as the secularisation of the state is picking up steam, the Protestant Reformation occurs. And of course it occurs in Germany, because that's where everything is occurring. That's going to keep occurring! So what I want to investigate with you next time is the Protestant reformation and how it furthers the dissolution of the Nomological order, the Normative order and the Narrative order. Notice how they're already all under significant stress: [In] this new scientific worldview, the Nomological Order is one that I don't fit into; the Normative order of ascent and self-transcendence, that's gone; the Narrative Order of there being a story and a life and a purpose to things, that's gone.

Luther is going to come and he's going to bring about a Protestant Reformation that is going to exacerbate this collapse of the Axes of meaning and the ways in which we are connected to ourself, each other and the World. We'll take a look at that next time we're together. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Episode 20 notes

[**Mark Taylor**](#)

Mark C. Taylor is a postmodern religious and cultural critic. He has published more than twenty books on theology, metaphysics, art and

architecture, media, technology, economics, and postmodernity.

Book mentioned- After God - [Buy here](#)

Meister Eckhart

Eckhart von Hochheim OP, commonly known as Meister Eckhart or Eckehart, was a German theologian, philosopher and mystic, born near Gotha in the Landgraviate of Thuringia in the Holy Roman Empire.

William of Ockham

William of Ockham was an English Franciscan friar, scholastic philosopher, and theologian, who is believed to have been born in Ockham, a small village in Surrey.

Ockham's Razor

Occam's razor, also spelled Ockham's razor, also called law of economy or law of parsimony, principle stated by the Scholastic philosopher William of Ockham (1285–1347/49) that *pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate*, “plurality should not be posited without necessity.”

Catharism

The Cathars (also known as Cathari from the Greek *Katharoi* for “pure ones”) were a dualist medieval religious sect of Southern France which flourished in the 12th century CE and challenged the authority of the Catholic Church.

Catharism was a Christian dualist or Gnostic movement between the 12th and 14th centuries which thrived in Southern Europe, particularly what is now northern Italy and southern France.

Theurgy

Theurgy describes the practice of rituals, sometimes seen as magical in nature, performed with the intention of invoking the action or evoking the presence of one or more deities, especially with the goal of achieving henosis and perfecting oneself.

Nominalism

In metaphysics, nominalism is a philosophical view which denies the existence of universals and abstract objects, but affirms the existence of general or abstract terms and predicates. There are at least two main versions of nominalism.

Aristarchus

Aristarchus of Samos was an ancient Greek astronomer and mathematician who presented the first known heliocentric model that placed the Sun at the centre of the known universe with the Earth revolving around it.

Euclid's Elements

The Elements is a mathematical treatise consisting of 13 books attributed to the ancient Greek mathematician Euclid in Alexandria, Ptolemaic Egypt c. 300 BC. It is a collection of definitions, postulates, propositions, and mathematical proofs of the propositions.

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Ep. 21 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Martin Luther and Descartes

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. Last time we took a look at the advent of the Scientific Revolution and we looked at the work of Copernicus and how the important advent of a scientific description of reality had with it the consequence that most of our experience, our sensory experience, was questionable as illusory in nature. Galileo also developed that idea of the math as the language of reality, and used that with the new experimental method — a method also born out of the idea that most of our cognition is deceptive and biasing in nature — and he used that to discover

inertial motion and that changed the notion of matter into something that exists and resists our will. But that had the effect of killing the universe and making it purposeless in nature. And thus, we become odd islands of meaning and purpose in a vast ocean of meaningless purposeless material motion.

So, all of that of course is going to have an impact on people's self-understanding, the meaning, that they're using to make sense of their existence. And look what's happening here: That Aristotelian idea that the structure of your experience and the structure of reality conform has been radically undermined. And now you are trapped within your own mind, behind veils of illusion, disconnected from the world, and God has become progressively more and more, a matter of will.

So there's an individual that takes all of this up and he does more than just think about this or speak about it or write about it. He's one of those really Titanic individuals who exemplifies the chaos and the anxiety of his time. This is Martin Luther. He's definitely deeply influenced — he's German — he's deeply influenced by the Rhineland Mystics. He's influenced by that growing tradition of the self as radically self negating; inner conflict being at the core of spirituality. He's an Augustinian monk. He's deeply influenced by Augustine's ideas of self depravity and our inability to achieve mystical union with God unaided, and through Augustine Luther of course is deeply immersed in and impressed with Paul's ideas about our inner conflict and how that parallels a conflict within God; between God's love towards us and God's justice driven anger and wrath towards us. And Martin Luther is very terrified of that wrath. He's very terrified of it. And he has taken that notion, through Tauler, of mystical self negation, and it has become radicalised because of the influence of Augustine and Paul and his own inner conflict so that the self negation in Luther's psyche has become self-loathing. He experiences The Self as radically folded it into Itself, obsessed with itself in a completely immorally, self-centred fashion. So the self is this radical, self feeding, self-negating... because, as the self is enfolded and obsessed with itself, it is simultaneously being cut off from God and cut off from reality.

So it is very much a self destructive process! And I really want you to hear that: "Self"-destructive process that he sees as the essence of the Self. So this

is Luther's interpretation of the biblical notion of pride and rebellion against God that we are intrinsically self obsessed in this self aggrandising, self destructive fashion. So try to think of moments in your life that will give some substance to what Luther is saying. You have discovered a pattern of behaviour: self destructive. For example, perhaps you keep dating the same kind of person and you keep going back to this and it keeps turning out to be wrong for you - and perhaps also wrong for the other person! So you step back and you've talked to friends and you reflected and you make a deliberate, conscious effort, "Ah, no, I'm not going to date 'this' kind of a person anymore. I'm not going to date that type of person. I'm going to date this type of person. And that will change things. I'll break this pattern", and you go in and you find somebody, they seem to be totally different and you start dating them and then low and below hold against your will — even though it seems to be something that you wilfully brought about — you find yourself caught in the same destructive pattern again! And of course, Freud and Jung and the whole psychodynamic tradition — [which are] very much part of the legacy of Luther, by the way! I'm going to make much of that fact, that we keep repeating, even in our conscious efforts to change our behaviour, we keep repeating these self destructive patterns.

Luthor's interpretation of Paul: A cultural seedbed for narcissism

So although I'm critical of Luther, there's a deep truth here in Luther. There is the touching of the way in which our unconscious processes, our unconscious cognition can be beset with these — we've talked about these — parasitic processes that have a life of their own and can consume us. So Luther is convinced that he cannot do anything to save himself. He takes Augustine's notion that the Neoplatonic mystical ascent is insufficient on its own; it has to be supplemented with the love of God through Christ. He takes that and he radicalises it in a very powerful way because of his own personal wretchedness. He comes to the conclusion that there is nothing he can do, and that leads him to a startling interpretation of Paul. An interpretation that is going to put him at odds with the Catholic church. This is the interpretation that we are saved by faith alone, where faith becomes nothing more than a complete acceptance of God's saving grace.

So let's, unpack this very carefully because it's become so immeshed in our way of thinking and being. The idea here is that faith is... notice what's happened: All that sense of Participatory Knowing, the sense that we're participating in a process — Remember the Israelite notion that we're participating in our cultural history, we're participating in the creativity of God? — all of that is now gone! It's gone! And your sense of what it's like to be you, your sense of self is completely twisted and illusory. So all the Perspectival Knowing, all the Participatory Knowing is being eradicated. It's being reduced down to the acceptance of a proposition. And an acceptance that cannot in any way be based on evidence or argument, because that would be your mind participating in your salvation. It has to be a radical, pure acceptance. So the self-negation of the Rhineland Mystics has come to fruition in Luther's ideas here.

Now, what does that mean? That means that you have to... you radically, radically have to accept is there's absolutely nothing you can do. And even your affirmation of the propositions of the creeds of Christianity is something that has to be given to you. And what does that mean from God's side of this equation? It means that God's act of saving you is completely arbitrary! There is not[hing]... since there is nothing you do, there is no thought, word or deed that you perform that in any way earns or has any causal effect upon God's behaviour! And I'm not over representing this! Look at the debate between Luther and Erasmus! Erasmus tried to propose what he called "Synergy": that the human being and God were working together in a participatory fashion for salvation — with God, of course, having the bulk of the work — and Luther rejects that utterly! God's saving of an individual is completely arbitrary.

So God has become... Remember what we talked about in Ockham? That God's will supersedes his reason? God's reason is now not involved at all! It is just an arbitrary act of will that saves us. And we have to radically accept that arbitrariness. Now think about what that means! And there's a weird... there's an irony here. There's an irony here and it's almost a self referential irony because Luther is trying, and I think he's very sincere, but he's trying to rescue us from the fact that we are obsessed with ourselves in an idolatrous fashion and that that obsession is a source of deep suffering for us. We know that that self obsession cuts us off, separates us! But the irony is, in

his endeavours to deal with that, look at what Luther is teaching... What is he putting into our cultural grammar? That we are inherently worthless and that our inner life is one of self-loathing, and the only solution to that is arbitrary unearned regard.

This is the cultural training for narcissism. Narcissism is to be trapped, to be self obsessed, within self-loathing, and that what you want to alleviate [this] is unearned positive regard. Not for any reason, not for anything you've done; completely amoral, unearned, positive regard. That's narcissism! So one of the deep ironies of Luther's revolution is that — and I think this says something about what's going on at the time — one of the deep ironies is [that] he actually lays the grammar for cultural narcissism. We are all being trained to experience ourselves as wretched, self obsessed, and that the only solution is unearned positive regard. And so we can see the spirit of Luther in our obsession with Instagram and our obsession with Snapchat; we constantly want unearned positive regard.

Now there are other consequences of this radical change. Of course — immediate consequences — Luther comes into conflict, he protests against the Roman Catholic church — that's [where] "Protestant" comes from — because the Catholic church has a different doctrine of salvation: That it's one in which the human being still has a participatory role. Because of that, the church also thinks that it's cultural history — think of how this is still an Israelite notion — the church still thinks that its tradition matters for human salvation. That participating in that tradition, the tradition, the cultural history of the church, is also something that is needed. Now, I'm not advocating for Catholicism here over Protestantism. I'm trying to get you to understand what the two sides were standing for.

An argument over the authority over the self: Self's Sovereignty vs God

So Luther is attacking all of that. He's attacking the authority of the church. He's attacking the authority of tradition. So history and tradition and institution don't matter. Why? Because Luther is a child of his time. He is trapped inside his own mind. He advocates that all that really matters, in matters of faith, are what individual conscience (Writes individual

conscience on the board). (And please remember what this word means. It means knowing yourself: science, con science, conscience, knowing yourself.) The one thing you know is yourself. And so Luther refuses to recant. He refuses to change his interpretation to be in line with the church. And he valorises individual conscience as the final authority over a person's spiritual life. This lays the foundation... So do you see what's happened here? This withdrawal of meaning into the individual mind, isolated individual mind, is now being appropriated as, "well, that must mean that the mind, the individual conscience, is the final sole authority of what matters"! It's a radical idea. Many other cultures find this [to be] a bizarre idea that we possess in the West.

And so of course there's a lot of discussion nowadays about individual responsibility, individual authority. We have, as Adorno talks about it, we have a "Cult of Authenticity", that being true to yourself — and this is Lutheran; being 'true to yourself' — is the ultimate authority by which you should judge and evaluate your life. Now notice what has happened: The connection to reality, 'being true to reality', has been superseded by being true to yourself. And that is also emerging with a cultural grammar that is training us in narcissism. Now because of this, Luther... Luther was a monk! And yet he comes to the conclusion that the monasteries should be shut down! Why would he come to that conclusion? Well, the West, for a long time, had these paired institutions. You had a knowledge institution (writes knowledge on the board) that has already emerged and is being developed in the middle ages, and this of course is the University (writes university below knowledge). Where we're supposed to get a 'universal' education, to come to understand as much of reality, the universe, as you can. And that was paired to a place where you have to go through transformation in order to acquire wisdom (writes wisdom on the board to the right of knowledge), and this is the monastery (writes monastery below wisdom, paired with university).

The rise of politics and the State

And so this is the idea here: that here (indicates Wisdom & monastery) you're seeking that self-transcendence; this is the legacy of the axial revolution. This (indicates Knowledge & wisdom) of course is a response to the emergence of, first, Aristotelian science and then the new science with

people like Bacon, Copernicus, Galileo... And the two are supposed to represent an important synthesis of how human beings are to make sense of themselves and to find a meaningful life. But this institution (wisdom) places a huge premium on self-transcendence, as we've seen (writes "self transcendence" on the board between Wisdom and Monastery) and for Luther, this (circles "self transcendence") is the grand delusion. The idea that human beings are capable of self-transcendence is something he thinks is the greatest lie that our self tells us. He sees that as the greatest instance of the sin of pride. See if you lose the Perspectival, Participatory sense of faith, if faith just becomes assertion, born out of radical acceptance, then the idea of this being even possible to you disappears. And so what happens is that these institutions are being shut down (puts a big X through Wisdom and Monastery). Now that means the university now needs something else (indicates the now absence of Wisdom) in order to take this knowledge and give it existential, transformative relevance to individual life. The university has to be attached to something else that transforms people's lives, gives structure and purpose to their existence. And of course we know what that's going to be. That's going to be the State (writes State to the left of University, taking the place of Monastery). And knowledge is not going to be linked so much to wisdom. It's going to be linked to politics (writes politics to the left of Knowledge).

And of course that is going to be supported by the new science; people like Bacon famously arguing that "knowledge is power", the for-runner of the work of Michel Foucault and others. So we get the loss of all the psycho-technologies of wisdom; of cultural communities that are committed to providing guidance and support to people who want to cultivate wisdom; of a historical tradition that can relate to us the patterns of success and failures and give us practices that we can use to test out and try for transformation... All of that is being lost. So you know where to go for information. You know where to go for knowledge. But now, today, you do not know where to go for wisdom. We have Sapiential Obsolescence (writes this on the board) of our knowledge and we have knowledge being inextricably bound to the machinery of the State and to politics (circles Knowledge & University and Politics & State) such that it is becoming increasingly difficult right now for us as a culture to distinguish politics from knowledge; from the wilful

assertion of things that we must simply accept because of an arbitrary will wielding power. So the Protestant Reformation is Titanic! It is really inappropriate, if you're trying to understand the advent of the Meaning Crisis, to only look at the Scientific Revolution. You must look at the scientific revolution and the Protestant Reformation together. There are conjoined.

Now, there are other important aspects of the Protestant Reformation that come to the fore. Because of his attack on tradition and institution, Luther advocates what he calls the “Priesthood of all Believers”. There is nothing in between, there is no mediator between you and God (writes Individual Conscience on the board and God above it). There is no church. There's no priest. There's nothing here (indicates the space between the two). There is just a direct personal relationship (draws a double ended arrow between the two). Again, this idea of your own personal spirituality has its root here. Now, because of this Luther argues that, for the Priesthood of all Believers, everybody has an equal spiritual authority because, of course, learning processes of growth and self-transformation (indicates the crossed out Wisdom and Monastery on the board), those are no longer important criteria. All that matters is the degree to which God has saved someone.

The introduction of democracy & the Church vs the State

Now we've talked about some of the negative consequences of that, but a positive consequence for that is that Luther argues for a complete form of democracy within the church. Everything should be decided democratically because there should not be any significant authority or hierarchical structure because Luther is rejecting all of that. This of course is why the Catholic church is so resisting to him, why they are so inimical to him. They just want this idea eradicated because it undermines the very structure and existence of the institution of the Catholic church.

Now, Luther doesn't propose political democracy, he only proposes democracy within the church. But nevertheless that is going to give people, in their day to day lives, experience with democratic processes; democratic decision making. In fact, in the areas that they consider most important about

their lives, they're going to be acting democratically. Now Luther thinks that there shouldn't be democracy in the World outside of the church and when the peasants revolt in Germany, because they're being influenced by this idea of the importance of the individual, conscience and authority, Luther does not side with the peasants! He sides with the princes! He sides with established authority. He has a two worlds doctrine: There's a doctrine within the church and that's a world that is — remember how God is divided? — that's the world of God's love, and that's where we act democratically. But outside the church we don't know who is saved and who's not saved — We'll come back to that point — and because of that that's the world under God's wrath and that's the world that has to be kept in check by political authority, wielding the sword of power.

Secularism in culture & the advent of corporate capitalism

Again, that's a dark aspect of Luther! But it also brings with it the beginning of the idea of the separation of Church and State; a radical new idea! Luther, of course, is proposing it because he's proposing that within the church, under God's love, people should be treated one way and outside of the church, which is under God's wrath, there should be a different way in which people are treated and politically operate. And the State should not interfere with the Church. So we get the beginnings of separation of church and state, which we take for granted, but this is going to further drive the secularisation of the culture. It's going to further drive the secularisation of the culture because, more and more, people are experiencing the sacred as something private, separate, secluded unto itself; separate from the State and Politics and of course also [from] Science and the University (indicates both on the board, respectively).

Now that not knowing who's saved, of course also brings with it terrific problems! This was made into a classic argument, which has come under some criticism, but I think the core insight is still of value by Max Weber. The problem with Luther's model is [that] there's nothing you can do to know that you're saved because there is nothing you can do to bring... you have no causal role! Which means there's no causal evidence. There's no evidence. How do you know if you're saved, because God chooses people

arbitrarily? So this provokes terrific anxiety! There's tremendous anxiety about whether or not you're saved! You have your own in[dividual]... see... and Luther gives you... There's this dramatic tension in Luther. He gives you this double bind: He tells you that what you ultimately have to rely on is your individual conscience (in one hand), but he tells you that inner world is one of overwhelming self deception (in the other hand) (indicates the juxtaposition between both hands).

And so what do you do with this anxiety? Well, you can't do anything officially, but what you can do is you can work hard to make your life good! Because if you're succeeding in the world, especially socioeconomic success, that surely is a sign that God has chosen you, that God loves you. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to develop what becomes [known as] The Protestant Work Ethic, because my only way of knowing is this unofficial way, this relatively unconscious way of knowing that I'm saved is if I'm succeeding well! So I'm going to work hard to succeed, and I'm not going to use my wealth in any way to promote myself. I'm not going to do any, what would later be called conspicuous consumption, because that would be a sign of pride. So I work hard and in order to avoid pride, I'm going to push that money, the wealth I acquire, back into my business. I'm going to get the Protestant Work Ethic and this is going to align so well with the emerging corporations that we talked about, the emerging ascendancy of the commercial class, and we get the advent of capitalism. As Weber's book famously puts it, "The Protestant [Work] Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism".

And you see, this worry is a real worry! And look what you watch happen, and what's amazing is how Luther was surprised by this, for a man who is in many ways, brilliant! - He translated the Bible into German by the way! He makes the Bible readable for everybody because of the Priesthood of all Believers. And he's a brilliant translator. Many people consider him as one of the foundational figures of modern German. - He doesn't... He honestly thought that everybody would read the Bible the same way he did. So he thought we'd gotten rid of the Pope, but [that] there would be a unifying thing that would hold Christianity together, which is the idea of the Bible. So the Bible becomes very Holy and many people have said that what Protestants have is a paper Pope; the Bible takes the role for them that the Pope does for the Catholic world. And of course we're facing struggles, right

now, in our culture because we don't quite know what to do with this terrible and awesome book: The Bible.

The fragmentation of Protestantism; driving industry

What shocked Luther, and shouldn't shock us, is that Protestantism quickly fragments, because when you give people no authority other than their own individual conscience, when you separate them from any claims upon them of tradition, any claims upon them of history or institution, any claims upon them of knowledge, the idea that they will all agree [is] actually a ridiculous idea. And so what happens and continues to happen to this very day is the huge and ongoing and accelerating fragmentation of Protestantism into denomination after denomination after denomination. And you get what has been called, in other quarters but can be applied here, "The Narcissism of Small Difference": You have to find that piece of evidence that shows that you are unique, that shows that out of all of the damned masses, God has elected you! Your uniqueness, your specialness, your unearned unique specialness has to be guaranteed! And the more I'm like these other people, the more that comes into question. So not only am I driven by my own radicalized subjectivity in my interpretation, I'm also hungry for a spark of specialness for me, that will show that I am saved. And so the narcissism and the fragmentation of Protestantism walk, MARCH, in lockstep together, mutually accelerating.

Hard working children of secularisation

So notice what's happened, take a look: you're getting... god is withdrawing! God's withdrawing!! By the time of Luther, God has become very much this arbitrary will in a world that is nothing but a battle of wills. Think about how, not that long after Luther, you have Shakespeare. Luther is the great writer of German. Shakespeare is the great writer of English. And notice how, [for] somebody who is plumbing the depths of the human psyche - Shakespeare - in a way that of course has struck most of us as perennially profound, how absent God is from that world of Shakespeare. There [are] supernaturals there! There are the witches in Macbeth. There are ghosts in Hamlet, but God is not ever present. And the supernatural is absurd and arbitrary and largely an Agent of chaos and a destiny that thwarts people in

their endeavours. It's telling how much God has withdrawn into being an arbitrary, absurd, supernatural Agency that largely thwarts and undermines human activities.

So the Protestant Reformation is fundamental to our grammar of how we understand ourselves. And the problem is, even though we are, many of us, are children of the secularisation that is accelerated by the Protestant Reformation, we still carry that grammar around in our head: We have to work hard. We have to work very hard. And if you don't work hard, there's somewhere [where] it's going to be revealed how worthless we are, and that we hunger for that unearned positive regard! We need to find that mark of our uniqueness that shows that we are chosen from the damned and that we will not disappear into nothingness and meaninglessness, but instead we will be adored for simply who we are.

Existencial solitude

All of these factors: the scientific revolution, the advent of the beginnings of capitalism, especially corporate capitalism and the Protestant Reformation, are all mutually reinforcing each other. They're giving people tremendous anxiety! The scientific revolution is basically cutting you off from the world. And the Protestant Reformation is basically orphaning you from the mother church and tradition and history. LOOK: you have to bear it all! (Points at "Individual conscience" on it's own on the board)! Your individual can[science]... You! Alone! By yourself!!! You have to bear it all. While simultaneously being told you don't have the resources or the capacity within you to do it. You're a nothing, that has to bear it all. You're cut off from the world. You cut off from reality behind illusion. There's a restless battle of wills. You're cut off from wisdom institutions with Sapiential obsolescence. So this is a time of a lot of existential dread. You see the very thoughtful response of people like Pascal, who's now experiencing the cosmos, not as a cosmos! Remember what cosmos means? 'A beautiful order that we can participate in, and that will afford our self-transcendence'. NO! Pascal - who's a mathematical genius. He 'gets' the new math - he looks out at the cosmos and he says, "those infinite spaces terrify me!". The Cosmos is now cold and terrifying. It's vastness is inhuman and crippling of the human spirit.

Rene Descartes

[There is] an individual who arises [at the] same time and [who] wants to address this anxiety. And we'll talk about the comparison between Pascal and this person. This person is Rene Descartes. Descartes wants to take this grammar of the scientific revolution about math as the mark of reality, and he wants to use it to come up with on his own, like a good Protestant — although he's Catholic! — but on his own, from his own individual conscience, he wants to come up on his own! Forget the history. Forget the tradition. This is Descartes! [He's going to] use the new math to come up with a solution to this emerging meaning crisis.

Descartes is a genius! And what he does is he invented a new psycho-technology. One of the most powerful psycho-technologies! A psycho-technology that has been so internalised into our culture and our cognition that it is almost transparent to us. We do not realise it is the lens by which we see and understand the world. Descartes liked to sleep in! It probably led to his death because when he had to go to Sweden, they didn't let him sleep in and he had to go out into the cold air, and that's probably what led to his death. So he'd like to sleep in. So one day he's laying in bed and it was the fashion at the time, the architectural fashion, for there to be tiling on the floor and tiling on the walls. There's a fly flying around the room. Now for most of us, that's where we... that's it! That's all we get: fly in a room! BUT Descartes noted that if he counts the number of tiles along These three axes, he can come up with three numbers that will plot wherever the fly is in the room. Descartes invents, Cartesian Graphing (writes Cartesian Graphing on a cleaned board), the system we use today, the X, Y Z system. He takes the new algebra — the new way in which Galileo had been using math — and he pushes it even further: He invents graphing!

Algebraic equations: Capturing reality in cartesian graphics

And what psycho-technology — because that's what it is (points at an X, Y, Z, Cartesian Graph drawn on the board). This is a standardised strategy, learned from your society. A socialised, standardised strategy for information processing — what psycho-technology more means 'Science' to you than a graph? When I can make a graph, I'm doing science! When I can

think graphically, I'm thinking scientifically! This is one of the most powerful and pervasive psycho-technologies, and he invents it. And this brings with it a powerful idea, because he invents analytic geometry: Any geometrical shape can be converted into an algebraic equation. Equations Capture reality (writes Equations on the board) because — remember what Galileo has done, “math doesn't have to share the same ‘gestalt’ as what it's representing” — that has now been taken to its fulfilment in Descartes. Equations are not in any way (writes $f=ma$ on the board) like what they represent. But nevertheless, Following up on Copernicus and Galileo, they are what cuts through illusion and into reality.

Now this is a radical idea! Because of graphing and analytic geometry we get this idea that we can grasp the world with equations. So you think that this (writes $e=mc^2$ on the board) captures something deep about the world — E equals MC squared — and you should, because when you really understand this, you can take a paperclip worth of matter and you can smash a city to the ground, men and women like gods. That's intoxicating! The power that it puts at our fingertips. It seems to provide overwhelming evidence that this way of thinking puts us deeply in touch with the fibre and fabric of reality. We are fundamentally in contact, but it's not a contact of experience. It's not the Aristotelian conformity. It's not participatory. It is purely propositional. It is purely abstract. It is purely symbolic.

Now that's going to bring with it a radical idea. Descartes thinks, “you know what? This is how I can understand the Meaning Crisis! All this anxiety...” — he didn't of course call it the Meaning Crisis, that's anachronistic on my part, but I'm putting words into his mouth so that we can talk to him across space and time! — There's all this anxiety, there's all this sense of disconnection.

So Descartes understands the Meaning Crisis as a lack of a search for certainty (writes “Meaning Crisis => Lack of search for Certainty” on the board). “Conformity” in the Aristotelian, the Neoplatonic sense; Participatory, Perspectival Conformity has been replaced by Propositional Certainty. And of course the thing about math for Descartes is it gives you certainty. That's why math cuts through all the illusions. That's why it allows us access to such power (circles $e=mc^2$).

Hobbes: Cognition is computation?

So Descartes thinks the answer to the crisis is to change, [to] transform our minds, not in any kind of spiritual transformation, but to transform our minds into machines of certainty; minds that will only work mathematically and logically in terms of equations. The way to get certainty is to turn myself into a machine that represents the world through abstract symbolic propositions, and then manipulate those propositions in a purely logical, mathematical function. So what Descartes is proposing is that the way to address the anxiety of the age is for each one of us to adopt a method that will turn us into computers. That's what a "computer" is. "Computer" is originally a word applied to people, by the way! In the 1930s or forties, you could have a job as a computer. That was your job. You were to be given the task of taking equations and processing them in a logical mathematical fashion.

So reasoning is being reduced to computation - we'll talk about what that might mean in a minute. The idea is if we can make our minds into purely computational machines, then we will achieve certainty. Certainty in our beliefs will give us what Descartes thinks we need in order to alleviate the anxiety that we're suffering. And of course we do that! On one hand we have the cultural grammar of Luther and the narcissism and the radical self doubt; and on the other hand, we have the Cartesian grammar, we seek certainty, we won't believe anything until it's certain. And of course we vacillate between, "I must accept it without any evidence or reason" -Luther, [and] "I can only accept it if it's absolutely certain and beyond question" -Descartes!

Now both of these of course are pathological. The first is pathological because if you completely remove people's agency, and how they come to their beliefs, then you radically undermine any meaning in life they might possess. The other one, the pursuit of certainty, and there are individuals who seem to speak as if mathematical science will still give us certainty - that's an illusion! Part of what we discover after Descartes, and Descartes [himself] was also surprised in that people ended up disagreeing with him, is that science doesn't and can't provide certainty. These two equations I put up on the board. This is from Einstein ($e=mc^2$). This is from Newton ($f=ma$). What Einstein showed is things that Newton thought were certain —

absolute space and time — these kinds of formula actually don't possess the certainty that Newton thought they did.

We'll talk a little bit later about why we can't, except in very limited contexts, there are deep, deep reasons why we can't pursue certainty. And therefore we can't seek certainty as the solution to the loss of connection; connection to our Self, connection to the world, connection to other minds. Now, why does Descartes'... — it's again, this radical irony! It's very similar to Luther! — Why does Descartes' attempt to address this burgeoning loss of connections? Why does it actually result in exactly the opposite: an increased sense of disconnectedness? Well part of it, of course, is the failure of the project of certainty. You can understand the 18th and the 19th, and especially the 20th centuries as scientific, historical and philosophical undermining of the idea that we can achieve certainty. Of course, one of the great principles of modern physics is the Uncertainty Principle.

But let's go back. So Descartes proposes that we should do this, but there's an individual at his time who's a contemporary of Descartes, who makes it explicit and radical and then challenges Descartes with that radical derivation. Hobbes says, "all of this, what this means is that cognition is computation". Hob says that! He uses an older word, he says Rathio-Sonation [?Ratiocination]. What we would now say is cognition. By [ratiocination] I mean computation: cognition is computation. Now there's a lot of people who were going to disagree with this model of computation; there's a lot of discussion right now! Brian Cantwell Smith, a colleague of mine at the university of Toronto, does a lot of important work on the metaphysics and computation. I am not trying to state that this is the absolute truth about computation; that of course would be ironic, given what I just said about certainty! All I am arguing is historically this has been the interpretation of what computation was for people like Descartes and Hobbes. That's all we need for this argument.

AI and the death of the soul

But Hobbes says cognition is computation, and then here's the radical idea he proposes: He takes a new idea, current at the time! - Remember the idea that matter is a substance? Remember the old Aristotelian ideas "matter is pure potential"? But with Galileo matter is a reality in the sense of a

substance - it resists (demonstrates by pressing down heavily on the desk), and it's good that it resists because I need something that resists my will in order to help me with my biases. So matter is inert, it's resistant, it's really there. I push on it. Notice that, again, all that's left of conformity is 'resistance of will'. Hobbes says, "matter is real! Well, what if I built a material machine, that did computation? If cognition is just computation and I can build a machine that does computation..." — and some of the first automatic machines are being built at this time; calculating machines — "... If I can make a material machine that does computation, I will have made cognition. I will have made a mind!". Right there, at the heart of the scientific revolution, Hobbes is proposing Artificial Intelligence (Writes Artificial Intelligence on the board at the head of the progress of detail from Hobbes: Hobbes => cognition is computation => Matter => material machine that did computation? => Artificial Intelligence).

Notice how artificial intelligence [-] is a child of the advent of the meaning crisis and the scientific revolution. It's not a modern idea! Artificial intelligence goes back to this time! What is Hobbes doing with this? Think... I said Galileo kills the universe and Copernicus kills the reality of our sense experience. But Hobbes is doing something way more personal because up till now you've been isolated inside your own mind, but at least still there (gestures to his head); I still have something special, unique, something spiritual! Hobbes kills the soul.

There's no soul because of artificial intelligence! If I can build a machine, a purely material machine that is capable of computation, then I will have made a mind and I didn't have to involve any 'soul stuff', any 'spirit stuff' in making it!

And that's radical! We'll take a look at how Descartes responds to that, and how deep that response is woven into our culture and the Meaning Crisis, and how we move between AI and Descartes even today. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

END

Episode 21 notes

[Martin Luther](#)

Martin Luther, O.S.A. was a German professor of theology, composer, priest, Augustinian monk, and a seminal figure in the Reformation. Luther was ordained to the priesthood in 1507. He came to reject several teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church; in particular, he disputed the view on indulgences.

Johannes Tauler

Johannes Tauler OP was a German mystic, a Roman Catholic priest and a theologian. A disciple of Meister Eckhart, he belonged to the Dominican order. Tauler was known as one of the most important Rhineland mystics. He promoted a certain neo-platonist dimension in the Dominican spirituality of his time.

Adorno

Theodor W. Adorno was a German philosopher, sociologist, psychologist, musicologist, and composer known for his critical theory of society.

Bacon

Francis Bacon was an Irish-born English figurative painter known for his raw, unsettling imagery. Focusing on the human form, his subjects included crucifixions, portraits of popes, self-portraits, and portraits of close friends, with abstracted figures sometimes isolated in geometrical structures.

"knowledge is power"

The phrase "scientia potentia est" is a Latin aphorism meaning "knowledge is power". It is commonly attributed to Sir Francis Bacon, although there is no known occurrence of this precise phrase in Bacon's English or Latin writings

Michel Foucault

Paul-Michel Foucault was a French philosopher, historian of ideas, social theorist, and literary critic. Foucault's theories primarily address the relationship between power and knowledge, and how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions

The Priesthood of all Believers.

The doctrine asserts that all humans have access to God through Christ, the true high priest, and thus do not need a priestly mediator. ... This introduced a democratic element in the functioning of the church that meant all Christians were equal.

Max Weber

Maximilian Karl Emil Weber was a German sociologist, jurist, and political economist, who is regarded today as one of the most important theorists on the development of modern Western society. His ideas would profoundly influence social theory and social research

Book Mentioned- The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism - [Buy Here](#)

The Narcissism of Small Difference

The narcissism of small differences is the thesis that communities with adjoining territories and close relationships are especially likely to engage in feuds and mutual ridicule because of hypersensitivity to details of differentiation

Pascal

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and Catholic theologian. He was a child prodigy who was educated by his father, a tax collector in Rouen.

Rene Descartes

René Descartes was a French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist. A native of the Kingdom of France, he spent about 20 years of his life in the Dutch Republic after serving for a while in the Dutch States Army of Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange and the Stadtholder of the United Provinces

Uncertainty Principle

In quantum mechanics, the uncertainty principle is any of a variety of mathematical inequalities asserting a fundamental limit to the precision with

which the values for certain pairs of physical quantities of a particle, such as position, x , and momentum, p , can be predicted from initial conditions.

Hobbes

Thomas Hobbes, was an English philosopher, considered to be one of the founders of modern political philosophy. Hobbes is best known for his 1651 book Leviathan, in which he expounds an influential formulation of social contract theory

Brian Cantwell Smith

Brian Cantwell Smith is a scholar in the fields of cognitive science, computer science, information studies, and philosophy, especially ontology.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 22 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Descartes vs. Hobbes

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. Last time we took a look at Martin Luther and the deep impact in our cultural grammar made by the Protestant Reformation, and we talked about things like cultural training for narcissism, Sapiential Obsolescence, the division of church and state which furthers secularism and the rise of the Protestant Work Ethic, and how that integrated with emergent Corporate Capitalism. We then took a look at some initial responses by Pascal to this change and the loss of the cosmos and it being replaced by “the infinite spaces that terrify”. Then we looked at an individual who tried to respond to that, a brilliant genius from the heart of the scientific revolution, and that's René Descartes. He creates a new

psycho-technology, the psycho-technology that is at the core of the scientific enterprise as understood today. And that's Cartesian graphing. And the whole proposal is that we can render everything into equations and that if we mathematically manipulate those abstract symbolic propositions, we can compute reality. And that Descartes saw in that a method for how we could achieve certainty, and that he understood the anxiety of his time as being provoked by a lack of certainty and the search for it, and this method of making the mind computational in nature would alleviate the anxiety that was prevalent at the time.

And so I noted that we had two different elements in our grammar that are in significant tension with each other from... And they both, they share... That's what's so interesting about them! They share, they overlap significantly, in the idea of the isolated, individual mind (draws two overlapping circles, labelling the overlapping area as "Isolated Individual Mind"). Whereas Luther is going to put an emphasis on conscience (written to the left of the circles), Descartes is going to put an emphasis, as we'll see - we began to see last time - I will now call consciousness (written to the right of the circles). Although, of course, these two words are highly related in nature, but on one side we have the grammar from Luther telling us that we "need to accept without question, without evidence without argumentation". And then Descartes is "we should only accept when we have certainty". And neither one of those is viable for us. There are both pathological in a very deep way. But we saw that Descartes, nevertheless, proposes this new method, a method [that is], again [It's] similar in so many ways to essential features of the Protestant reformation: a method cut off from tradition, a method cutoff from institution, a method that relies just on the individual mind in relationship to itself.

So although in one way, in one sense, these two grammars - the Lutheran grammar and the Cartesian grammar - seem so opposed in our culture, and these grammars are at war in our current culture-war - the war between an idea, an understanding of faith as a radical acceptance (points to the Luther on the left) and knowledge as the pursuit of logically derived certainty (points toward Descartes on the right). Although they are at that... grammatical tension is at the core of a lot of our culture-wars, nevertheless

these two views are so deeply bound together because of their mutual influence and their shared commitment to the isolated individual self.

Diving Deeper Into Descartes, Pascal And Hobbes

Descartes has a couple of contemporaries. As I mentioned, Pascal - we'll come back to Pascal in a bit - but we also talked about Hobbes. And Hobbes comes up with the radical proposal that, following on [from] Descartes, if cognition is computation, and if matter is real, then we can build a material computer and we could artificially make cognition. Artificial intelligence is a product of the scientific revolution and is part and parcel of the advent of the meaning crisis in modernity. Now, what I want to do is take some time to look at these two interactions that I've mentioned; draw them out a bit — we have Descartes versus Hobbs, and then we have Descartes and Pascal (all written on the board, Descartes at the top) — [see] what we can learn from these interactions cause they're pivotal. And we're now going to remind ourselves that the idea of Artificial Intelligence is deeply relevant to both the scientific revolution and the meaning crisis.

I've shown you how it's relevant to the scientific revolution, and I pointed out last time that it is deeply relevant to the meaning crisis because Hobbes, with the proposal of Artificial Intelligence, proposes to finish the swath of death that has been created by Galileo killing the universe, for example. And what Hobbes is doing is killing the human soul! And of course that's going to exacerbate the cultural narcissism, because if we no longer have souls, then finding our uniqueness and our true self, the self that we're going to be true to, becomes extremely paradoxical and problematic. If you don't have a soul, what is it to be true to your true self? And what is it that makes you utterly unique and special from the rest of the purposeless, meaningless cosmos? These are going to be crucial questions.

Now I want to take a look at how Descartes responds to Hobbes, because that's going to make clear to us again, both the scientific import and the existential relevance of the AI project. And it'll also make clear deeper problems that we are now facing in the meaning crisis. Now here's where it's important to make clear how we should treat Descartes. So it's very fashionable, philosophically and cognitive scientifically, to blame Descartes for many, many mistakes! There's a famous book by Damasio, a book that in

other respects I think very highly of: "Descartes' Error," and we'll talk about all this stuff later. However, I mean, if I were to put it in a sentence: "I wish I had made Descartes' mistakes"!

Descartes is Titanically brilliant, and the mistakes he makes are so foundational to our culture, so woven into our cultural grammar, that overcoming them is not going to be an easy task. Why I say this is because I want to look at how Descartes actually rejects Hobbes' proposal of Artificial Intelligence and why that rejection is still scientifically [and] philosophically relevant to us today, but how it makes our existence problematic. What I want to say is there is often a claim made that Descartes rejects Hobbes' materialism because Descartes is Catholic and that his motivation is religious. And then there is the innuendo that Descartes is actually operating, sorry for this pun, in bad faith; he's merely trying to preserve his religious beliefs. I think this completely misrepresents, and is a disservice to Descartes' intellectual integrity.

How Descartes Responds To Hobbes

Descartes does not respond to Hobbes out of his religious faith. Descartes responds to Hobbes out of the fundamental machinery and central claims of the scientific revolution. And I want to take a look at that because I want to show you how problematic our worldview is becoming and has become. So Hobbes proposes, basically, this idea of Artificial Intelligence. Descartes says that that's wrong, and he has a series of arguments against Hobbes that are very telling! And what Descartes basically does is argue about the central claims that are being made by the scientific revolution. The central claims that are being made are claims that matter is real and reality is mathematically measured and that the meaning and value of things is not in the things themselves. So let's go through this very carefully.

Descartes says, "well, Hobbs, if you are making an argument, if you're engaging in reasoning (writes "reasoning" on the board), as opposed to just computation, you actually care, you have a goal, you're held to a standard of truth (writes "care: standard of truth" on the board after an arrow from "reasoning") because whatever I'm doing, when I'm reasoning, I'm working towards the goal of truth, which means I'm acting on purpose (writes "purpose" beside truth). And secondly, truth depends on meaning (writes

“meaning” below truth). If I asked you is the following claim true: “twoo grip, nick, nick picky-packka-packka!”, is that true? You presumably can't tell me if it's true or false because you first need to know what I just meant. Truth depends on meaning. So reasoning acts on purpose (underlines meaning and purpose). It acts in terms of meaning, and it cares about standards or goals; it works according to a normative standard of how we ought to behave (adds “Normative,” coming off “care,” along with “ought to behave”).

Okay notice this: This is at the heart of reasoning! This goes centrally to a lot of useless time, I would say - I'm just going to be somewhat harsh here - but a lot of useless time in the current culture-wars of discussions of rationality. I actually, I'm a scientist who scientifically studies rationality in human reasoning. And it is often surprising to me, how little of the science of rationality advocates of rationality make use of! How difficult — and this is what I'm going to show you — it is to integrate notions of rationality with a scientific materialism. I'm not anti-materialistic. That's not what I'm doing here. I'm trying to show you that people who advocate a model of rationality that is ultimately Cartesian, that rationality is about behaving purely logically in an attempt to get certainty in our truths — Sam Harris, for example, comes to mind — are not paying attention to the criticisms of that model made by the very self same Descartes! Do not advocate one side of a phenomenon without paying attention to central criticisms made about it by its progenitor. Because what's Descartes saying to Hobbes? He's saying, “well, look! Look, what's central to reasoning: normativity, how things ought to be, meaning and purpose (circles ought to, meaning and purpose)”).

And Hobbes - and I'm going to act on Descartes' behalf here, and I can do this, I think, in all integrity and legitimacy because we have Hobbes letters to Descartes and Descartes' response, and Descartes' response are often contemptuous! So you can almost hear Descartes saying “Hobbes you idiot! You can't have a material reasoner because what is the scientific revolution saying about matter? It's saying that matter is inert. It has no purpose (writes Matter on the board and lists Inert and Purposeless underneath). There is no meaning in matter...” we've already, we've been doubting that since Ockham! Ockham's Razor; remember what it actually cuts (adds meaning[less] to the list under Matter)? “...And it acts in terms of ought to

be (adds “ought to be” to the list), not how things are? No! (CROSSES “OUGHT TO BE” OUT) Science doesn't act in terms of how things ought to be. It acts only in describing and explaining how things actually are! It has no values (adds “actually are” and valueless to the list). So science is teaching us that the world is purposeless, matter is meaningless. There's no normative standard or structure in matter. It's just actually how it is and how it actually is, is valueless. So Hobbes, matter lacks meaning, purpose, normativity. It's inert. How could you possibly get all of those things out of matter? How could you? If you're a reasoner, you care about the truth, and yet truth depends on meaning purpose — at least the pursuit of truth — and normative standards of how things are ought to be. And none of those are in matter!”

Well, Hobbes responds and says, “well, you know what it's like? What I can have is I can have [little, I have like] my Abacus and it's automated and I have little pieces of paper on them and the pieces of paper are manipulated (draws some squares on the board with a word written on each)...” — much like the letters on your computer screen — “...and if they're manipulated in the right way, I get a meaningful sentence: ‘The cat is on the Mat!’”. And then Descartes says, “Hobbes, you're being an idiot! Because you're making a fundamental mistake here. First of all, your English, I'm French. I don't have this (“cat”), I have this (“chat”)! Physically, these are two very different things, yet we're both thinking about the same ‘Meow Meow creature’! There's no meaning, there's no intrinsic meaning in these material marks (indicates the pieces of paper drawn on the board). If waves on a shore happened to mark/scratch the pebbles so that this word (Hi) appears on the beach, would you think the ocean is talking to you? That'd be ridiculous! It's just random grooves cut in the sand by the water. It has no intrinsic meaning. These things (words on the pieces of paper) only have meaning because they are associated with ideas in your mind. And those ideas actually possess meaning”.

Do you see what Descartes is saying? He's saying, “look, you have a view of matter that makes the rationality that you're holding out to be so central, actually deeply, deeply problematic!”. See, this is what we need to pay attention to when we invoke rationality as a standard. Of course, we should invoke rationality as a standard, but first of all, two things, we should note:

the idea that rationality is just the logical manipulation of propositions is something we should question because, I've shown you already, that's not historically accurate. That's a particular view that we see from Descartes. Secondly, Descartes himself rejects that because he realises that rationality is caring about the truth on purpose, according to normative standards and values and none of that machinery can actually be found in the scientific model matter. So, you know what is actually deeply mysterious in our culture right now, although it is invoked religiously - and I mean that? It's exactly the notion of rationality itself. This is not me advocating irrationality. Not at all. I am against the adoration of it as if it is a philosophically unproblematic phenomenon. That is irresponsible and seriously misleading. Is that it? No, there's more; Descartes is going to say more! In order to say that, we need to go back to Galileo. What more does Descartes say to Hobbes?

The Conversation Goes Back To Galileo

What more does Descartes say to Hobbes? Hobbes says, "well, look! Galileo had this problem...", and we've talked about it, but let's go over it again: Mathematics is the language of reality - ultimately a platonic idea. And then you get the idea that there are two kinds of properties (draws two arrows coming down from one point on a freshly cleaned board). There are the properties that are measurable by math; those are the primary properties, the primary qualities (Primary Qualities written at the base of the arrow on the left), the ones that are mathematically measurable. And although the term isn't quite used this way in Descartes' time, shortly thereafter it's going to come to take on this meaning: the mathematical properties are properties that are in the object regardless of whether or not anybody is paying attention to them, looking at them, involved with them... So if I can measure it mathematically, it's in the object. It's objective (writes Objective below Primary Qualities, on the left).

But of course Galileo faced the fact that many qualities of experience — and notice how this is part and parcel of this whole scientific revolution and the calling into question of experience — Galileo noted that many qualities are not mathematically describable: how beautiful something is; how sweet the honey tastes; how wonderful the Rose smells. And then he has an important

idea here - these were called Secondary Qualities (writes Secondary Qualities on the board, on the arrow on the right). And the idea here is — and notice how this follows on from Copernicus — these don't exist in the object! They only exist in my mind. They're part of that veil that experience places between me and the world. They're part of the way in which my mind doesn't touch the world. These are purely subjective qualities, purely in the subject (writes Subjective below Secondary Qualities, on the right). Object, throwing against (demonstrates throwing something against the wall), throwing against, objects, throwing against, because matter resists me. Subjective, I can throw it under me (similarly demonstrates this) I can dominate it.

Now, notice what Descartes' saying. Descartes' going to pick up on this. Now, philosophers have a nice way of talking about these secondary qualities. They have invented this term called Qualia — that's plural — the secondary qualities (writes this on the board beside Secondary Qualities). And the idea here is they're purely subjective. They exist only in the mind. And that these make up an important part — and there is all kinds of debate about this. I'm not going to try and resolve that here — but somehow these Qualia are central to consciousness (writes consciousness on the right, below Qualia). They're part of the fabric and or the content and or the nature of consciousness. Remember I said that Descartes is emphasising consciousness?

Now here's the idea: what the scientific revolution showed, one of its big insights, is this (circles Primary Qualities & Objective) is in the world in matter, and this (circles Secondary Qualities & Subjective) is not in the world, it is only in mind. (Both sides labeled Matter and Mind respectively.) And then what you can say to Hobbes is the following, and many philosophers - I've said it repeatedly (Thomas Nagel comes to mind, and many others)-[have said] "matter does not possess these properties, the Qualia, consciousness, therefore there's no way to manipulate matter to generate Qualia, consciousness". That's really, really devastating because it brings with it the possibility that the AI... not only will the AI not have meaning, not have purpose, not have any normative values, the AI will also not have any conscious awareness of its cognition. It will not possess consciousness.

Notions Of Certainty

Now Descartes brings in one other important aspect to this which isn't quite as explicit, but it was very quickly derived from other people around him. See, what has happen in Descartes, by the time of Descartes, is we've seen this slow withdrawal! Everything is withdrawing from the world into the mind. The mind is getting isolated, trapped inside of itself! And then Descartes famously worries about that. He says, "I want to doubt everything, [to] try to find something I cannot doubt". He makes what I, to my mind — other people have said this, [so] this isn't original to me, but I think it's important — he makes a mistake about this notion of certainty. There's two notions of certainty. There's a logical notion and a psychological notion. The logical notion of certainty is something like absolute deductive validity: It's impossible for the premises to be true — impossible — and the conclusion false. That's different from psychological certainty. Psychological certainty is an inability to doubt. So you find something certain because you are incapable of doubting it. (Certainty is written on the board with Logical and Psychological both coming off it.) The problem is these are not identical by any means. Think of the radical bigot. The radical bigot — I am not, I hope, such a person! — but the radical bigot cannot doubt certain things. They cannot doubt the superiority of the white race or some other such garbage! They're psychologically incapable of doubting it precisely because of the depth of their ignorance and bigotry. So they have psychological certainty, but it is certainly not logical certainty. There is no direct connection between psychological certainty and logical certainty.

But what Descartes does is he thinks that if he pushes this (psychological certainty) far enough, it will somehow become identical to this (logical certainty). And it never does. And that's part of the problem we face. Because he realises... To be honest, what he does is he says, "I'll doubt everything I can possibly doubt!", and then he even doubts the math. Because he realises that his commitment to math is still ultimately based on an aspect of psychological certainty, because there could be some evil genius, perhaps like the matrix, who's actually programming his brain, unbeknownst to him to make him believe in the axioms of math. And before you say "that's ridiculous!", come to realise how much modern physics has

rejected the axioms of Euclidean geometry, even though they were once taken to be absolutely unquestionable.

I Think Therefore I Am

So why am I saying all of this? Because what Descartes comes to, the point that he thinks he finds, that connects these two together (psychological and logical certainties), is he cannot doubt that he exists, because in order to be subject to illusion, his mind must exist. So even the most comprehensive set of illusions guarantees, to him, the existence of his mind. This is the famous “cogito ergo sum,” “I think therefore I am”. It's not an argument! There's no argument there. I think therefore I am: there's no, that's not a logical argument! It's not a logical argument. It's a statement of where psychological certainty becomes indistinguishable from logical certainty because the idea is, in order to be suffering from an illusion, I must exist.

Notice what's happening: We used to have the mind in touch with the world. Then the mind is at least in touch with the math. And now all we have left, is this (points at Consciousness on the board with one hand whilst emphasising a small point in/on his head with the other); all that the mind actually touches is itself. That's what consciousness is! Now notice how weird consciousness is. Like when I [-] ask you, “how do you know the cup's there?” You'll say, “well, I see it or I interact with it”. If I ask you, “how do you know you're conscious?”, you just say, “I know I'm conscious by being conscious”. What does this mean with Hobbes? Well, Descartes is saying “that 'Aspect,' that's the touchstone of reality. The mind touching itself, Hobbes, is nothing that matter has! Matter doesn't have...”. Because what the scientific revolution did was take all of that contact out of the world, and it took it... I'm even willing to say it's not even in the math, it's just here (points into his own head)!

Weak vs Strong AI

So these are devastating problems! I would put it this way: If you're an advocate - and you should pay very serious attention to Artificial Intelligence! Because I'm trying to show you [that] not only is it going to change the world socioeconomically, politically and culturally, [I'm] trying to show you [that] it's going to change your understanding of who and what

you are, and it is going to interact with the Meaning Crisis in profound ways! But if you're interested in this and if you are doing something, [some] work on it, and some of the scientific, theoretical work I do is an attempt to contribute towards the development of AI, [then] you need to pay attention to a distinction, a distinction that was made famous by John Searle, between weak and strong AI. I don't like those terms because weak AI implies something defective, because we never use the word 'weak' as a compliment! Why do I say that? Because weak AI is the project of just making machines that could do things for us that typically intelligent animals or human beings could do; your laptop computer is weak AI, and there is nothing weak about this! In a social or value sense, it is a legitimate and real pursuit that computer revolution has transformed the world.

There is nothing deficient or defective of people who want to make weak AI. You depend on weak AI! We carry around these star Trek computers in our phone, and we go to automatic banking machine! All of this has profoundly altered our lives! So when I use this word, I am not using it in a pejorative sense - perhaps Searle was, I don't know, but I'm not! But here's what is of value in Searle's distinction between weak and strong AI: weak AI does not really advance our scientific understanding in the following way, and this is a way that matters! This is how you would succeed at strong AI. And when I say it, it should show you how difficult strong AI is! A lot of people now talk/use this term 'Artificial General Intelligence' to talk about strong AI. What is strong AI? Strong AI is to make a computer that not [only] does just some intelligent things, or models what it's like, but it's actually an instance of mind. It's to succeed in Hobbes' project. It is to make a mind! But to succeed in Hobbes, this project requires you to do the following: If I'm actually making a material mind (writes "Making a material Mind" on the board, coming off Hobbes from the start of the lecture), how do I know I've really succeeded? If, when I make this (Making a material Mind), I can give an answer; if I can give an explanation of how Descartes is wrong.

If I can answer all of Descartes' objections, in an explanatory fashion, not just yelling at him, "Descartes silly, silly, silly!", but I build a machine! And then I can say, "look, given how the machine is built and operates, here is my scientific explanation for how you can get purpose, meaning, normativity, consciousness, and that contact with realness that Descartes

talked about". That's strong AI and that's a lot harder. That's why people who are invested in that project are a lot more cautious about predicting when we will have AGI. The fact that computational machines are going to change our society in the next 10 to 20 years is undeniable. You're just some sort of intellectual Luddite if you try to resist that! But the idea that that immediately translates into a profound understanding of the nature of the mind is a second question. And the people I respect, the people I think [who] are doing the best work in strong AI - people pursuing AGI - are a lot more cautious about whether or not we're going to be able to answer Descartes and show in a deeply explanatory, evidence-based way, how Hobbes is right.

Modern Cognitive Science's Current View On The Problem

So, we are still with that problem now. I work in cognitive science! We're still at that problem. We're still wrestling with this problem right now. And there are many people on both sides of this issue - I do not want to misrepresent one side - I mean, most people in the professional business think that Hobbes is ultimately right. They take seriously Descartes' challenge - if they're good scientists, and most of them are! There are many - it's a minority, but it's not a small minority - there are many of these scientists who think that Descartes might be fundamentally right. So this is still very much an open and important question that goes to the core of us.

Now you may think, some of you, perhaps also if you have a religious orientation and I'm not insulting you here, I am not insulting you, because you might think, "well, Hobbes tries to kill the soul, and these arguments from Descartes, they sort of preserve the notion of a soul!", and that's great because if I have a soul, well, then of course: then immortality is a real possibility for me. Well, be careful! You may not want the Cartesian baby, even though you're trying to throw out the materialistic bathwater! Because the problem with Descartes' solution is it's existential cost. (Wipes board clean.)

Mind Versus Matter And An Ultimately Bigger Problem

It's existential cost! ...because what Descartes was basically arguing for is that mind and matter are essentially different or they share no fundamental properties. Mind moves on purpose. It moves according to values. It works in terms of meaning and Qualia. It cares about and pursues the truth, and it has this kind of contact with itself that no material thing has. Whereas matter is extended in space and time, displays force, transfers energy. So all the properties that mind has, matter doesn't have. And all the properties that matter has, mind doesn't have. So Descartes, of course, came to a plausible conclusion that mind and matter are two radically different kinds of things. Mind is a completely immaterial substance. Matter, of course, is a completely material substance. And you may say, "Yeeaaay!". [But] here's the problem" If mind and matter share no properties, how do they causally interact?

How do they causally interact? Here: I'm going to show you mind over matter. I'm thirsty! I desire water because water is good. So I'm going to move on purpose. So notice all these mental terms: "desire" and "want," and "I value" the water and I'm going to "move on purpose". And here I do: I move and I get some water (walks over and picks up his cup of water). That's mind making matter change (drinks some of the water). But how can it do that? Mind has no energy. It doesn't take up space. It doesn't have any force!

What about the reverse? Can matter ever cause mind...? Here we go! BEHOLD!!! I'm going to start with a completely material event and it's going to end up in a completely mental event.... (SMACKS HIS HAND ON THE DESK REALLY HARD!!!) AAAAW! Two pieces of matter slam into each other, and the end result is pain! What's pain? Well, it's a Qualia! It's a Qualia about the value of your experience. How much does pain weigh? Does it even make sense of.../ What colour is it? What's its electromagnetic radiation? What's its chemical structure?

Look, your experience is moment to moment, mind and matter are intimately interacting in a bi-directional matter: Mind and Matter (writes Mind & Matter on the board with bi-directional arrows between them), intimately, continuously doing this (the interaction). And yet Descartes' whole position, the way he responds to Hobbes, makes it impossible that they can interact

because they share no properties in virtue of which they can interact, because he used that gap to argue against Hobbes, because it's the gap between Matter, scientific matter, and mind that Descartes' uses against Hobbes.

But the problem is that gap undermines your whole existence, because what does it mean? It means you are radically cut off from yourself; your relationship between your mind and your body is a complete and utter mystery! The most intimate aspects of your experience — the taste of this water [for example] — is absurd because there's no way that the taste, which is a mental thing, and the water, which is a physical thing, could in any way be related to each other.

Other Minds; Yet Another Problem

But it's worse because look around you! There's another person. How do you know what's going on in their mind? "Do you directly see their mind?/Of course not!/Well, how do I know?/They utter words!/Well, no, they don't. They make sounds..." When we talked about, remember what Descartes says to Hobbes, [that] there's nothing in the sounds that's meaningful? "... Their face moves and they make gestures and they express their emotions...". So what you're saying is you get what's going on in somebody's mind because of the way their physical body moves and makes other physical things like air move. But if there is no connection between mind and matter, and your body is a purely material thing — and I hope you don't disagree with that — then there's no way by paying attention to body [that] I can figure out what's going on in mind! Because there's no connection between them!!

This is called "The Problem of other Minds". How do I know — and Descartes seriously worried about this — how do I know that the rest of you are not just mindless automatons? Not just zombies? How do I know this? Because the only mind that my mind touches, according to Descartes, is itself. "At least the mind is still in contact with the world with Descartes, right John? Because the math touches the world?", "Ah haaa! Be careful there!!". Descartes has given us two different answers: He said the math tells us what's real, and it's objective. But the mind touching itself, in consciousness, is ultimately the touchstone — and I use that: "touch-stone"

— of reality; It's purely subjective. And so what we have are these two different standards of realness: subjective consciousness (inside) [and] objective math (outside). And so what our society, our culture has now done, historically, is careen back and forth between them!

You get the empiricists and the positivists (writes Positivists on the board underneath Math & Real) [saying], “No, science tells me what's real!”, and then all you say [is], “well, how do you know it's not a dream?”, “Oh, well, huh, huh, silly, silly, silly!! Nobody really pays any attention to that!”. And what you get are insults! You get insults and ad hominem arguments! It's like, “well, no! No, answer....!”, “Oh, well, you know, it's...!”. And then we invoke rationality. And what do you mean by rationality? And how does rationality fit into this mathematically realised world when we don't have any mathematical material way of talking about purpose and truth, etc...? It's very problematic!!

So you swing the other way and you come over here and you have the Romantics (writes Romantics to the right of Positivists, underneath ‘mind touching itself is consciousness’) - I don't mean the rock group and I don't mean romantic love; we'll talk about these guys in a bit. So what's ultimately real is my pure subjective experience. But then the problem with that is, well, how is that to be in touch with the world? How is that to be in touch with other people? How is that to be in touch with reality at all? It leaves me totally disconnected. How would I know it's not just all a dream (circles Romantics)? And so I go back and forth and back and forth (indicates an arrow going back and forth between these two descriptions of reality; math/objective/positivists & consciousness/subjective/romantics).

Self Is An Island

So what Descartes actually gave us wasn't a secure way of being in contact with reality. He gives us a completely unstable grammar of realness and our culture is riven by these two demands and we swing back and forth between [them]: a subjective and an objective account of realness as we swing back and forth between attempts to understand the relationship between mind and body and between mind and mind. So notice what we have here: We have a loss of perspectival and participatory knowing. We've seen a gradual loss of contact with the world; a loss of contact with tradition and history; loss of

contact with our own bodies; loss of contact with other people, other minds; loss of contact with reality! And then you say, “well, at least Descartes gives me contact with my own mind, right? At least I have that, right? I have my little, tiny, Cartesian, Lutheran Island and at least that's where I can make my last stand!”.

Well, do you? Because you have to be really consistent! If you're going to be Cartesian and logical, you have to be consistent and here's the problem: You can't invoke historical, cultural notions of the self! See, when Descartes says “Cogito, ergo sum,” [And he says and] you may say, “well, therefore I know that I exist!”, well, what's this “I” that exists (writes a big I on the board)? Is it all of “John Vervaeke” (writes his name on the board under “I”)? Because, first of all, it can't be anything introspective because a lot of my introspection is false or wrong (writes Introspection below his name and puts an X beside it to negate it). Is it based on my memories? Well, my memory is certainly capable of making all kinds of mistakes. It always does. In fact (writes Memories below introspection, also with a X to negate it)! Well, what about my history? Well, what access do I have to my history and how do I measure that history Mathematically? My memory is certainly not trustworthy, according to standards of certainty, and I don't have any mathematical way of gaining access to my past (writes Math below memory, with an X)!

All that you have contact with is this moment of self awareness right now; isolated, atomic moment. Now take that completely isolated, contentless — having no autobiography, no contact with its body, no contact with the world, no contact with other minds — and then place it inside Pascal's infinite spaces that terrify; that completely atomic empty self, adrift in empty infinite spaces of terror. And that's what you get. That's where you are. If you think through things carefully, according to the fractured, tortured, tensions of our current cultural grammar. That's how you get into the Meaning Crisis.

Now, Pascal was aware of this. And, like I said, he was as great a mathematical genius as Descartes. He, on his own, rediscovered from axioms forward, recreates all of Euclidean geometry as an adolescent! On his own!!! He's just brilliant! He's part of the scientific revolution. He invents the

barometer as a way of measuring air pressure. But he has a transformative experience — we talked about those — and they convince him that what Descartes is trying to achieve — the certainty — is not possible, and that the Meaning Crisis is powerful. Pascal makes a distinction between what he calls the Spirit of Geometry (written on a freshly cleaned board) — you have to think of that in Cartesian terms; I would say today, ‘the spirit of math’ or ‘the spirit of computation’ — and what he calls the Spirit of Finesse (also written on the board). And his fear, his concern is that we have lost this (puts a big X through Spirit of Finesse), and we have come to think of all of knowing and being in terms of the spirit of geometry (puts a big box around Spirit of Math).

And this is a theme, this Pascalean theme, as you've been seeing it running through this history: we have slowly lost [procedural, know that] the importance of procedural knowledge - knowing how to do things; we've lost perspectival knowing - knowing what it's like; and we've lost participatory knowing - knowing that is part and parcel of how we are bound up with something else, someone else, in a process of mutual transformation, reciprocal revelation! Because that's what finesse is! To do something with finesse...[-] if I'm doing a move in Thai chi and I do it with finesse, It's like jazz! Right?! (Demonstrates a little Thai Chi move.) There's an element in there that I can't capture in terms of mathematical propositions. It's knowing how, in terms of knowing the right timing, the right placement... When you're kissing someone else, you have to do it with finesse: the right timing, the right placement, the sensitivity to the contact, knowing what it is like to be you, knowing what it is like to be the other person, and then getting those two perspectives to have a participatory relation, to be in a relation of mutual revelation with each other. That's what's necessary to kissing someone well.

And so Pascal is pointing out that what has been lost in the scientific revolution is all these other kinds of knowing and being, and these are the kinds of knowing and being that he found present in the transformative experience that he had. It was for him a religious experience, but we've seen that these transformative experiences are not necessarily religious. [They are always spiritual. But they're not often/ Sorry, they're not always, I should, I should be careful here!] They're not always things that reinforce established religious beliefs or propositions. Sometimes they challenge the beliefs that

the person has had, as we've seen. Sometimes they lead to anti-religious or at least non-religious propositions. Nevertheless, Pascal is on to something, to my mind, when he argues that the loss of the Spirit of Finesse has left us bereft of having the capacity for transformative truth, transformative knowing. And so we're now stuck where Socrates was at the beginning of the Axial Revolution. We have scientific knowledge, but remember Socrates rejected it because — although it was rigorous and even plausibly true — it did not afford transformation, self-transcendence into wisdom, because now I don't believe in self-transcendence because of the Protestant Reformation! And I don't have to go through personal transformation according to Descartes. Look at what Descartes is saying: "you do not have to be transformed in order to come into contact with ultimate reality. All you have to do is use the right method, do the right computation". So all of this part (indicates Spirit of Finesse) of the Axial Revolution is being lost. That's what Pascal is putting his finger on and he's doing it extremely well.

So what I want to do next is to follow up a little bit more on Descartes, and [to] take a look at Kant and the rise of the pseudo-religious ideologies and the main problem facing us in the West today. We face these undeniable, at least — if we're being rational — crises: environmental, economic, socio-political, cultural-wars... We need deep, fundamental transformation — transformations of cognition, consciousness, culture, community — but we have lost the psycho technologies, the Spirit of Finesse, the traditions and the institutions for affording that. Because the thing that used to do that was religion, but we've lost religion! And as I'm going to show you next time, we tried secular pseudo-religious alternatives and they drenched the world in blood.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

END

Episode 22 notes

Pascal

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and Catholic theologian. He was a child prodigy who was educated by his father, a tax collector in Rouen.

Hobbes

Thomas Hobbes, was an English philosopher, considered to be one of the founders of modern political philosophy. Hobbes is best known for his 1651 book Leviathan, in which he expounds an influential formulation of social contract theory

Author - Antonio Damasio

Antonio Damasio is a Portuguese-American neuroscientist. He is currently the David Dornsife Chair in Neuroscience, as well as Professor of Psychology, Philosophy, and Neurology, at the University of Southern California, and, additionally, an adjunct professor at the Salk Institute.

Book - Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain - [Buy Here](#)

Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain is a 1994 book by neurologist António Damásio, in part a treatment of the mind/body dualism question

Ockham's Razor

Occam's razor, Ockham's razor, Ocham's razor or law of parsimony is the problem-solving principle that "entities should not be multiplied without necessity."

Thomas Nagel

Thomas Nagel is an American philosopher. He is a University Professor of Philosophy and Law, Emeritus, at New York University, where he taught from 1980 to 2016. His main areas of philosophical interest are legal philosophy, political philosophy, and ethics.

Cogito, ergo sum.

Cogito, ergo sum is a philosophical statement that was made in Latin by René Descartes, usually translated into English as "I think, therefore I am". The phrase originally appeared in French as je pense, donc je suis in his Discourse on the Method, so as to reach a wider audience than Latin would have allowed.

John Searle

John Rogers Searle is an American philosopher. He was Willis S. and Marion Slusser Professor Emeritus of the Philosophy of Mind and Language and Professor of the Graduate School at the University of California, Berkeley.

Weak and Strong AI

With strong AI, machines can actually think and carry out tasks on their own, just like humans do. With weak AI, the machines cannot do this on their own and rely heavily on human interference... They can process and make independent decisions, while weak AI-based machines can only simulate human behavior.

Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant was a German philosopher and one of the central Enlightenment thinkers. Kant's comprehensive and systematic works in epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics have made him one of the most influential figures in modern Western philosophy.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 23 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Romanticism

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. So last time we took a look at three pivotal figures. Two of them are in a dialogue with the central figure that we were talking about last time, and that's Rene Descartes. And

we took a look at the debate between Descartes Hobbes and how that is so current and relevant to us today in the debate around the possible creation of strong AI and what that means both scientifically and existentially to us. And we then took a look at what comes out of Descartes' response to Hobbes. If you remember, Descartes builds a defence against Hobbes proposal for a completely materialistic artificial intelligence computer model of the mind, in terms that are drawn very strictly, and I think rigorously, from the central insights of the scientific revolution, and that seems to save the human soul from the Hobbesian onslaught! But we then note that we pay a really, really devastating price for the Cartesian defence. We have a radical disconnection between mind and body, which is radical because of how embodied your experience of yourself and your world is. A radical disconnection between mind and other minds because you only have access to other minds through bodies, and if there is no possible connection between mind and body, there's no way you can read other people's mental states off of their bodily behaviour.

And then we have the radical disconnection between mind and reality because Descartes gives us two competing models of how we get in touch with what's real. One is we track the mathematical, and then that of course was picked up by Positivism and people who advocate for science as our main access to reality. And then the other is that "Cogito, ergo sum", that all that's left of the contact with reality is the moment where the mind touches itself, and we get this purely subjective notion of realness that's picked up by the Romantic tradition and is also prevalent in our world today. And we swing between the Positivistic and the Romantic notions of how we decide what's real, in a completely unstable fashion.

We then noted that even your connection to yourself has been undermined because the Cartesian project is so radical in its withdrawal, is so radical in its disconnection from mind, body, world, tradition, history, culture, that all the "I" is that's in the Cogito (writes a big, capital "I" on the board), all that is guaranteed to exist is this moment (clicks fingers); Self-awareness. So you end up with this completely atomic, completely autobiographically empty self, adrift in the terrifying, infinite spaces that Pascal talked about. And we talked about Pascal's response to Descartes and how Pascal was convinced that Descartes' attempts — and Pascal was right about this — Descartes'

attempts to try and deal with the anxiety of the scientific revolution by promoting a methodology of searching for certainty would ultimately come to ruin. And of course they have come to ruin, as we've said! Instead, what Pascal pointed out is that we have lost all these other ways of knowing that was so central to the Axial Revolution! All we have left is a spirit of geometry. We have lost the procedural knowing, the perspectival knowing and the participatory knowing that are so integral to the transformative experiences that have been central to our discussion of the Axial ages legacy. And of course, Pascal himself had such a transformative experience and found the Cartesian framework incapable of addressing or articulating it.

Why A Return To A Traditionally Religious Is Not Viable

I'd like to now pick up on what comes after Descartes because I foreshadowed at the end of our last episode that we are in a quite significant situation. We are radically disconnected from ourselves, both our own bodies and our own minds, from other people, from the world, from history, from culture, from sapiential institutions, from traditions of transformation. We are radically isolated and bereft, and yet we face these tremendous crises: ecological crisis, socioeconomic crisis, political crisis, mental health crisis. They're all inter-locking and we face it.../ And they are so exigent and so pervasive and so profound and so complex that we need a fundamental transformation in consciousness, cognition, character, community, in order to really restructure our sense of who and what we are and our relationship to the world, in order to address these crises.

Now, the systematic set of psycho-technologies that have brought about such radical transformations in the past have been religion. And yet part of the heritage of Descartes and the scientific revolution and the ongoing fragmentation that has followed from the Protestant Reformation is an increasing secularisation of the world. That's a little too simplistic! I mean, it's bifurcated: You get the increasing secularisation on one hand and then the increasing attempt to nostalgically retreat to a pre-scientific model, in various forms, of fundamentalism which of course is doomed, ultimately, to a complete kind of failure. But this is happening such that for many of us a return to religion in order to provide the multilevel, multi-variate, complex

transformation that is needed to meet the crises that we're facing, is not available to us precisely because we are post-religious or we are myopically entrenched within a pre-scientific model of the scientific revolution that will in no way avail us with what we need in order to address these crises. So either way you want to turn the religious option is not a viable one.

Why A Secular Approach Is Not Viable Either

What I want to now explore is why a secular solution, for many people, also no longer seems viable. So what I want to argue is that we face this hard problem of needing a religion that is no religion, but cannot be fully secular, but we don't want it to be religious! And it is filled with all this paradoxical tension and contradiction that I've tried to argue is the hallmark of the Cartesian legacy. The way I want to argue that is to try and show the responses to the meaning crisis that come after Descartes, and I'm going to talk about them in terms of the “Pseudo-Religious Ideologies” and how we have been traumatised by our interest [in] and bewitchment by these ideologies precisely because these ideologies have led to Titanic warfare and genocidal bloodshed. And so we're trapped between “we can't return to religion” and “we can't move to its political secular alternatives because of the trauma that has been inflicted by their history”. And so we are stuck! “There is no political solution” to quote The Police, and yet we also are not willing to return to a nostalgic, and therefore impotent, religious framework. So we sit, trapped!

Kant: How Is It That Math Is So Good At Describing Reality?

So how did that arise? So, again, we have to move rapidly and I mean, I don't want to trespass on your time! This video series is already long, but we're moving through Titanic figures here and it always is, I feel, a difficult thing to do! But I want to talk about the figure of Kant, and we'll talk about Kant in a couple places, so I need to introduce him here anyway! So Kant is trying to deal with this fracturing in realness that Descartes has left — the two sides, the inner subjective mind touching itself and the outer of mathematical — and Kant brings up a question that is very important, and there's been other people who have given voice to this, and this is an important one, which is: “How is it that math is so good at describing

reality?”. Why just accept Galileo's claim that it's the language of the universe? [We have, we know law.] See, at one point we had an answer to why math is so descriptive of reality, we had the Neoplatonic answer: The idea that reality is ultimately grounded in intelligible form and those intelligible forms — you remember the Idos, the structural functional organisations — are ultimately abstract, eternal, etc, and that's the ultimate grounding. That's why many people who are realists in mathematics formally and explicitly labeled themselves as Platonists, because that is a way of trying to explain how mathematics gives you access to reality when it is nothing like spacial, temporal, material reality. I mean, why is it that something like math describes physics so well?

And what Kant was really trying to get at is “how do I get those two sides of Descartes together? How do I get the side that says math is real, math gives me access to reality, but all I really have is access to my own mind! How do I get those together?”. And Kant comes up with a really radical proposal. He calls it a “Copernican Revolution”. He thinks it's as important as Copernicus' revolution of the external world. And the Kantian proposal is a very interesting one because what I think it does is, it really radicalises things even more!

So Kant's proposal is [that] these categories, these patterns of intelligibility we find in the world, the mathematical properties, aren't actually there! Not in the sense we think they are! So what Kant does is he basically makes use of a move that Ockham made. If you remember Ockham's razor — and remember, I often say people don't understand what they're invoking when they invoke Ockham's Razor — Ockham's Razor basically says that all these patterns of intelligibility you think are in the world are actually in your mind. What Kant does is [he] says, “well, these ways of measuring the world mathematically, they aren't the features of the world, they are the way in which experience has to be organised in order to make sense to the mind. So let me try and give you an analogy for understanding that. So I'm going to do a reverse on the analogy you've seen me use when we were talking about Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. (Takes off his glasses.) So let's do it the other way around: the world is very blurry. There's too much! And so what I have to do is I have to filter it (puts his glasses back on again). I have to

filter it so that it will fit my eye and my brain, and I, can make sense of it. So these filters have to be put into place.

Getting Separated From “The Thing In Itself”

And so Kant's idea was there are structures in the mind that basically act as these filtering frames. It's kind of both a combination of a filter and a frame (writes Filter-Frame on the board). And what they do is they impose a structure of intelligibility on experience (writes “Impose a structure of intelligibility on the world of experience” below Filter-Frame). So this is opposite to the Platonic [Model]! This is why it's a Copernican Revolution. It's a complete reversal of the Platonic Model. So the idea is [that] I'm not discovering the patterns of intelligibility that structurally functionally organise the world, what's actually happening is this pattern is being imposed on the information coming in so that it will fit my mind and make sense to my mind. And that's the basis of my capacity for reasoning about the world (writes “Reasoning about the World”, off “Impose a structure of intelligibility on the world of experience”). I can reason about the world, not because the world is ultimately rationally structured, but — like Ockham said, “the world is absurd in itself” — I can reason about the world because I have filtered it in such a way that my mind can process it according to its own internal grammar.

So, see? This is why it's a Copernican reversal! I'm not discovering in the world - the mathematical properties of things. My mind is filtering and imposing a structure on them so that it can make sense and think about them. So you have to take this word and this phrase and make it really, really strong (puts real emphasis on the following): Your mind is making sense of things! And when we talk about relevance, we're going to see that there's a deep way in which Kant is, I think, right! Then you say, “okay. So yeah! I see how he's sort of completely inverting the world from Plato. I get that! So math isn't discovering reality! Math is ultimately about how the mind imposes a structure on reality. So it can reason about it”. Great! What does that mean?!? [Well notice/ we've got/ now the mind...] (Draws a small box on the board.) Remember we talked about this model of the contact with the world being withdrawn and it's being withdrawn inside the mind (touches cup, then walks back and raises an empty hand to his forehead) by Luther

and then it's being withdrawn (raises the other empty hand to his head) really by Descartes? Now, not only is it withdrawn, it's in prison. The mind is in here (points inside the little box drawn on the board), and all that can get in here (draws an arrow into the box) always has to pass through this filtering frame (circles a circle around Filter-Frame - the arrow comes from here). And for Kant, that means we can never know the world as it is in itself, as he famously said, "The Thing in Itself", we can never know the world as it is (writes The Thing in Itself below the arrow). This is why, of course, the Cartesian search for certainty is going to be completely undermined.

A New Kantian Understanding Of The Grammar Of How Our Minds Operate, At A Very High Price

So ultimately, notice how this is all coming together: The mind is ultimately only really touching itself (indicates the box). It has no contact now with the world (indicates "The Thing in Itself"). It's not only withdrawn from the world, it's isolated and trapped within itself (indicating the box again). But it does answer the question, "Well, why does math work so well?". Well, math works so well, according to Kant, because that's the grammar of how our minds operate. That's why math, which seems such a mental and abstract and weird thing, seems to [make the world succeed that] give us access to the structure of the world - It's not really giving [us access] to the [structure of] the world! It's creating a structure in the world of experience that makes sense to human beings. Now that's a really big price to pay! The price you pay for getting the two sides of Descartes back together is to get them both inside the mind and to be radically, radically out of touch with the world now.

So you can imagine that people are upset with this! This is a very challenging idea. There's going to be some really important responses to this. There's going to be the Romantics and Hegel, but I want to concentrate on the Romantic solution because I've already mentioned it, and we'll talk a little bit about Hegel when we talk about Marx. So there's an idea here, right?

It's sort of implicit in Kant! There's an idea of information coming in from the world. (Thinking about and attempting to start adding to the above 'box'

diagram.) The problem with this diagram is it's too simplistic. So think of the filter as having sort of levels of processing, right (starts new diagram just below the other one, to help explain the following concepts, with 5 vertical lines)? There's the raw information from the thing in itself (writes 'raw' on the right, near 'The Thing in Itself'), and it's getting processed, it's coming in (gestures moving through the vertical lines of processing). [-] And then there's all of this structure being imposed on it (draws three slightly curved arrows — layers of structure — from the left, pointing back to the layers of processing).

Now this, by the way, is the most prevalent model in most of cognitive psychology and cognitive science; where you see this Kantian grammar of trying to understand the mind is in current contrast between bottom up processing versus top down (to the left, John writes 'bottom up' at the bottom of an up arrow beside 'top down' at the top of a down arrow). So the idea of bottom up processing — we talked about this when we talked about attention — is this is processing that starts in perception and moves towards cognition. Top down is processing that starts in cognition, starts from your knowledge, and move down into perception. Remember, we talked about this when we talked about how you do "this", right (writes THE CAT on the board where each of the middle letters H and A are neither a H or an A, but somewhere between each)? The cat, right? You see this as a H and this as an A (circles them respectively), and how you do that? Well, you use the knowledge of the word to disambiguate the letters, and you use the knowledge of the letters to construct the word. And the two are completely interpenetrating in a completely self-organising manner outside of your cognitive awareness. It actually makes your reading possible for you. It's a condition on the possibility of you reading. And so this is the same model here (indicates the newer box model of the mind with the vertical layers of processing and the layers of structuring). The mind is imposing a structure, and it's filtering and framing and structuring the information coming in from the world. So this Kantian model is pervasive through all of cognitive science and for good reason: it turns out to be a very, very powerful way of looking at things.

But as I moved this way (draws a little right to left arrow below the vertical processing lines), as I move into the mind — as I get inside the framework

(indicates entering the first box diagram of the mind) — my cognition, of course, becomes more and more rational (writes Rational below the diagram, below the little right to left arrow), [it] becomes more and more mathematically, logically intelligible. But think about it! Notice you've got this weird idea now! As my processing becomes more rational, more logically mathematical, I'm actually getting farther and farther away from being in contact with the world! Isn't that a... See... notice the platonic [in]version, the comp[lete]... the platonic reversion, like a complete reversal, of the platonic structure is bringing with it a reverse consequence. So for Plato, as you pursue rationality, you move deeper and deeper into reality. But for Kant, notice as I move more and more into rationality, I moving away from being in contact with reality! Now what comes to mind is, well, isn't the opposite then the case? And think about how this is going to make Freud and Jung possible! I mean, you know how you get Carl Young? Take Kant.../ if you don't know Kant, stop talking about Jung! Because Jung repeatedly tells his readers "I'm a, Neo-Kantian. I'm through and through a Kantian". He tells you that repeatedly! And so if you don't know Kant, shut up about Jung, because you're not understanding Jung properly! The way you get Jung is you take [Kant and you take] Kant's epistemology and you add it to Gnostic mythology, and that's how you get [Jung]. That's the equation for Jung (writes "Kant + Gnostic = Jung" on the board)!

The Rise Of The Romantics, Romantic Love And Romanticism

So why do I say this? We'll think about this because if I go the other way (left to right), if I open the mind up to these more irrational, less fully processed parts of cognition, the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious aspects of my experience, as I move into the right, the imaginary, irrational, dream like aspects of my cognition, I'm going to lose rationality!! But notice what I'm gaining; I'm gaining back that lost contact with the world. Lachman talks about this in a really good book called The Lost Knowledge of the Imagination. And so I think this is a misunderstanding, but notice what's going on here — and this is why my attitude towards the romantics is so ambivalent — they're picking up on Pascal! They're trying to recapture the lost perspectival, participatory knowledge! The actual, involved contact with reality! But because they're

inside this Kantian framework (indicates the diagrams on the board), the way that's going to happen is by moving (left to right) into the depths of the irrational aspects of the mind because those are the parts of the mind that are closer to reality. And so, of course, what Jung and Freud are going to do is they're going to take [that] what the romantics do about how to reach out into the world and they're going to make it... well at least for Freud it's completely reaching down into the psyche. For Jung, it's reaching down into the psyche and back out into the world. We'll come back to that later.

So this is the main idea of romanticism! Romanticism, ultimately, isn't about loving your sexual partner in a particular way. It's the idea that we can recapture contact with reality by moving away from the rational layers of cognition and into the irrational layers. Why does that get associated with love? Because remember, in the Neoplatonic tradition, [which] the romantics, in this twisted way, are trying to get back to — they're trying to get back to Gnosis and participatory knowing — in that Platonic tradition, the quintessential form of participatory, perspectival knowing is love. The romantics have this.../ they get that! They're remembering that! So, we move into the irrational (gesturing left to right on the diagrams on the board) and we'll regain contact [with] and, of course, that relationship to the world where we're actually in touch with the other, and there's mutual disclosure between myself and the other - that's love. And so the Romantic return to reality through irrationality gets connected with love, and that's how we get romantic love. And we get the idea of it as a fundamentally irrational force, and you get romanticism.

And then you get the idea that, well, "what is the faculty that stands between perception and reason?". What's between.../ here's perception here (writes Perception on the board) — the part where The Thing in Itself [is], the world — and here's reason up here (writes Reason above Perception). What's the faculty in between [them], that mathematically intelligible and the sensuously experienced [faculty]? Well, it's imagination (writes Imagination between Perception and Reason).

Imagination: Expression And Impression

Imagination is where the mind initially imposes that order on the raw data of experience. See for us - And the romantics were very critical of this and this

is something that they were right about! - We understand the imagination just as moving mental images around in our head. And the romantics made a big distinction between “imagination” and that faculty which they called “fancy”! Or like “Phantasm”, right? No, no, for them imagination is how the mind imposes structure on raw data so that it becomes available to reason. And so the imagination is the place in which we can get closer, outside of the reason, to the access to reality. So music and art are going to be understood as giving us access, through the imagination, to what's real. Why? Because music and art are where the mind seems to be imposing an order in such a way that meaning is made, that we can then rationally reflect upon.

So you're getting two views now that are coming into opposition. One, the older view, represented by the enlightenment — I mean that in the scientific sense, not the Buddhist enlightenment — people like John Locke: “the mind is an empty canvas and sense experience comes in and writes on it”. That's empiricism. So the mind is a blank slate. The romantics have exactly the opposite view: “We don't actually ever know what the world is in and of itself. The world is an empty canvas on which imagination expresses...” presses itself out. This is why expression (writes “ex-pression” on the board) is so important to the romantics: to press yourself, to press out, the mind in imagination presses itself onto the world. And of course that's where Jung and Freud are going to get the notion of ‘projecting onto the world’ from. So you have these two com[peting].../ and that's why the Romantics see themselves in deep competition with the Empiricists who of course are part of what becomes known as the Scientific Model.

So what's going on here is, these two views... The mind is a blank slate upon which the world impresses itself - Locke uses the term ‘impressions’; the world impresses itself on your mind. Or the romantics, “No, no! The world is a blank canvas upon which the mind expresses itself!”. And both are wrong! I mean, I very rarely just sort of state things. But I'm really confident of this! Both of these models: the mind of a blank slate is just overwhelmingly wrong! Way too much argument and evidence against it. And this model of the world as a blank slate that we merely express ourSelf onto is also wrong.

Romanticism Becomes The First Pseudo-Religious Ideology

But what we get is we get this weird new thing: everybody is swept up in the Romanticism. So Romanticism becomes a pan-European movement. It's a movement of the arts. It's a movement in literature. Goethe writes "The Sorrows of Young Werther". You have people like Beethoven bringing in a romantic element to music. You have lots of romantic poetry: think of Blake, think of Wordsworth. So you have this movement! It gets taken up into religion by Schleiermacher as a way of trying to understand religion. It's a pan-European movement. And it does, or it... Oh!! (exasperates), it's hard to be fair to this, but at least, aghhh... at least it appears to do what religion used to do. It integrates music and art and literature and the project of trying to find and make meaning in the scientific worldview, by giving you this whole framework of how you regained contact with reality - one of the hallmarks of the religious quest! You're going to regain contact with reality by moving into the world of the imagination, making use of art and music and poetry and literature, all of the machinery — we'll talk about this later — of religion. And what it's going to do is irrationally take you into contact with reality. So Romanticism is the first and it is the godfather/godmother of all the pseudo-religious ideology.

It looks like, behaves like and performs a kind of massive transformation on culture and cognition and consciousness! And people start experimenting with Altered States of Consciousness precisely because of all of this, all of this way of thinking. This is why Freud is going to take a look at hypnosis, etc... Altered States of consciousness, people are taking various drugs: Coleridge and others. There's all of this experimentation precisely because of this way of looking at things! But what it does, you're paying a really devastating price for this Pseudo-Religious Ideology of Romanticism. And if you think that Romanticism is not alive in our culture, you're not paying attention to the fact that we still understand and use the grammar of Romanticism to talk about love! And we even buy into, at least for periods of time, a romantic model of how love operates: romantic comedies are these weird metaphysical perversions in which we throw away the scientific model of things and believe that somehow love is this irrational force that brings us in contact with the course of history, at least our own personal history and

destiny, and that of another person! It's all so much bullshit!! Right? And it's devastatingly bad bullshit, because you are still trapped where Luther and Descartes left you. You're still trapped inside your mind (taps inside the box diagram on the board), not really in touch with things, and the only way you get in touch with them is by thinking and behaving irrationally???

You are trying to make this machinery (gestures to the board) of the imagination carry all of the Neoplatonic weight that religion and tradition and philosophy and history carried. You try to make your romantic partner take the role of all of that. No person can bear that. No human relationship can bear that burden. So we go into our romantic relationships with unreachable expectations of how the person is going to address everything that we've lost in our history. And of course they can't! Which of course is why many people simultaneously say that their romantic relationships are the things where they find or look for the most meaning in their life and their romantic relationships are those things that precisely caused them the most trauma and suffering their life.

Pseudo-Religious Ideologies - Just Words

So these pseudo-religious ideologies are really, really important because they point to an attempt to try and get into words... try to get into words, to propositions, into ideological ways of thinking everything that religions used to do for us! Because the problem with the Romantics.../ See the romantics get this in one way! They get that the language can't do it all. And that's why they turn to poetry, right? "To see the world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wildflower, to see infinity in the Palm of your hand and spend eternity in an hour." There's Blake trying to use imagery to point to a transformative experience, a mystical experience. But you see the problem is, if you don't have any sapiential traditions, if you don't have the spiritual exercises that Hadot talks about, if you don't have the systematic set of psycho-technologies, if you do not have regular and reliable methods and guides for these transformative experiences, all you have in the end are the words.

And if you're not Blake, if you're not Coleridge, when you read the poem, you don't.../ I mean, even if you can appreciate how great a poem it is, you're not capable of getting much from it because everything has been reduced to the words. See the Romantics didn't give us anything else. They

don't give us practices. They don't give us institutions. They don't give us systematic sets of psycho-technologies. They give us promises, they give us images and they give us words. It's a Pseudo-Religious Ideology. So it sweeps the continent, but it's like spiritual junk food. It's tasty, but it's not nutritious.

And so what happens to it? Well, it quickly gets translated into nastier forms. Not without first of all, of course, setting the world on fire. Romanticism plays a big role in the rise of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Don't forget Romanticism.../ Beethoven is writing music initially because he's a fan of Napoleon and when Napoleon crowns himself emperor that's when Beethoven actually abandons him. This is the time we're talking about! Why? Why would the Romantics be attracted to Napoleon? Now you see... We have to be careful here! There's some very good podcasts you can listen to comparing Napoleon to Hitler. "Ohhh! Aghhhh! Ohhhh (sounds of exasperation!)!" Right? That's your reaction! As soon I mentioned the word Hitler! ...That's fine! But Why...? Of course, Napoleon didn't engage in genocide, but he drenches Europe in blood. He launches Imperial conquests. There's lots of good historians that say "maybe we only like Napoleon because more time has passed"! They like him... Look what Napoleon is doing by force of will — and that's what the imagination is — he is pressing a structure on the world! He is restructuring the world. He is painting his picture onto the world. Here is the "Isolated Self" pressing itself out on the world, imagining the world into another shape and existence.

The Failure Of Romanticism

So of course, Napoleon is defeated and science continues to move on! And what happens is there's a response to the failure of Romanticism - it ultimately fails! Now, here's the thing that we have to understand — and I've tried to indicate this to you — Romanticism fails. It fails to actually do what it sets out to do: it fails to be the replacement for Christianity [and in that], but it doesn't go away. So the way I put those two together — the fact that it fails, which I tried to show you, but it doesn't go away, which I've tried to show you — is the notion of that we live with decadent Romanticism. We live in decadent Romanticism and romantic comedies are the quintessential form of pornography in which we indulge in decadent Romanticism.

So what happens after the failure of this great Pseudo-Religious Ideology? Well, there are further attempts to try and understand these Romantic (wipes board clean mid-sentence), the irrational aspects of the psyche and this world making capacity and the way... and it's... we're still carrying this — member from [what] Ockham and Aquinas — the priority of the will.

Schopenhauer And The Priority Of The Will - The Will To Live

So here Romanticism very quickly passes into Schopenhauer (writes Schopenhauer on the board) who is the godfather of Nihilism — and notice that a lot of these names are not going to be German: Goethe, one of the founding figures of romanticism, is German, even though he comes to reject it later; Schopenhauer is German; Nietzsche is German; Hegel is German; Marx is German... Again, everything keeps happening in Germany and I've shown you why! Because that's where this history is unfolding. What does Schopenhauer argue? Well, He completely internalises that model of the world that we saw around the time of Ockham and even in Luther, he picks up on Kant, but he says... (readying to draw on the board) now, let's use an "up down model" (draws a domino shape vertically and starts in the top box): Here's the Rational part. Remember? And it's out of touch with reality, and like the Romantics, here's the Irrational part (writes Rational in the top box and Irrational in the bottom box).

And the Romantics saw this (irrational) as imagination (writes imagination to the right, off of the Irrational piece of the domino) and they saw it sort of spontaneously happening! But it's still an act of will (writes will off of imagination) because they talk about 'expression', pressing out (writes expression beside will). But Schopenhauer really zeroes in on this (circles will), and he says, "no, no! What's down here is arbitrary will!" (Now on the left, writes Arbitrary [Will] off of the Irrational piece of the domino). Notice that it's like, "God" - it's like that God that we get after Ockham!! This is the will to live; the raw [-] will to live. The raw will (writes Will to Live under Arbitrary Will). This is what drives you, this is what structures, this is what filters and frame[s] all of your experience. This will to live. Of course, this is going to be important to a lot of modern discourse. It's relentless and it's

pointless, because it is not rational! And here's where Schopenhauer does a twist.

It's doing this (the will acts irrationally), but not fundamentally in service of your rational mind; it makes reasoning possible. But all of this (indicates the whole domino—the rational and irrational mind)... So Kant does the Copernican revolution — he inverts Protestantism -- and then Schopenhauer inverts Kant! Kant [said] that this [irrational] is processing is for the sake of this [rational]. But what Schopenhauer says is, “no, no! This (irrational) is actually who's in charge!”. He says the will is like a huge man and the ego (gestures Rational) is sitting on his shoulders. This is a little machine in the service of this (draws a circle around rational, with an arrow pointing around and down towards irrational). And if you don't think that's Carl Jung, you better go back and read some more Jung. That's what I mean, if you don't get this Kantian heritage, you're not reading Jung very well!

So, Schopenhauer! Let's use one of Schopenhauer quotes because it really, really brings this out and you can see how it prefigures Freud in such a powerful way. Schopenhauer says that “sex is the cruel joke that the species plays on the individual”. Because what sex is, is this ‘Will To Live’, this ‘Irrational’ Will to Live and it filters and frames all of your experience and it promises you meaning and fulfilment in everything that God and religion and history pro[mise]! ...and then you have it [do it!], and none of that accrues to you!!! And he says, “and then what's the difference between you who does that for 40 years and a Mayfly that does it for one day?”.

Nihilism And Machines Of Meaningless Existence; Joining Forces With Romanticism

So we're restlessly driven by these irrat[ional]... Look at how, again, everything's being drawn into the mind and now drawn into the unconscious, irrational parts.../ So this is where that Arbitrary God has now withdrawn [to] in that Lutheran, Cartesian, now Kantian, now Schopenhauer way! It's inside of you and we're just all machines! And you get Richard Dawkins: “We're all just replicating machines for our selfish genes”. It's not a radical idea! We think we're doing all of this for (indicates Rational), but it's actually all (indicates Irrational). And so for Schopenhauer it's this nihilism, it's this

pessimism because he saw that once you remove the connection between Meaning Making and Rationality, you pay a very, very devastating price for it. And so what do you have there?

Well, what do you have? You have a meaningless existence because it's being shaped and framed, not in contact with reality, not even in contact with your rational egocentric way of.../ it's just an irrational, unconscious arbitrary will to live that is shaping, filtering and framing all of your experience with the world. And then you die! And what was it all for? Schopenhauer has enough of the Romantics left in him that he has this idea that, in art and music, we can become disinterested enough in our own self, we can quiet the Will To Live enough that we can get momentary breaks, momentary vacation, momentary respite from this restless pointless Will To Live. So this is how this is the Godfather, this is how Romanticism as a Pseudo-Religious Ideology, and Nihilism as an existential response become inextricably linked together. Even though most people don't realise it. Most people don't realise that, In fact, these two things, Romanticism and Nihilism, are actually deeply intertwined and closely related to each other. So think about that when Valentine's Day rolls around! Are you actually expressing the contact with reality, or are you merely being pushed around by the irrational will to live?!

Fredric Nietzsche

So Schopenhauer, of course, has a great follower, a person who is now very prominent, because if [Schopenhauer] is the godfather of Nihilism, Nietzsche is the godfather of Postmodernism (writes Nietzsche on the board at the end of an arrow coming down off Schopenhauer). So Nietzsche is a disciple of Schopenhauer. He's actually a disciple of both Schopenhauer and Wagner (writes Wagner on the board, level with Schopenhauer, with another arrow coming down to Nietzsche) and Wagner represents romanticism in music breaking down. So Wagner takes Romanticism and he sort of breaks the last vestiges of grammar - he breaks the connection to the home key, all kinds of things! He opens up the possibility for music becoming untethered from its tradition, in very powerful ways. And of course, the problem with Wagner is he's also a very vicious anti-Semite! And you might say, "what's going on? Like, why... what is going on with Germany [and] this

antisemitism thing?"! Well first of all, we've seen how Gnosticism — which is running as an undercurrent, as I mentioned, underneath the Rhineland mystics and other things — has a possible, I'm not equating the two, but Gnosticism has a possible version of it that is deeply antisemitic. But more importantly, you have a connection back to Luther (writes Luther in the middle of, and above Nietzsche and Schopenhauer).

#ON-SCRENE NOTE:

QUOTE

Luther anti-semitically states that “we are at fault in not slaying them [the Jews].”

The treatise also argues for burning their books, synagogues, and homes, and drafting them into forced labor or exiling them.

#END OF NOTE#

Why would Luther say that? Well, Luther would say that because the Jews, in Luther's mind, are followers of the law and people — and remember Luther has an interpretation following Augustine and Paul and his own exacerbation of it — people who follow the law are people who are trying to earn their salvation. The point of the law is to reveal to you that you're completely incapable of earning your salvation. And so the Jews, who reject Jesus, reject faith and salvation in terms of the law. So the Jews are evil! It's interesting that the two great people (draws a vertical, double ended arrow between the two), the people who are consider to have created modern German style are Lutheran and Nietzsche (indicates them both on the board respectively).

Nietzsche, The Will To Power And A New Self-Transcendence

What does Nietzsche do? Does he give up all of this (indicates the diagram on the board)? No, he takes it and he tries to invert it. He keeps the notion of will. He keeps the fact that it's deeper than r[?/]. He keeps that it's framing the world, filtering. He keeps all of that, but he rejects a lot of the Kantian stuff. He rejects the Platonic stuff. He famously says, “I hate Socrates! He's

so close to me, I'm always fighting him". He's got this deep conflict with the Axial Revolution. Why? Because he comes up with this way of responding to the nihilism of Schopenhauer with the "Will To Power" (written under Nietzsche). It shares some features with somebody we'll talk about later, another important Cartesian thinker we're going to come back to, Spinoza - The notion of conatus. So the idea here (indicates the domino diagram) is that everything has a Will To Live. Here, for Nietzsche, everything has a Will To Power. Everything is pressing itself out. And the thing about Nietzsche is, he thinks that this is not just a feature of our minds. This is a feature of reality itself. That when we're.../ So Schopenhauer had the idea "when we're in touch with the will to live, we're actually in touch with that 'driving force'", because again, the most irrational part of us is the part that's in touch with reality. Then you get this Will To Power, this irrational, filtering, framing thing. But whereas here (Domino, Will To Live side) it's pessimistic because it's wearying and it's relentless and meaningless (makes a series of inward, withdrawing gestures), here Nietzsche says, "no, no! Turn it around. Stop! Stop being..." and this is going to be his point, "stop being so Christian! Stop thinking about all that negotiation as what's right! This will to power, this pre-Christian desire to extend and create and master oneself in the world (makes a series of grand, outward gestures), that's what we need!". Because Nietzsche sees in it something, and there's a deep insight here! And if we're going to criticise Nietzsche and the postmodernists — I don't understand people who advocate for Nietzsche and criticise postmodernism! You've got to spend more time getting that working out together, right? — But Nietzsche sees something here. He sees a way of getting back something that was lost in this whole history (draws a big arrow from Will To Power and writes Self Transcendence and underlines it). How can we get self-transcendence?

Because Nietzsche tries to understand the Will To Power as exactly that desire from the Axial Revolution to transcend oneself, to go above oneself, to create beyond oneself (again, makes a series of grand, upward and outward gestures). And he had, his father was a Lutheran pastor. Hmm? So he understands Christianity in a totally Lutheran way: that Christianity is about suppressing this capacity for self transcendence. It's an unfair reading of Christianity - it certainly doesn't capture Neoplatonic Christianity!

Nietzsche is deeply influenced by the Stoics and a lot of Axial-age thinkers and he's trying to bring it back, but he's blocked in some important ways by this Lutheran interpretation of Christianity. So Nietzsche says Christianity represses this (Self Transcendence), and that is why we suffer! But if we remove the Christian condemnation of this (Self Transcendence), then the pessimistic, world wearying, will to live becomes the active, creative act of self transcendence, and we can get back the meaning that was lost in the Meaning Crisis.

A Near Complete Model, Dangerously Thwarted By Self Deception

But, that's a very dangerous way to start thinking - in a lot of ways! Because here's my deepest critique of Nietzsche — and it's really hard to critique Nietzsche because he doesn't have a single voice! He has many voices and they undermine and criticise each other. It's maddening! And that's why, if anybody says they have sort of a single interpretation of Nietzsche, you have to really be careful and cautious about it, because reading Nietzsche is like reading the Bible - purposefully! He purposefully modelled himself... He wrote "Also sprach Zarathustra" to try and replace the Bible because he understood the role of myth and imagery and symbol, because he's still influenced by the Romantics! — But here's my criticism: See, Nietzsche gets this... He understands how self deceptive we are. He constantly is criticising human beings for being self deceptive, but he can't do anything about it! He can't do anything about it because he has reduced, in his mind.../ reason has gone through this Kantian thing, and this Cartesian thing, and reason is this logical framing thing. He's lost something! ...because the problem for Nietzsche is you have self-transcendence without the machinery of dealing with self deception, because what's the machinery for dealing with self deception from the Platonic tradition that Nietzsche rejects? That's what Rationality really is. Rationality is ultimately about the set of psycho-technologies that afford self-transcendence by training you, skilfully, to overcome Self deception.

And because, although he is so aware of self deception because of this heritage (Will To Live diagram) and because he is so attracted to Self transcendence, there's a tragedy in Nietzsche — which is why I believe he

was attracted to tragedy — because although he wants self-transcendence, he could not provide us with the machinery of overcoming self deception, other than endless critique, endless satire, endlessly undermining himself. He is honest. But he's not capable of the rationality that is actually the core of addressing self deception. And therefore he has a one sided model of Self-Transcendence enmeshed in a Will To Power. And that is going to be a very dangerous thing and we're going to take a look more at that when we take a look at more Pseudo-Religious Ideologies and how they drenched the World in post-Napoleonic blood next time.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

END

Episode 23 Notes

“there is no political solution”
from a song by The Police
"Spirits In The Material World"

lyrics:

There is no political solution
To our troubled evolution
Have no faith in constitution
There is no bloody revolution
We are spirits in the material world
Our so-called leaders speak
With words they try to jail you
They subjugate the meek
But it's the rhetoric of failure
We are spirits in the material world
Are spirits in the material world
Are spirits in the material world
Are spirits in the material world

Where does the answer lie?
Living from day to day
If it's something we can't buy
There must be another way
We are spirits in the material world
Are spirits in the material world

The Police

The Police were an English rock band formed in London in 1977. For most of their history the line-up consisted of primary songwriter Sting, Andy Summers, and Stewart Copeland. The Police became globally popular in the late 1970s and early 1980s

Kant

Immanuel Kant was a German philosopher and one of the central Enlightenment thinkers. Kant's comprehensive and systematic works in epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics have made him one of the most influential figures in modern Western philosophy

Hegel

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was a German philosopher and an important figure in German idealism. He is considered one of the fundamental figures of modern Western philosophy, with his influence extending to the entire range of contemporary philosophical issues, from aesthetics to ontology to politics, both in the analytic and continental tradition

Marx

Karl Heinrich Marx was a German philosopher, economist, historian, sociologist, political theorist, journalist and socialist revolutionary. Born in Trier, Germany, Marx studied law and philosophy at university. He married Jenny von Westphalen in 1843.

Lachman

Gary Joseph Lachman, also known as Gary Valentine, is an American writer and musician. He came to prominence in the mid-1970s as the bass guitarist for rock band Blondie. Since the 1990s, Lachman has written full-time, often about mysticism and occultism.

[The Lost Knowledge of the Imagination - Buy Here](#)

The ability to imagine is at the heart of what makes us human. Through our imagination we experience more fully the world both around us and within us. Imagination plays a key role in creativity and innovation. Until the seventeenth century, the human imagination was celebrated.

John Locke

John Locke FRS was an English philosopher and physician, widely regarded as one of the most influential of Enlightenment thinkers and commonly known as the "Father of Liberalism".

Goethe

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was a German writer and statesman. His works include: four novels; epic and lyric poetry; prose and verse dramas; memoirs; an autobiography; literary and aesthetic criticism; and treatises on botany, anatomy, and colour.

[The Sorrows of Young Werther](#)

The Sorrows of Young Werther is a loosely autobiographical epistolary novel by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. First published in 1774, it reappeared as a revised edition in 1787. It was one of the most important novels in the Sturm und Drang period in German literature, and influenced the later Romantic movement.

Book mentioned - The Sorrows Of Young Werther - [Buy Here](#)

Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven was a German composer and pianist whose music ranks amongst the most performed of the classical music repertoire; he

remains one of the most admired composers in the history of Western music. His works span the transition from the classical period to the romantic era in classical music.

Blake

William Blake was an English poet, painter, and printmaker. Largely unrecognised during his lifetime, Blake is now considered a seminal figure in the history of the poetry and visual arts of the Romantic Age.

Wordsworth

William Wordsworth was an English Romantic poet who, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped to launch the Romantic Age in English literature with their joint publication *Lyrical Ballads*.

Schleiermacher

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher was a German theologian, philosopher, and biblical scholar known for his attempt to reconcile the criticisms of the Enlightenment with traditional Protestant Christianity.

Freud

Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, a clinical method for treating psychopathology through dialogue between a patient and a psychoanalyst. Freud was born to Galician Jewish parents in the Moravian town of Freiberg, in the Austrian Empire.

Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an English poet, literary critic, philosopher and theologian who, with his friend William Wordsworth, was a founder of the Romantic Movement in England and a member of the Lake Poets. He also shared volumes and collaborated with Charles Lamb, Robert Southey, and Charles Lloyd.

Schopenhauer

Arthur Schopenhauer was a German philosopher. He is best known for his 1818 work *The World as Will and Representation*, which characterizes the

phenomenal world as the product of a blind and insatiable metaphysical will.

Nihilism

Nihilism refers to a number of different views in philosophy, all of which express some form of negation towards common philosophical concepts, such as knowledge, existence, or the meaning of life.

Nietzsche

Nietzsche was a German philosopher, essayist, and cultural critic. His writings on truth, morality, language, aesthetics, cultural theory, history, nihilism, power, consciousness, and the meaning of existence have exerted an enormous influence on Western philosophy and intellectual history.

Richard Dawkins

Richard Dawkins FRS FRSL is a British ethologist, evolutionary biologist, and author. He is an emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford, and was the University of Oxford's Professor for Public Understanding of Science from 1995 until 2008.

<https://www.richarddawkins.net>

The Selfish Gene (passively referenced)

The Selfish Gene is a 1976 book on evolution by the biologist Richard Dawkins, in which the author builds upon the principal theory of George C. Williams's Adaptation and Natural Selection.

Book Mentioned - The Selfish Gene - [Buy Here](#)

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a broad movement that developed in the mid- to late 20th century across philosophy, the arts, architecture, and criticism, marking a departure from modernism. The term has been more generally applied to describe a historical era said to follow after modernity and the tendencies of this era.

Conatus

The notion of conatus.

Conatus is a central theme in the philosophy of Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677). According to Spinoza, "each thing, as far as it lies in itself, strives to persevere in its being" (Ethics, part 3, prop. ... 5); each thing, therefore, "is opposed to everything which can take its existence away" (Ethics, part 3, prop.)

[**Also sprach Zarathustra**](#)

Also sprach Zarathustra, Op. 30 is a tone poem by Richard Strauss, composed in 1896 and inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical 1883-1885 novel Thus Spoke Zarathustra. The composer conducted its first performance on 27 November 1896 in Frankfurt. A typical performance lasts half an hour.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None (German: Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen, also translated as Thus Spake Zarathustra) is a philosophical novel by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, composed in four parts written and published between 1883 and 1885

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 24 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Hegel

Welcome back. This is the 24th episode of awakening from the meaning crisis. Last time we were talking about the historical developments that happened around Kant. We took a look at Kant and Schopenhauer and

Nietzsche, and I presented Nietzsche as one of the great prophets — I'm using that in the old Testament sense of prophet — of the Meaning Crisis. And we talked about a way of understanding what Nietzsche was saying - how It's not just simply atheism. And we also took a look at a way in which Nietzsche doesn't really, adequately, give us a response to the Meaning Crisis although he indicates that an important project within the response to the Meaning Crisis is how to reappropriate, from the Axial legacy, the idea of radical self-transcendence within a secular, scientific worldview.

Now I want to go back to Kant and trace out another important line of development that's going to be crucial for understanding the Meaning Crisis. And that's the line that comes from Kant and to Hegel (writes both names on the board; Kant at the top with a small line down to Hegel). I can't go through all the various important German thinkers like Fichte and Schelling, but I want to talk a lot about Hegel because of the tremendous impact Hegel has had on the political landscape and the cultural landscape surrounding the Meaning Crisis. And as we know, Kant also had a deep influence on the Romantics who also have a significant impact on Hegel.

So if you remember Kant has this model of the way the mind Is framing reality (draws a square box) in order to produce what is rational within it (draws an arrow pointing into the box, at 'Rational'). And this was then taken by the Romantics and reversed in an interesting way (adds additional lines to the right side of the box - 'filter' lines) that the closer you got to [the actual contact with] reestablishing the contact with reality (writes Reality to the right of the box diagram), the more you're reversing this process of rationalisation, and you're coming into contact with reality via more irrational States of mind. And what Kant had of course is the idea that reality out here was The Thing In Itself (writes The Thing In Itself outside the box, beside Reality), which we cannot directly interact with. We can only interact with our experience. Do you see how the disconnection from the world becomes radicalised in Kant and all the meaning is totally within a self-enclosed activity, a self constructing, self-enclosed activity of the mind. And the thing in itself is nothing that we can come into rational contact with. And that's why, of course, as I said, the Romantics propose this radical idea — sort of the exact opposite of the Axial Revolution — that by moving into more irrational states, we can reestablish contact with reality.

Now, Hegel is aware of both the Romantic response and the Kantian framework. And talking about Hegel is - Oh my gosh! Hegel is a Titanic and complex and difficult tinker! And so, once again, I want to remind everybody that I'm trying to cut through a lot of material. I'm trying to zero in on those aspects of Hegel's thought that are, I think, directly relevant to understanding the genealogy of the Meaning Crisis.

So what Hegel says, first of all, is that this idea (The Thing In Itself) makes no sense! Hegel points out that The Thing In Itself is completely unknowable, and for something to be completely unknowable, he argues, is indistinguishable from it being nonexistent. If there is nothing that can possibly be known about it, then we should stop thinking about it as something that exists, something that should be taken into account when we're talking about a relationship to reality. And if you remove The Thing In Itself, then you get this idea: that reality is totally found within this structure (indicates just the box diagram alone). This is of course a form of idealism (writes Idealism off to the left of the box diagram), which has nothing to do with pursuing ideals. Idealism is the idea that reality is ultimately constructed, made by, the mind in some fashion. Hegel makes the famous claim that "the real is the rational," that this rational stuff and reality are actually identical. If you get rid of this side of the equation — The thing in itself — all you're left with is this (box); that reality is the rational. The real is the rational, and the rational is the real. And this of course is an important derivation, I think is the correct way of putting it, from the original insight from Parmenides — that we saw exemplified in Plato — that there's a deep connection between being and being known. That there's a deep connection between our sensing something as real — and I don't mean just physically sensing, I mean making sense — our sensing something as real and how intelligible it is to us, how knowable it is to us. And Perl, in his book "Thinking Being", the Classical introduction to metaphysics, just does a fantastic job at explaining how profoundly fecund this idea has been for us. So Hegel takes that Platonic inspiration and he weds it to a critique of The Thing In Itself and then we get this idea that what's going on actually is not that the mind, like in Kant, is making the structures of rational experience of reality. No, no, you get that the mind is actually making the structures of reality itself.

Well, what about the irrational stuff that the Romantics were talking about? Well, Hegel sort of re-understands and reinterprets these developmentally! He understands the irrational aspects of the mind not as us moving towards the contact with the unknowable Thing In Itself (left to right on the diagram through the filter edge of the box). Instead the irrational aspects of the mind are actually a potential within the mind, a developmental potential for rationality. So the idea is [that] our rational, intelligible experience, has not fully developed, has not been fully self-actualised, and you can hear the Aristotelian aspects in Hegel's thought.

Living Systems Of Patterns Of Intelligibility - Geist

Now, when I start talking about mind in this way, and rationality, we have to be very careful: we're not talking about mind in a sense that it's your mind, the individual mind. We're talking about mind in an extended sense. We're talking about the entire system of patterns of intelligibility that are at work in humanity. All of the patterns of intelligibility that we're using to make sense in this (indicates box diagram of mind/reality) profound way. If you think about this room, for example (gestures the room with wide arms), and my mind is structuring my experience (further gesturing). And then if you give Hegel his critique of Kant — that there's nothing beyond the structuring of experience (removal of The Thing In Itself) — then you have the idea that this is all, in a sense — in a deeply metaphysical sense — this is all (still gesturing the room) the activity of these patterns of intelligibility. The patterns of intelligibility and reality is this mind in this extended sense. So try to think of these patterns of intelligibility as structuring reality, not just the experience of reality, and that they form a living system: they're developing. Like in Aristotle, it's like a living thing. They're going through a process of self-actualisation. The irrational elements are constantly being transformed into more rational intelligible elements.

So the Germans have a great word for all of this, the word Geist, and like all German words. It doesn't train, translate that readily into English. It covers these two words that we separate in English and it overlaps between them mind and spirit (all three words written on the board), because what it's trying to pick up on are, again, this living system of patterns of intelligibility (gestures around the room again with wide arms) by which we ultimately

makes sense. And given this argument against an unknowable reality, being a reality (the negation of The Thing In Itself), then the patterns by [which we are] making sense are identical to the patterns by which reality is intelligibly structured. So this isn't individual idealism. This is what's going to become known as Absolute Idealism (writes Absolute above Idealism on the left of the box diagram) because the absolute is another term that's used for this system of self-realisation of the patterns of intelligibility, rather than talking about an individual mind. I'm trying not to get too abstract here, but it's hard not to be abstract when you're talking about Hegel's idealism! And so my task with you is to try and explain this in a way that constantly makes it plausible to you and also at least viable so you can see why it became an attraction the way of thinking. If you deeply buy Kant and the Romantics, and yet you accept Hegel's argument against this (The Thing In Itself), you reinterpret the Romantics the way he did you get this position (Geist).

Finding Geist Through History

How do you study it? How do you understand it? How do you study [these] living systems of patterns of intelligibility that structure experience and reality? Well, you study history. And here you can see, of course, the deep influence of Christianity and, going back to the Axial Revolution within ancient Israel about understanding history as the process by which reality, and our understanding of reality, are co-unfolding together. So you study history and you look for patterns in the history. What are you looking? What kind of patterns [are you looking for]? These are patterns of how we have systematically made sense, how cultures have created World-views, ways of making sense, ways in which we have — as I've often used the metaphor — we've created grammars by which we make sense of ourselves and the world. So you can see some of the influence of Hegel on some of the terms and ideas that I've been using as we've been engaging in our historical analysis.

So these are patterns we realise, and I want to really pick up on the double meaning of this word (writes Realise on the board) like I've indicated before when realising means, here, both that it is something we experience, but it is also a way in which things are being made real, coming into realness, coming into reality in a developmental sense. So we're talking about looking

at history to discover the development of this grammar of intelligibility, this grammar of human thinking, human being, human living, how humans are 'worlding,' how they're creating worlds of intelligible patterns in which we can act in a meaningful manner and understand ourselves, the world and each other. And what you discover, Hegel said, is if you look at this history you see [that] it's not static. You can see that it is going through a developmental process and that development is driven by [sort of] two opposing movements or forces.

Differentiation And Integration Lead To An

Understanding Of Systematisation

One is a process of differentiation. (Wipes the board clean and writes Differentiation.) So think about when you're trying to make sense, what do you have to do often? You have to grasp the differences between things. You have to distinguish, you have to clarify, you have the contrast. So a good way of thinking about this is this term we use, "Articulation" (written after differentiation). Articulation means to speak and to make sense, but it also means to find all the joints, find the division points between things. So part of what we're doing when we're trying to make sense [is] we're engaging in a process of "differentiation articulation". But of course, we also are doing the other, we are doing integration (writes Integration below Differentiation). We are gathering things together so that we have systematic connection[s] that are being realised. [Again, it's, we're not] We're becoming aware of them, but we're also constituting them and making them. And, again, not as individuals, but as participants in this project of how the patterns of intelligibility are working themselves out through our thought, through our behavior, through our ways of living and being in the world. So Hegel understands the process of 'understanding' as the creation of a system; systematisation (connects both Differentiation and Integration together on the left, writing Systematisation), because when I'm doing this, when I'm differentiating things and also integrating them together, I'm putting them into a systematic relationship.

So let me give you an analogy for understanding Hegel. Please remember, it's an analogy. So when you study child development, you can see children

have ways of making sense of the world and that discloses the world to them in a certain way. And that way in which they make sense works for them, it gives them a certain understanding. But what happens, as you go through stages of development, is that that system gets incredibly improved. Things that were often confused together, get differentiated apart and then get reintegrated so that you get a more sophisticated, systematic understanding of the world. And again, when I say this 'understanding,' you have to understand that it means not just in your head, but how the world is structured for you. So you've got this living system of patterns of intelligibility and you see across history that it's always being articulated by differentiation and then being integrated into a systematic way of understanding being, and not just being, but how the world is being to us.

Dialectic: A Powerful, Cohesive Model Of The Systematisation Of Ideas.

So Hegel thought he saw this internal development in Geist. This (writes Geist on the board again) is his name, as I said, for this notion of an extended mind (indicates Differentiation/Integration/Systematisation). It had an internal development (writes Internal Development off Geist), much like a living thing, much like a child. So what do you see happening? What you'll see in the history of ideas, as we try to make sense of things, you'll see an idea is proposed (writes Idea on the board) - a particular idea, a way of understanding. And it gets contrasted, it gets clarified, it gets distinguished. It gets differentiated from a counter idea (writes Counter Idea to the right of Idea). But then what typically happens is that these two ideas then are drawn together into a Higher Integration (writes Higher Integration above idea and counter idea, completing a triangle). Now, this is often popularly explained, and Hegel doesn't actually use these terms this way, but this is often explained by this idea of Thesis, Anti-thesis and Synthesis (written below Idea, Counter Idea and Higher Integration respectively). So the idea is, you get an idea, you'll get a counter idea, it's integrated together, and then this (Higher Integration/Synthesis) serves as a new idea to start the whole process again - here's the counter idea (writes counter idea beside Higher Integration to create the base of another triangle), and then that gets integrated and so on and so forth. And what you have is the increasing

articulation and integration of the patterns of intelligibility — which for Hegel, given the argument (removal of The Thing In Itself), are also the patterns of realness, the patterns of reality — you get this incredible complexification. You get emerging capacities for understanding and being in the world. He calls this process Dialectic.

So, Just to give a quick example from the history of ideas: You have people who are trying to get at ‘What is reality? What kind of thing is reality?’ and you'll have certain people like Parmenides and Plato saying [-] Reality is changeless (writes Changeless under ‘idea/thesis’) because when I know something, I know it to be true, and for things to be true, that has to be.../ that's the way they really are! And if they're changing and I try to know them, I can't ever get a true grasp of them. And you get this idea that reality is changeless. And then you get people like Heraclitus and others saying, “No, no...!” If you do that, then the whole capacity for understanding your experience of reality - that things are changing - if you write off all that experience as an illusion, then there's no content to your experience! There's nothing actually that you're having an experience about! In fact, they argue the opposite, that reality is pure change (writes Change below Counter Idea/Antithesis). So you've got Parmenides and an aspect of Plato (on the left - thesis), and then you got Heraclitus (on the right - antithesis): “To be real is to be unchanging,” “No! To be real is to be changing!” And you can see this where people in our culture [will] talk about reality as if it's eternity, but they'll also talk about “there's nothing as real as change itself,” that reality is always in process.

The Modern Scientific Method Starts To Fit In

And then Plato comes along, as we've seen, and proposes a way of integrating them together. And what he says is “no...”, that there are Eternal Patterns (writes Eternal Patterns on the board) and they structurally organise Changing Processes (writes Changing Process below Eternal Patterns, with a down arrow joining them) — and if you remember that maps onto this (Eternal Processes) is more having to do with the ‘upper world’, the more real world, and this (Changing Processes) is the more illusory world — and you can see this played out in our science. And you say, “what do you mean John?”. Well, science is built around the idea that there are these Eternal

Patterns - “laws” - and yet they constrain and interact with “forces,” which are defined completely in how they change things (Changing Processes). And so science is a synthesis out of these two ways of trying to understand reality. And it ultimately goes back to Plato and we use math to talk about this (Eternal Patterns/laws) and we use experiments to talk about this (Changing Processes/Forces) and so forth.

A Model For Self-Awareness Developing Within The History Of Ideas - A Philosophical Endpoint?

So this is not a ridiculous idea that Hegel has; it's a profound idea! You can see at it at work! And if you talk about something — to use, I think, a strong analogy — about how science is progressing and something about the patterns that science discovers are also the patterns of reality, then you have something strongly analogous of how Hegel is thinking of Geist. So this Dialectic — even the term that Hegel uses, by the way, this is inspired by Plato, although I think Hegel's interpretation of dielectric is very different from Plato's — but this whole process of the way in which Geist is historically developing is a process of self-transcendence on Geist's part, emergence, It's the way in which Geist is developing, self-actualising, the way in which it is moving from a more and more irrational making sense to a more and more rational, systematic making sense. So Hegel proposes that in the history of dialectic, we can get to a stage where the system of understanding and realisation becomes aware of itself. That one of the ideas, one of the systems of making sense, that emerges is this idea itself (gestures the whole framework on the board!).

And do you see what that means? And there's hubris in Hegel here, because what Hegel is basically saying is his philosophy is the philosophy in which this process of Geist and realisation has become reflectively aware of it[*self*], in which this process has created a systematic understanding that grasps the dialectical principles of Geist. When you get that, then you have what he calls Absolute Spirit, Absolute Geist. There's this telos, there's this goal in this whole process: all of history is moving — and of course he now sees himself as the discoverer of this — but all of history is moving to this moment of Absolute Idealism. So rationality is seen as a systematic process in the self-development of Geist, of its self-understanding. Now, many of

you are probably finding that this is a very impersonal way of talking about mind and meaning, and we will come back to that. So hold on to that. We will come back to that.

So when the process of making sense of understanding passes into this stage of self-understanding (makes upwardly churning gestures through the framework on the board), when the process creates systems of ideas (indicates Systematisation) that grasp this pattern of dialectic, then Hegel says that what's happened is we have moved from Understanding — with a capital U because it's not individual understanding, but the Understanding in Geist — to Reason — with a capital R. What does he mean by that? The principles of rationally making sense, this living system of principles for rationally making sense, moves from understanding things to understanding everything systematically. All the things are getting integrated into a systematic understanding and that systematic understanding is now self-reflective: it includes and refers and grasps itself. In a very deep sense Rationality has realised itself. It was a very powerful way of thinking.

Reality Realising Itself - God Is Secularised Back Into The Detail

Now, put this all together with the original and crucial premise of Idealism. If this is a process by which Rationality Realises itself, and the Real is the Rational, this is also a process by which Reality Realises Itself. This process at work in and through us, and in and through history, by which reality and rationality have realised themselves is “God”! Do you see what Hegel has done? He's taken, again, as I've mentioned, this Hebrew Christian idea that God is that process by which we make sense and we develop and create the world with God, and he has created a philosophical understanding of that, and it translated that religious way of talking about history into a completely secular, philosophical way of talking about history. He has secularised and rationalised the Hebraic heritage!

Now this is important, because this god is, in many senses, a secularised, non-religious god! This is not a god that is intervening in history through prophets. This is a god who has been realised through the reflective actions, the contemplation of a philosopher: Hegel. Hegel understood his project in

very religious terms. But, and this is a very important but, he was always translating those religious terms into philosophical, conceptual terms of rational development. He would consistently take the religious terms and go through this kind of translation (indicates the framework on the board), this kind of exposition and explication and explanation that would transform them into philosophical, conceptual theories of how rationality, intelligibility and reality have co-developed together.

So I'm going to read you a quote from the earliest system program of German idealism. He States the following, quote: "Here I shall discuss an idea, which as far as I know has not occurred to anyone else. We must have a new mythology...", notice the word he's using! Notice he's using that word in a way that resonates [with] how we've been using the word mythology in this lecture series! "...we must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in the service of the ideas" (taps the board). Notice that language, it must be in the service of the ideas. It must be a mythology of Reason, capital R reason (taps Reason on the board). It must be about this (waves hand to indicate the framework on the board).

He goes on to say, quote, "In the end, enlightened and unenlightened must clasp hands." The philosophical and the mythological, the enlightened, and the unenlightened. Notice the language: enlightened. Must class pans.

Mythology must become philosophy in order to make the people rational, and philosophy must become mythological in order to make philosophers sensible. Notice that this is simultaneously a philosophical proposal and a social, cultural, program for how to transform religion, people, and the role of philosophy within that transformation.

He then goes on to say that this will lead to a, quote, "Higher spirit sent from heaven must found the new religion among us. It will be the last and greatest work of mankind. This is the final utopia". This is the culmination. This will be the last religion. This will be the last thing because all of this (framework on the board) results in this final stage in which Geist, this living system of patterns of intelligibility and how reality itself is structured, has generated a systematic self-understanding, and we grasp all of our previous cultural and intellectual history.

Drawing Out The Model Via Example

I want to show you how Hegel does this in a specific example - this translation between mythology and philosophy to create the new religion that is beyond all other religions. (Wipes the board clean.) So let's think of the process by which Understanding is moving to Reason (writes Understanding with a down arrow to Reason on the board). And you can see that that's directly parallel to the process by which mythology is moving to philosophy (writes mythology with a down arrow to Philosophy to the right of the above). So let's give an example of a very important mythological structure, and of course I'm going to take Christianity because I've tried to show you, Hegel is secularising Christianity in many ways. So Hegel argues... Let's put the myth on this (left) side and then the philosophy on this (right) side (writes both on the board). And we're going to see how we go from making sense of things to this self-realisation participating in the system that grasps the systematicity of this whole process.

So you have the Father and the TrinityI (writes Father under Myth). Well, what does the Father represent? Well, the father represents, Hegel would argue, Understanding as undifferentiated, unarticulated, unactualized (writes Understanding as unarticulated, unactualized and undifferentiated under Philosophy). And then, of course, the idea is you get the incarnation and the Son [sorry. That should be capitalised, I don't mean any disrespect] (writes Son under Father). Now, the incarnation is how our Understanding starts to get differentiated into particular things. Here's a table, here's a cup, right? I'm here, the world's over there. We get all this articulation. So you get the beginning of articulation into particular things (writes articulation into particular things under philosophy). And so you can see there's a sense in which the Son is the counter, the antithesis of the father.

But then you get the reconciliation of the Son to the Father, the Son is sacrificed and the Son reconciles with the father (writes Son reconciles with the Father on the left), and that of course is that moment of higher integration - a higher new kind of identity is created. So this corresponds to the realisation — again, trying to pick up on both meanings of this term — the realisation of the identity in difference of the father and son (writes realisation of the identity in difference of the father and son on the right). So

the Father and Son are both different and one, and that's how Understanding is now moving to this process where the integration and the differentiation are being brought together - Understanding is realising that understanding is made out of differentiation and integration, and there's a kind of reconciliation, a higher order self-awareness that is taking place.

And then we finally moved down here to the Holy spirit (writes The Holy Spirit on the left) — and of course there's a bit of a pun intended because that's Geist is one way of translating spirit — and this is, what? What did we see in the new test[ament]? We ultimately get the idea that God is Agape (writes God is Agape beside The Holy Spirit) - God is identical to the very process by which we are making each other into persons. And we don't individually possess Agape in our minds; Agape is something we dwell within, a process of making sense and making persons and making [a] community of persons. And of course, what does The Holy Spirit correspond to? Well, this is Geist dwelling within its self-awareness (writes the self-awareness of Geist on the board). God has always been Agape, we just didn't realise it. God is dwelling within the development of the community.

The Grand Synthesis Of Myth, Philosophy And Science

This is what Hegel is doing. This is why Hegel has been called the Thomas Aquinas of Protestantism. He's doing in Germany, post the Protestant Reformation, what Aquinas was doing when, if you remember, when European thought — the systems of European thought — encountered Aristotelian science. Hegel is now taking all of the machinery — the theological machinery — that he sees at work in Myth, and he is integrating it with the Philosophical and Scientific understanding that is impacting so powerfully on Europe in his time. He's trying to deal with how to restructure Christianity in light of the Scientific Revolution, the Protestant Reformation, and this (indicates the example on the board) is what he's doing. And he creates this powerful system. It's this just tremendously powerful system. This grand synthesis.

And that's important because Hegel felt — and like I said, there's an element of hubris in here — that his system exemplified what it was talking about:

his philosophical system, in the way it provided a total — pay attention to that word — a total explanation of reality, mind, being, God, religion, philosophy, history... he thought it exemplified it, demonstrated it. So German Idealism was just massively influential because of this Grand Synthesis that it offered. But you can see what's going on here, right? You can see that this is a very powerful attempt to try and save the meaning making machinery and salvage the axial legacy (indicates the Trinity on the left), and somehow give us an account of how we can still develop an increasing contact with reality in a way that is ultimately spiritual and rational at the same time.

Hegel is in many ways a Titanic figure, trying to provide a powerful grammar, a philosophical set of concepts, conceptual vocabulary, and theoretical principles for structuring that vocabulary. He's trying to create a grammar by which we can deeply respond to the Meaning Crisis. So he's enormously popular and as I said, this form of German Idealism spreads across Europe [in] very powerful ways. [It's] deeply influential. You'll even see figures within America like Josiah Royce, early on in the intellectual history of America, deeply influenced by Hegel. So why is this important? Well, Hegel is just going to have a profound impact on any future attempts to try and respond to the Meaning Crisis just because of the way he's trying to synthesise everything together.

Criticisms Of Hegel And His Grand Synthesis: Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard And Marx

But what's more important is, for many people, this form of idealism — German idealism — has completely collapsed! It's no longer considered a viable position! Now I'm not here to argue about this [-] on an abstract philosophical level, because there are, of course, many defenders of Hegel today! I want to take a look at what has happened in the critical response to Hegel and how that has infused the development and the intensification of the Meaning Crisis. Remember, Hegel sets up this pattern of secularising religion into systems of ideas that attempt to give us a total explanation and guide. He's the godfather, in this sense, of Totalitarian Ideologies. (Wipes the board clean.)

(Writes Hegel at the top of the board.) So the three main avenues of seeing a response... We already did one - the person who has a deep critique of Hegel is Schopenhauer (writes Schopenhauer below and to the left of Hegel) because, and as you remember, Schopenhauer understands the relationship not the way Hegel does, in terms of Reason, Schopenhauer understands it in terms of Will — the Will To Live — and then Nietzsche takes that up as the Will To Power, and he tries to use that as a way of recapturing Self-transcendence. So we've already talked about that, so I'm not going to go over that again, but please remember it. So the fact that the aspect of will and the will to live and the will to power wasn't adequately being addressed was what Schopenhauer points to.

And then we have, of course, the tremendous critique of Kierkegaard (writes Kierkegaard below Hegel). Kierkegaard famously said, "Hegel made a system and then sat down beside it"! What's he pointing out here? There's an 'impersonalism,' there's a lack of perspectival and participatory knowing, in Hegel's whole proposal. It has been rendered into a system of ideas. All of this connectedness to reality, to ourselves and to each other, all of the process by which we cultivate wisdom and self-transcendence has been rendered into a system of beliefs; a system of ideas. Perspectival and participatory knowing have been lost. The only participation we have is in our understanding and appreciation of the Hegelian system. Now, what does that mean? Kierkegaard is pointing out, I believe, to the idea that our attempt to make contact with what's most real, our attempt to realise the divine, like in Platonic Anagoge - and Plato's [Hegel's] dialectic was linked deeply to Anagoge - has been completely severed from personal transformation and self-transcendence. You do not have to undergo any radical change! You do not have to have a mystical experience. You don't have to have a higher state of consciousness. You do not have to have encountered a Socratic challenge. Theology has become completely conceptual, propositional, rational self-reflection. It is not in any way engaged with projects of transformative experience.

Westphal, in his book *Transcendence, and Self-Transcendence*, echoes this critique and points out that while Hegel is proposing this tremendous epistemic self-transcendence — we come to know how we know — he has lost the deep connection you saw in Plato to what Westphal — I'm not quite

happy with term — calls Ethical Self-transcendence. This is the process by which we become radically different. We overcome our egocentrism. We become more capable of Agapic love and Kierkegaard points out, I think quite correctly, that when we move through those transformative experiences, it requires what he would call a 'leap of faith'. And this is a very dangerous concept, and I'm not going to try and defend it, but I think this makes sense, given what we've already seen in the work of LA Paul, and others, that going through these transformative experiences is not something you can reason your way through. We exist before we have discovered this essence about who and what we are. That's the whole point of existentialism, as I mentioned. So what Kierkegaard is pointing out is that this system, for all of its grandeur, is in a very deep sense like what Socrates found with the original natural philosophers. It is profound truths that have no existential transformative relevance. You cannot find in Hegel how to cultivate wisdom; you can only find a theoretical structure for interpreting history.

What about Marx? (Writes Marx on the board to the right of Kierkegaard) Marx is the other great critic of Hegel. And I hope you're seeing a pattern here: (pointing at Schopenhauer) what's missing is the connection to will, our participatory, perspectival involvement; (pointing to Kierkegaard) what's missing here is the connection to transformative experience, to ethical self-transcendence. What's missing here according to Marx? Well, what Marx is basically arguing — again, Marx, I mean God!!! You know? Just titanic things we're talking about here! And there's all these aspects of Marx I can't touch on like his whole economic critique, and that's not what I'm trying to do here — Marx is basically saying that history is not driven by.../ think of Plato; think of the man and the lion and the monster (head, heart, gut). History is not driven by reason, by the man (head), history is driven by the monster (gut). It's driven by our socioeconomic activity as we try to provide for our material existence.

So Marx was of course deeply influenced also by Feuerbach (writes Feuerbach off Marx) - which means 'fire stream,' it's a great name!! And Marx says, "You can't understand me unless you have passed through the fire stream of Feuerbach's work!" Feuerbach made this proposal, contrary to Hegel, that religion is not the arena in which Geist has been unfolding itself and reality and intelligibility had been co-developing. Instead, he argues that

religion is a projection — a term, of course, that Freud and Jung are going to pick up on — that when I'm thinking about God, what I'm actually doing is projecting an ideal model of my own humanity. And Feuerbach's idea is that this projection distorts and distracts us, it deludes us, and it ultimately alienates human beings from their own role within historical processes. So Marx is going to take up this idea, this critique of religion, and he's going to see religion, not as Hegel does as the vessel and vehicle in which Geist is unfolding itself, he's going to see religion as a noxious projection that is actually diluting people and distracting them from how they are the authors of history.

Marx And An Introduction To 'The Clash' Driven By

Socioeconomic Motives Over Ideologies

So, what Marx does is he says, "Okay, once we get rid of the religious distortion and we shift to the material monster, we see the dialectic at work there. The dialectic is a dialectical materialism, not a dialectical idealism". So the clash is not between ideas that are contrasting and integrating. The clash is a process of political struggle between opposing ways of socioeconomic life. We have different classes — that's what the class is: a socioeconomic way of life — that oppose the idea of this distinction and articulation has been [being?] turned into one of conflict between these classes. But these classes are, nevertheless, systematically related. They are interdependent. They rely [on] and define each other. So history is a dialectic that is constantly, through these clash[s], these conflict[s] of political struggle between the classes, is working out the self contradictions in socioeconomic life — this is the core of Marx's critique of capitalism, that it contains all these inherent self contradictions — and that this process...

This process of political struggle and violence will work out the self-contradictions in our socioeconomic activity until we achieve a political state of peace and freedom - the promised land! Always the attempt to find the promised land.

So what has Marx done? Do you see he's actually, in a sense, completing — I'm not trying to justify, I'm just saying he's developing and bringing to a

kind of logical conclusion — that secularisation implicit in Hegel. And he's supplying — I have criticisms of this being an adequate solution, but this is what he sees himself doing — he sees himself supplying the missing participation that we don't have in Hegel. How do you participate in Hegel? Well, Marx says, this is how you participate: a called to arms! The philosophers have only talked about the world, right? The communists want to change it! That's the communist manifesto: "workers of the world unite, we have nothing to lose, but our chains"! The idea is that the dialectic and participation come together in the idea of political, socioeconomic revolution. And you can also see elements of will here. Violent ideologies; violent totalising ideologies that promise a secular utopia. That is the culmination of the internal logic of history. So you have this deep politicalisation of the process by which people are supposed to try and have faith, sense the course of history, participate in the Kairos. Do you see? The Kairos of Christianity has become the revolution, the turning point in history that you have to participate in, you have to be on the right side [of]. You have to help bring about the utopia.

So these three critiques all push... this (Kierkegaard) is of course pushing towards existentialism, a religious kind of existentialism. This (Schopenhauer) through Nietzsche is pushing towards an anti-religious existentialism. This (Marx) of course is pushing towards Marxism. But what they all share is [-] a sense that Hegel's totalising ideology has not captured the core of human meaning making. We'll take a look at how this ramifies through Germany in the next episode. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

END

Episode 24 Notes

[Fichte](#)

Johann Gottlieb Fichte was a German philosopher who became a founding figure of the philosophical movement known as German idealism, which developed from the theoretical and ethical writings of Immanuel Kant.

[Schelling](#)

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, later von Schelling, was a German philosopher. Standard histories of philosophy make him the midpoint in the development of German idealism, situating him between Johann Gottlieb Fichte, his mentor in his early years, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, his one-time university roommate, early friend, and later rival.

Parmenides

Parmenides of Elea was a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher from Elea in Magna Graecia. He is thought to have been in his prime around 475 BC. Parmenides has been considered the founder of metaphysics or ontology and has influenced the whole history of Western philosophy.

Perl

Dr. Eric Perl is a Professor of Philosophy in the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts at Loyola Marymount University.

Thinking Being: Introduction to Metaphysics in the Classical Tradition - [Buy Here](#)

In Thinking Being, Perl articulates central arguments and ideas regarding the nature of reality in Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Thomas Aquinas, thematizing the indissoluble togetherness of thought and being, and focusing on continuity rather than opposition within this tradition.

Geist

Geist is a German noun with a degree of importance in German philosophy. Its semantic field corresponds to English ghost, spirit, mind, intellect. Some English translators resort to using "spirit/mind" or "spirit" to help convey the meaning of the term.

Absolute Idealism

Absolute idealism is an ontologically monistic philosophy chiefly associated with G. W. F. Hegel and Friedrich Schelling, both of whom were German idealist philosophers in the 19th century.

Dialectic

Dialectic or dialectics, also known as the dialectical method, is at base a discourse between two or more people holding different points of view about a subject but wishing to establish the truth through reasoned methods of argumentation.

Heraclitus

Heraclitus of Ephesus was an Ancient Greek, pre-Socratic Ionian philosopher and a native of the city of Ephesus, then part of the Persian Empire. His appreciation for wordplay and oracular expressions, as well as paradoxical elements in his philosophy, earned him the epithet "The Obscure" from antiquity.

The Trinity

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity holds that God is one God, but three coeternal consubstantial persons or hypostases—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—as "one God in three Divine persons". The three persons are distinct, yet are one "substance, essence or nature"

Josiah Royce

Josiah Royce was an American objective idealist philosopher and the founder of American idealism. His philosophical ideas included his version of personalism, defense of absolutism, idealism and his conceptualization of God. Royce is known as the only noted American philosopher who also studied and wrote history.

Kierkegaard

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic and religious author who is widely considered to be the first existentialist philosopher.

Westphal

Merold Westphal is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Fordham University and Honorary Professor, Australian Catholic University. His most recent works include *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence* (IUP) and *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* (IUP).

Book Mentioned: In Praise of Heteronomy: Making Room for Revelation (Philosophy of Religion) - [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Transcendence and Self Transcendence - [Buy Here](#)

Marx

Karl Heinrich Marx was a German philosopher, economist, historian, sociologist, political theorist, journalist and socialist revolutionary. Born in Trier, Germany, Marx studied law and philosophy at university. He married Jenny von Westphalen in 1843

Feuerbach

Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach was a German philosopher and anthropologist best known for his book The Essence of Christianity, which provided a critique of Christianity that strongly influenced generations of later thinkers.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 25 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - The Clash

Welcome back to awakening from the Meaning Crisis. This is episode 25. Last time we took a look at important developments that are centred upon the figure of Hegel and, again, as I said last time, I can't give a comprehensive analysis of Hegel's thought. It's too complex and sophisticated! I was trying to do the best I could to capture that within Hegel's thought which is directly relevant to our understanding the

genealogy of the Meaning Crisis. And we saw how Hegel proposes how to move beyond Kant and the Romantics by rejecting Kant's notion of The Thing In Itself and saying, "look, reality is just the patterns of intelligibility! There is nothing above and beyond that..." — a form of Idealism — "...and that as our ideas are being realised, as patterns of intelligibility are being developed, reality is also simultaneously being developed". And we took a look at this notion of a system, a [-] quasi-living system, of these patterns of intelligibility in development called Geist, and that Hegel proposed that that development can be understood as a process that he called Dialectic, echoing Plato but I think severing the notion of dialectic from Anagoge which figures in some of the criticisms of Hegel that we looked at towards the end.

This dialectic is a process in which ideas — again, not just things in the head, these are patterns of intelligibility, patterns of the way reality is realised both in the sense of being known and being actual — there's this pattern in which ideas articulate and differentiate from each other: One idea is opposed by another, contrasted to, distinguished from, and then it is taken up in a higher order integration. And then that serves as a new idea that can be contrasted with other ideas and this dialectical process complexifies, the pattern of intelligibility, it emerges and develops and becomes more and more. So the irrationality, the failure to understand is being slowly transmuted, actualised into deeper patterns of understanding, deeper aspects of being. And then the idea is that this reaches a state in which a system of ideas emerges that grasps the dialectical process itself as found exemplified, Hegel believed, in his own philosophy - and this is the culmination; the state of Absolute Geist. And if we remember that for Hegel, "the Real is the Rational, the Rational is the Real", what we get is that this development of the rationality in intelligibility of reality is also the development of reality itself. And so this co-development of meaning and being is Absolute spirit, Absolute mind. This is Hegel's version of God. Secularised, non-religious God.

We saw how much Hegel understood his philosophy in religious terms, but that he was always pursuing that understanding by translating religious terms and religious experience into philosophical, conceptual structure, and he advocates for a new mythology, a mythology that is integrated with philosophy, a mythology of reason, which will be the last and greatest work

of mankind, the culmination of all of history. I took you through an example of how understanding — the ability to make sense — passes into this moment of self-realisation in reason as mythology passes into philosophy; we did an example of that showing how Hegel secularised the Trinity in a historical process of the self-realisation of rationality. And in that sense, Hegel is the Thomas Aquinas of Protestantism. He was proposing this Grand Synthesis, this grand secularisation of the whole Hebraic, Christian idea of God at work in history and God working through human beings and in their Agapic processes to co-create the real future, the Utopic, but real future.

We took a look at the main criticisms of Hegel. We reminded ourselves of the criticisms made by Schopenhauer about [how] the Will To Live was missing. And then how Nietzsche takes this up and the Will To Power, and this whole centrality of the will. I took a look at the other great existential forerunner Kierkegaard and his criticism, basically using some of the terms we've developed, that Hegel has reduced everything to propositional, conceptual, knowing - he has left out the perspectival, participatory knowing; he has left out Anagoge; he's given us only epistemic transcendence; he hasn't given us existential, ethical self-transcendence. Personal transformation and transformative experience, that are necessary for returning to making deeper contact with reality, has been left out, and we noted that this is also consonant with the work of LA Paul (book shown on screen: *Transformative Experience* by LA Paul) about how we can't reason our way through transformative experiences that are so central to the cultivation of wisdom.

We then looked at another person who emphasised this lack of will and participation in Hegel's system and this is the work of Carl Marx, and Marx's great proposal — great and terrifying proposal — is that history is not driven by reason — the 'man' in Plato's system — but by the 'monster'! And Marx is deeply influenced by Feuerbach and Feuerbach's critique of religion as the projection of our own humanity and that religion is not the arena in which spirituality is working itself out! Religion is the projective distortion that distracts us from how we are the authors of spirituality in history; it is a vehicle of self alienation. So Marx takes the Feuerbachian critique and he rejects the theistic resonances within Hegel - the idealistic - and he says, "no, the dialectic is not a dialectic of ideas that's playing itself

out religiously. It is a dialectic of economic forces that is playing itself out politically. The dialectic is not between ideas that are in contrast, but between socioeconomic ways of life - classes - that are in political conflict with each other, but are nevertheless systematically related". And as that historical process of class conflict unfolds, this dialectic will work out all the self-contradictions in our socioeconomic system — our current one being capitalism, for example — until the contradictions are resolved in a socioeconomic state in which peace and freedom have been achieved, because all of them — the internal contradictions that drive the violence — will be resolved.

This is a completely secularised version of the Judaeo-Christian model of God working himself out in history to bring us to the promised land. Marx offers the participatory knowing that is missing in Hegel by proposing how we identify with our class, we identify with the struggle, and we participate in the Kairos, the turning of history, by engaging in revolution. And so the totalising, the totalitarian kind of ideology that Hegel is proposing is being wedded to the idea of violent political change within revolution. And so this is very, very powerful pseudo religious ideologies. So what started in Romanticism has now come to fruition in that we have the proposal of secularised political socioeconomic ideologies in conflict as the way in which spirit, and spirituality, is to be understood and pursued: Pseudo-religious ideologies.

Nationalism And Imperialism And Germany

We should mention a couple of other ones that of course are emerging at the same time, have been emerging since the disruption in the socioeconomic life of Europe following the black death. We've [-] already seen the rise of commercialism, but we're also going to see the conclusion of this idea that the political arena is the place in which ideas struggle with each other, and meaning is made. That the secularisation, of course, is going to be understood in terms of your participation, not necessarily in your class like you have in Marx, but in other ways in which people are going to declare their political identity. And this is nationalism. Nationalism is the idea that the Nation State can take the role, in many ways, that God has taken In the past. That the Nation State - and your patriotic devotion to it, your

commitment to it, you're willing to sacrifice for it, your participation in its historical development that proceeds you and will follow you upon your death - is trying to do many of the things that religion had done for people in the past. And you get the fierce nationalism that is emerging in the 19th century around the same time as Marx and Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are doing their seminal work.

So Nationalism, when it is understood this way and when it is understood in terms of will, of course gets very clearly wedded to the emerging socioeconomic and technological power driven by the scientific and industrial revolutions in Europe. And that Nationalism very quickly gets wedded to Imperialism. So Nationalism and Imperialism become ways in which people have secular, pseudo-religious ideologies and identities that they pursue as a way of trying to fill the gap that has been vacated by the erosion of the Christian framework. Now a place in which this is all fiercely happening, in a really intensified way, is Germany. So all of this work, all of these people we are talking about — well, not Kierkegaard, but Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Marx — they're all in Germany! And again, Germany is the place of Luther where you get the first big change towards secularisation. Germany, as a country, is younger than Canada! It doesn't come into existence until, I believe, 1870 on the work of Bismarck - the Germans had been fragmented as a nation, they were not a Nation State. They had been fragmented for centuries, and through powerful "real politic", meaning, "ethics be damned", Bismarck helps craft and unite the nation of Germany into a Nation State.

And so Nationalism is fierce in Germany because Germany has finally gone from being just a cultural leader to becoming a political entity with tremendous economic, industrial power and scientific production in its grasp. Nationalism is fierce and Germany sees itself in competition with the other Nation States that have got a head start in their Imperial self-promotion. Germany sees itself lagging behind France and England in the creation of World Empire. So Nationalism and Imperialism become paramount in Germany. And then disaster strikes!

The Wars

And it's a disaster that actually reverberates around the world because this whole attempt to secularise progress — in terms of material advancement, scientific advancement, technological advancement, Nationalism, Imperialism — comes to a crashing disaster in the First World War in which all this machinery that was supposed to bring us to utopia, was seeming to take the place of God and our spiritual traditions, drenches Europe in [a] traumatic tidal wave of blood and destruction. An entire generation is decimated. So Europe itself is traumatised by this. But Germany is especially traumatised because it is defeated. All it's national and Imperial and cultural ambitions are thwarted. And the victors, France and England especially, treat Germany very, very poorly. They weaken it, significantly, economically. They cripple it militarily. All of this has taken up a lot of careful history and I can't go into this in great detail. What we need to know is, let's gather this together: This is Germany and the state post-World one, the Weimar Republic, this state of.../ The collapse of German idealism. The thwarting of the dreams of Nationalism and Imperialism.

Germany, remember, is the country that has been — I don't know what the right word [is] — tainted by Luther's horrible antisemitism. The antisemitism we talked about, in his work "On the Jews and Their Lies", in which he proposes a genocide; genocidal policies towards the Jews. We saw that Germany is the home of the Rhineland mystics. There's been an undercurrent running through Germany that helped fuel the Protestant Reformation, but there's this undercurrent of the mystical tradition. It comes to fruition, for example, in people like Böhme, who's a German Lutheran mystic, and a Protestant mystic - a very odd thing in some ways. But this undercurrent in Germany... it's very, Neoplatonic, very Gnostic. We've seen, as I said, the collapse of German idealism under the critique of the alternatives; by Marx and the existentialists. German idealism also seems to fail because of the critiques that are coming out of Positivism and a philosophical position that is wedded to the tremendous success of scientific materialism. Scientific materialism. Marxism is arising in Germany as a real threat.

We saw, of course, that Germany was the home of the powerful Romantic tradition. Goethe is one of the important generators of the Romantic tradition and we saw how Romanticism is also becoming decadent in Germany. We

have the ongoing fragmentation caused by the Protestant Reformation. The Germans have developed an explicit form, the idea of Will To Power. It's this resentment, this undercurrent of Gnostic mythology, antisemitic religious tradition, the collapse of German idealism, leaving this philosophical vacuum. The collapse of the Romantic tradition also leaving philosophical vacuum. The thwarting of Nationalism and Imperialism. The advocacy of a Will To Power as the way in which human beings can recapture the lost self-transcendence. And of course that Nationalism and that antisemitism very quickly integrate with a racist interpretation of history to try and replace Hegel's idealistic interpretation of history, or Marx's socioeconomic interpretation of history.

A Gnostic Nightmare

And all of this is drawn together in the autodidactic vortex of Hitler's mind. We talked about the dangers of a fragmented autodidactic approach to the Meaning Crisis. The Meaning crisis is being driven to a fever pitch in the Weimar Republic. And all of these forces are being spun in a romantic — and I mean that in a decadent sense — romantic, wilful, autodidactic manner. Reading *Mein Kampf* is a difficult thing to do. Not just because of the abhorrent moral stance of its author, but because it verges on incoherence because of the attempt Hitler has of trying to articulate all of this personally. See — and this is not a coincidence, I think — Hitler is like Luther! Be careful of this analogy. I'm not claiming an identity. I'm not trying to insult all Lutherans. But what do I mean by that? Hitler sees his own personal struggle — “*Mein Kampf*”; “my struggle” — as representative of, emblematic, symbolic of all of Germany, and beyond that of all of Western civilisation! And he exemplifies this chaos and he articulates this weird mythology. You see you misunderstand Nazi-ism if you understand it only as a political system, if you understand it only, for example, as fascism or racism. It is those things! But you have to understand that the fascism and racism are actually in service of a Gnostic nightmare (Writes Gnostic Nightmare on the board).

I mean, you can feel the currents of “we have our ‘true self’, we're born with it...”, “Well, that's it's in our blood...” You can hear a decadent romanticism. And then you can hear the Gnostic, “here we are, we are actually a master

race, but we are trapped within a worldwide conspiracy that is keeping us from knowing our divine heritage and only by opposing and trying to thwart the evil overlords can we come to our true, divine heritage as the master race that is in our blood and in the soil of our nation!" Do you see? it's.../ And Luther's antisemitism is mixing up with a strand of Gnosticism that says, if you remember, the people that worship the Demiurge, the people who worship the God of the old Testament are the Jews! And this is all makes a weird twisted kind of sense. It's a Gnostic nightmare in which Hitler is crafting something that hangs between a religion, a totalitarian ideology and a personal mythology that he exemplifies and people are attracted to! [-] You shouldn't understand, and you can't respond to Nazi-ism as if it is just a political movement. You're not getting it!

It is a Pseudo-Religious Ideology! A totalitarian proposal that confuses and distorts myth, mysticism, nationalism, and fuses this with decadent romanticism, decadent Gnostic mythology, the will to power of Nietzsche. That's why the great propaganda film about the Nazis is actually entitled "Triumph of the will". Triumph of the will! It's being linked to imperialistic racism. Do you see what I'm trying to show you? Nazi-ism is a tsunami of bullshit in which all of these currents that are emerging out of the collapse of the three orders are being spun by Hitler in order to try and give people a brutally powerful response to the exigent intensity of the meaning crisis in Weimar, Germany. And Hitler lucks out because that whole socio-cultural process is intensified by the socioeconomic collapse of the great depression which seems to vindicate his Gnostic nightmare. It seems to vindicate his dream of dealing with the collapse of meaning to a mythology of imperialistic, racist, twisted, decadent, romantic Gnosticism that has gathered together the shards of this whole historical process in the place in which they were often originating, which is Germany.

Nazism And Marxism Clash On The Eastern Front

So we have, now, these two great pseudo-religious ideologies: Marxism and Nazi-ism. And of course they are diametrically opposed to each other, and Hitler proposes his history of race against [the] communist proposal of the history of class. And these two pseudo-religious ideologies — that both propose a totalitarian ideology infused with mythologies of grasping and

driving the Kairos of history towards the utopia of the promised land — they meet! They meet in the most titanic struggle, to use the term that both marks and Hitler use, the titanic struggle of the Eastern front in world war II. You see, the thing about many of us is we tend to understand World War II largely from the perspective of the British or the American or the Canadian viewpoint, because we're British or American or Canadian, right? We forget that the Western front, while significant, and I do not want to in any way denigrate the tremendous sacrifice that people made or endured on the Western front, but the Western front is dwarfed by what's happening on the Eastern front.

1943. These two Titanic forces, and the historical socio-political, socioeconomic forces that they have marshalled, they meet at the battle of Kursk in 1943 (writes Kursk 1943 on the board) on the Eastern front. There's nothing like it anywhere else in World War II. There's nothing like it anywhere else in world history. This is the biggest battle ever. Literally! This battle involves millions of men, tens of thousands of pieces of equipment, thousands and thousands of tanks, thousands of airplanes. It goes from horizon to horizon. It's brutal and vicious. There's individual acts of tremendous brutality set within this huge technological machine of mass destruction.

The battle of Kursk ends, eventually, in a Russian victory. So militarily it spells the beginning of the end of the Nazi regime and the ascendance of the Soviet Union into the post World War II military superpower dominating Eastern Europe. So of course it has all of that historical significance, but the battle of Kursk points to, the literal...

[what do I want to say?] It's overwhelming! It's literally sort of beyond comprehension in terms of its size and its scope and the death and the sheer amount of technology and material. This also has an impact [-] on the genealogy of the Meaning Crisis. I want to point to what this (indicates Kursk on the board) leads to and then, of course, I've alluded to the cold war that comes after it. (Wipes the board clean.)

The Meta-Crisis Negative Feedback Loop

This tremendous struggle... It is symptomatic of the meaning crisis. What we have is a fixation at the level of beliefs. Both sides are fixated on belief systems, totalitarian ideologies and attempts to create secular alternatives to religion. Totalitarian systems of ideas that are supposed to explain history, reality and how we can achieve utopia, how we can recapture the Axial legacy? We have the complete politicalisation of the quest for meaning. Mythology is being confused with politics — ‘con-fused’ with politics — in powerful ways: The perspectival knowing has been reduced to your political viewpoint, the participatory knowing has been reduced to your political identification and it marshals tremendous physical resources and a Titanic struggle of wills - confrontation of ideologies. Now, what does all of that legacy mean for us? Because of course, eventually, the Soviet union also collapses! Well, this whole secularised political process of the pseudo-religious ideologies is not only symptomatic of the Meaning Crisis, it also contributes to the Meaning Crisis. It's not just a result, it causally feeds back into exacerbating the Meaning Crisis. Okay, How?

Well, we face the “Metacrisis” - Tomas Bjorkman has called it that and talked about it. This is the intertwining [of the] ecological, socioeconomic and spiritual crisis, existential crisis of our time, the mental health crises, et cetera. Now, the Metacrisis — in which the Meaning Crisis plays a significant role, is interdependent with these other crises — to address this, this is going to require comprehensive ch[ange].../ We have to have comprehensive change in our consciousness (writes consciousness on the board), our cognition (writes cognition below consciousness) — because I've shown you the deep history of all of this — we have to have a comprehensive change in our consciousness, our cognition, our character (writes character below cognition) — where we cultivate virtue, wisdom, compassion self-transcendence — our culture (writes culture below character) — how our communities structure distributed cognition together; create systematic psycho-technologies. Now, the only thing in the past that has created systematic sets of psycho-technologies that transform cognition, consciousness, character, and culture in an inter-dependent way, is religion! That's the only thing that we've created that does this! (Writes Religion to the left of Cognition, Consciousness, Character and Culture).

A Religion That Is Not A Religion At All - The Big Dilemma

Now in the 19th and the 20th century, we tried to create alternatives to this: the pseudo-religious ideologies that have drenched the world in blood. (Wipes the board clean again.) So, what do we do? We need to respond to the Metacrisis (writes Metacrisis at the top of the board again), but we have been traumatised by the pseudo-religious ideologies (writes Traumatised by pseudo-religious ideologies below and to the right of Metacrisis). So that no longer seems like a viable option. One thing that some people are pursuing is a nostalgic attempt to return to religion (writes Nostalgic return to religion below and to the left of Metacrisis), an attempt to ignore all of this history. And of course this leads to various kinds of fundamentalism (writes fundamentalisms on the left), and I do include certain forms of atheism as being pseudo-religious fundamentalism - Read Chris Hedges book on this, I think he makes a good case for it. This of course can interact with how everything has been politicised (writes politicised below fundamentalism). When those interact (politicisation and fundamentalism), of course, we get the potential for terrorism (adds terrorism to the flow/list on the left). And so many people rightly are very doubtful of this (response flow/list on the left) as a response.

Many people find themselves stuck here (in the middle). They're post religious (writes post religious between 'traumatised by...' and 'nostalgic return to...'). They reject this (left side), but they also reject this (right side), the pseudo religious ideologies. They're Post religious, and they find themselves, as we said, fragmented, autodidactic (lists both of these down the middle), and these 'responses' (writes responses below fragmented and autodidactic in the middle), of course, dangerously interact with this (politicisation/terrorism on the left), facilitated by things like social media and the internet, and also dangerously interact with these pseudo-religious ideologies (on the right). What I'm showing you here is [that] we seem to need a religion that cannot be any kind of religion at all.

We seem to need a religion that cannot be any kind of religion at all. We can't deal with the Meaning Crisis by pursuing pseudo-religious ideologies, [by] trying to deal with this as a political issue. This is why I steadfastly

refuse to build an argument for this work that I'm trying to share with you as on the back of a political controversy, as a confrontation of political ideologies. Trying to frame or understand the Meaning Crisis as a struggle between political ideologies, [-] as a political process of using violence, potentially, or argument to change belief is to misrepresent the Meaning Crisis. "There is no political solution to our troubled evolution", to quote The Police. We somehow need a religion that is not a religion at all. We need a god beyond all gods. For many people this seems, I think reasonably enough, to be a dilemma, to be a contradiction. And we are not just being stuck on the horns of a dilemma, we are being gored and ripped apart by the horns of the dilemma. So the clash, the adversarial clash of pseudo-religious ideologies, is not only symptomatic of the Meaning Crisis, it contributes to the Meaning Crisis by locking us into (indicates the framework on the board with a locking gesture), or at least contributing to, the way in which we are locked into this dilemma, this aspect, of the Meaning Crisis in which we need a religion that is not a religion at all.

Moving On From The History To The Cognitive Science

So I could continue on this history, I could talk about great works of literature that struggle with this dilemma. I think a fruitful way of understanding one of the great novels - I consider it one of the greatest and certainly one of my favourites - Moby Dick, is about this dilemma! I think you could make a good case for that! You could talk about different aspects of popular culture. You could see the zombie mythology as an articulation of this and aspects of the Meaning Crisis. But we'll come back to that because it's now time to move from the historical analysis; from understanding the genealogy; the collapse of the three orders - the Nomological, the Normative and the Narrative; the dilemma that emerges out of the attempt to deal with the collapse through the creation of pseudo-religious ideologies. It's time to pass from that historical analysis, because we could continue it. We could carry it, like I said, into an analysis of popular culture, important works of art and literature. We could talk about Dostoevsky or as I've mentioned, Melville or Conrad, and that, of course, is not in any way an exhaustive list.

But it's time, I think now, to turn to the other side of the argument that we need to make. We need to turn, now, to not a historical analysis of the genealogy of the meaning crisis, but a cognitive scientific analysis of the machinery, the cognitive machinery, of meaning making itself (wipes board clean). Because if we want to respond [to], awaken from, the Meaning Crisis in a way that does not enmesh us inexorably in this dilemma, that gives us a way of recovering the Axial legacy without trying to do that through utopic totalitarian ideologies, I propose that what we do is try to understand, using our best science, the machinery of meaning making and use that as a way of trying to build a theoretical structure for recovering and salvaging what we can of the Axial legacy. And hopefully that science — that science of cognition, that cognitive science — will also afford the engineering of new systematic sets of psycho-technologies, practices of self-transcendence, that can be coordinated with the science such that we are not just talking about responding to the meaning crisis and the historical forces therein, we are affording and providing people with the means to begin the process individually, and hopefully collectively, of creating systematic sets of psycho-technologies that bring back the connectedness lost in the three orders, and bring back the sapiential pursuit of self-transcendence.

What Is Cognitive Science? An Introduction

So, the way to begin that is to just talk about what cognitive science is, and of course, I mean, I'm a cognitive scientist! I teach cognitive science at the university of Toronto. I teach the introduction to cognitive science. I teach many courses. I teach a course on Buddhism and cognitive science - some of you may know about that. I teach upper level courses on the cognitive science of consciousness. And I teach also cognitive psychology, where I do a lot of work on this machinery of meaning making and the machinery, the cognitive machinery, at work in wisdom and self-transcendence. So what I want to do is present to you... [I mean, I'm laughing because like I have entire university courses in which I do this, but I want to try and present to you] or introduce to you 'what is cognitive science' - a particular vision of cognitive science because, of course, academics will disagree as to what cognitive science is and I'm going to present what cognitive science is for me, not in terms of my personal proclivities or tastes, but my argument for what I think is the best vision of what cognitive science should and can be

doing. And I want to present that in a way that is deeply interrelated with the Meaning Crisis.

Cognitive science is a fairly recent discipline. It really emerges only in the late 70's as an explicit academic discipline, the early 80's, and it's born out of an important idea that we actually have multiple disciplines that are studying this thing called "Mind", the organ of cognition (writes Mind in the top right corner of the board). [So, for example, there are some people...] Let's organise this way: We can talk about, sort of, levels of reality or levels of analysis - to keep Kant happy (writes 'Levels of Reality/Analysis' on the board, on the left of what will be two columns)! And then we can talk about different disciplines (writes 'Disciplines' on the board as the title of the right column), all dealing with this phenomenon (circles Mind). And I want to show you how, as the science is advancing, it's also contributing to the Meaning Crisis in the way it's fragmenting the sense of mind and attendant senses of identity and self.

So what do I mean? So you have the understanding of mind by understanding the brain (writes brain in the left column - levels of reality/analysis - beginning at the bottom). And people should be more careful when they criticise this. The brain is a terrifically complex and sophisticated thing. But what you do here is, you're going to try and understand the mind by studying the brain, studying patterns of neural activity. And of course the discipline that studies this is Neuroscience (writes Neuroscience, correspondingly, at the bottom of the right column), and they talk about entities like neurones, — Neuro-science (indicates the semantics of neuroscience by emphasising Neuro in the word on the board) — they talk about neurones, neural processes, they use fMRIs, perhaps EEG, new technologies for observing the brain's behaviour.

But of course, there's another discipline that is talking about the mind, cognition, at a different level. This is where you try to understand the mind in terms of information processing (writes Information Processing above Brain in the left column), and here you're not so much talking about neurones, you might be talking about neural networks, but you're talking more about programs, algorithms. You're talking about ways in which we could potentially make artificial intelligence, because computers and neural

networks aren't made of neurones, they're made out of different kinds of matter. And so [-] we're not talking about the brain level - now we're talking about information processing and this is computer science (writes Computer Science above Neuroscience on the right), but especially in the project of Artificial Intelligence (adds 'AI' beside Computer Science on the board), especially — and we'll talk about what this means later — Artificial General Intelligence (adds AGI) where what I'm trying to do is not just make machines that can do sophisticated things (AI), but I'm trying to make machines that actually are cognitive agents (AGI). We're going to talk a lot about AI, and of course we know that AI has the potential to radically transform our self understanding and exacerbate the Meaning Crisis, and it is doing so already.

But of course, another way I study your mind is I study your behaviour (writes behaviour above Information Processing). Now notice here, I'm talking about.../ what do I do here (referencing Computer Science)? I don't cut out brains (now referencing Neuroscience) and slice them under microscopes or run fMRIs! I make simulations (back to referencing Computer Science), I actually create programs or neural networks or various combinations. So notice what I'm showing you: each discipline is directed to a different level (moving up from Brain) and it's using different language, and it's using different methods of investigation, and it's amassing different kinds of evidence. So what's the discipline that studies behaviour? That's Psychology (writes Psychology above Computer Science)! A discipline that I'm privileged to practice at the University of Toronto. And we talk about different things! I mean, psychologists sometimes talk about brains, and they sometimes talk about this (indicates Computer Science) because cognitive psychology is very influenced by cognitive [computer] science, but generally psychologists are trying to understand behaviour, and we talk about things like working memory and longterm memory. We talk about those kinds of things. And what we do is we use experimentation on human beings and we gathered statistical data, demographic data, et cetera, and we try to understand. So again, a different level using different language, different methods and different kinds of evidence.

Is that enough? No, there's another discipline that talks about mind... because of what I'm doing right now - I'm making noises come out of my

face-hole and you understand my mind: language! Language seems to be a really important way in which mind operates and mind communicates. It's through language that minds are linked together. So you get language here (written on the left) and this of course is studied by linguistics (written on the right). And here you don't talk about working memory and long term memory. You might, if you link them together (indicates joining Linguistics and Psychology on the board) in psycho-linguistics — and notice how there's this constant wanting to link the levels together in these new hybrid disciplines — but generally, in linguistics, you talk about things like tree structures, you talk about transformational grammar, you do something like experiments, but it's more where you're testing people's judgments about whether or not a certain utterance is grammatically acceptable, [or] make sense. So again, different level, different language, different methods, different kinds of evidence.

And then, as I've said before, long before the internet networked computers together, Culture was networking minds together (writes Culture in the left column) because most of our problem solving is done with distributed cognition, and the discipline that studies that, of course, is anthropology (written in the right column) and anthropology uses a different method: it uses participant observation because — listen to that language — because culture is something you have to know in a participatory, knowing fashion; you have to go through the transformation of inculcation to know what a culture is, it uses participant observation, it generates ethnography.

So what am I showing you? I'm showing you that this term (mind) doesn't refer in a univocal fashion. It's equivocal. When I'm saying mind, it's not clear what I mean. Science is fragmenting what the word mind means (highlights all the different disciplines on the board), and therefore it's fragmenting You, who and what you are! Now here's the idea - we have a problem here! We'll come back [and talk] about this: if we don't get clear about how we can integrate these various different meanings of mind, we're going to engage in lots of equivocation (writes equivocation below mind in the top right of the board). I'll come back and talk about that. But here's the other idea: it's highly unlikely — and already we've seen that these different disciplines want to hybrid together — it's highly unlikely that these various levels are not causally impacting and constraining each other (draws a bunch

of little arrows randomly connecting the different levels). In fact, it's highly plausible that these various levels causally interpenetrate and deeply influence each other. So we need to capture the causal interaction, between the levels.

How do we capture this causal interaction (left column) that is not being captured by any one of the individual disciplines (right)? Well, we follow that impulse to hybridisation, but we pursue something more. What we want to do is we want to get all of these disciplines talking to each other, not in the equivocal fashion, but in a meaningful fashion, talking to each other. We want a kind of theoretical integration because that integration of these different languages and ontologies for each one of these disciplines is how we're going to capture the missing causal interaction between the levels and avoid equivocating.

And it also holds this potential: because if we can get a discipline that does that (collectively indicates discipline column), then we will also not only have a theoretical scientific advance (collectively indicates levels column), we will start to be responding to the fragmentation of the mind (indicates mind). Now a discipline that helps to bridge between different ontologies, discourses, methods, ways of theorising, bringing evidence together... the discipline that does that is Philosophy (writes philosophy to the right of the Discipline column). So, what you want is you want some philosophical training in how discourses — and I mean this very deeply — how disciplines, ways of theorising, observing, studying reality, these different levels of the reality of the mind... You need a discipline that is capable of trying to bridge between those vocabularies, and that's Philosophy.

Now, if I take this philosophy — so I get training in this (indicates philosophy on the board) — and I get training in these (the various disciplines) and I start to try to bridge between the disciplines to avoid the equivocation and to facilitate grasping the causal interaction (between the levels)... Then I'm doing Cognitive Science (writes Cognitive Science on the board).

So in the next episode, we'll talk a lot more about the nature and practice of Cognitive Science. But I hope you can see, already, how it's going to be relevant to trying to understand the machinery of Meaning Making and the

fragmentation of ourselves and our identities that is at work within the Scientific Revolution.

Thank you for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 25 notes

book shown on screen: **Transformative Experience by LA Paul** - [Buy Here](#)

Her account of transformative experience holds that part of the value of living authentically is to experience our lives and preferences in whatever ways they evolve. Using classic philosophical examples about the nature of consciousness, and drawing on recent work in normative decision theory, cognitive science, epistemology, and the philosophy of mind, Paul develops a rigorous account of transformative experience that sheds light on how we should understand real-world experience and our capacity to rationally map our subjective futures.

[Bismarck](#)

Otto Eduard Leopold, Prince of Bismarck, Duke of Lauenburg, known as Otto von Bismarck, was a conservative German statesman who masterminded the unification of Germany in 1871 and served as its first chancellor until 1890, in which capacity he dominated European affairs for two decades.

[Weimar Republic](#)

The Weimar Republic, officially the German Reich, also referred to as the German People's State or simply the German Republic, was the German state from 1918 to 1933. As a term, it is an unofficial historical designation that derives its name from the city of Weimar, where its constituent assembly first took place.

[On the Jews and Their Lies](#)

On the Jews and Their Lies is a 65,000-word anti-Judaic treatise written in 1543 by the German Reformation leader Martin Luther. Luther's attitude toward the Jews took different forms during his lifetime. In his earlier period, until 1537 or not much earlier, he wanted to convert Jews to Lutheranism, but failed.

[Martin Luther](#)

[Jakob Böhme](#)

German, 24 April 1575 – 17 November 1624) was a German philosopher, Christian mystic, and Lutheran Protestanttheologian. He was considered an original thinker by many of his contemporaries[3]within the Lutheran tradition, and his first book, commonly known as Aurora, caused a great scandal. In contemporary English, his name may be spelled Jacob Boehme; in seventeenth-century England it was also spelled Behmen, approximating the contemporary English pronunciation of the German Böhme.

[Mein Kampf](#)

Mein Kampf is a 1925 autobiographical manifesto by Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler. The work describes the process by which Hitler became antisemitic and outlines his political ideology and future plans for Germany. Volume 1 of Mein Kampf was published in 1925 and Volume 2 in 1926.

[The battle of Kursk](#)

The Battle of Kursk was a Second World War engagement between German and Soviet forces on the Eastern Front near Kursk in the Soviet Union, during July and August 1943

[Tomas Bjorkman](#)

Tomas Björkman is a Swedish financier, social entrepreneur and author. Björkman has worked in Stockholm and Geneva and is currently based in London.

<http://www.tomas-bjorkman.com>

[Chris Hedges](#)

Christopher Lynn Hedges is an American Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Presbyterian minister, author and television host.

Book alluded to - I Don't Believe in Atheists - [Buy Here](#)

Moby Dick

Moby-Dick; or, The Whale is an 1851 novel by American writer Herman Melville. The book is the sailor Ishmael's narrative of the obsessive quest of Ahab, captain of the whaling ship Pequod, for revenge on Moby Dick, the giant white sperm whale that on the ship's previous voyage bit off Ahab's leg at the knee.

Dostoevsky

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, sometimes transliterated Dostoyevsky, was a Russian novelist, philosopher, short story writer, essayist, and journalist.

Melville

Herman Melville was an American novelist, short story writer, and poet of the American Renaissance period. Among his best-known works are Moby-Dick, Typee, a romanticized account of his experiences in Polynesia, and Billy Budd, Sailor, a posthumously published novella.

Conrad

Joseph Conrad was a Polish-British writer regarded as one of the greatest novelists to write in the English language. Though he did not speak English fluently until his twenties, he was a master prose stylist who brought a non-English sensibility into English literature.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 26 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Cognitive Science

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. This is episode 26. Last time we took a look at what's happening in Germany in the period post Hegel, post Marx, post Nietzsche. And we took a look at the rise of the Pseudo-Religious Ideologies and all the various other cultural undercurrents and threads and processes of transformation that were gathered together in Germany and then exacerbated and ignited, if you'll allow me a volatile metaphor, by Germany's terrific defeat in the terror that was world war one and the impact of this had on Germany and how all of this, all of these features that we saw at work in Germany and in the Meaning Crisis get spun in Hitler's autodidactic myopia into a Gnostic nightmare, titanic pseudo-religious ideology, and how the two great pseudo religious ideologies of Nazi-ism and Marxism, at least the Stalinesque version in the Soviet union come to titanic blows in the Eastern front at the battle of Kursk. And then I pointed out that [all] this, and then the ideological battle, [the] political ideological battles of the cold war thereafter have left us deeply traumatised.

We place no faith in pseudo-religious ideologies, utopian visions to solve the Meaning Crisis. At least many of us don't. We do not see ourselves as capable of the nostalgic return to religion, somehow pretending that all of this history and all the science can be ignored in a kind of fundamentalism - and please note that I'm not equating all religion with fundamentalism. Instead we find ourselves in the middle, in between these, and we're trapped! We can't go back and we can't do a secular alternative to religion. And yet we need something that will systematically create psycho-technologies that transform consciousness, cognition, character and culture in a way that religions have, if we're going to address the meaning crisis and, in fact, the Metacrisis that we're confronting right now in the world today.

And so we're caught in this situation and we pursue either various radicalisms — and I critiqued the idea that the meaning crisis should be understood, or we should attempt to solve it, by the clash or through the clash by means of the clash of political ideologies, that that is to

fundamentally misframed it because, if you remember, Kierkegaard and Marx and Schopenhauer all in their different ways, and in ways that we can't criticise, are nevertheless pointing to the fact that the participatory and perspectival knowing that is so crucial to responding to, and losses of meaning and regenerating meaning, has been ignored by Hegel. So we can't do this politically. It doesn't mean that politics is irrelevant, but it means that framing and formulating the problem at the political level is to radically miss-frame it and miss-formulate it.

And then I proposed to you that instead we turn to an alternative way of trying to reformulate the problem, that we try and get a scientific understanding, as best we can, of the meaning machinery, this machinery that we perspectivally participate within. We don't just simply.../ I'll often say "Meaning Making", but as I'll argue, we don't make meaning the way the Romantics said, neither do we just receive meaning from the world the way the Empiricists in the enlightenment argued. We're going to see that it's neither one of those - that's another dichotomy that we have to transcend. But nevertheless, let's look at this machinery, the machinery of meaning realisation. What are the cognitive processes at work within it? And I propose that we do that from a scientific worldview, precisely because — at least from a scientific point of view — precisely because we need that to compliment the historical analysis and because the scientific worldview is part of the problem of the Meaning Crisis itself.

So I propose we take a look at the science of cognition and that means that we take a look at Cognitive Science. I am a cognitive scientist professionally but, as I said from the very beginning of this series, I'm offering you a particular interpretation of how to do Cognitive Science. Not everybody in cognitive science would agree with me, but I think it is a viable and a respectable version of cognitive science that can be argued for. What is that idea? It is the idea that cognitive science is born out of a particular way in which the scientific study of mind has unfolded. And as I indicated last time, it's a way that has actually contributed significantly to a version of the meaning crisis that is deeply personal, deeply into the very guts of our minds and bodies. And this has to do with the idea that this term (writes Mind in the top right of the board) has now become equivocal (writes equivocal below Mind), and we'll come back to that in a minute, because we actually

are talking about different things or at least different levels of the reality of mind with different disciplines. Different disciplines that use different vocabularies, different theoretical styles of argumentation, different means of measuring phenomena, different ways of gathering evidence.

A Review Of The Levels And Disciplines

So we have the brain that's being talked about by the neuroscientist (writes both on the board, left and right respectively) who talk about patterns of neural activity, using fMRIs, et cetera... we talked about that. And then we have a totally different level at which we're understanding intelligence, the mind, in terms of Information Processing (writes Information Processing above Brain on the left), especially when we're in the project, not of measuring brains, but of trying to make machines that are instances of mind; not just simulations, but bona fide instances. And this is the project of Artificial General Intelligence, projects like machine learning, et cetera (writes AGI and machine learning on the right above neuroscience). And of course, they talk about different things! They don't talk about neurones. They might talk about neural networks, but those aren't the same thing, importantly. They'll talk about algorithms, heuristics, all that sort of stuff. And they don't use fMRIs, they actually make machines and processes. Different ontology, different methodology, et cetera.

Then, of course, we have understanding mind as Behaviour and that's Psychology (writes behaviour on the left and psychology on the right) and here we talk about things like working memory and problem solving, decision-making and we do experimentation on human beings and statistical analysis... Again, different ontology, different theoretical vocabulary, different methods of studying the phenomenon, different ways of presenting evidence. And we noted throughout that there are attempts to create hybrids between the various disciplines. So these are the levels of reality here (writes Levels at the top of the list on the left), and these are the disciplines here (writes Disciplines at the top of the list on the right). Because above this, as we said, we have Language (writes language above behaviour) because of the tremendously important and special role that language plays with respect to being a medium for mind and being a way of communicating mind. And of course, here we have Linguistics (writes linguistics above psychology).

And we might get psycholinguistics to try and bridge between them, but nevertheless, in linguistics we're talking about things like, sentence structures and rules of transformation and gathering different kinds of evidence, et cetera. And then the networking of minds and brains together through language and behaviour is Culture (writes culture at the top on the left), and that studied by Anthropology (writes anthropology at the top on the right) and that has a very different method. This (anthropology) really emphasises the perspectival and the participatory. So you do participant observation, you write ethnographies.

What Is Equivocation?

And of course that (indicates the breakdown of “Levels” and “Disciplines” on the board) helps to give.../ one of the advantages of the science is it helps to formulate and specialised people so they can get much more precise analysis. And so this is a good [thing/fit]. I'm not trying to in any way despise this, but it is problematic in that it carries with it... first of all, it fragments us (circles equivocal) with this term “mind”(circles Mind). It's now become equivocal. What are we talking about when we're talking about our mind and related constructs like ourself? So let's remember what equivocation is. Equivocation is when you fall into confusion, precisely because you do not keep track of the meaning of your terms. So here's one of my favourite [examples], right? So, “Nothing is better than long life and happiness” (written on the board). Kind of something that you'd get in star Trek, right? Great! ...and then I can say to you, “a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is better than nothing” (written below previous statement). Okay, so nothing is better than long life and happiness and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is better than nothing, ergo “a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is better than long life and happiness” (draws a line under the previous two statements and writes this)! So you know what you should do! You should eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and then commit suicide!!

Now that's ridiculous, and that's the whole point! This should not convince you to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and commit suicide. It's designed to convince you of the ridiculousness of this argument. And why is the argument ridiculous? Because I'm use[ing].../ the argument hinges on the this (circles both instances of the use of “nothing”) and that, because I'm

using the same term, it sounds like I can make the inference. But of course, although I'm using the same word, I'm not meaning the same thing. This (nothing #1) means 'no thing' from the set of things that makes life worth living is better than long life and happiness. This (nothing #2) means no thing from this set of things you should eat. And those are not equivalent sets. There's not equivalent reference. If you don't keep track of what your words mean — that's why I'm always so careful to try and give you the meaning of things and the history of the meaning of a term — If you don't get sensitive to the meaning of terms, you'll fall into equivocation (circles equivocation again), which is a disastrous way to try and reason about anything.

So what's the point of that? Well, The term mind isn't univocal. It can be.../ What am I talking about? Am I talking about 'this'? Am I talking about this? Am I talking about this? Am I talking about this? Am I talking about it? (Pointing to all the different levels) Am I talking about how this and this [interact]? Some are talking about this (pointing to two different levels)? We don't know! And the degree to which I'm equivocal, without realising it, is the degree to which my thinking about my mind and therefore myself is ridiculous. If you aren't clear about what this word means, how you're using this concept, you will be bullshitting yourself through equivocation. I also pointed out that one of the consequences of this is fragmentation. What do I mean by that? Well, there's an ignorance in this (indicates the levels/disciplines on the board). And again, I'm not, I am not disparaging these sciences. I love these sciences! I've got education in them and I value them. That is not what is happening here. But, one of the things that is missing that we are ignorant of in this model is this: these various levels of reality causally impact and constrain each other in very important ways (draws little arrows between the different levels). These individual disciplines don't capture that. That's why there's this constant temptation and need to create the hybrids like psycho-linguistics.

The Full Breakdown - What Is Cognitive Science?

So, how are we going to study, therefore, the relationship between the levels? We have to get the disciplines to hybridise or, beyond that, to talk to each other, to integrate together in some fashion, if we're going to deal with

that ignorance and that has to be an astute practice. We can't just integrate by equivocating - no integration through equivocation because that's just bullshitting. So, what we have to do is we have to have a philosophically astute integration. We need philosophy (writes Philosophy to the right, grouping the disciplines together) precisely because philosophy is the discipline that has us take conceptual care to try and articulate the meaning of our terms, to try and bridge — because that's what philosophy does: it tries to bridge between these different vocabularies, these different ontologies, these different methodologies. That's what philosophy does! Philosophy isn't about sitting around in cafes, smoking cigarettes and saying vaguely obscure things! The discipline that tries to come up with a philosophically astute integration between these disciplines so that we can avoid equivocation and deal with fragmentation and overcome the ignorance of the causal relationship between the levels... that's Cognitive Science. That's what cognitive science is. That's what people mean when they say cognitive science is an interdisciplinary science.

Now I hope you see that cognitive science is already directly confronting and addressing one of the ways in which the Meaning Crisis is inhabiting us in terms of the way the scientific Worldview — again, I'm not denigrating it — but the way in which the scientific worldview is fragmenting (indicates the levels on the board) us and causing us to fall into ignorance about who and what we are, and to equivocate and bullshit ourselves about who and what we are. Cognitive science is placed to address that by its very nature. And of course it is the science that is going to talk about this meaning generation process, because all of these (the disciplines) are about that in some important way. They're all about how mind makes sense. (Wipes board clean.)

Distinguishing Three Kinds Of Cognitive Science

- Cognitive Sciences Understood As Generic Nominalism

Now I want to argue that there are different ways in which you can understand how you practice cognitive science - how you try and create these bridges between the disciplines. [I'm going to] And I'm not presenting

them in a neutral fashion. I'm telling you that right from the beginning. I think one of these ways is the best way. A way, nevertheless, in which people use this term, and they'll often not capitalise it and they'll pluralise it, they'll talk about the "cognitive sciences" (writes this on the board) and then all that is just "Generic Nominalism" (writes this below cognitive sciences). Cognitive Science or the cognitive sciences is just a name for the 'genus' that each one of these disciplines belong to: Anthropology is one of the cognitive sciences, machine learning is one of the cognitive sciences, Neuroscience is one of the cognitive sciences. Generic Nominalism is useless given the concerns I've articulated for you. It's not going to address the equivocation. It is not going to address the fragmentation. It is not going to give us any purchase on addressing the ignorance between the different levels of reality. So I believe we should, although this is often used this way, we should reject this at least as the sole meaning of what Cognitive Science is doing. (Wipes board clean again.)

- Cognitive Science Understood As Interdisciplinary Eclecticism

The next thing people do is they will have this term "Cognitive Science", and they understand it as a kind of Interdisciplinary Eclecticism (both written on the board). [What I do, I'm, you know, to do cognitive science] Let's say [-] I'll be a member of one of the core disciplines, let's say I'm a neuroscientist. And what I do is I'm a neuroscientist, but I read a bit about psychology or perhaps linguistics... And then I picked some ideas that are interesting from the other disciplines and I use them. And sometimes I'll tell some of my linguists or psychological friends, some of the things I'm doing in neuroscience and some of those ideas might interest them... And the model for this is, kind of — I mean this as an analogy — what we have in 'Interfaith Dialogue'. See, the whole point about interfaith dialogue is the Christians and the Buddhist talk, and I find something interesting — let's say I'm a Buddhist — in Christianity and the Christian side finds something interesting me, and we talk... But we're not trying to radically transform each other. There's no sense in which there's going to be a really significant transformative transfer of insight between us. And we're certainly not trying to make something above and beyond Buddhism and Christianity. It's not like after we do the interfaith dialogue, we're going to have come up with a

new religion! Now I use that metaphor precisely because I think it's helpful for understanding.

Now the goal of interfaith dialogue is to enhance mutual understanding and build tolerance and respect, reduce violence... and these are all noble endeavours, so I'm not disparaging this. But notice the problem here. Notice it's not really capturing why people feel so strongly drawn towards creating things like Psycho-linguistics that bridge between them, the different disciplines. See the problem with this is it's either too weak or too strong. This (interdisciplinary eclecticism) can very quickly just become.../ there's no significant bridging between the disciplines. There's some interest, there's some creation of mutual respect, but it's not the case that we're really capturing significant, theoretically important relationships between the different levels by having strong and transformative insights passing between the disciplines. So this will tend to degenerate, or people will realise they need something stronger. They will realise that there is something to this attempt to create the linking disciplines. (Wipes board clean again.)

- Cognitive Science Understood As Synoptic Integration

And that's the third and I think, therefore, best vision of Cognitive Science. That's the vision of Cognitive Science as Synoptic Integration (writes this on the board). Synoptic Integration is not saying that all the disciplines are saying the same thing. But it's not simple eclecticism of "well, they're all saying different things, but let's get them all to be friendly and like each other, and they can have some sort of peripheral influence on each other". Synoptic integration is saying, "no, we need to build something right between the disciplines that addresses the equivocation, deals with the fragmentation and fills in the ignorance - tells us about how the levels are actually causally interacting and constraining each other. That's Synoptic Integration. So what you want to do is you need to say, "They're not saying the same thing, but they're not just saying different things either!". You have to create this bridging vocabulary that integrates across the disciplines (writes Bridging Vocabulary below Synoptic Integration).

Metaphor

Now that's a tricky thing to do! But we've talked a long time ago about the fact that our brains, actually, since the upper Palaeolithic transition... we've been training them and developing them and inculcating them to get very good at bridging between domains. Even the word 'bridge' exemplifies what I'm referring to, namely metaphor. We use metaphor as a way of bridging between demands. I am not about to make the argument that science is metaphor - that is not what's happening here. But I'm trying to use metaphor as a way of saying that there's already a cognitive ability in us that we can exapt and make use of in Cognitive Science.

Look at how a metaphor works: If I say to you — and Sam is a human being — I say to you "Sam is a Pig" (writes this on a freshly cleaned board), notice what you have to do in order to make this work. It looks like I'm creating an identity claim: "Sam is a pig", but of course what makes it a metaphor is it's not an identity claim! I can't use this as a way of telling you that Sam has pink skin and he lives on a farm and he's going to be eaten by other human beings someday. Because that's not what I mean. I mean something like he's glutinous or he's sexually selfish or something like that. So notice what I have to do: I have to keep the two different (left to right down/up line below the two) while also saying how they're importantly the same (right to left up/down line above them). Now, why am I doing that? Because the difference, right (writes 'difference' on the line below Sam and Pig)? That difference gets me outside of my [framing of Sam] - here's my framing of Sam (makes a containment gesture over on the left near Sam). And the difference gets me outside of my framing of Sam (moves viewpoint way over to the right). And I look through this (the Pig end of the simple metaphor framework on the board), I look through if you'll allow me (holds up his own glasses) the 'framing' of something as a pig, and I use this to look and see something in Sam, a way in which they're identical. So I stepped back, through the difference, but I look through, into the identity (writes 'identity' on the line above Sam and Pig) and I see things in Sam through my 'pig lenses', if you'll allow the metaphor, and it allows me to see and understand Sam in a different way. It alters what I consider salient in Sam, it restructures.

Aptness Of Metaphors

And so metaphor has this duality about it (indicates the anti-clockwise motion around the metaphor on the board (Sam -> difference -> Pig -> identity) and what you want to do is you want to create a metaphor that balances these in an appropriate way. When a metaphor balances these two well, we talk about a metaphor being ‘apt’ (writes aptness on the board). So notice if I make the ‘identity’ relation too strong, if I emphasise this side too much and I say, “Bees are Hornets!” you don’t think, “Oh wow! What a great metaphor that is! That’s such a wonderful metaphor!” In fact, that’s a really crappy metaphor! It doesn’t give me enough distance. I can’t step back enough and have an insight into [bees]. This provokes, no insight, there’s no insightful transformation of my understanding of bees - this is too close. But if emphasise the ‘difference’ too much, something like, “arguments are chairs! Well, arguments are chairs because they’re both human made structures and we use them on a day to day basis and...”! This is a very crappy metaphor precisely because the difference is too great. I’ve stepped back so much, if you’ll allow me, I’m losing sight of this and it’s not clear, it’s vague - what am I supposed to see about arguments through this distant lens of chairs!? ‘Apt’ is when I get an appropriate balance of that.

So what I’m looking for, in Cognitive Science, is I’m looking for theoretical constructs, proposed theoretical entities, that get this apt balance, that allow me to keep the differences between the disciplines, but I also see from and through those distances, relevant identities that allow me to look from neuroscience into Artificial intelligence in an insightful way. Or [-] step back from behaviour and psychology [and] step into linguistics and then I look at psychology - I keep that distance, but I also try and see, “ahh, but what can I see in psychology through the lens of linguistics now?”. Of course the thing about Cognitive Science is it’s not trying to create single aptness, it’s not trying to create a one.../ This (Sam is a Pig) is one way - I’ve just bridged between two domains. Cognitive Science is trying to create constructs that are multi-apt, that bridge between multiple domains, multiple disciplines. And that multi-aptness is really important.

Plausibility And Bias Reduction

So I’m trying to create constructs with multi-aptness (writes this on the board). They get this balance between identity and difference that affords

and provokes insightful transformation of the theorising from one discipline to another. And I start to create an overarching integration. Now this brings up an important idea about “well, what's constraining me? [-] How do I judge if I'm doing this well or badly?” Well, this has to do, I think, with this notion that is very much the notion that we use when we're considering how to create new constructs, new ideas, theoretical entities that will bridge between domains, create lines of inquiries. This is plausibility (writes plausibility below constructs with multi-aptness). Now there are two meanings to this word: One is just a synonym for high probability (writes high probability off plausibility), and that's not the one I mean. There's a different meaning originally, really, brought to the fore by Rescher's work (writes Rescher off plausibility too), but a lot of other people... there's work being done now... some good work in psychology being done on plausibility. I'm doing some work with Leonardo Ferraro and Junchul Kim on plausibility and this other sense of plausibility isn't a synonym for high probability. It's a synonym, not for rational, but for reasonable, [the sense] ‘making good sense’, and of course, man, that's so relevant to us, right? Making good sense. Deserving to be taken seriously. Right? (Writes ‘reasonable’, ‘making good sense’ and ‘deserving to be taken seriously’ all off Rescher.) This is what plausible means. It's reasonable. It makes good sense. It should be taken seriously.

When we look at ideas that we're using to make sense of the world - and again, this is building on a lot of people's work! I can't refer to them all, all the people I'm trying to draw together. Of course, people make judgments of plausibility all over the place and they bullshit themselves in this in all kinds of ways. We'll talk about that. So I'm talking about here, not a descriptive theory of what people do when they're saying something possible, I'm talking about a normative theory about ‘what do they do when they're doing it well?’. What are they doing when they're doing it well? So part of the argument is this: people, of course, really like ideas that are multi apt, right? Here's my idea (draws a little box on the board), my thesis, my proposal, some model, whatever kind of construct I'm using. And it's multi-apt in that I can use it and it can bridge to this domain and this (draws four medium length arrows coming out of and diverging from the right side of the box), I

can go into these many different domains. I can do this insightful connecting and transfer.

I think this is a much better way, this notion of multi-aptness and being able to go into many different domains and help us find, formulate and solve problems. I think this is a much better understanding of what scientists are trying to invoke when they say a theory is ‘elegant’ than just talking about simplicity (writes elegant on the board, below the diverging arrows) precisely because of the way we have no canonical way of trying to work out what scientists are meaning when they talk about simplicity, whereas it's clear that they do seek constructs that do this. Now here's a problem: Is that good enough (the multi-apt box and arrows construct)? Is that good enough to make a construct plausible? The problem with that is, if it's just on its own, we're lacking something. We're lacking another thing that we want and this is a point actually made by Rescher, and it comes out in some of the psychology of plausibility. You see, we also want that these constructs are produced in a certain way. [Not just that...] This is how they're used (writes Used above the arrows coming out of the box on the right), but this is how they're produced (writes Produced above the ‘idea’ box, to the left). This is their forward orientation (on the right). This is their backward orientation (on the left). We want a construct that has been produced by many convergent, independent lines of investigation (draws 4 arrows converging into the left side of the ‘idea’ box, writing ‘convergence’ below).

Now, let me show you just a concrete example of that is this. And you can see it even in young kids. You prefer information that integrates — think about integration — across multiple senses. So you prefer information that is not just something you can see, but also you can simultaneously hear. That's why seeing and hearing me right now is better than just seeing me or just hearing me. Now, why is that the case? Well, you see, if I'm getting all of my information, just through one channel, there's a very good chance that this thing (idea box) is being produced by bias, by distortion in that [one] channel. But if I'm getting the same thing produced from multiple independent channels, there's a very good chance that it's not being produced by the bias or distortion in any one of these [input channels]. There's a very good chance that the relative biases and distortions cancel each other out. So by doing convergence, I get bias reduction (writes bias reduction off of

convergence), and man does that matter for overcoming the way in which we bullshit ourselves with salience! So convergence gives me bias reduction, what Rescher calls trustworthiness (writes trustworthiness below bias reduction). Now trustworthiness isn't truth. It's not certainty. This, by the way, is why science likes numbers. Scientists like numbers, not because we're fascists, or because we don't appreciate the artistic beauty of blah, blah, blah, blah... We like numbers because they give us this (indicates the construct on the board). Look (draws 3 tallies on the board), you can see three. You can hear three (claps loud three times), you can touch three (touches three things). Numbers afford convergence, and they boost trustworthiness. They help to reduce bias. And remember, I've tried to argue that the [-] scientific method of experimentation and observation are methods, psycho technologies, in which we're trying to reduce bias; reduce the way in which we're deceiving how we're coming up with our constructs.

What Conspiracy Theories Are

Now think about this: If you had just elegance — that multi-aptness, you can bridge to many different areas and link lots of stuff together — but it wasn't produced in a trustworthy manner, what would you have? You would have conspiracy theories. That's exactly what conspiracy theories do! They're a form of bullshitting because they're very: "Look, if you will just accept that the British Royal family are lizard reptilian aliens from another dimension, you can explain so much of their political and social and interpersonal behaviour! Just give me this idea..." (elegance imbalanced construct) "... just give me this and look at what I can do! Look at all the different disparate facts I can link and integrate together! I can give you this synoptic integration...". And you should be saying "Yeah, but it's all bullshit". It's bullshit because we want this (useful/elegant side), so it's very salient, but it's bullshit precisely because we've lost this (taps production/convergent side of the construct). We don't trust the construct.

What Triviality Is

What about the opposite? So, The conspiracy theory is farfetched because it gives us lots of this (*1 - draws large divergent arrows), but very, very little convergence (draws small convergent arrows). What about this? Where I've got tremendous convergence (*2 - draws large convergent arrows), surely

we'd like this, and there's very little insight integration (draws small divergent arrows). What's that? Well, if you read scientific journals, you'll see people — any [journals], even beyond philosophical [ones] — people rejecting this (*2). This up here, this (*1) is the conspiracy theory and it's farfetched (writes farfetched beside new diagram *1). But you know what this is (*2)? This is triviality (writes triviality beside new diagram *2) and we reject things [that are trivial]. Now to accuse something of being trivial is to not say it's false. It's to say that it has no transformative power (indicates divergent arrows on main construct diagram): it makes no difference. It causes no insight. It affords no integration.

Deepity: A Pseudo-Profound Statement

So this (indicates *1 & *2) tells us something. And notice! Notice, notice, notice ways in which we can equivocate on these (excitedly cleans the right side of the board, leaving the diagrams). We can equivocate between these two (draws a little double ended arrow between *1 & *2). So Daniel Dennett talks about this. This is a way in which, one way in which we bullshit ourselves, he calls it the “Deepity”; a Deepity. So people do this: they'll say things like “love is only a four letter word” (writes this on the board)! And everybody says this and “Oh, it's very profound...” and you take another drink of your alcohol or whatever! Now notice what's going on here: On one level this is a triviality. Of course Love is a four letter word! I've got many different independent memories, different uses, everybody's using the word love this way (indicates all the different converging arrows on *2). Love is a four letter word. Now at that level, it's trivial. But then I'm supposed to equivocate between this as a word (draws a square around love), I'm equivocating between this as a word and this as a concept for a thing that I care about because love as a thing has tremendous elegance. It goes into so much of my life. But notice what's happened here: I'm not actually giving you any information or analysis about love as a thing or a concept! I'm pretending to give you multi-aptness, when in fact all I'm doing is giving you triviality. I equivocate. So I say, “love. It's just a four letter word”. It's bullshit!

It's bullshit that makes use of, abuses - and this is a powerful way in which we bullshit ourselves, with these Deepities, these things that sound deep and

are not deep at all because what we're doing is equivocating. We start with something that's undeniably trivial and then we're equivocating with something that looks like it's elegant and multi-apt. And we bullshit ourselves! We do the reverse, right? We say something that looks like it's really multi-apt, really controversial, it's going to change everything (draws another box with large (*3) divergent arrows coming out; representing great insight and transformative power). And then we're challenged, "Oh no, but 'great criticism' ...", "Oh no, no. I never meant that! I only met this trivial thing that nobody would possibly object to!" (Draws another box with small (*4) convergent arrows going into it; representing weak convergence). This is the motte-and-bailey strategy, right? Where you present [an argument] and it's looks radical and controversial (*3). And then when you're criticised you withdraw. "No, I was just saying this! (*4)", it looks like I'm doing [this] (*3), but yeah it's just this (*4)! But then I pretend that I didn't actually change my position. They're the same thing (points out the two different boxes from *3 & *4). And that is, again, how we bullshit ourselves.

Coming To What Is Profound:

Establishing A Trustworthy And Powerful Balance

So notice how we can abuse this machinery and bullshit ourselves. Now, the fact that we can abuse it, tells us how we can improve it [to] how it's supposed to be used! Because if we acknowledge that [-] this is abuse (*1 & *2), that the Deepity is an abuse. If we acknowledge that the motte-and-bailey strategy (*3 & *4) of avoiding criticism is an abuse. If we admit that we don't want farfetchedness and triviality, we can put this all together into a Normative account of what good plausibility is: We have high convergence matched by high elegance. Now we'll talk a little bit later, when we do some more cognitive science, we want something more about this (circles particular attention within the first box of the main construct) in terms of relevance, realisation and other things, but we'll come back to that. But when I get a balance between convergence and elegance, then I get something that's highly plausible. I'm making a construct that is trustworthy and powerful and it's affording me getting a new pattern of intelligibility. This is how I make integrative new patterns of intelligibility in the world. And so

this is what you're trying to do in cognitive science. You're always trying to create these constructs that are high in plausibility.

When I get something that is extremely trustworthy, that is balanced with powerful multi-aptness then I think that's what we mean when we say something is profound (writes Profound on the board). It's the exact opposite of the Deepity, the triviality, the conspiracy, the Motte-and-Bailey bullshit. It's profound! Now being profound doesn't mean it's true. Being profound means it's very reasonable and it should be taken very seriously.

I'm going to now try and exemplify this with you. I should mention before I go, that this idea of the balance between this (convergent side) and this (divergent side), I got this from Elijah Millgram's really, really brilliant work on Practical Induction. Practical induction is not induction about how you change your belief. Practical induction is how you change your desires, how you change what you care for. It's deeply relevant to that Socratic project of having a rationality of what you care about. (Wipes entire board clean.)

Cognitive Science: A Definition

Okay. So what I want to do is first of all draw this together in this definition... so Cognitive science is the discipline that it's trying to bring about synoptic integration. And I'm going to say, it's trying to bring about profound synoptic integration. It's trying to create these constructs, that bridge — don't reduce — bridge between the disciplines. Profound synoptic integration that addresses equivocation fragmentation and ignorance - the ignorance of the causal relationship between the levels of reality that we designate by the term line.

- Cognitive science = “Profound synoptic integration that addresses equivocation, fragmentation and ignorance.”

That's what cognitive science is trying to do. And of course, as I've tried to show you throughout, it is deeply relevant to the Meaning Crisis because it deals with this issue of fragmentation, the confusion we have about ourselves, how we're sort of pulled apart. It deals with, as you've just seen, the meaning making machinery and it deals with, again, as you've just seen, our propensity for bullshitting ourselves and deceiving ourselves.

Meaning Cultivation

Now, what I want to do is I want to do the Cognitive science of “meaning making”. I'm not totally happy with the term (meaning making), because it sounds too romantic in my ears. I'd also want to say “meaning seeking”, but that sounds too empiricist in my ears, like meaning is just out there to be seen and experienced! So I'm going to try a new metaphor, because it also goes with something else I've been saying from the beginning. And this is inspired by the way we talk about the ‘cultivation’ of wisdom and it's inspired by Heidegger's use of this metaphor: “Meaning Cultivation” (writes this on the board). Because what I'm going to try and argue, and [-] also you've seen this in the history, is meaning isn't something we are imposing wilfully on the world. That's a mistake from our history. Meaning isn't something we just find in the world - that's to ignore the scientific revolution. Meaning is something between us and the world, like the way you cultivate a plant - you're doing stuff with the plant, but you're also allowing the plant to unfold. You're cultivating, with the world, meaning between you and the world. So as much as possible, I'm going to try and switch [to] this (underlines Meaning Cultivation). [But] I will fall into habit because this is the language that we inherited from the cognitive revolution in psychology about talking about meaning making and making sense. And, where the emphasis is on us making, even though, as I'm going to show you, the third generation Cog-science is much more talking this way (taps Meaning Cultivation) than the romantic notion that we impose or make meaning, or we simply sense it or find it in the world.

Okay, I want to start doing the cognitive science of this (Meaning Cultivation). I want to take a look at the science of cognition. And I want to try and exemplify what I showed you, what I argued for. I want to try and exemplify Synoptic Integration and the creation of a plausible construct. So the faculty in us that is supposed to be our core cognitive capacity, our core capacity for meaning cultivation and being able to adaptively respond to the world — and this goes all the way back to the Greek heritage — this is the notion of Intelligence. Intelligence is the capacity that makes you a cognitive agent. At least an agent whose cognition is working with meaning as opposed to a living thing that is in some sense — like a plant — responding, maybe in a very sophisticated fashion, but it's just responding in this

complex fashion to its environment. Intelligence means you are in some sense, a Cognitive Agent (writes Cognitive Agent on the board, off Intelligence).

General Problem Solver

Okay. So, what is it that we should.../ how should we frame this? We're going to try and get a purchase on this. So a good way of trying to understand this is, the way we try to test for intelligence, is being a General Problem Solver (writes this off of Intelligence too). And this goes back both within the psychometric to people like Binet and Simon who are trying to measure intelligence and people like Newell and Simon — two different [Simons], by the way — that are trying to create artificial intelligence, make intelligence: artificial intelligence, artifactual intelligence, right? Not fake intelligence. Both of them, point to this idea that when we're trying to measure or make intelligence, we're trying to measure you as a general problem solver, or we're trying to make a machine that is a general problem solver. Now, what does that mean? Okay, so here's a machine (picks up his red cup) that's not a general problem solver. This is good for solving this problem, holding water, and we've talked about this, in such a way that I can use it. It solves a bunch of other problems maybe, but not very many. Not very many. It's very limited in its problem solving capacity. Unlike that cup, you are capable of solving a wide variety of problems in a wide variety of domains. You are a general problem solver.

You can worry about God and how to get a drink. How to go swimming. How to build a houseboat...! The number of domains in which you can operate is vast and within each one of those domains, there are many different kinds of problems you can solve. You are a general problem solver. And that's why, when we measure intelligence, we give you a wide variety of different kinds of tests - to see if you can solve a wide variety of problems across multiple domains. That's how I test to see if you're a general problem solver and what Newell & Simon were exactly trying to make. They in fact called it — we can't use this term now because it now means Global Positioning [Satellite] — but they called it the GPS, the General Problem Solver. The first project to make artificial intelligence, not just

computational machines but artificial intelligence, was this project of trying to make the General Problem Solver.

Rationality Over Intelligence

The Process Of Problem Solving Over The Solution

Okay! So you are a general problem solver! Okay, great, that makes sense. (Indicating General Problem Solver on the board...) Now, what I need to do is a couple of things to be.../ I've got to be very careful here! And cause people get very.../ (Now moving back to indicate Intelligence on the board...) Of course this is... we'll come back to that. This is such a politically Laden term, precisely because we aren't clear about what we're talking about - we're equivocating all over the place and we're ignorant of how this term is applied to different levels of reality. And yet, nevertheless, we bullshit ourselves by finding it salient and rushing into speech and action without the clarity that is needed. We'll see, for example, that this (still indicating intelligence) is not a synonym for being rational; being intelligent. And what you ultimately should care about is not how intelligent you are, but how rational you can become.

So let's take care here. We're meaning some capacity you have for solving your problems and learning, and so we want to keep intelligence separate from knowledge (writes knowledge off of intelligence also). Of course having knowledge enables you to do things and in that sense, in a broad sense of activity, it makes you more adoptive to your environment: you can do lots of things, even if those things make claims that other people value for their truth. But [-] if you make these synonymous (intelligence and knowledge), then you can't use this (intelligence) to explain this (knowledge). You can't say the reason why Susan was able to acquire such knowledge is because she's intelligent because if intelligence means possessing knowledge then all you're saying is Susan possesses knowledge because Susan possesses knowledge, which is non explanatory! (Wipes knowledge off the board.)

What Is It To Solve A Problem - Newell & Simon

So what we want to ask is “what is it to solve a problem?”. Don't focus on the product, having the answer, getting the knowledge. Focus on the process.

The process. And this is going to be a hallmark — we've talked about this before — the hallmark of rationality is valuing the process, not just being fixated on the product, especially the belief, the conclusion. So what — we've got to analyse the process — what is it to solve a problem? And this is where the work of Newell & Simon was just so deeply influential. (Wipes board clean.) It's been influential in psychology, computer science, economics. It's just Seminole and important work.

Now, as I first try to describe it to you, it's going to strike you as somewhat trivial! But let's go very carefully on what we're going to do. We're going to try and analyse a problem down into four basic features. And we'll end today's episode with that. And at that point, it won't seem like we've got that profound construct that we're looking for. And then I'll need you to wait to next time. But Newell and Simon basically said, "What is it to have a problem?". A problem is when there's a difference between the state you're in, which they called your initial state (draws a circle on the left of the board with I.S. in it) and the state you want to be, and this is your goal state (draws a circle on the right with G.S. in it). So I have a problem when there's a significant difference between those, for example, I'm thirsty (I.S.) and I don't want to be thirsty (G.S.), and those aren't the same thing. Those things have to change in the world and in me (walks over and takes a drink of water) for the difference between the initial state and the goal state to go away. So part of what I have to do when I solve a problem is this system has to be able to represent — we'll have to come back to how are we're going to use that term — the initial state and the goal state.

And then there are actions (draws little lines from I.S. circle to the right), operations I can perform that will change the state I'm initially in, to some other States (draws new, similar circles at the end of the operation lines). So, for example, part of the problem I had was I'm over here and the glass is over there! So one of the things I can do, one of the things I can do is I can walk towards the glass. The cup. Of course, another thing I can do is I can raise my hand (raises hand straight up, well away from the cup). Now you say, "Well, don't raise your hand. That's stupid!". Well, wait! There's going to come a point though, when I do need to raise my hand (demonstrates). So I'm going to need that operation! Okay? So... I think you're you starting to see things...! And then what I do is, from here (diagram on the board),

perhaps I can do two other operations (adds two more operations to one of the new States circles), from here, maybe three from here, maybe only one and so on and so forth... (adds a network of operation and states to the board, between I.S. and G.S.). I'm not going to draw it all out, right...?

So, so far I've got three things that I'm analysing problem solving into: Initial State, a Goal State and Operators that can transform one state into another state. (Simple, horizontal flow Search Space Diagram shown on screen (@57:24)) There's one other thing I have. I have what are called Path Constraints. You see, I'm a general problem solver. I don't want to find just any solution. One of the ways I can make lunch for myself is to burn down my house. It will cook my food! That is not a good solution. Not because it doesn't achieve the goal I want in this situation of cooking my food, but it really reduces me as a general problem solver. I don't want to solve this problem to the detriment of my ability to solve multiple other problems, or I will lose my intelligence. I will lose my capacity as a general problem solver.

So what I have to do is the following... Solving a problem is this: it's to have a sequence of operations (starts to indicated progressing left to right through the operation circles on the board), a sequence of operations that will transform the Initial State into the Goal State while obeying the Path Constraints, preserving me as a General Problem Solver. That's what it is to solve a problem. And this (brackets the whole diagram on the board), this is called the Problem Space or sometimes called the Search Space. Now, what this analysis does for you is it explicates the problem space, and this is where all of the powerful insight of Newell and Simon's work comes out, because once we start to pay attention to properties of this search space, we can see how profound this idea actually turns out to be. And that's what we'll do in our next session together.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 26 Notes

Rescher

Nicholas Rescher is a German-American philosopher, polymath, and author, teaching at the University of Pittsburgh. He is the Chairman of the Center for Philosophy of Science and has formerly served as Chairman of the Philosophy Department.

Book alluded to: Plausible Reasoning - [Buy Here](#)

Leonardo Ferraro

Junchul Kim

Daniel Dennett

Daniel Clement Dennett III is an American philosopher, writer, and cognitive scientist whose research centers on the philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, and philosophy of biology, particularly as those fields relate to evolutionary biology and cognitive science.

Book mentioned: Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking - [Buy Here](#)

motte-and-bailey

The motte-and-bailey fallacy (named after the motte-and-bailey castle) is a form of argument and an informal fallacy where an arguer conflates two positions which share similarities, one modest and easy to defend (the "motte") and one much more controversial (the "bailey").

Elijah Millgram

Elijah "Lije" Millgram is an American philosopher. He is E. E. Erickson Professor of Philosophy at the University of Utah. His research specialties include practical reason and moral philosophy. Elijah Millgram received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1991.

Book mentioned: Practical Induction - [Buy Here](#)

Heidegger

Martin Heidegger was a German philosopher, and a seminal thinker in the Continental tradition of philosophy. He is best known for contributions to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism.

Binet and Simon

Binet Simon Scale of Intelligence

The Binet-Simon scale was created by the French psychologist Alfred Binet and his student Theodore Simon. ... Binet believed that intelligence is malleable and that intelligence tests would help target kids in need of extra attention to advance their intelligence.

Newell and Simon

Fifty years ago, Newell and Simon (1956) invented a “thinking machine” called the Logic Theorist. ... The Logic Theorist and other cognitive simulations developed by Newell and Simon in the late 1950s had a large impact on the newly developing field of information-processing (or cognitive) psychology.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 27 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Problem Formulation

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. This is episode 27. So last time we took a look at the nature of Cognitive Science and argued for Synoptic Integration that addresses equivocation and fragmentation, and the ignorance of the causal relation between these different levels which we [use to] talk about mind and study mind, and it does that by trying to create plausible and potentially profound constructs. And then I proposed to you that we'd start doing cognitive science in two ways: First of all, just trying to look at the cognitive machinery that is responsible for Meaning Cultivation.

But also trying to exemplify that pattern of bringing about Synoptic Integration through the generation of plausible and potentially profound constructs. So we took a look at the central capacity to be [a] cognitive agent, and this is your capacity for intelligence and, of course, intelligence is something that neuroscientists are looking for in the brain and that artificial intelligence machine learning Is trying to create. They're trying to create intelligence. Psychology, of course, has famously been measuring intelligence since its very inception. The word intelligence has reading between the lines which seems, we'll see, has a lot to do with your use of language, et cetera. Culture seems to be deeply connected to the application and then development of intelligence.

So intelligence is a great place to start. And then I said we need to be very careful. We don't want to equivocate about intelligence. We want to make sure we approach it very carefully because, although it is very important to us, we often are using the term in an equivocal and confused manner and [are] therefore bullshitting ourselves in an important way. And then I proposed to you that we don't focus on the results, the product of our intelligence — our knowledge and what our knowledge does for us — our technologies, for example. We focus instead on the process that allows us to acquire knowledge because that way we have something we can use intelligence to explain how we have acquired the knowledge we have.

I then proposed to you to follow the work that was seminal, both in the psychometric measure of intelligence — Binet & Simon — and the attempt to artificially generate intelligence — the work of Newell & Simon — and this is the idea of intelligence as your capacity to be a General Problem Solver, to solve a wide variety of problems across a wide variety of domains. And then, in order to get clear about that, we took a look at the work of Newell and Simon, trying to give us a very careful formal analysis of what is going on in intelligence. And I'm going to come back to those ideas in a minute or two - this idea of analysis, of formal analysis.

(Now referring to the diagrams from the end of the last episode which are still on the board) A problem was analysed into a representation of an Initial State and a Goal State, and I have a problem when my Initial State and my Goal State are significantly different. I can then apply Operations or

Operators, these are actions that will change one state into another state — remember me moving towards the cup, raising my hand, for example — and I can have a sequence of operations that will like take me from my Initial State to my Goal State, but I have to follow the Path Constraints. I want to remain a General Problem Solver. I don't want to solve any one problem to the detriment of my capacity to be a general problem solver, or then my solving this problem will undermine my intelligence in general. So to solve a problem is to apply a sequence of operations that will transform the initial state into the goal state while following the path constraints. And then you can analyse that by taking a look at the Problem Space. And it was this explication — making explicit — of the Problem Space that was the radical — and I will in fact argue profound — power in what Newell and Simon were doing. That's what made their work so impactful in so many disciplines.

Now there's two things we have to note about this (diagram of problem solving) that are potentially misleading. First of all, one is I didn't draw the whole diagram out, and that wasn't just happenstance - we'll come back to that. The second one is this diagram is misleading precisely because it is created from God's-eye point of view. If I were to fill the diagram out, you could see all of the pathways at once and you could see, at once, which pathway leads from the Initial State to the Goal State. But of course in life, when you have a problem, you are not out here (John's point of view, looking at the board). Having a problem is precisely to be here (John moves to the left of the Initial State, assuming it's point of view) and you do not know which of all these pathways will take your Initial State to Goal State while obeying the Path Constraints. You don't know that. You're ignorant. Because remember, we're not confusing intelligence with knowledge. Solving this is how you acquire knowledge. The problem solving method is any method for finding the sequence of transformations that will take you from the initial state, into the goal state while obeying the path constraints.

And you say, “okay, I get it! The diagram isn't complete. And you're over here. You can't see the whole thing. You don't know which of all the pathways.... Yeah. So what?”. Well, here's so what: When I have analysed this and formalised it, when I've explicated it, in terms of problem space, it reveals something. I can calculate the number of pathways here by the

formula F to the D (***) , where F is the number of operators I'm applying at any stage and D is the number of stages I go through. So Keith Holyoak gave a very famous example of this — a psychologist who was instrumental in doing important work on the psychology of problem solving. Let's do a concrete example of this - it's a great example because it brings up machines that we have today.

Combinatorial Explosion

So let's say you're playing a game of chess. So on average the number of operations you can perform on any turn — that's F — is 30. Now don't say to me, “well, how many of those are stupid?”. That's not the point! I'm trying to explain how your intelligent; that's what I have to explain. It's not what I can assume. So there's 30 legal moves and, on average, there's 60 turns (**Writes 30 to the power of 60 on the board**). That's the number of pathways that are in the problem space. This is known as Combinatorial Explosion. It sounds like a science fiction weapon, but it's actually a central fact! This is a vast number. It's something like 4.29 times 10 to the 88th in standard, sort of scientific notation. Now, I want you to understand how big this is; how astronomically, incomprehensibly, large this is. So one thing you might say is, “well, you know, that's easy! I have many different neurones and they all work in parallel and they're all checking different alternative pathways, and that's how I do this: Parallel Distributed Processing!”. And there's an important element in that, but that's not going to be enough, because you probably have around that many neurones (writes 10 to the power of 10 on the board, below the last figure). Now that's a lot! But it's nowhere near this (1st number) and you say, “ah, but it's not the neurones. It's number of connections” and that's something like 5 to the 10 to the 15th (**), and that's a big number! But you know what it's astronomically far away from? It's astronomically far away from this (1st number). So even if it's each synaptic connection is exploring a pathway, this is still overwhelming your brain. In fact, this is greater than the number of atomic particles that are estimated to exist in the universe. This is, in a literal sense, bigger than the universe. It's big.

And what does that mean? That means you cannot do the following: you cannot search the whole space (Problem Space). For very, very many

problems, the problems are combinatorially explosive and therefore you cannot search that space. You do not have the time, the machinery, the resources to search the whole space. Now here is what is deeply, deeply interesting about you. This is sort of my professional obsession, you might put it (wipes the board clean), If I could represent it this way. If this is the whole problem space (draws one big circle) — this is what you do somehow — you can't search the whole space... I mean, you can't search, you can't look here (one section within the circle) and then reject. Because if you look at this part of the space and reject it, and then look at this part of it, then you end up searching the whole space. It's not a matter of checking and rejecting because that's searching the whole space! What you do is somehow do this: you somehow zero in on only a very small subsection of that whole space (draws a thin, 3 to 5 degree wedge of the circle at 12 o'clock) and you search in there and you often find a solution!! You somehow zero in on the relevant information and you make that information effective in your cognition, you do what I call Relevance Realisation. You realise what's relevant. Now this fascinates me, and that fascination is due to the work of Newell and Simon, because... how do you do that? You say, “well, the computers are really fast...!”. Even the fastest chess-playing computers don't check the whole space! They can't! They're not powerful enough for fast enough. That's not how they play.

So this issue of avoiding combinatorial explosion is actually a central way of understanding your intelligence. And you probably hadn't thought of that before - that one of the things that makes you crucially intelligent is your ability to zero in on relevant information. And of course you're experiencing that in two related, but different ways. One way is [you're], and the way this is happening so automatically and seamlessly for you, is the generation of ‘obviousness’. Like, what's obvious? Well, obviously I should pick up my marker. Obviously I should go to the board. Obviousness is not a property of physics or chemistry or biology. Obviousness is not what explains your behavior - it explains your behavior in a “common sense” way, but obviousness is what I scientifically have to explain. How does your brain make things obvious to you? And that's related to, but not identical to, this issue of how things are salient to you. How they stand out to you. How they grab your attention! And what we already know is that that process isn't

static because sometimes [-] how you zeroed in on things as relevant, what was obvious to you, what was salient to you, how you 'join the nine dots' is obvious and salient to you, and yet you get it wrong! And part of your ability is to restructure what you find relevant and salient - you can dynamically self-organise what you find relevant and salient.

Now Newell and Simon wrestled with this and there's a sense in which this (indicates the thin wedge of the circle on the board) is the key problem that the project of Artificial General Intelligence is trying to address right now. In fact, that's what I argued. I've argued in some work I did with Tim Lillicrap and Blake Richards, some work I've done with Leo Ferraro - there's related work by other people. But new Newell and Simon realised that in some way you have to deal with combinatorial explosion - to make a general problem solver, you have to give the machine, the system, the capacity to avoid combinatorial explosion. We're going to see that this is probably the best way of trying to understand what intelligence is. People like Stanovich argue that what we're measuring when we're measuring your intelligence in psychometric tests is precisely your ability to deal with computational limitations, to avoid combinatorial explosion. Christopher Cherniak argues something similar.

Heuristics And Algorithms

So what did Newell and Simon propose? Well, I want to talk about what they propose and show why I think it's important and then criticise them in what they mistook or misunderstood and therefore why their solution — and I don't think they would have disputed this — why their solution was insufficient. They proposed a distinction that's used a lot, but these terms have slipped - I've watched them slip in the 25 years I've been teaching at UFT. I've seen the term slip around, but I want to use them the way Newell and Simon used them within the context of problem solving. And this is the distinction between a heuristics and an algorithm (writes these both on the board). They actually didn't come up with this distinction. This actually came from an earlier book by Pólya called *How To Solve It*, which was a book just on the psychology and it was a set of practical advice for how to improve problem solving. So remember we talked about what a problem solving technique is? A problem solving technique is a method for finding a

problem solution. That's not trivial because a problem solution has been analysed in terms of a sequence of operations that takes the Initial State into the Goal State while obeying the Path Constraints.

Okay. So what's an algorithm? An algorithm is a problem solving technique that is guaranteed to find a solution or prove — and I'm using that term technically, not 'give evidence for' but prove — that a solution can't be found. Okay. And of course there are algorithmic things you do. You know the algorithm for doing multiplication for example - 33 times 4, right (writes this sum on the board)? There is a way to do that in which you can reliably guarantee / get an answer. So this is important, and I remember I said I'd come back to you and explain why Descartes' project was doomed for failure? Because algorithmic processing is processing that has held to the standard of certainty. You use an algorithm when you are pursuing certainty. Now what's the problem with using an algorithm as a problem solving technique? Well, it's guaranteed to find an answer or prove that an answer is not findable. So algorithms work in terms of certainty! Ask yourself: in order to be certain that you [have] found the answer or proved that an answer can not be found, how much of the problem space do you have to search?

There's some a-priori things you can do to shave the problem space down a little bit. And computer science talks about that, but generally, for all practical purposes and intents, in order to guarantee certainty, I have to search the space, the whole space, and the space is combinatorially explosive. So if I pursue algorithmic certainty, I will not solve any problems. I will have committed cognitive suicide. If I try [to] be algorithmically certain in all of my processing, if I'm pursuing certainty, as I'm trying to get over to the cup, a combinatorially explosive space opens up and I can't get there because my lifetime, my resources, my processing power is not sufficient to search the whole space. That's why Descartes was doomed from the beginning. You can't turn yourself into Mr. Spock. You can't turn yourself into Data. You can't turn yourself into an algorithmic machine that is pursuing certainty. That is cognitive suicide. That tells us something right away, by the way, because logic — deductive logic — is certainty. It is algorithmic. It works in terms of certainty. An argument is valid if it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false. Logic works in terms of the normativity of certainty. It operates algorithmically. So does

math. You cannot be comprehensively logical: If I tried to be Mr. Spock and logic my way through anything I'm trying to do, most of my problems are combinatorially explosive and I won't solve even one of them because I'd be overwhelmed by a combinatorially explosive search space.

This tells you something. This is what I meant earlier when I said trying to equate rationality with being logical is absurd. You can't do that. The issue: these terms are not, and cannot be — as much as Descartes wanted them to be — they are not, and cannot be synonymous (writes rational 'does not equal' logical on the board). Now that doesn't mean that rational means being illogical or willy-nilly. Ratio / rationing (underlines Ration in Rational) pay attention to this. 'Ratio', 'rationing', 'being rational' means knowing when, where, how much and what degree to be logical. And that's a much more difficult thing to do. And I would argue more that: being rational is not just the psycho-technology of logic, but other psycho-technologies - knowing where, when, and how to use them in order to overcome self deception and optimally achieve the goals that we want to achieve. Often when they talk about rationality, people think I'm talking about logic or consistency and they misunderstand that is not what I've meant. And that's what I said when Descartes was wrong, in a deep sense, from the beginning.

Newell and Simon realised this. That's precisely why they proposed the distinction: a heuristic is a problem solving method that is not guaranteed to find a solution. It is only reliable for increasing your chances of achieving your goal. So I've just shown you: you cannot play chess algorithmically. Of course you can — and even the best computer programs do this — play chess heuristically. You can play chess doing the following things. Here are some heuristics... 'get your queen out early', 'control the centre board', 'castle, your King'. You can do all of these things and nevertheless not achieve your goal - winning the game of chess. And that's precisely because of how heuristics work. What heuristics do is they try to pre-specify where you should search for the relevant information (draws a bigger, 45 degree wedge in the circle). That's what a heuristic does: it limits the space you're searching. Now, what that actually means is it's getting you to 'prejudge' what's going to be relevant — and of course that's where we get our word 'prejudice' from — and a heuristic is therefore a bias, it's a source of bias. This is why the two are often paired together - the heuristic-bias approach.

Look, what my chest heuristics do is they bias where I'm paying attention. I focus on the centre board, I focus on my queen. If I'm playing against somebody who's very good, they'll notice how I'm fixated on the centre board and the queen and they'll keep me focused there while playing a peripheral game that defeats me. I played a game of chess, not that long ago and I was able to use that strategy against someone. This it's called the "No Free Lunch Theorem"; that it is unavoidable - you have to use heuristics because you have to avoid combinatorial explosion. You can't be comprehensively algorithmic, logical, mathematical. The price you pay for avoiding combinatorial explosion is you fall prey to bias again and again, and again. The very things that make us adoptive are the things that make us prone to self deception.

But if you remember, we talked about these heuristics and biases when we talked about the representativeness heuristic, and the availability heuristic that were at work when you take your friend to the airport, because you can't calculate all the probabilities - it's combinatorially explosive. So you use the heuristic: How easy could I remember plane crashes? How prototypical to do they...? How representative are they of disasters and tragedies? And because of that, you judge it highly probable that the plane will crash and then you ignore how deeply dangerous your automobile is. So the very things that make you adoptive make you prone to self deception. (Wipes board clean, except for the circle diagram.)

Praise For Newell And Simon

Now, this account. I think... I have tremendous respect for Newell and Simon. First of all, let me tell you why I have respect and then what criticisms I have. So, first of all, this idea that [that] part of what makes you intelligence is your ability to use your heuristics, I think that's a necessary part. And the empirical evidence that we use these heuristics is quite, quite powerful and convincing and well replicated. This is also an instance of doing really, really powerful work and this will add one more dimension to what it is to do good cognitive science. Yes, it's about creating plausible constructs that afford Synoptic Integration, but there is another way in which Newell and Simon exemplified, they modelled to us, what it is to do it well, do it properly. And again, this is going to relate to the meaning crisis.

Notice what they've done. Notice how all of the aspects, all of the great changes that have made the scientific way of thinking possible are exemplified in what Newell and Simon are doing. Notice that they're analysing (writes analysing on the board). They're taking a complex phenomenon and they're trying to analyse it down into its basic components. Just like Thales did so long ago when he was trying to get at the underlying substances and forces. They're trying to do that ontological depth perception. And then, like Descartes, they're trying to formalise it. They're trying to give us a graphical mathematical representation. The problem space is a formalisation that allows us to do calculations, equations (writes formalisation below analysing). That's how I was able to explain to you combinatorial explosion. And then what they were doing is they were trying to mechanise (writes mechanise below formalisation). I know that will make some people's hackles rise, but the point of this is if I've got this right, if I can make a machine that can carry out my formal analysis, because that means I haven't snuck anything in. And that really matters because it turns out that [in] trying to explain the mind, we often fall into a particular fallacy.

Ok, so how do you see? Well, here's a triangle out here (draws a little triangle) and the light comes off of it and then it goes into your eye (draws a little eye) [-], and then the nerve impulses — and then I'll equivocate on the notion of information to hide all kinds of theoretical problems — and then it goes into this space inside of my mind — let's call it maybe working memory or something (draws a circle to represent this) — and it gets projected onto some inner screen (draws a little screen in the circle with the image of the triangle on it) and there it is, it's projected there. And then there's a little man in here (draws a little stickman) — the Latin for little man is Homunculus — and the little man, maybe it's your central executive or something, says "triangle". ...and that's how it works, right? And notice what's going on here: It sounds like I'm giving a mechanical explanation, and then I invoke something.

Now what you should ask me right away is the following: "Ah, yes, but John, how does the little man, the little Homunculus, see the inner triangle?", "Oh, well, inside his head is a smaller space with a smaller projection in the middle. And there's a little man in there that (draws a smaller repeat of the above diagram) [says] "triangle!""", and so on and so forth... And do you see

what this gets? This gives you an infinite regress. It doesn't explain anything. Why? This is the circular explanation. Remember when we talked about this, right? This is when I'm using vision to explain vision. And you say, "well, yeah, that's stupid! I get why that's stupid. That's non-explanatory. Circular explanations are non-explanatory!". Yes, they are: they're non-explanatory.

The Naturalistic Imperative Of Cognitive Science

But here's what I ultimately have to do. And this is what Newell and Simon are trying to do. They're trying to take a mental term — intelligence (writes intelligence on the board, labelling it 'mental') — and they're trying to analyse it, formalise it and mechanise it so they can explain it using non-mental terms. Because if I always use mind to explain mind, I'm actually never explaining the mind. I've just engaged in a circular explanation. What Newell and Simon are trying to do is analyse, formalise and mechanise an explanation of the mind. They're not doing this because they're fascists or they're worshipers of science, or they're enamoured with technology! Maybe some of those things are true about them, but independent from that I can argue is — which is what I'm doing — that the reason they're doing this is that it exemplifies the scientific method because it is precisely designed to avoid circular explanations. And as long as I'm explaining the mental, in terms of the mental, I'm not actually explaining it. I call this the Naturalistic Imperative in Cognitive science (writes Naturalistic Imperative at the top of the board): try to explain things naturalistically.

Again, some of this might be because you have a prejudice in favour of the scientific worldview and there's all kinds of cultural constraints. Of course! I'm not denying any of that critique. But what I'm saying is that critique is insufficient because here's an independent argument: the reason I'm doing this is precisely because I am trying to avoid circular explanations of intelligence. Why does that matter? Remember, the scientific revolution produced this scientific worldview that seems to be explaining everything except how I generate scientific explanations. My intelligence, my ability to generate science, is not one of the things that is encompassed by the scientific worldview. There's this whole in the naturalistic worldview! That's why many people who are critical of Naturalism, always zero in on our capacity to make meaning and have consciousness as the thing that's not

being explained. They're right to do that! I think they're wrong to conclude that that somehow legitimates other kinds of world-views — we'll come back to that. Because I think what you need to show is you need to show that this project is — because this is an inductive argument, it's not a deductive [argument] — you have to show that this project is failing, that we're not making progress on it. And that's a difficult thing to say! You can't defeat a scientific program by saying, [by] pointing to things it hasn't yet explained. Because that will always be the case! You can't point to problems it faces! What you have to do — and this is something I think that Lakatos made very clear — you have to point to the fact that it's not making any progress in improving our explanation. And it's really questionable, and I mean that term seriously, that we're not making any progress in explaining intelligence by trying to analyse formalise and mechanise it. That's getting really hard to claim that we're not making any progress.

Now, why does this matter? Because if Cognitive science can create a Synoptic Integration by creating plausible constructs, theoretical ways of explanation, like what Newell and Simon are doing, that allow us to analyse formalise and mechanise, they have the possibility of making us part of the scientific worldview, not as animals or machines, but giving a scientific explanation of our capacity to generate scientific explanations. We can fit back into the scientific worldview that science has actually excluded us from as the generators of science itself. (Wipes board clean.) Newell and Simon are creating this powerful way of analysing formalising and mechanising intelligence. There's lots of stuff converging on it. There's stuff from how we measure intelligence — we talked about it, how we're trying to make machines — and that holds a promise for revealing things about intelligence that we didn't know before! Like the fact that one of the core aspects of intelligence is precisely your ability to avoid combinatorial explosion, make things salient and obvious and do this in this really dynamically self corrective fashion like when you have an insight.

A Critique Of Newell And Simon

So, I'm done praising Newell and Simon for now, because now I want to criticise them because Newell and Simon's notion of heuristics — also a valuable part of the multi-aptness, a valuable new explanatory way of

dealing [with], thinking about our intelligence — while necessary is insufficient because Newell and Simon were failing to pay attention to other ways in which we constrain the Problem Space and zero in on relevant information, and do that in a dynamically self-organising fashion. Well, what were they failing to notice? They were failing to notice that they had an assumption in their attempt to come up with a theoretical construct for explaining general problem solving. They assumed that all problems were essentially the same. This is kind of ironic! We have a heuristic - as you remember, challenged a long time ago by Ockham. We have a heuristic of Essentialism (writes Essentialism on the board, under Heuristic) - this is also a term that has been taken up and, I think, often applied loosely within political controversy and discourse.

The idea of Essentialism is that when I group a bunch of things together with a term — remember Ockham's ideas about [how] we group things together just by the words we use for them; that's Nominalism — but when I group a bunch of things together, they must all share some core properties. They must share an essence. Remember, that's the Aristotelian idea of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for being something, right? It is of course the case that some things clearly fall in that category. Triangles have an essence: all triangles, no matter what their shape or size have three straight lines, three angles, and the angles add up to 180 degrees. And if you have each and every one of those, you are a triangle. And there are also natural kinds. One of the things that science does, and we'll see why this is important later, is it discovers those groupings that have an essence. So all gold things have a set of properties that are essential to being gold. And we'll talk about why that's the case later.

Not everything we group together — and this was famously pointed out by Wittgenstein — has an essence [-]. [For example] we call many things 'games'. Now, what set of necessary and sufficient conditions do all and only games possess? "Well... Oh! They involve competition!", "well, there are many things that involve competition that aren't games — war — and there are games that don't seem to involve competition, like catch!" "Oh, well at least they involve other people", "solitaire?", "Oh, um, they, well, they have to involve imagination!", "Solitaire?", "but they have to involve pretence...", "catch?? What are you pretending to do!?" And this is the

constraints point. You won't find a definition that includes all and only games. And this is the case for many things like chair, table, et cetera. Remember, this was all part of what Ockham was pointing to, I think!

So the idea is we come with a Heuristic. We treat any category as if it has an essence. But many categories don't have essences. We're going to come back to that shortly in a few minutes when we talk about categorisation. Why do we use this Heuristic? Because it makes us look for essences. Why do we want to look for essences? Because this allows us to generalise and make very good predictions. Yes, I can over-generalise. But I can also under-generalise! That's also a mistake. So we use this heuristic because it's adaptive. It's not algorithmic because there are many categories that don't have essences. Newell and Simon thought this category (Problems) had an essence that all problems are essentially the same, that all problems are essentially the same and therefore they could come up with one base.../ [-] if all problems are essentially the same, then to make a general problem solver, I basically need one problem solving strategy! I just have to find the one essential, I may have to make variations on it, but I have to find the one essential problem solving strategy. And because of this, how you formulate a problem, how you set it up to try and apply your strategy, how you represent the Initial State, the Goal State, the Operators, the Path Constraints, that's trivial, right? That's not important because if all problems are essentially the same, you're going to be applying basically the same problem solving strategy. Both of those assumptions [-] were in fact being driven by a psychological heuristic of essentialism. Essentialism isn't a bad thing! At least talking about it as a cognitive heuristic. It shouldn't be treated algorithmically, but we shouldn't pretend that we can do without it.

Well And Ill-Defined Problems

Now, if Newell and Simon were right about this, then of course these aren't problematic assumptions (that problems are of one essential kind and that they are trivial). But they're actually wrong about it because there are — and many people have converged on this at different times and using different terms — but there are fundamentally different kinds of problems, and there are different ways in which there are different kinds of problems. I just want

to talk about a central one that's really important to your day to day life. This is the distinction between well-defined problems and ill-defined problems.

In a well-defined problem I have a good meaning and effective guiding representation of the Initial State, the Goal State, the Operators, so that I can solve my problem. So I take it that for many of you, that problem I gave earlier (writes 33×4 on the board again) — and there is a relationship between something being well defined in algorithmic. They are not identical, but there is a relationship — for many of you, that should be a well-defined problem. You can tell me your Initial State: this is a multiplication problem. And that gives you useful guiding information. You know a lot of things by knowing your initial state. You know what the Goal State should look like: this should be a number when I'm done. And you know that this number (the answer) should be bigger than these two numbers. The most beautiful picture of all time of a Platypus does not count as an answer. You know what the operations are - singing and dancing are irrelevant to this. This is well[-defined], and a lot of your education was getting you to practice making whole sets of problems well-defined and part of what psycho-technologies do is they make well-defined problems for us. Like literacy and numeracy - mathematics. And because of that power and because of their prevalence in our education, we tend to get blinded and we tend to think that that's what most problems are like. And that means we don't pay attention to how we formulate the problem, because the problem is well formulated for us precisely because it's a well defined problem. But most of your problems are ill-defined problems. In most of your problems, you don't know what the relevant information about the Initial State is, you don't know what the relevant information about the Goal State is. You don't know what the relevant Operators are. You don't even know what the relevant path constraints are.

You're sitting in lecture perhaps at the university, and you've got this problem: "Take good notes". Okay, what's the initial state? "Well, I don't have good notes!", "And?", "Uh, well, um, yeah. Okay. Okay.....!" So what should I do? And all you'll do is give me synonyms for relevance realisation: "I should pay attention to the relevant information, the crucial information, the important information...", "and how do you do that?", "Uh, well, you know, it's obvious to me, or it stands out to me!", "Great! But

how? How would I make a machine be able to do that? What are the operations?", "Oh, I write stuff down!" Do I just write stuff down? Like, I draw, I make arrows. Do I write everything down? "Well, no, I don't write everything down and I don't just..." What are the operations? Does that mean everybody's notes will look the same? No, when I do this in class everybody's notes look remarkably very different! So what are the Operations and what does the Goal State look like? "Well, good notes!", "Great! What are the properties of good notes?", "Well, they're useful!", "Why are they useful?", "Well, because... Oh because they contain the relevant information connected in the relevant way that makes sense to me. And so that I can use it to...", "yeah, right... I get it..."!

What's actually missing in an ill-defined problem is how to formulate the problem: how to zero in on the relevant information and thereby constrain the problem so you can solve it. So what's missing and what's needed to deal with your ill-defined problems and turn them into something like well-defined problems for you is good problem formulation, which involves, again, this process of zeroing in on relevant information: Relevance Realisation. And you see if they had noted this, if they had noted that this bias made them trivialise formulation, they would have realised that problems aren't all essentially the same and they would have realised the important work being done by problem formulation. And that would have been important because that would have given them another way of dealing with the issue of combinatorial explosion.

Let me show you: So we already see that the Relevance Realisation that's at work in problem formulation is crucial for dealing with real world problems. Taking good notes - that's an ill-defined problem. Following a conversation - that's another Ill-defined problem: "Well, I should say things!", "What things?", "well, Oh...", "When?", "well when it's appropriate...", "How often?", "Well, sort of...". Tell a joke. Go on a successful first date. All of these are ill defined problems. Most of your real world problems are ill-defined problems. So you need the Relevance Realisation within good Problem Formulation to help you deal with most real world problems; already, Problem Formulation is crucial! But here's something that Newell and Simon could have used, and in fact Simon comes back and realises that later in an experiment he does with Kaplan in 1990 (writes Kaplan and

Simon 1990 on the board). And I want to show you this experiment, because I want to show you precisely the power of problem formulation with respect to dealing with constraining the problem space and avoiding combinatorial explosion. I need to be able to deal with ill-defined problems to be genuinely intelligent. I also, as we've already seen, have to be able to avoid combinatorial explosion. That has something to do with relevance realisation, and that has a lot to do, as we've already seen, with Problem Formulation.

The Mutilated Chess Board

Let me give you the problem that they used in the study of the experiment. This is called The Mutilated Chess board example, right? There are eight columns and eight rows. And so we know that there are 64 squares. Now, because this is a square, [-] if I have a domino and it covers two squares — it'll cover two squares equally if I put it horizontally or vertically — how many dominoes do I need to cover the chess board? Well, that's easy: 2 goes into 64... I need 32. 32 dominoes will cover this without overhang or overlap. Now I'm going to mutilate the board. I'm going to remove this piece and this piece (two diagonally opposite corner pieces). How many squares are left here? 62. There are 62 squares left. So I've now mutilated the chessboard. Here's the problem: Can I cover this with 31 Domino's without overhang or overlap? And you have to be able to prove — deductively demonstrate — that your answer is correct.

Many people find this a hard problem. They find it a hard problem, perhaps you're doing this now, because they formulate it as a covering problem. They're trying to imagine a chess board and they're trying to imagine possible configurations of Domino's on the board. So they adopt a covering formulation of the problem, a covering strategy, and they try to imagine it. That strategy is combinatorially explosive. So famously there was somebody, one of the people in one of the experiments, one of the participants, trained in mathematics and was doing this topographical calculation and they worked on it for 16 to 18 hours and filled 81 pages of a [-] notebook. And they didn't come up with a solution! Why? Because if you formulate this as a covering strategy, you hit combinatorial explosion. The problem space explodes and you can't move through it. And that's what

happened to that participant. It's not because they lacked the logic or mathematical abilities. In fact, it was precisely because of their logic and mathematical abilities that they came to grief. Now, you should know by now that I am not advocating for romanticism... “Oh, just give up logic and rationality...” That's ridiculous. You've seen why I I'm critical of that as well. But what I'm trying to show you, again, is you cannot be comprehensively algorithmic.

Okay. So if you formulate this as a covering strategy, you can't solve it. Let's reformulate it. And you can't quite see this on the diagram (the drawing on the board), but you'll be able to see it clearly in the panel that comes up (clear, onscreen picture of a chessboard). These squares (the two diagonally opposite corners that were removed) are always the same colour on a chess board. In fact that's not hidden in the diagram and what's used in the actual experiment - that's clearly visible; these squares are always the same colour. You say “so what?” Right! That's the point! You can see them, but they're not salient to you in a way that makes a solution obvious to you. They're not salient to you! They're there, but they're not standing out to you in a way that makes a solution obvious to you.

Let's try this: If I put this domino on the board, if I put it horizontally or vertically, I will always cover a black and white square. Always. There is no way of putting it on the board that will not cover a black and white square. So in order to cover the board with dominoes, I need an equal number of black and white squares. I must have an equal number of black and white squares. That must be the case, but these squares (the two removed) are the same colour! Is there now an equal number of black and white squares there? No! Because these [removed ones] are the same colour. There's not an equal number of black and white squares.

I must have an equal number of black and white squares. I know for sure — because these [two] are the same colour — I do not have an equal number of black and white squares. Therefore I can prove to you that it is impossible to cover the board with the dominance.

If I go from formulating this problem as a covering strategy, which is combinatorially explosive, to using a Parody strategy in which the fact that [these two] are the same colour is salient to me, such that now a solution is

obvious — now, it's obvious that it's impossible -- I go from not being able to solve the problem because it's combinatorially explosive to a search space that collapses (clicks fingers) and I solved the problem. This is why the phenomenon we've been talking about when we talked about flow and different aspects of higher States of consciousness is so relevant. This capacity to come up with good problem formulation — problem formulation that turns ill-defined problems into well-defined problems for you; problem formulation that goes from a self-defeating strategy because of combinatorial explosion to a problem formulation that allows you to solve your problem — that's insight. That's insight. That's why the title of this experiment is “In Search of Insight”. That's exactly what insight is. It is the process by which bad problem formulation is being converted into good problem formulation.

That's why insight, in addition to logic, is central to rationality. And in addition to any logical techniques that improve my inference, I have to have other kinds of psycho-technologies that improve my capacity for insight. And we've already seen that that might have to do with things like mindfulness - because of mindfulness' capacity to give you the ability to restructure your salience landscape. So we're starting to see how Problem Formulation and Relevance Realisation are actually central to what it is for you being a real-world Problem Solver: avoiding combinatorial explosions, avoiding ill-definedness. We're going to continue this next time as we continue to investigate the role of Relevance Realisation in intelligence and related intelligent behaviours like categorisation, action [and] communication.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 27 Notes

[**Keith Holyoak**](#)

Keith James Holyoak is a Canadian-American researcher in cognitive psychology and cognitive science, working on human thinking and reasoning. Holyoak's work focuses on the role of analogy in thinking.

Tim Lillicrap

Timothy P. Lillicrap is a Canadian neuroscientist and AI researcher, adjunct professor at University College London, and staff research scientist at Google DeepMind, where he has been involved in the AlphaGo and AlphaZero projects mastering the games of Go, Chess and Shogi

Blake Richards

Blake Richards is an Assistant Professor in the Montreal Neurological Institute and the School of Computer Science at McGill University and a Core Faculty Member at the Quebec Artificial Intelligence Institute.

Stanovich

Keith E. Stanovich is Emeritus Professor of Applied Psychology and Human Development, University of Toronto and former Canada Research Chair of Applied Cognitive Science. His research areas are the psychology of reasoning and the psychology of reading.

Christopher Cherniak

Christopher Cherniak is an American neuroscientist, a member of the University of Maryland Philosophy Department. Cherniak's research trajectory started in theory of knowledge and led into computational neuroanatomy and genomics.

Pólya

George Pólya was a Hungarian mathematician. He was a professor of mathematics from 1914 to 1940 at ETH Zürich and from 1940 to 1953 at Stanford University. He made fundamental contributions to combinatorics, number theory, numerical analysis and probability theory.

How To Solve It

How to Solve It (1945) is a small volume by mathematician George Pólya describing methods of problem solving

Book mentioned - How to Solve It - [Buy Here](#)

Mr. Spock

Spock is a fictional character in the Star Trek media franchise. Spock, who was originally played by Leonard Nimoy, first appeared in the original Star Trek series serving aboard the starship Enterprise as science officer and first officer, and later as commanding officer of two iterations of the vessel.

Data

Data is a character in the fictional Star Trek franchise. He appears in the television series Star Trek: The Next Generation and Star Trek: Picard; and the feature films Star Trek Generations, Star Trek: First Contact, Star Trek: Insurrection, and Star Trek: Nemesis. Data is portrayed by actor Brent Spiner.

“Data is in many ways a successor to the original Star Trek's Spock (Leonard Nimoy), in that the character offers an "outsider's" perspective on humanity.”

No Free Lunch Theorem

In computational complexity and optimization the no free lunch theorem is a result that states that for certain types of mathematical problems, the computational cost of finding a solution, averaged over all problems in the class, is the same for any solution method. No solution therefore offers a "short cut"

Lakatos

Imre Lakatos was a Hungarian philosopher of mathematics and science, known for his thesis of the fallibility of mathematics and its 'methodology of proofs and refutations' in its pre-axiomatic stages of development, and also for introducing the concept of the 'research programme' in his methodology of scientific research programmes.

Wittgenstein

Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein was an Austrian-British philosopher who worked primarily in logic, the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of language. From 1929 to 1947, Wittgenstein taught at the University of Cambridge.

Craig A Kaplan

[In Search of Insight - Kaplan and Simon 1990](#)

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Ep. 28 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Convergence To Relevance Realization

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. So we have been looking at the Cognitive science of intelligence and we've been looking at the seminal work of Newell and Simon, and we've seen how they are trying to create a plausible construct of intelligence. They're drawing many different ideas together into this idea of intelligence as the capacity to be a General Problem Solver. And then they're doing a fantastic job of applying the Naturalistic Imperative, which helps us to avoid the Homuncular Fallacy because we're trying to analyse, formalise and mechanise our explanation of intelligence, explaining the mind, ultimately, in a non-circular fashion by explaining it in non-mental terms. And this will also hopefully give us a way of re-situating the mind within the scientific worldview. We saw that at the core of their construct was the realization via the formalization and the attempted mechanization of the combinatorial explosive nature of the problem space and how crucial relevance realization is and how somehow you zero in on the relevant information. They proposed a solution to this that has far reaching implications for our understanding of meaning cultivation and of rationality. They propose the distinction between heuristic and algorithmic processing and the fact that most of our processing has to be heuristic in nature. It can't pursue certainty. It can't be algorithmic. It can't be Cartesian in that fashion. And that also means that our cognition is

susceptible to bias. The very processes that make us intelligently adaptive, help us to ignore the combinatorial explosive amount of options and information available to us are the ones that also prejudice us and bias us so that we can become self deceptively misled. This was a powerful.../ They deserve to be seminal figures in that they exemplify how we should be trying to do Cognitive science. And they exemplify the power of the Naturalistic Imperative.

But, there were serious shortcomings in Newell and Simon's work. They themselves, and this is something we should remember — even as scientists, the scientific method is designed to try and, it's a psycho-technology designed to try and help us deal with our proclivities towards self-deception — they fell prey to a Cognitive heuristic that biased them. They were making use of the **essentialist heuristic** which is crucial to our adoptive intelligence. It helps us find those classes that do share an essence and therefore allow us to make powerful predictions and generalizations. Of course, the problem with essentialism is precisely [that] it **is** a heuristic. It **is** adoptive. We are tempted to overuse it, and that will make us miss-see that many categories do not possess an essence. Like Wittgenstein famously pointed out: the category of game or chair or table. Newell and Simon thought that all problems were essentially the same. And because of that, how you formulate a problem is a rather trivial matter. Because of that, they were blinded to the fact that all problems are **not** essentially the same, that there are essential differences between types of problems and therefore problem formulation is actually very important. This is the distinction between well-defined problems and ill-defined problems, and I made the point that most real world problems are ill-defined problems. What's missing in ill-defined problems is precisely the Relevance Realization that you get through a good problem formulation.

We then went into the work in which Simon himself participated, the work of Kaplan and Simon, to show that this self-same Relevance Realization, through problem formulation, is at work in addressing combinatorial explosion. We took a look at the problem of the mutilated chess board in that if you formulate it as a covering strategy, you will get into a combinatorial explosive search. Whereas If you formulate it as a parody strategy, if you make salient the fact that the two removed pieces are the same colour, then

the solution becomes obvious to you and very simple to do. Problem formulation helps you avoid combinatorial explosion and helps you deal with ill-definedness and this process by which you move from a poor problem formulation to a good problem formulation is the process of *insight*. And this is why, we have seen throughout, insight is so crucial to you being a rational cognitive agent. And that means that, in addition to logic being essential for our rationality, those psycho-technologies that enhance our capacity for insight are also crucially important; indispensable.

We know that in *insight* Relevance Realization is recursively self-organizing, restructuring itself in a dynamic fashion. So insight, of course, it's not only important for changing ill-definedness — so this is what problem formulation is doing, or as I'll later call it problem framing (writes P.F. - Problem Framing as a heading on the board) — it's doing this (writes 'ill-defined —> well defined' on the board). It's also doing this: it's helping me avoid combinatorial explosion (writes 'avoid C.E.' on the board). But it's also doing something else, something that we talked about and saw already before with the nine dot problem. It's helping you to overcome the way in which your Relevance Realization machinery is making the wrong things salient and obvious for you. So insight is also the way in which this process is self corrective (writes 'self corrective' on the board) in which the problem formulation process is self-corrected because you can mislead yourself, be misdirected.

So insight deals with converting ill-defined problems into well-defined problems by doing problem framing, problem formulation, or doing reframing when needed. It helps us avoid combinatorial explosion by doing problem formulation or reframing as with the person who shifted from a covering strategy to a parody strategy in the mutilated chess board. Or it also helps us correct how we limit, inappropriately, our attempts to solve a problem by what we consider salient or relevant. And it allows us to reformulate, reframe and break out of the way we have boxed our cognition and our consciousness in. So insight is crucial in the cultivation of wisdom.

I want to go on now... What we're seeing is [-], we're doing this thing where we're understanding intelligence and we're seeing many things just converging on the idea of being a general problem solver (draws several

converging lines). And then where we're seeing many instances already within that, once we get this notion of trying to come up with a general problem solver, we see that that in turn.../ many different things are feeding into this issue of Relevance Realization as what makes you capable of being a General Problem Solver. So we have many things feeding into this (GPS) and then we're analyzing (has written RR at the convergent point, with GPS above it, with it's own lines in and out and refers to a relationship between the two with a line representing 'analysing'). So this (GPS) has tremendous potential — I'm trying to show you a plausibility structure — many converging lines of how we measure, investigate and talk about intelligence lead to understanding intelligence as a General Problem Solver, and then we're starting to see that many of the lines of investigation are converging [to show that] what makes you generally intelligent is your capacity **for** Relevance Realization. I want to continue this convergence. I want to make it quite powerful for you.

Categorising

So presumably one of the things that contributes, as I mentioned, to your capacity for being a general problem solver, Is your capacity for categorizing things. I already alluded to that when I just discussed this issue last time. Your ability to categorize things massively increases your ability to deal with the world. If I couldn't categorize things, if I couldn't see these both as markers (holds up two markers), I would have to treat each one as a raw individual that I'm encountering for the first time, kind of like we do when we meet people and we treat them with proper nouns. So this would be Tom, and then this would be Agnes and meeting Tom doesn't tell me anything about what Agnes is going to be like. And we talked about this when we talked about categorical perception. But if I can categorize them together, I can make predictions about how any member of this category will behave. It massively speeds up my ability to make predictions, to abstract important and potentially relevant information. It allows me to communicate. I can communicate all of that categorical information with a common now: "marker". Your ability to categorize is central to your ability to be intelligent.

So what is a category? A category isn't just any set of things. A category is a set of things that you sense belong together. Now we noted last time that

your sense of things belonging together isn't necessarily because they share an essence. That's the common mistake, right? How is it that we categorize things? How does this basic ability central to our intelligence operate? I'm not going to try and fully explain that, I don't know anyone that can do that right now! All I need to do is show you, again, is how this issue of relevance realization is at the centre. The standard explanation, the one that works from common sense, is the one you see in Sesame street! You give the child [four] things (places out three markers and a board cleaner), "here are three things... three of these things, they're kind of the same. One of these things is not like the others, three of these things are kind of the same...". And you have to pick out the one, right? And so these go together, this one doesn't. These are categorized as markers... That's the Sesame street explanation. What's the explanation? I noticed that these are similar, right? I noticed that this one is different. I mentally grouped together the things that are similar. I keep the things that are different mentally apart. And that's how I form categories! Isn't that obvious?

Differentiating Between Logical And Psychological Similarity

Well again, explaining how it becomes obvious to you and how you make the correct properties salient is the crucial thing. Why? Well, this was a point made famous by the philosopher, Nelson Goodman. What a great name, Goodman! Nelson pointed out that we're often — well, I'm going to use our language, I think this is fair — but we're often equivocating when we invoke 'similarity' and how obvious it is, between a psychological sense and a logical sense, and in that sense we're deceiving ourselves that we're offering an explanation. So what do I mean? Well, what does similarity mean in a logical sense? Well, remember the Sesame street example: "kind of the same". Similarity is **Partial Identity**: kind of the same. Okay, what does Partial Identity mean? Well, you *share* properties, you *share* features, and the more features you share, the more identical you are, the more similar you are. There you go! Okay, well, that's pretty clear! Well, once you agree with that, Nelson Goodman is going to say, "well, now you have a problem because any two objects are, logically, overwhelmingly similar!".

Because pick any two objects, I would say a bison and a lawn-mower! All I have to do is list lots, I have to pick properties that they share in common. Well, they're both found in North America. Neither one was found in North America 300 million years ago. Both contain carbon. Both can kill you if not properly treated. Both have an odour. Both weigh less than a ton. Neither one makes a particularly good weapon. In fact, the number of things that I can say truly that are shared by [a bison] and [a lawnmower] is indefinitely large. It's combinatorially explosive. It goes on and on and on and on. And this is Goodman's point: they share many, many indefinitely large number of properties. Now what, I imagine, you're saying is, "yeah, that's all true..." — I didn't say anything false! Notice how truth and relevance aren't the same thing; I didn't say anything false — but what you're saying to me is, "yeah, but those aren't the *important* properties, you're picking *trivial* and..." notice what you're doing. You're telling me that I haven't zeroed in on the *relevant* properties, the ones that are *obvious* to you, the ones that *stand out* to you as salient.

So what you're now doing is you're moving from a *logical* to a *psychological* account of similarity. For *psychological* similarity is not any true comparison, but finding the *relevant* comparisons. And the thing about that is that doesn't seem to be stable - Barsalou pointed this out. So I'm going to give you a set of things; Is it a category? Okay. So it's your wife, pets, works of art, gasoline, explosive material. Is that a category? Works of art, your children, your spouse, gasoline, explosive material. Is that a category? And you go, "no! They don't share enough in common!". Now here's what I say to you: "There's a fire!". "Oh, right!! All those things belong together now!". Because I care about my wife, I care about my kids because fire can kill them [and] pets! And explosive stuff and flammable stuff is dangerous. Now it forms a category! In one context, not a category and another context, a very tight and important category!

Now the logical sharing has not changed. What's shared psychologically is what properties or features you consider *relevant* for making the comparison. Out of **all** of what is logically shared, you zero in [-] on the relevant features for comparison. You do the same thing when you're deciding that two things are different because any two objects, any objects you think are really the same also have an indefinitely large number of

differences. And when you are holding things as different, because you have zeroed in... here [for example] (indicating the pens and cleaner), shape and use are relevant differences. So at the core of your ability to form and use categories is your capacity, again, for zeroing in on *relevant* information.

A Robot With A Problem - The Proliferation Of Side Effects

Okay. Now, one thing that people sometimes say to me when I start talking this way is they say, "Oh, you know, Darwin, Darwin, Darwin, Darwin..." And we'll talk about Darwin again! And Darwin's very important and we'll talk about his work, but what they mean by that, it's like you're doing all this abstract, you're.../ Concrete, survival situations: I've just got to make a machine that can *survive*. Right? And that's just *obvious*, right? It avoids this and it finds that. Well, first of all, is it? So one of the things a machine has to do, for example, is avoid danger. "Danger will Robinson!"

right?! *Danger*. What set of features do all dangerous things share? Don't tell me synonyms for danger. I mean, holes are dangerous. Bees are dangerous. Poison is dangerous. Knives are dangerous. Lack of food is dangerous. What do all of those share? And don't say, "well, they lead to the damaging of your tissue". That's what danger [is]. Those are synonyms for danger. What I'm talking about are *causes* of danger. What do they share? How do you zero in on them? And you still say, "well, I sort of get that, but still just moving around the world, finding your food!?" Okay. Well, let's do that. Let's try and make a machine that's going to find [food]. It's going to deal with that very basic problem. It's going to be a cognitive agent looking for its food.

Now, because it's an electronic machine - it's a robot - we're going to have it look for batteries. This is an example from Daniel Dennett. So here's my robot (draws on the board), it's mobile, it's got wheels. It's got this appendage for grabbing stuff. It's got all these wonderful sensors. It's got lots of computational power duggaduggadugga...! So we know what we need to do: In order to make it an agent, a cognitive agent — that's what we've been talking about from the very beginning — it has to be different from merely something that generates behaviour. Everything generates behaviour! This behaves in a certain way, this behaves in a certain way, this behaves in a

certain way (indicating various random things around him). What makes you an agent — I mean, this isn't **all** that makes you an agent, this is a philosophically complex problem — but the crucial thing about what makes you an agent is the following: You can determine the consequences of your behavior — I'm using that term very broadly — you can determine the consequences of your behavior and change your behavior accordingly. So this ability to determine the consequences, the effects of your behavior is crucial to being an agent. So we build a machine that can do that: it can determine the consequences of its behavior.

(Drawing) So here's a wagon. It has a nice handle and on it is a nice juicy battery. Now, the robot will try and do what you and I do. And this is also a Darwinian thing because for, most creatures, you have to not only find food, you have to avoid being food. And so you don't just eat your food where you first find it. Even powerful predators, like leopards, move their food to another location because it will get stolen, they could get preyed upon, et cetera... You don't eat your food where you first come across it. Fast food restaurants are somewhat of an anomaly, but [for example] when you walk into the supermarket, you just don't start eating. You try and take your food to a more safe place. You try and share your food with other people because that's a socially valuable thing to do. That's why, when you're eating something you don't like, you give it, "eew, this tastes horrible! Taste it..." you want to share, right? You want to use food as a way of sharing experience, bonding together.

So the robot is programmed to take its food, the battery to a safe place, and then consume it. Well, that seems just so simple, right? That's so simple. Well, we have to make this a problem because we were talking about being a problem solver! And on this wagon is a lit bomb. The bomb is lit, which means there's a very high probability [that] the fuse will burn down and the bomb will go off! And we put the robot in this situation. Now what does the robot do? The robot pulls the handle because it has determined that a consequence, an effect of pulling the handle is to bring the battery along. So it pulls the wagon and it brings the battery along because that's the intended effect. That's the consequence that it has determined is relevant to its goal. But of course the bomb goes off and destroys the robot and we think, "Oh, what did we do wrong?" What did we do wrong? There's something missing.

And then we realized, "ah, you know what? We made the robot only look for the intended effects of its behavior. We didn't have the robot check side effects!". And that's really important, right? Every year this happens; people fail to check side effects. They go into a situation in which they know flammable gas is diffuse, but it's dark! And so they strike a match because they want the intended effect of making light. But it has the unintended effect of creating heat, which sets off the gas and explodes and harms or kills them.

So we say, "ah, we have to have the machine not only check the intended effects. It has to check the side effects of its own behavior." Okay, so what we're going to do is we're going to give it more computational power, right? It's going [have] (draws) more sensors, way more sensors, way more comp[utational power]. And we're also going to put a black box inside this, like they do in an airplane so that we can see what's going on inside the robot. And then we're going to put it into this situation (as above), because this is a great test situation because once we solve this simple Darwinian problem, we'll have a basically intelligent machine. So we put it in this situation. And it comes up to the wagon and then... nothing happens! It doesn't do anything! And we go, "WHAT???" The bomb goes off! Why didn't it just move away from the wagon or why didn't it try to lift the battery off? Well, we take a look and we find that the robot is doing what we programmed it to! It's trying to determine all of the possible side effects. So it's determining that if it pulls the handle, that will make a squeaking noise. If it pulls the handle, the front left wheel will go through 30 degrees of arc, the front right wheel will go through 30 degrees of arc. The back wheel, same way. Back left wheel, back right, there'll be a site wobbling and shifting in the wagon. The grass underneath the wheels is going to be indented. The position of the wagon with respect to Mars is being altered... Do you see what the issue is here? The number of side effects is combinatorially explosive. Oh crap!!!

So what do we do? Well, we think "we'll give..." — and this is something that I'm going to argue later [that] we can't do: we come up with a recipe, a definition of relevance. Nobody knows what that is. I'm going to, in fact, argue later that that's actually impossible and that's going to be crucial for understanding our response to the Meaning Crisis. But let's give them the

possibility: we have a definition of relevance and what we'll do is we'll have the robot determine which side effects are relevant or not. Oh, so that's great. So we add that new ability here (draws into the new robot). We give it some extra computational power. We put it in here (same situation as above again) and it goes up to the wagon and the battery and the bomb goes off and it doesn't [do anything], it just sits there calculating! What's going on? And what we notice [is], we look inside and it's making two lists! And it's, (mocks creating the two lists) here's the wheel turning, that's irrelevant and it's judging it, "That is irrelevant". Oh, here's the change in Mar "it's irrelevant". And it's making a list and this list is going and it's correctly labelling each one of these is irrelevant, but the list keeps going and going and going!

See, this is going to sound like a Zen Koan: you have to ignore the information, not even check it.../ See Relevance Realization isn't the application of a definition. It is somehow intelligently ignoring all the irrelevance and somehow zeroing in [on], making the relevant stuff salient, standing out so that the actions that you should do are relevant to you, are obvious to you. This is the problem of the Proliferation of Side Effects in behavior, in action. This is called the Frame Problem. Now there's different aspects of the frame problem. One was a technical aspect, a logical aspect of doing computational programming and Shanahan, I think, is correct that he and others have solved that technical problem. But when Shanahan himself argues is once you've solve that technical version of the frame problem, this deeper problem remains. And of course he calls this deeper problem, this deeper version of the frame problem, the **Relevance Problem**. He happens to think that consciousness might be the way in which we deal with this problem. We'll talk about that later. Many people are converging on the idea that *consciousness* and related ideas like working memory have to do with our ability to zero in on relevant information. But let's keep going...

Communication Problems

Because what about communication? Isn't that central to being a general problem solver? You bet! Especially [when] most of my intelligence is my ability to coordinate my behavior with myself and with others.

Communication is vital to this. We see this even in creatures that don't have

linguistic communication; social communication makes many species behave in a more sophisticated fashion. And I already mentioned to you, there's a relationship between how intelligent an individual is and how social the species is. It's not an algorithm. There seem to be important exceptions like octopus, the octopus, but in general, communication is crucial to being an intelligent, cognitive agent. Let's try and use linguistic communication as our example, because that way we can also bring in the linguistics that's in cognitive science. So the point is when you're using language to communicate, you're involved with a very particular problem. This was made really clear by the work of Grice, HP Grice. He pointed out that you always are conveying much beyond what you're saying. It's much more than what you're saying. It always has to be! And that communication depends on you being able to convey much more than you say.

Now, why is that? Because I have to depend on you to derive the implications — that's a logical thing — and then, what he also called *implicature* — which is not a directly logical thing — in order for me to convey above and beyond what I'm saying. So [for example] I drive up in my car, I put my window down and I say, "excuse me..." there's a person on the street, "I'm out of gas!" And the person comes over and says, "Oh, there's a gas station at the corner". And I go, "thank you", and drive away! So notice — lets go through this carefully — so I rolled down the window and I just shout out, "EXCUSE ME!". Okay? Now what would I actually need to be saying to capture everything that I'm conveying? I would have to say.../ I'm shouting this word EXCUSE ME in the hope that anybody who hears it understands that the ME refers to the speaker and that by saying "excuse me" I'm actually requesting that you give me your attention understanding, of course, that I'm not demanding that you'll give me your attention for like an hour or three hours or 17 days, but for some minimal amount of time that's somehow relevant for a problem that I'm going to pose that's not too onerous.

"I" — and again, when I'm saying "I", I mean, *this* person making the noises who is actually the same as the one referred to by this other word, "ME" (in 'excuse me') — "I'm out of gas". And, of course, I don't mean ME or I, the speaker, I mean the vehicle I'm actually in! I'm not asking you to make me more flatulent! I'm asking for you to help me find gasoline for my car! And

I'm actually referring to gasoline by this short term 'gas'. And by saying this, I know you understand that my car isn't completely out of gasoline. There's enough in it that I can drive some relatively close distance to find a source of gasoline.

The other person, "Oh!". [Just] by uttering this otherwise meaningless term, I'm indicating that I accept the deal that we have here, that I'm going to give you a bit of my attention, and I understand that it's not going to be too long, too onerous. I can make a statement, seemingly out of the blue, that you will know how to connect to what you actually want, which has gasoline for your car, that's not completely out of gas. I will just say the statement, "there is a gasoline station at the corner!" You will figure out that that means that you can drive to it. I'm talking about a nearby corner. Somehow relevantly similar to the amount of gasoline [left in the car], like this isn't a corner halfway across the continent! There's a gasoline station [which] will distribute gasoline for your car. It's not for giving helium to blimps. It's not a little model of a gas station. It's not a gas station that's closed and not has not been in business for 10 years! It's a gasoline station that will accept Canadian currency or credit. It won't demand your firstborn or fruits from your field! And you know how all of that's going on? Because if any of that is violated, you either find it funny or you get angry. If you say, "excuse me, I'm out of gas" and the person comes up and blows some helium into your car. You don't go, "Oh, thank you! That's that's, that's what I wanted! I wanted some gas, helium. Yeah!!!" It's ridiculous! If you drive to the corner and there's a gas station that's been out of business for 10 years, you go, "What? What's going on? What's wrong with that person?".

Always conveying way more than you're saying. Now, notice something else. Notice I tried to explicate what was [said], I gave you a whole bunch of sentences to try and explicate what I was conveying. But you know what? Each one of these sentences is also conveying more than it was saying! And if I was trying to unpack what [they] said, what [they] were conveying and what they say, I would have to generate all of their sentences and so on and so on. And you see what this explodes into: You can't say everything you want to convey! You rely on people reading between the lines. By the way, that is actually what this word means! At least one of the etymologies of "intelligence" is "Inter-ledger", which means to read between the lines. So

what did Grice say we do? Well, what we do is we follow a bunch of maxims. We assume that when we're trying to communicate, there's some basic level of cooperation — I don't mean social cooperation, just communicative cooperation — and we assume that people are following some maxims.

So you're at a party, and you hear me say [-] you asked me, "well, how many kids do you have?", and I say, "Oh, I have one. I have one kid", "Oh, okay." And then later on I'm talking and you overhear me -- somebody asked me the same [question] -- " how many kids do you have?", "Oh, I have two. I have two sons." And, "What?", you come up to me and say, "what's wrong with you? Why did you lie?", "What? I didn't lie. If I have two kids, I necessarily have one child. I didn't say anything false saying I have one kid!" And you'll just say "what an asshole!". Because I didn't provide you with the relevant amount of information. I didn't give you the information you needed in order to try and pick up on what I was conveying. You spoke the truth, the logical truth. Or I did in this example. But I didn't speak it in such a way — this is, again, why you can't be perfectly logical — I didn't speak it in such a way that I aided you in determining what the relevant conveyance is.

The Four Maxims Of Conveyance In Communication

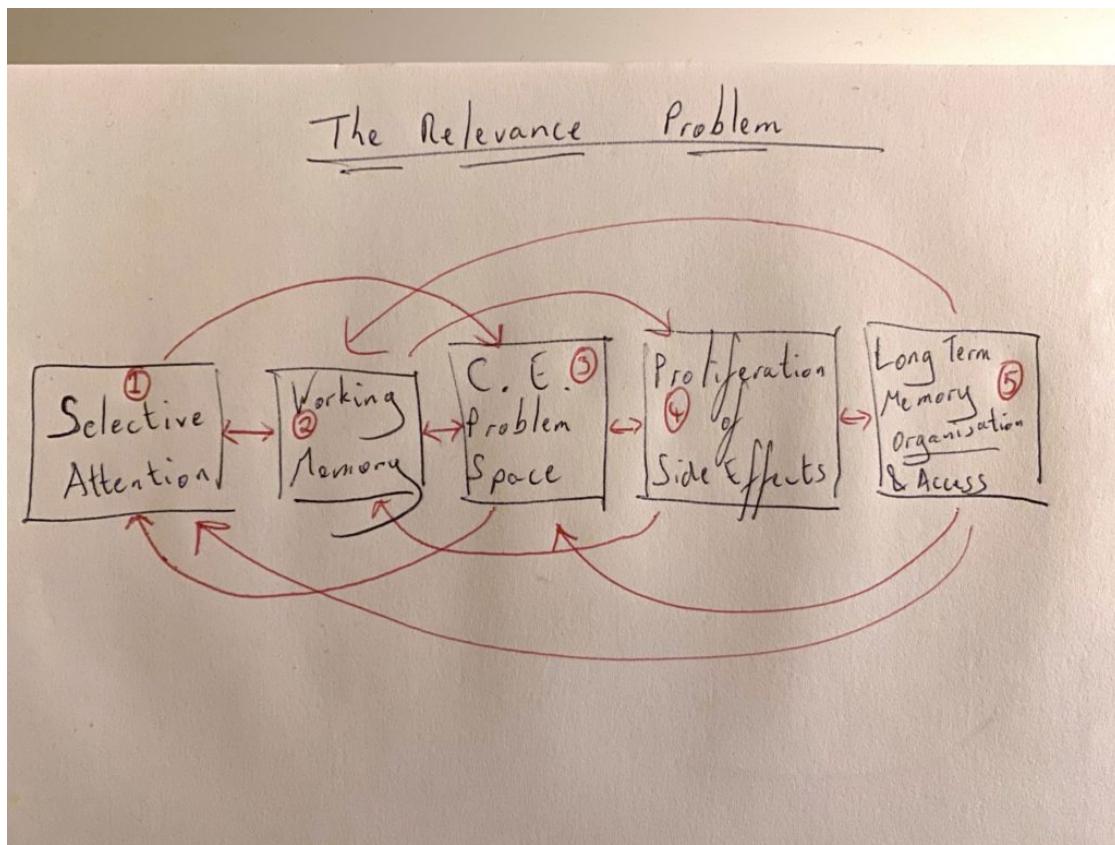
So Grice said we follow four maxims. (Proceeds to write these on the board) We assume the person is trying to convey (1) The Truth. And then (2) a maxim Quantity; they're trying to give us the right amount of information. This is actually often called the maxim of Quality (rubs out Truth and replaces it with Quality), it has to do with truth though. And then there's a maximum of (3) Manner. And then there's a maximum of (4) Relevance. So this is basically, we assume that people are trying to tell the truth (1). They're trying to give us the right amount of information (2). They're trying to put it in the kind of format that's most helpful to us in getting what's conveyed beyond what's said (3), and they're giving us relevant information (4). There it is again, Oh, look!! there's the word: Relevance! . Then Sperber and Wilson come along writing a very important book, which I'll talk about later and I have criticisms of, but the book is entitled "Relevance". And what's interesting is they're proposing this — not just as a linguistic phenomenon,

but a more general cognitive phenomenon: They argue that all of these (1,2 & 3) actually reduced to the one maximum: be relevant.

Okay, so manner: [-] what is it to be helpful to somebody? Well, it's present[ing] the information in a way that's helpful [to] them. Well, what you do is you try and make salient and obvious what is relevant. Okay. That was easy! Quantity: give the relevant amount of information. What about this? And you say, "ah, John I got ya! You can't reduce **this** one. Because **this is truth**. And you have been hitting me over the head since the beginning of this series that truth and relevance are not the same thing!" You're right. So what does Sperber and Wilson do about that? Well they do something really interesting, they say, "we don't actually demand that people speak the truth, because if we did, we're screwed because most of our beliefs are false! What are we actually asking people to do? We're actually asking people to be honest or sincere. That's not the same thing." You're allowed to say what you believe to be true, not what is true. Okay. "So what?" you say. Well, that means the maximum is actually 'be sincere'.

What does sincere mean? "Well, convey what's in your mind", "everything that's in your mind? *Everything* that's going [on]?" So when you asked me, "How many kids do you have?" I've got all this stuff going on in my mind about *this marriage is failing*. *What am I going to do to take care of these kids, I love this kid, but it's okay...* all of that and (gestures a head exploding from so much related content) oh man, have you been trapped with somebody that's getting drunk and they talk like that at a party? It's horrible! You're trapped! If you say one [thing][-] "do you have any kids?" And you're trapped for three hours! So that's not what we mean. We don't mean "*tell me everything that's in your mind right now. Convey it all to me, John, give it to me all!*" That's not what we mean. What do we mean? We mean convey what is relevant to the conversation or context. Out of all of the possible implications and implicatures, zeroing in on those that you might think are relevant to me, our conversation and the context. So that also reduces to relevance.

The Relevance Problem



(*proceeds to work through detailing this on the board)

So at the key of your ability to communicate is your ability to realize relevant information. Notice what I'm doing here. I'm doing this huge convergence argument again and again, and again, what's at the core of your intelligence (draws converging lines like in the construct of Synoptic Integration)? What's at the core of your intelligence again and again, and again, is your capacity for relevance realization (writes R.R. where the lines converge to). It's even more complicated than this! (Wipes board clean.) [-] Remember this: all of the information available in the environment, overwhelming combinatorially explosive! You have to selectively attend to some of it. So this is doing relevance realization: **Selective Attention** (1). And then you have to decide how to hold in **Working Memory** (2), what's going to be important for you. Lynn Hasher's excellent work showing that working memory is about trying to screen off what's relevant or irrelevant information. You're using this (Working Memory) in your problem solving. You're using this (Working Memory) and here is where you are trying to deal with the **Combinatorial Explosion in the Problem Space** (3), all that stuff

we talked about. Also interacting with the ***Proliferation of Side Effects*** (4), like we saw with the robot and the battery when you try to act. So you're trying to select [something], what do I hold in mind? How do I move through the problem space? Once I start acting, what side effects do I pay attention to? Which ones do I not pay attention to? And all of that has to do with, out of all the information in my Long Term Memory, how do I organize it? How do I categorize it? How do I improve my ability to access it? ***Longterm Memory Organisation and access*** (5) is dependent on your ability to zero in on **relevant** information.

And this of course feeds back to here (5 → 3). This feeds back to here (5 → 2), This feeds back to here (5 → 1),

These are interacting (2 & 4), these are interacting (1 & 3).

This is the Relevance Problem. That (what he's detailed on the board)! That's the problem of trying to determine what's relevant. It's the core of what makes you intelligent?

Now, why does that matter? What I'm trying to show you is how deep and profound this construct is. This idea of Relevance Realization is at the core of what it is to be intelligent. And we know that this isn't just cold calculation. Your Relevance Realization machinery has to do with all the stuff we've been talking about: salience, obviousness, it's about what motivates you, what arouses your energy, what attracts your attention? Relevance Realization is deeply involving. It's at the guts of your intelligence, your salience landscaping, your problem solving. Okay, so what do I want to do? What I want to do is the following: I want to propose to you that we can continue to do this (draws the convergence argument diagram - 5 lines converging to RR). I can show you how all of this is... I could do more! About how it's all converging on this. Then I want to do two things. I want to try and show how we might be able to analyse formalize and mechanize this (writes these down from in the convergence diagram) in a way that could help to coordinate how our consciousness, our cognition our attention, access to our longterm memory... how all that's working. Then what do I want I do with this? I want to try and show you how we can use Relevance Realization in a multi-tap fashion (draws lines diverging out of RR in a

similar way to the Synoptic Integration construct), to try and get a purchase on these things we have been talking about in the historical analysis.

Can we use Relevance Realization and how it's dynamically self-organizing in this complex [construct] (indicates the Relevance Problem construct on the board)... It's self-organizing within each one of these (1 to 5 individually). Remember I showed you how attention is bottom up and top down at the same time — all of these are powerfully self-organizing — and how the whole thing is self-organized? We know it's so organizing in insight. Can I use Relevance Realization to explain things that are crucial to wisdom, to self-transcendence, to spirituality, to meaning? That's exactly what I'm going to do. I'm going to use this construct (convergence construct) once I've tried to show you how it could potentially be grounded (down through analysing, formalising and mechanising), building the synoptic integration across the levels and then do this kind (the multi-apt, diverging lines of the construct) of integration.

And think about why this makes at least initial plausible sense. Relevance Realization is crucial to insight and insight is central to wisdom. Relevance Realization — and you're getting a hint of it — seems to be crucial to consciousness and attention and altering your state of consciousness. We've already seen it can be crucial two Wisdom and Meaning Making. And that would make sense. Look, isn't it sort of central that what makes somebody wise is exactly their capacity to zero in on the relevant information in a situation? To take an ill-defined, messy situation and zero in? To pay attention to the relevant side effects, the relevant consequences? To get you to pay attention to what are the important features to remember the right similar situations from the past? Right? Well you say, "okay, I sort of see that. Well, what about the self-transcendence?" Well, we already see that this is a self-organizing, self-correcting process. We already know that there's an element of insight. The very machinery that makes you capable of insight is the machinery that helps you overcome the biases, helps you to overcome the self deception. And it helps you solve problems that you couldn't solve before. We talked about this with Systematic Insight. "Okay... so consciousness, insight, wisdom, but what about meaning? Come on! Like, where's all that?"

Well, here's the proposal, (taps the Synoptic Integration construct of Relevance Realisation on the board) right? That what we were talking about when we talked about *meaning* in terms of the three orders -- the normal logical, the narrative and the normative -- would, yes... were connections that afforded wisdom, self-transcendence very much... "But what connections?" Well, the connections that were lost in the meaning crisis! The connections between mind and body, the connections between mind and world, the connections between mind and mind, that connection of the mind to itself! These are all the things that are called into question: the fragmentation of the mind itself. [-] And we saw how this, all throughout, had to do with, again, the relationship between salience and truth, what we find relevant in terms of how it's salient or obvious to us and how that connects up to reality. And how it connects — remember Plato — [it] connects parts of us together in the right way, the *optimal* way. What if what we're talking about when we're using this metaphor of meaning is we're talking about how we find things relevant *to* us, *to* each other, parts of ourselves relevant *to* each other, how we're relevant **to** the world, how the world is relevant *to* us? All this language of connection is not the language of largely causal connection. It's the language of establishing relations *of* relevance *between* things.

Perhaps there's a deep reason why manipulating Relevance Realization affords self-transcendence and wisdom and insight precisely because Relevance Realization is the ability to make the connections that are at the core of meaning, those connections that are quintessentially being threatened by the Meaning crisis. That would mean if we get an understanding of the machinery of this (Synoptic Integration Construct of RR), we would have a way of generating new psycho-technologies, re-designing, reappropriating older psycho-technologies and coordinating them systematically in order to regenerate, [be] regenerative of these fraying connections. Relegitimate and afford the cultivation of wisdom, self-transcendence, connectedness to ourselves and to each other and to the world.

And that's in fact, what I want to explore with you and help explain to you in our next session together on Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Episode 28 Notes

Barsalou

Lawrence W. Barsalou is an American psychologist and a cognitive scientist, currently working at the University of Glasgow. At the University of Glasgow, he is a professor of psychology, performing research in the Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology.

Dennett

Daniel Clement Dennett III is an American philosopher, writer, and cognitive scientist whose research centers on the philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, and philosophy of biology, particularly as those fields relate to evolutionary biology and cognitive science.

Shanahan

Murray Patrick Shanahan is a Professor of Cognitive Robotics at Imperial College London, in the Department of Computing, and a senior scientist at DeepMind. He researches artificial intelligence, robotics, and cognitive science.

Learn more about him in this [website](#)

HP Grice

Herbert Paul Grice, usually publishing under the name H. P. Grice, H. Paul Grice, or Paul Grice, was a British philosopher of language, whose work on meaning has influenced the philosophical study of semantics. He is known for his theory of implicature.

Sperber and Wilson

Relevance Theory is a framework for understanding utterance interpretation first proposed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson and used within cognitive linguistics and pragmatics.

Relevance

Relevance, first published in 1986, was named as one of the most important and influential books of the decade in the Times Higher Educational

Supplement

Book mentioned – Relevance – [Buy Here](#)

Lynn Hasher

Lynn Hasher is a cognitive scientist known for research on attention, working memory, and inhibitory control. Hasher is Professor Emerita in the Psychology Department at the University of Toronto and Senior Scientist at the Rotman Research Institute at Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care

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[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

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[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 29 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Getting to the Depths of Relevance Realization

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. This is episode 29. So last time I went through with you a series of arguments, trying to show you the centrality of the issue of Relevance Realisation. I want to review that with you and then try and begin an account of how we might come up with a naturalistic explanation of Relevance Realisation, and then build that into an overall plausibility argument about using that notion of Relevance Realisation to explain many of the features that we consider central to human spirituality, meaning making, self-transcendence, altered States of consciousness and wisdom. Before I begin that, I want to remind everybody of how much the work I'm talking about now has been done in collaboration with other people, especially the work with Tim Lillicrap and Blake Richards in 2012, the article we published in the Journal of Logic and Computation. Work with Leo Ferraro in 2013. Some current work with Leo Ferraro, Anderson Todd, Richard Woo. Current work I'm doing with

Christopher Mastropietro and some past work with Zachary Irving and Leo Ferraro on the nature of intelligence.

So, we want to take a look at what we did last time. We did, very quickly to remind you, a series of arguments. A series of arguments that pointed towards how central Relevance Realisation is. We did arguments around the nature of problem solving. And you remember, we saw the idea there of the Search Space, as proposed by Newell and Simon, and we faced a couple of important issues there. We faced issues of Combinatorial Explosion and what we need is Problem Formulation or Problem Framing that allows us to avoid combinatorial explosion by zeroing in on relevant information. I also proposed to you, and I'll return to this later, that problem solving is our best way of trying to understand what we mean by intelligence - your capacity as being a General Problem Solver. Also, we know the problem of Ill-Definedness - very often a problem formulation is needed in order to determine what the relevant information is and what the relevant structure of that information is. So that, again, points us into relevance. These two together (Combinatorial Explosion & ill-definedness) also pointed towards a phenomenon we've already talked about — insight — and the fact that you often have to solve a problem by altering your problem formulation and re-determining what you consider relevant.

We then took a look at Categorisation. I'll come back to this again in another way, a little bit later in this lecture, but we took a look at how categorisation ultimately depends on judgments of similarity and can get into an equivocation there. We can equivocate between a purely logical notion of similarity in which case any two objects are indefinitely similar or dissimilar to each other. And if we mean, instead of logical similarity which would not help us to categorize, psychological similarity? Okay, then we're talking about making a comparison of two things in terms of the relevant features of comparison, the relevant aspects. So we're into relevance and we're also introducing an important idea [that] I want you to remember; this notion of an Aspect, a set of relevant features that cohere together and are relevant to us, especially in projects like categorisation. So we keep getting [Relevance].

Of course, if you remember, doing good Cog-Psi I do a convergence argument (draws Convergence diagram again) to get a trustworthy problem or construct. And then I basically do a divergence argument (draws equally balancing, diverging lines on the right) to show how it has the potential to explain many important phenomena and establish a relevant balance between them. And so that's what I'm building here (indicates the balanced construct drawn on the board). Right now we're on this side (left; converging), how all these things are converging on Relevance Realisation (writes RR in the circle in the middle of the diagram). And then, as I said, can we use this to explain many of the features that seem to be central to human spirituality, meaning making, self-transcendence, altered States of consciousness and wisdom.

We then took a look at Communication. [-] We might've done the robot first. It doesn't matter! We did communication and we saw the issue there is the fact that you have to convey more than you can say. And then that led us into the work of Grice and the series of maxims that make conversational implicature possible. And that got us into that all of the maxims collapsed to the maximum of being relevant. We then did [-] the issue of robotics, the actual interaction with the environment. Here's the idea of being an agent and we saw the robot was trying to pull the battery that's on the wagon and that wagon also has the bomb on it. And what we saw is the problem of the Proliferation of Side Effects. You can't ignore all side effects or you'll be grotesquely stupid. You can't check all side effects or you'll be grotesquely incapable, and so therefore you have to zoom in on their relevant side effects. So again and again, and again everything is centring on this (indicates the diagram of convergence/divergence construct - Synoptic Integration of Relevance Realisation).

I want you to also now remember a couple of other things from previous lectures, how we talked about the convergence argument. This is an independent convergence argument when we talked about consciousness — not the nature of consciousness, but the function of consciousness — all the convergence arguments (duplicates the convergence diagram for consciousness), that what's going on in consciousness is doing Relevance Realisation (puts RR at the centre of this convergence diagram for Consciousness). Especially in complex, ill-defined situations in which our

agency is directly involved. So consciousness seems to be bound up with Relevance Realisation. And we also talked about how this overlaps with how Working Memory -- the work of Lynn Hasher -- the job of working memory is to be a relevance filter and to screen off irrelevant information and allow in to processing, deeper processing, more relevant information. And I also pointed out — I want you to see how all these connections are forming — that there's deep connections between working memory and your measures of your general intelligence - how intelligent you are. So we see that we're getting, actually, a very powerful convergence argument towards the centrality of Relevance Realisation as constitutive, as constitutive of your intelligence, your cognitive agency, as significantly contributory towards your existence as a conscious being.

Where Relevance Fits Into Meaning

And I also suggested to you last time that this notion of Relevance Realisation — and this is what we're going to develop today — may be a way of explaining that sort of fundamental aspect of meaning — the kind of meaning that was lost in the Meaning Crisis that's expressed in the three orders, in which we were pursuing coherence and significance and purpose — that sense of connectedness, connectedness. And I'm going to try to argue that as we understand what relevance is, that relevance is exactly that sense of connectedness. So there will be deep connections between meaning and relevance (from boiling down all the arguments to being about relevance). There's deep connections between relevance and agency. That's the whole point about the robot (robotics) and communicating (communication). And there's going to be deep connections, we've already seen, between meaning and agency (completes an important triangle on the board between Meaning — Relevance — Agency), that one of the whole things about agency is its relationship to the arena, the Agent:Arena relationship, and how that grounds, that's the meta-meaning grounding of all our other more specific meaning making projects.

So I hope I've made at least a good convergence argument for you. That many things converge upon, many things that we're interested in — many central, defining features of intelligence and agency and aspects of the functionality of our consciousness — everything is sort of converging on

this Relevance Realisation. What I want to try and show you now is how you might move towards — and this has been sort of the core of my, I guess you'd call it my scientific work — how you move towards trying to offer a scientific explanation of relevance and what that would look like and the difficulties you face doing so. I also want to try and argue that there's good reason to believe that we're talking about a unified phenomenon, a unified thing here: relevance. That this isn't just a family resemblance term for a lot of disconnected things, that there's reason to believe this is a central thing.

Theories Of Relevance - A Guiding Principle

Let's start with trying to offer theories of relevance, and there are good ones out there. There's the work of Sperber and Wilson and others, and I will refer to some of that work as we move along, but let's try and work towards it at the metal-level. What do we need for a good theory of relevance to do?

What kind of mistakes do we need to avoid when we're trying to explain relevance? The main mistake that I want to point to is a mistake in which we are arguing in a circle. If you remember, this is part of what goes into things like the Homuncular Fallacy - remember when I tried to explain vision with the little man in my head having vision?! I don't want to use whatever I'm using.../ Let's put it this way: whatever process or entity that I'm trying to use to explain relevance should not itself require relevance. What do I mean by that? If I have something "X" and I'm using ["X"] to explain relevance, [then] [X] cannot itself presuppose relevance for its function, because if it does that, I'm ultimately arguing in a circle. I have to find processes that are themselves, not processes that realize relevance if I'm going to explain in terms of those processes, Relevance Realisation itself.

Another way of putting this is [that] I ultimately want to explain intelligence in terms of processes that are not themselves intelligent. Because if I don't, if I'm always explaining intelligence in terms of processes that are themselves intelligent, that is no different than homuncular fallacy of explaining vision in terms of internal processes that are themselves visual processes. So that's going to be a guiding methodological principle. Now that turns out to be very powerful and as many people have pointed out — Fodor famously has pointed out in repeated places — it's actually very difficult to explain

relevance without presupposing relevance in the machinery that you're using to explain it.

Let's take a look at some candidates. We might think that we could explain relevance in terms of how we use Representations. This is a very powerful way we think about the mind, that there are things in the mind, ideas, pictures, that stand for, represent the world in some way. We might think that perhaps it's much more that relevance is a function of Computation; computational processes. Or we might think that we explain relevance in terms of what's called Modularity, that there's a specific area of the brain dedicated to processing relevance. (writes Representation, Computation and Modularity on the board.) I want to take a look at each one of those, and I want to try and argue as to why I think they're inadequate and what that helps us to see. And what I want you to see is, and I'll try to show this along the way, that [-] if, and I'm trying to make it more than an if, but if Relevance Realisation is so central to our meaning making, our cognition and our consciousness and our self-transcendence et cetera, as we learn about how we have to best try to explain or understand it we should garner lessons about how to best think about and reflect upon human spirituality. At least in the terms that I have defined it for us.

Breaking Down Representation

So, Representation... Now this is just a terrifically hot issue both in terms of interest and controversy within cognitive science in general and I'm not going to try and completely decide this issue right now although I think I'll say things that are pertinent to that debate, but let's take it that what we mean by a representation is something, as I said, some mental entity that stands for, refers, directs us towards an object in the world. That's all I need! Whatever else representations are in all that controversy, that's all I need for the point I want to make! Because I want to show you something very important about a representation and I mentioned it a few minutes ago and this is a point that John Searle has famously made. Representations are aspectual. OK so I hold this thing up (pen) and you form a representation of it. Remember all the things we talked about when we talked about categorisation, we talked about similarity etc. So when you form a representation, you do not grasp all of the true properties of this object

because all of the true properties, the number, is combinatorially explosive. We've already seen that. So out of all the properties (draws a circle) you just select some subset (draws a small wedge of the circle), and what subsets do you pick? Well, you pick a subset that is, here it comes, relevant to you!

Are they just a feature list? No, we've already seen that along time ago; they have a structural functional organization, they are made relevant to each other.

So here's what we've got: a set of features that are relevant to each other and then a set of features that have been structurally functionally organised so that they have co-relevance, is then relevant to me. That's what an aspect is (underlines aspect in aspectual). So whenever I'm representing anything, this is a marker (holds up marker), however I could change it's aspectuality (changes his grip on the marker): it's now a weapon! And we do that all the time! In fact one of the ways we check peoples creativity is to do exactly that; we will give some object and say how many different ways can you use it? How many different ways can you categorize it? Namely, how many different ways, how flexible are you at getting different aspects from the same object? So representations are inherently aspectual, but notice the language I'm using: You're zeroing in on relevant properties out of all the possible properties, you're structuring them as how so-relevant to each other and then how that structural functional organization is relevant to you.

Aspectuality deeply presupposes your ability to zero in on relevance, to do Relevance Realisation. That means that representations can't ultimately be the generators, creators of relevance, they can't be the causal origin of relevance. Now, can representations feedback and alter what we find relevant? Of course, nobody's denying that. That's of course why we use representations! But [what we can't serve], they can't serve as the ontological basis the stuff in reality that we're trying to use to generate a noncircular account of Relevance Realisation.

Things And Places - Multiple Object Tracking

Now that's going to tell us something really interesting. It's going to tell us that if this meaning and this spirituality is bound to Relevance Realisation, that the place to look for it is not going to be found at the level of our representational cognition, the level of our cognition that is using ideas,

propositions, pictures, etc. Once again I am not saying that those things do not contribute or affect what we consider relevant. What I am saying is that they are not the source, the locus of how we do Relevance Realisation. I want to show you have this cashes out even in an empirical manner. This goes to some really interesting work done by Zenon Wylshyn on what is called Multiple Object Tracking. Multiple Object Tracking is really interesting. So basically what you do is give people a bunch of objects on a computer screen, let's say I have x's and o's (draws several on the board) and they'll be different colours and different shapes all kinds of different things like this, and what I do is I have the objects move around and let's say this was a red X and then after it moves around I ask you "where is the red X?" and you have to point at it. I may ask you "where is the green circle?", "where is the blue square?", you get the task... Now what's interesting is how much you can do this! You can track about eight, that's on average, objects reliably. What's really interesting about them is the more objects you track the less and less features you can attribute to each object. What do I mean by that? Suppose I'm tracking — well that's six shapes (on the board) — suppose I was tracking the red X and I have to keep it... I can, after lots of movement, say "oh, it's there now. It started there, and it's there now!". What I won't notice during that is that the red X has become, for example, a blue square! So all of its content properties get lost! All I'm tracking — and I need you to remember this — is what you might call the hereness, where is it, and the nowness. Where is it?

It's here now, it's here now, it's here now, it's here now, it's here now (pointing in various different directions in the room). Everything else, it's shape, it's colour, it's categorical identity, all get lost! So he calls this FINSTING. This stands for Fingers of Instantiation. Its basic idea is like this: your mind has something equivalent to putting your finger on something - I don't know what this is (water bottle), suppose I didn't know what it was, I put my finger on it. I don't know what it is, I just know it's here, nowness! And it's here now, it's here now... (moves bottle around, with finger attached!). Here and now are indexicals: these are just terms that refer to the context of the speaker, so here now (lifts the bottle and moved it around with his finger again) so it's here now and it moves around and my

mind can keep in touch. Noticed my language: in touch, in contact, in touch with something. But that's all it's doing, it's just tracking the here-nowness.

Well, that's really cool! Why do we have this ability? Well, first of all I'm going to propose a way of thinking about this - he doesn't use this language, but I think it will be helpful! I don't think it's in any way inconsistent. This ability to do this is like salience tagging (writes salience tagging on the board). When I touch this (bottle) I am making this here-nowness salient to me. This here-nowness is salient to me. Not the bottle, not even the flat surface because remember I lose all of those particular qualities. All I have is the here-nowness. This is salient to me, and we do this with demonstrative terms like this! Notice the word this is not like the word cat. Cat refers you to a specific thing, meow meow the animal that pretends to love you!

Actually I know some cats now that I am actually convinced do actually love me, so I have to amend my usual comments about cats!! But this isn't like cat! This can go, watch: this (pen), this (bottle) this (wall) this (light switch), OK? It doesn't refer to a specific thing, it picks out, it does a salience.../ it makes something, it doesn't make some-thing, it just makes some hereness and nowness!! Sorry for talking about this [like this], but this is how we have to talk 'salient' to you!

Now I want you to pick up on something I just said with this. Terms like this and here and now but especially this. These are linguistic terms and they do what is called demonstrative reference. They do not refer to a particular thing they do not refer to the bottle or to the marker or to the wall but this, this, this, this (pointing to these various things) OK? All they do is salience tagging; this and that. Now why is that important? Well, Pylyshyn wants you to understand FINSTING — FINSTING is obviously not a linguistic phenomenon, I'm not speaking in my head when I'm doing this (points to the X's and O's) in fact if you try and speak in your head you're going to mess yourself up — so he is using demonstrative reference as a linguistic analogy for something you enact. So I'm going to try to draw that out by calling it Enactive Demonstrative Reference (writes this on the board), rather than linguistic demonstrative reference. Which I've tried to explain to you with this notion of the salience tagging of hereness and nowness.

Why is this so important? Well here's where the analogy can help me: I need demonstrative reference I need enactive demonstrative reference before I can do any categorisation. Look, if I'm going to categorize things I need to mentally group them together. This is mental grouping: this, this, this (three individual pens), this (the group of the three pens together). That's what mental grouping is. Mental grouping is to salience tag things and bind them together in salience tagging. So what am I showing you? What I am trying to show you is any categorisation you have depends on Enactive Demonstrative Reference and Enactive Demonstrative Reference is only about salience and here-nowness! You see, all of your concepts are categorical! That whole conceptual, representational, categorical, pictorial... all of that depends on this (categorisation), but this (categorisation) depends on something that is pre-categorical, pre-conceptual. And you say but you'reAnd you say "but you're using concepts to talk about it!". Don't confuse properties of the theory with properties of what the theory is about! Of course I have to use words to talk about it! I have to use words to talk about atoms! That doesn't mean that atoms are made out of words or dependent on words! I have to use words to talk about anything, and I don't want properties of my theory and properties of the phenomena of the theories to be confused. I want a theory about, for example, vagueness to itself be clear! I want a theory about a illogicality to itself be logical. I want to theory about irrationality to itself be rational. Do not confuse properties of the theory with properties of the thing being referred to. Yes, I have to use language and concepts to talk about it, but that does not mean that the thing itself is made out of, or dependent on, concepts and categorisation. I've given you an argument and I've given you empirical evidence towards this claim and they massively, they massively, converge together.

Now notice, this is a fundamental connectedness to reality you're getting with the FINSTING, with the Enactive Demonstrative Reference, when you're getting that initial salience tagging, because it's like the mind being in contact with the world. That's why Pylyshyn even uses the metaphor of contact! All right so the representational level is not going to give us what we're looking for. In fact we need to think about ways in which we need to pursue something that is sub-representational. So in Cog-Sci we would call that.../ the representational level is called the semantic level (writes semantic

above aspectuality). Because this is the level at which words have meaning or, by analogy, at which representations have representational meaning. So we have to go sub-semantic, we have to go sub-categorical, we have to go sub-conceptual. Now, is that such a bizarre claim? We saw, in Higher States of Consciousness, that people claim to have the most profound sense of meaning and it is precisely ineffable. They reliably, across traditions, across historical contexts, claim that it is not conceptual, it can't be grasped categorically and they use the language of hereness and nowness to describe it - it's fully present, it's like at eternal hereness and nowness. So this is actually not a bizarre claim to consider. Now it's difficult for us because we habitually identify with — that's our ego structure m, I would say — we tend to identify with the way in which we are running representations in our mind; inner pictures, inner speech etc...

Breaking Down Computation

All right so perhaps we could consider the computational level [as] the level in which we could explain Relevance Realisation because we have found that the semantic level of representations is inadequate. This is often called the syntactic level. Semantics is about how your terms refer to the world. Syntax is about how your various terms have to be coordinated together within some system. So for example you know that there are grammatical rules in English about how you can put certain things together, that's the syntax. So in computation what we're usually doing is we're thinking about the relationship between our symbols — I don't mean symbol in the religious sense, I just mean the things that we're using within, for example, a code or a program or something like that — we're talking about the relationship between them. Now there's been a lot of issues around this and I want to point to a core argument by one of the strongest defenders, one of the originators and defenders of the computational theory of mind (writes Fodor on the board). So this is a tradition — you remember, it goes back to Hobbes — of the idea that cognition is computation, we talked about this, the manipulation of an abstract symbolic system, like a generally logical or mathematical symbolic system. The manipulation of that is what it is to think; to think is to do a computation. Now, Fodor has pointed out, and I think these are arguments in many ways analogous to Wittgenstein and you have to remember [that] he's a defender of the computational theory of

mind. He's considered to be one of the founding figures within cognitive science, so when he criticises it we have to first of all do two things, he died not that long ago, but we have to congratulate him on his honesty as a researcher. The capacity for self criticism is, for me, a demonstrative measure of how good a researcher is. If you're finding people that are incapable of self criticism in their intellectual pursuits then I would suggest you give them quite a wide berth in how much confidence you place in their work. So the fact that he does that is important and the fact that he launches into that self criticism means he's not being driven, not being motivated by his own particular theoretical bias. All that being said, what's the nature of the criticism? Well, the nature of the criticism is you have to make a distinction; ultimately you have to make a distinction between implication and inference.

Implication And Inference

People sometimes confuse these together (writes implication and inference on the boards). So implication is a logical relationship based on syntactic structures and rules, a logical relationship between propositions. So here's an abstract symbol: so if I have "A & B" and I know that's true, I can conclude that "B" is true; I don't know what B is, see I don't have any semantic content, it's purely semantic, but I can derive that. Now, when we try to think about implications, what we have to remember is an inference is when you're actually using an implication-relation to change your beliefs. And the thing about beliefs is that they have content. So when I'm making an inference I am not just making an implication I am using implication-relations in order to alter belief; changing belief. OK, you say, "well why does that matter?". Because changing beliefs to us brings up the important issue right away, the important issue right away is what beliefs should I be changing? What beliefs should I be changing? Let me try and show you what I mean: any proposition technically is defined in terms of its logical, syntactic structure by all of its implication-relations, and logicians can get very technical here about whether or not negation and implication are identical blah blah blah I'm just going to speak very broadly here because that's all I need. So a proposition: it's logical, it's computational Identity is defined by all of its implication relations to other propositions. So, for

example, part of the identity of this “A & B” is that it implies B; it also implies A and all kinds of things!

Now the issue that we have, and this is a point that was made, also independently, by Cherniak, is the number of implications, logical relations between any proposition and all the other propositions is combinatorially explosive. Combinatorially explosive! You cannot ever make use — and we talked about this, about how you can't be comprehensively logical — you can't make use of all of the implications of any proposition, ever; you cannot be completely logical, ever! What you do is, out of all of the implications, you decide which one of the ones you select, which one of the ones are going to be used in an inference. Fodor and Cherniak both independently talk about this as a kind of cognitive commitment: which of the implications are you going to commit to? And this matters to you! It matters to you because commitment is an act that makes use of your precious and limited resources of attention, memory, time, metabolic energy... you cannot afford, you cannot afford to spend them on all possible ones. You cannot even afford to spend them on inferences that are not — and here's what you knew I was going to say — relevant to the context! Which beliefs do I need to change — and that can mean strengthen by the way — which beliefs do I need to change ‘in this context’?

So notice, what out of all of these (implication relations), what am I doing? I'm choosing — and this is what Cherniak specifically argues, this is his term not mine — what makes, according to Cherniak, somebody rational — we'll come back to whether or not this is a good definition of rationality but it's at least what makes you intelligent as a cognitive agent — is that you select out of all the possible implications, the relevant ones because those ones are relevant to the context, because they're going to affect the beliefs that you've already done Relevance Realisation on, as applying to this situation, or representing the situation well. So inference massively presupposes Relevance Realisation.

Now you may think “well, but I can get around that because logic isn't just implications, it's the rules governing the implications. And maybe all I need to talk about is the rules!” And then here's the argument, that comes from Wittgenstein but I think ultimately it goes back to Aristotle, is how rules

work, right? And this is an argument that Brown and others have made very, very clear: rules are... obviously they are propositions! [But] they are not just propositions, they're propositions that — and this is perhaps why you're considering them — propositions that tell you where to commit your resources. Now the problem with that is that, of course, every rule requires an interpretation, every rule requires a specification of its application. Let's just use a moral rule because they are the easiest for people to have a connection to. I assume that many of you have this rule: "be kind", which means in a situation I will use inferences to derive actions and changes of belief and those will fit together in a certain way that will result in me achieving kindness towards others. So I have this rule, it tells me which implications to pay attention to, which beliefs I should make salient, etc. Now, what's the issue about this? Well, think about being kind... what do I mean by this problem of interpretation by specifying the application of the rule? The way I am kind to my son Spencer, what it means to be kind to Spencer, should I use that in the how I'm trying to be kind to my partner Sarah? No! That would be an appropriate. It could be condescending. It could be patronising. Now I want to be kind to both of them, in fact I love both of them deeply, but I'm not going to be kind to them in the same way most of the time. Well, what about how I'm kind to a friend? Should I be kind to a friend the way I'm kind to either Spencer or Sarah? That doesn't seem right either! What about how I'm kind to my students, should that be like I'm kind to a friend? No! How I'm kind to Spencer? No! How I'm kind to Sarah? No! What about how I'm kind to a stranger, should that be like I'm kind to my students? No! How about when I am kind to myself? Should it be like any of those?

So here's the thing and this is bound up with the fact that we have to always convey more than we can say - you can probably see that! I cannot specify all the conditions of application of the rule in the rule because the rule always has to convey much more than it can say. If I try to specify it in the rule the rule will become unwieldily because it will become combinatorially, explosively large; it will no longer serve. Well, you say, "well what you might do is put in a rule on how to use this rule - a higher order rule!" That's not going to work because the same problem is going to happen here! And this was Wittgenstein's point: you can't ultimately get an explanation of how

you follow rules in terms of just the rules. Your ability to follow rules is actually based on something else. Brown calls this, in his book on Rationality in 1988, the Skill of Judgment. Notice what we've moved here, we've moved out of the propositional language of a rule and we've moved into the procedural language of a skill. The skill: knowing how to judge what is relevant, pertinent in this situation. Now again, notice how we can't even maintain the two things that are supposed to be central to computation: we can't use inference because it presupposes relevance [and] we can't use rules because what is this procedural skill of being able to determine what is appropriate or what fits in the context, what fits the people or the situation, what fits the problems or task at hand? Well, that's the skill of Relevance Realisation.

Situational Awareness

So we're seeing that the computational level isn't going to do it for us. I want to stop here, before we go to this modularity issue, and point out something really interesting. Notice what we got with Fodor and Wittgenstein, and like I said, I think this ultimately goes back to Aristotle... Notice how the propositional — and this was one of Wittgenstein's famous arguments — ultimately depends on the procedural (writes propositional above procedural with a down arrow between them). One of my favourite quotes from Wittgenstein has to do exactly with this. He said, "even if lions could talk we would not understand them." Even if they could use all of our words we would not understand them because their skills of what is relevant or important or central to them are very different to ours. He called this "a form of life". Their form of life, the way they exercise across many contacts the skill of doing judgments of what is relevant, of what is salient and important to them, is fundamentally different from ours because they are cats rather than humans and therefore even if they spoke we would not understand them.

So we see that the propositional actually depends on the procedural (taps this on the board), but notice — and this is really important — if I am exercising the skill, so I'm going to throw this (pen), or do a Martial Art block (demonstrates block), or something [like that], that depends on what's called Situational Awareness. if I am a good martial artist, I don't just have my

skills and just apply them mechanically — it's a great thing if you spar with somebody that's fighting mechanically, because they don't have situational awareness! Now what is situational awareness? When I'm exercising a skill it depends on my situational awareness. What is situational awareness? Well, you know what it is! We've already talked about it! It's your perspectival knowing, it's your ability to do salience landscaping [and] it's ability to foreground, background, formulate the problem... it's all of that perspectival stuff. So my situational awareness is how my salience landscaping - foregrounding what's most relevant to the task, [backgrounding], how was it and is it [relevant?] [-]. What's irrelevant? How it's adjusting as the situation is changing so that the way I'm applying my skill is more adaptive and more fitted to the situation... (all the while demonstrating martial arts movements). So your procedural knowing depends on your perspectival knowing (writes perspectival below procedural with a downward arrow between them).

Well, you know where I'm going to go with this, right? Your perspectival knowing ultimately depends on how well the agent and arena fit together and generate affordances of action and affordances of intelligibility. If the agent and arena need to be in a conformity relationship, they need to be well fitted together — you've seen lots of arguments to this — in order for my salience landscaping to function appropriately. So the perspectival ultimately depends on the participatory (writes participatory below perspectival with a downward arrow between them). Now of course it goes this way, right? (changes the three down arrows to up arrows also.) They affect each other in multiple interactions (draws arrows linking different levels), I was not originally drawing the arrow of causal interaction, I just did that, but what I was trying to draw originally was the arrow of dependence: asymmetric dependence. This depends on this (Propositional and procedural), this depends on this (procedural and perspectival), this ultimately depends on this (perspectival and participatory) (works down through the different levels highlighting dependency). So we are getting a lot about how we should think about Relevance Realisation where we should look for it and notice it's starting to give us a way of connecting and thinking about the four kinds of knowing.

What About Modularity?

What about modularity? Well the idea would be something like this, and to be fair this comes up a lot, the idea [that] (drawing) here's the mind or the brain (draws a circle) and here's something like the “Central Executive”, or something like that (draws a smaller circle Inside the big circle and labels it Central Executive) — it's weird we use a business term for an aspect of our cognition, this is used in psychology — and the idea is that the central executive is making all kinds of important decisions. Well, maybe the central executive is responsible for Relevance Realisation and a lot of people — and I know this because I interact with psychologists — they say “well, that's it! That's the answer!”. But it's not an answer, it's not an answer at all! Because if it's right, it's ridiculously homuncular, because what does the central executive have to possess [if] inside the central executive is the capacity for Relevance Realisation? I haven't explained it! I've just pointed to a place and the problem is you shouldn't.../ So first of all I haven't explained it, it's homuncular, and secondly you shouldn't point to a place! Look, Relevance Realisation can't be in any one place, it has to simultaneously — you know this we've talked about this with how attention works, remember? — you know that you're always going from feature to gestalt and from gestalt to feature (draws two parallel up-and-down arrows beside each other to demonstrate to this). Attention has to be moving out towards the gestalt and down to the features. Relevance Realisation has to be happening both at the features level and the gestalt level in a highly integrated, interactive fashion. You can't point to one place and say “that's where Relevance Realisation is going on” because Relevance Realisation has to be happening at multiple levels of cognition in a simultaneous, self-organizing fashion. That's why it can lead to insight. And as I said, pointing to any one thing and labelling it is not an explanation. It is a homuncular diversion, that's all it is!

OK let's try and draw this all together... what are we learning? What I'm trying to show you, we are already learning something very interesting about meaning making. We are learning what we need, the kinds of properties and processes we need, in order to explain Relevance Realisation. First of all our account of Relevance Realisation — and bear with me on this because there's an important way in which I am going to modify this — but our account of Relevance Realisation has to be completely internal. Now what

do I mean by that? It has to work in terms of goals that are, at least initially, internal to the brain and emerge developmentally from it. Why? Look, any goal in which the brain is representing, or referring to something in the world (draws another circle for the brain and an arrow labeled ‘representing’ shooting way outside) can’t be the place where we can generate an explanation of relevance because in so far as I’m representing a goal to myself, I’ve already got the capacity for Relevance Realisation. The goals that are the originating source of Relevance Realisation have to be internal to the Relevance Realisation process. Now what does that mean? The goals have to be goals that are constitutive. What are constitutive goals?

Constitutive goals are goals that a system or process have helped to constitute it for being what it is. And this is especially the case for autopoietic systems. We’ve talked about this. Living things are not only self-organizing, living things are self-organized because they have the constitutive goal of preserving their own self-organization. To be alive is to have, or maybe even better, to be the goal of preserving the self-organization that is giving rise to you. That is a constitutive goal. Autopoietic things are self-organized such that they can protect and promote, they are constituted to protect and promote their own self-organization. Which means we should see that there’s going to be a deep connection between your ability to do Relevance Realisation and being an autopoietic thing because Relevance Realisation ultimately has to work in terms of autopoietic systems - systems that have goals that are completely internal in the constitutive sense. Now that’s important because that means there’s going to be a deep connection between doing Relevance Realisation and being a living thing.

Next, so when I say internal I mean autopoietically internal. A theory of Relevance Realisation has to talk in terms of processes that are scale invariant. Relevance Realisation has to act simultaneously at multiple levels — local and global, feature and gestalt — and it has to do it in a self-organizing fashion such that it is capable of insight, self correction. And that means, of course, and that ties in again with, being autopoietic, that the Relevance Realisation process has to be fundamentally self-organizing in nature.

Now we have a problem here, and it’s a problem that might derail the whole project! It might make it sound like the attempt to give a scientific

explanation of Relevance Realisation is impossible! Now notice I've been sort of playing between those and treating them as synonymous: a theory of relevance and the theory of Relevance Realisation. That's ultimately because I've been dodging an issue, because I am going to argue [that] you can't identify them. Because here is what I want to argue, or at least I'm going to state what the argument is going to be and then we're going to pick it up in the next video: I'm going to argue that we cannot have a scientific theory of relevance, we cannot have a scientific theory of relevance. I'm going to try and argue that that tells us something very deep about the nature of relevance and therefore something deep about the nature of meaning and our attempts to explain, articulate and celebrate our meaning making capacities. But I'm going to ultimately argue that that is no reason for despair because what I'm going to argue is that the fact that we don't have a theory of relevance doesn't preclude us from having a theory of Relevance Realisation. In fact it'll give us a good understanding of what the theory of Relevance Realisation is and that will help us because we will realize, pun intended, that all we ever needed was a theory of relevant realization.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 29 Notes

[Tim Lillicrap](#)

Timothy P. Lillicrap is a Canadian neuroscientist and AI researcher, adjunct professor at University College London, and staff research scientist at Google DeepMind, where he has been involved in the AlphaGo and AlphaZero projects mastering the games of Go, Chess and Shogi.

[Blake Richards](#)

The article we (John Vervaeke, Tim Lillicrap and Blake Richards) published in the Journal of Logic and Computation can be found [here](#).

[Leonardo Ferraro](#)

[Sperber and Wilson's book: "Relevance: Communication & Cognition"](#) shown on screen.

Book mentioned - [Buy Here](#)

Fodor

Jerry Alan Fodor was an American philosopher and the author of many crucial works in the fields of philosophy of mind and cognitive science.

John Searle

John Rogers Searle is an American philosopher. He was Willis S. and Marion Slusser Professor Emeritus of the Philosophy of Mind and Language and Professor of the Graduate School at the University of California, Berkeley.

Zenon Pylyshyn

Zenon Walter Pylyshyn FRSC is a Canadian cognitive scientist and philosopher. He holds degrees in engineering-physics from McGill University and in control systems and experimental psychology, both from the Regina Campus, University of Saskatchewan.

Things and Places - [Buy Here](#)

Cherniak

Christopher Cherniak is an American neuroscientist, a member of the University of Maryland Philosophy Department. Cherniak's research trajectory started in theory of knowledge and led into computational neuroanatomy and genomics.

Book Shown - Minimal Rationality – [Buy Here](#)

Harrold Brown

Rationality - [Buy Here](#)

An introduction to one of the major controversies in the modern philosophy of science. The author describes the philosophical problem of rationality and provides a new approach to its solution.

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Ep. 30 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Relevance Realization Meets Dynamical Systems Theory

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. This is episode 30. So last time we decided to dig into the central issue of realising what's relevant. And we are following a methodological principle of not using or presupposing Relevance, the capacity to realize relevance, in any process, purported cognitive process, or brain process that we're going to use to try and explain that ability. I gave you a series of arguments that we can't use representations to explain relevance because representations crucially presuppose it. And then we took a look at some very interesting empirical evidence that really comports very well with that: The evidence supporting FINSTING and your ability to do Enactive Demonstrative Reference, this Salience Tagging, just making 'stand out' the hereness and the nowness of something.

Are we then took a look at, and we drew a few conclusions about the 'meaning' we are talking about in meaning in life - that 'connectedness'. That connectedness is ultimately not generated by representations. Again, I'm going to keep saying this, I'm not denying that representations and belief in that level can alter and transform what we find relevant. We are talking about the explanation of the phenomenon, not how it is causally affected by other aspects of cognition. We then took a look at a syntactic level, the computational, level and saw arguments that neither inference nor rules can be used to explain the generation of relevance precisely because they also presuppose it. We looked at trying to deal with relevance in terms of some sort of internal module dedicated to it and that that won't work; it's

homuncular and Relevance Realization needs to be scale invariant or at least multiscalular. It has to be happening simultaneously in a local and global way and that points towards something else we noted about any theory that has to account for this self-organization of relevance that is demonstrated in the phenomenon of insight.

So we then saw that a theory has to use explanatory ideas that point to processes that are, at least in the original sense, internal to the Relevance Realization, the Relevance system. I tried to get clear about how not to misunderstand that. What I meant was the goals of that govern relevance realization initially have to be constitutive goals. They cannot be goals built upon representing the environment in a particular way, instead they have to be the constitutive goals that are part of an autopoietic system, a system that is self-organized because it has the goal of preserving and protecting and promoting its own self-organization. That draws deep connections between relevance realization and life and relevance realization and being an autopoietic thing. And of course, as I've already mentioned, Relevance realization processes have to be multiscalular, they have to be self-organizing and they have to be capable of developmental self-transcendence, self-correction, insight , etc.

We noted along the way about how this links up with an argument about how the Propositional depends on the Procedural, which then depends on the Perspectival, which then depends on, is grounded in the Participatory.

Distinguishing Between Theories Of Relevance And Relevance Realisation.

But we hit a roadblock, [which] I want to now zero in on. I had been treating them as identical but I'm going to [now] make a very important theoretical distinction between a theory of relevance and a theory of relevance Realization. Because what I want to argue is that there cannot be a theory of relevance, at least a scientific theory of relevance, and since we are playing in the arena of science, scientific explanations, I am just going to keep doing that qualification, I'm just going to say there could not be a theory of relevance, a scientific theory of relevance. Why not? Well, this has to do with an issue that was originally brought up by Chiappe and Kukla in an

article, a commentary on Behavioral Brain Science. Dan Chiappe and I have published work together. We are collaborating right now on a work on telepresence. I recommend you to take a look at the work of Dan Chiappe. But they made a point, and I think this point is very well taken, it's a point that goes back to JS Mill but you can also see an updated version of it in the work of the important philosopher, and philosopher of Science, Wilford Quine (writes Quine on the board).

So this has to do with how science works. Now of course, the philosophy of science tackles all kinds of controversial claims about 'what is science?' and how science works, but I take it that one thing that is agreed-upon in science is that science works through "Inductive Generalisations" (writes Inductive Generalisation on the board) or it tries to generate inductive generalisations. What do I mean by that? In science youIn the science you study a bunch of things here (draws a little container with vertical lines) and then you make predictions and claims that that will be the case for all of that type of thing. So you know here. So here I study a bunch of... (back to the diagram) here is a hunk of gold, here is a hunk of gold, here is a hunk of gold... I come up with a set of features or properties... does that generalise to all the instances of gold? And if it does then I come up with an Inductive Generalisation. I want to get the broadest possible inductive generalizations that I can, because that's how science works. It's trying to give us aIt's trying to give us a powerful way ofIt's trying to give us a powerful way of reliably predicting the world. It's doing other things, very importantly it's also trying to give us a way of explaining the world — I am not claiming this is.../ I've tried to make it clear, this is not meant to be an exhaustive account of science, it's meant to point to a central practice within science, but a constituent practice nevertheless. If you can't generate inductive generalizations in your purported endeavour, then you don't have a Science. This is why pseudo-sciences like astrology fail, precisely because they cannot do inductive generalizations.

You say "OK great!" So what JS Mills pointed out is that that means that we need what's called Systematic Import (writes systematic import on the board). And this is soAnd this is so relevant to what we were talking about last time; even using the word import is really relevant. What that means is science has to form categories because that's what I'm trying to do right?

I'm gathering a bunch of things and saying they belong, they are the same type of thing, they're all instances of gold, they all belong to the category of gold. Science has to form categories that support powerful - meaning as broad as possible - inductive generalizations (draws another container diagram with more vertical stripes and an arrow coming out to 'support powerful inductive generalizations'). To be able to do that is to have systematic import. Now what do I need? Think about reverse engineering this! In order to have reliable — that's what powerful means, reliable and broad inductive generalizations — in order to have those what do I need to be the case here? Well, I need there to be important properties for that category. One thing is I need the category members to importantly be Homogenous (writes homogenous on the board). There's a sense in which all the members of the category have to share properties (drawing) that's me indicating they're all sharing properties (draws a line horizontally through all the vertical lines in the diagram), right? And it's because they share properties that I can make the inductive generalisation that other instances will also have those important properties (draws two little rectangular boxes with the same horizontal lines indicating that they are identical instances of the category). That's exactly what I need because if the members are heterogeneous there's no set of properties I can then extend the generalisation. They have to be homogenous.

Back To Essence - Gold, White Things & Horses

Now this gets us towards something very important. This gets us towards an idea from Quine because there's a lot of discussion about this word right now in the culture (writes essence on the board). And I think the discussions is too polarised, and this has to go, again, with an issue made by Wittgenstein, but I want to put Wittgenstein and Quine together on this — very important modern philosopher (writes both Wittgenstein and Quine on the board and points at Quine) — because Wittgenstein, and this is what some of the critics of essence say, because if you remember according to Aristotle, and we talked about this when we talked about Aristotle, essence is a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. And what Wittgenstein pointed out, and remember we did this with the example of a game, that many of our categories don't have essences. There is no set of necessary and sufficient conditions that will pick out all and only games, there's no set of

necessary and sufficient conditions that will pick out all and only tables. So many of our categories don't have essences. That was Wittgenstein's point! Now Wittgenstein, I don't think you could ever pin him to the claim that no categories have essences, and that's what some people, I think, have concluded: that no categories have essences, [that] everything is just nominal description! But that's not right because of course, non-controversially, for example, Triangles have essences — that's why Aristotle thought many things did — if it has three straight sides, three angles, it's inclosed [then] it's a triangle! That's an essence to [being] a triangle. Now, that's mathematical. Here's what Quine argued, at least I think this is an interpretation of Quine that is philosophically defensible: Science... these things, like triangles, these are deductive essences, these are the essences that we can deduce. But what science discovers are inductive generalizations, and if they're powerful enough, science gives us the essence of something. The essence of gold is the set of properties that will apply to all instances of gold; all and only instances of gold.

That homogenous set that can generalise is what an inductive essence is. Now, what that means is we shouldn't.../ a couple of ways of talking in the media shouldn't, or the general culture, should not be so uncritically excepted! Essentialism isn't bad for things that have essences; why would it be!? Essentialism is the mistake of treating a category as if it has an essence. It is a mistake for things like games and tables precisely because they don't have an essence. It is not a mistake for things like gold because gold has an essence, inductively. Or triangle, because triangles have a deductive essence. It is too simplistic to say 'everything' has an essence, or 'everything' doesn't have an essence; it cuts both ways. It cuts both ways! There are many things that don't have essences, that's what's right about the critique of essentialism. But it is wrong to [conclude that there is no the it's wrong] to say that Wittgenstein's argument [point] it is not an argument. Because it's not a deductive argument that concludes that there are no essences, it only points [out] that many categories don't have essences. So that means it is possible to do a science when we do what? When we categorize things in such a way that we get this (indicates 'support powerful deductive generalizations' on the board) because when we get 'this' then we have the essential properties of the thing.

Now, the reverse is the case. That's what I mean by it cuts both ways. We can't have a scientific explanation of everything. We can't have a scientific explanation of everything. If the category is not homogenous, if it does not support powerful Inductive generalizations, if it does not have an inductive essence, we cannot have a science about it. It doesn't mean those things don't exist it means we cannot scientifically investigate them. So for example, I can't have a science of white things!

Now, are there things that are white? Of course there are. This blackboard is white. This pen, at least part of it, is white. This piece of paper is white. To say there are white things in this room is to say something true. Noticed that: there are truths that are state-able, but the category that I am using — this is JS Mills' example, White things — does not support any inductive generalizations other than the thing is white. Now don't give me "well, we can have a theory about light and lightness!" we are not talking about a theory about light, we are talking about a theory about white things.

Knowing that this is white (piece of paper) what does it tell me [about this pen]? So I study this white thing, OK? What do I learn about it other than... oh, nothing!! Other than it's white! Is there any other important shared... (indicating the whiteboard and the piece of paper) well, no! They're both flat but this is vertical this is horizontal...! You see? It doesn't generalise! It doesn't generalise. So it is correct to say that there are many categories that we form for which we could not generate a scientific theory or explanation, precisely because those categories are not homogenous; they don't have an essence.

So notice what that doesn't mean. The fact that I cannot have a scientific theory of it does not mean that the white things are made out of ghosts or dead Elves or ectoplasmic goo! It licenses no metaphysical weirdness. It just says that category functions in the sense that I can make true statements about its membership but it does not function in so far as it supports through systematic import, [through] powerful Inductive generalizations. What else do I need? Well, let's compare the white things, as JS Mills did, to horses.

Now, do you see, we depend on the fact that horses seem to have an essence? Now, whether or not they ultimately do, at some sort of species level or something really argued about in biology — and I'm not trying to be negligent of that, but I'm also not trying to resolve that — what did Mills

mean by his example of horses? Well, what he meant by.../ if I learn a lot about this horse, it will generalise to other horses. It will generalise. So horses are in really important ways Homogenous. That's why we can have a veterinary medicine, and things like that, I can learn about it in terms of horses that have already been studied and it will generalise well two horses that have not themselves yet been studied. That's fine. What else? ...and this is, I don't mean this to be a pun! I need the category membership to be stable. That doesn't mean to be 'horses and stables'. What's in the category, the kind of things that are in the category, should be stable. It shouldn't be constantly shifting or changing because if this — and this was a point made a long time ago by Plato — if what is here is constantly shifting (refers back to container diagram), now I don't mean particular members, I mean what kind of thing is in here is constantly shifting, then of course I can't do inductive Generalisation because I will get into equivocation. I will get into equivocation.

The word 'gravity' originally meant having to do with drawing down into the grave, as we mentioned, it had to do with a sort of important seriousness, but now we use that term to describe a physical mode of attraction and interaction. And if I don't notice the change in what goes into my categorisations I am not making a good inductive Generalisation, I am engaged in equivocation. And as I've tried to show you, equivocation is a way in which we make invalid, often ridiculous arguments. So it needs to be stable. We need the properties of the objects to, in some sense, be intrinsic or at least internal, inherent. This also comes from an argument by John Searle. Many objects have properties that are not intrinsic to the object but come from the object's relationship to us, for example, then they are attributed properties. So a clear example a sort of non-controversial example is something being money. Now here's, again, 'is money real?' Well, a lot of my life is bent around money, so in that sense it seems to be real! But does anything intrinsically possess the property of being money? If I take out some coin or piece of paper, is it intrinsically money? No, it's only money because we all attribute it as being money, we all treat it as money and that's what makes it money. If we all decided to not treat it as money, it ceases to exist as money! We can't do that with gold. Now, notice what I'm saying: we could all decide that gold is no longer valuable, no longer analogous to

money, but we can't all decide that gold no longer possesses it's mass [or] atomic number! We can't do that!

Now, the thing you have to remember is that many things that we think are intrinsic are actually attributed. (Holds up a plastic water bottle) this being a bottle is attributed because what it means to call it a bottle is the way it is relating to me and my usage of it! If there had never been human beings and this popped into existence because of some quantum event near a black hole or something, it isn't a bottle! It is an object with a particular mass, a particular structure, but it's not a bottle because being a bottle is something that it gets in its relationship to me. Now again, did I just show you that everything is an allusion? No! Again, the fact that there are many things that are genuinely relational, genuinely attributed, doesn't mean that I've shown you that everything's false! I've just shown you that you can't do science unless the members of your [category] are homogenous, stable, intrinsic or at least inherent (has listed these on the board), because that's what you need to have powerful Inductive Generalisation.

OK lets see something that fails this - all of these tests. Things that happened on Tuesday, OK? Events that happened on Tuesday - Tuesday events! Are there events that happened on Tuesday? Yeah! And there are even events that can happen on multiple Tuesdays! We categorize things in terms of the days, we categorize events in terms of the days. Now are all the events on a Tuesday homogenous? No! Are all the events on many different Tuesdays homogenous? No! They are very, very different and widely varying. Is it stable, the things that happen on Tuesday, is it the same every Tuesday? No, that's Groundhog Day or some kind of horrible Nietzschean hell! Oh and what about "TuesdayNess", being Tuesday, is that inherent? I mean is there Tuesday in the room when it's Tuesday? It can't be because there was a time when we didn't even have calendars. But notice how hard it is to realize that: there's no "Tuesdayness"! So can I make true statements? "Last Tuesday I went to a movie", is it true? Yes! Can I do a science of events that happened on Tuesday? No, I can't because it doesn't satisfy these criteria (indicates Homogenous, stable and inherent on the board). Does that mean that Tuesday is made out of ectoplasmic goo, Tuesday events actually take place in a different dimension? No, it doesn't, none of that! None of that! You have to be careful on — and this is what we learned from Wittgenstein — we

have to be very careful about the grammar of our thoughts, how we are regulating our cognition.

Now, what I want to try and show you is that relevance does not have Systematic Importance. Relevant events are like Tuesday events. Here let me show you: the things that I find relevant, other than me finding them relevant, what do they share in common? I might find this pen relevant, I might find my knee relevant, I might find this air relevant, I might find the fact that it's a particular day in May relevant. Do you see what I'm showing you? The class of things that we find relevant is not homogenous other than [that] we find them relevant, there is nothing that they share - it's exactly like the class of white things! What about [being] stable? So when I find something relevant do I always find it relevant? "This is relevant to me now..." (holds up a pen) "...will it forever be relevant to me? I will carry it, oh, it is relevant...!" No! Things are not 'stably' relevant - relevant one minute, irrelevant the next! You may say, "well there's things that are always relevant to [me]!" Always!? Don't know, very hard to find them! ...maybe, maybe oxygen, maybe? But that's only relevant to me if I want to keep living! A person who commits suicide, and some people commit suicide this way, they suffocate themselves to death, because that was more important to them than oxygen! It's not stable! Is relevance, and here's where I think we'll get into some difficulties I suppose, with some people, but is relevance internal or intrinsic to the object? Is there a way, if there had never been human beings or sentient beings, could this have relevance (referring to plastic bottle again)? It doesn't seem that that's, at all, a plausible intuition! Relevance always seems to be relevant to someone or something! And that, of course, I think is going to be bound up, that relevance, ultimately, has to be relevant to an autopoietic thing. Only things that have needs, only things that are self-organized so that they have the constitutive goal of preserving their self-organization - that's what it is to need; I need food because I am self-organized to preserve my own self-organization, which means I need food; food literally matters to me, food literally "matters" to me (physically indicates that food becomes the matter of his body) - it's hard to see how things could be relevant unless they were in relationship to an autopoietic thing! Relevance is not something for which we can have a scientific theory. I want you to notice what has come along the way: relevance is not intrinsic

to something. There can be no essence to relevance; nothing is essentially relevant. That's the whole point about talking about the problem of essentialism. And relevance is not stable, it's constantly changing!

A Helpful Analogy Of Relevance, Backed Up By Darwin

OK so what do we do? Well, first of all we add to our set of criteria that we need for good theory. Our theory of relevance realization can't be a theory of relevance detection. I've given you a sustained argument for that! This is not how relevance realization works, it's not detection, it's not this (holds up a pen) has relevance, and I detect it's relevance! And you might say, "well maybe relevance realization is just projective!" I'm going to reply to that too, I think that's also inadequate. In order to see how it's an adequateIn order to see how it's inadequate, in order to get out of the bind we seem to be getting in, I want to open up the distinction between the theory of relevance and a theory of Relevance Realization with analogy. Oh it's going to turnOh it's going to turn out to be a very, I hope, helpful analogy. And this will also, I think, help us to see why relevance is not something we merely project on the world. This is why I have a sustainedThis is why I have a sustained criticism against both empiricists — we just detect it — and the Romantics — we just project it. So let's get into that. What's the analogy that will help develop an argument to show why we neither merely detect it or merely project it, and help us get out of the bind that we can't have a theory of Relevance?

OK, notice a very important and, I think this is one of the central insights of Darwin and we talked about Darwin when we talked about Aristotle and dynamical systems — so if you need to, please go back and look again at video six; I don't want to repeat all those arguments right now [as] we built them so that we can use them now. See beforeSee, before Darwin's time, the people studying the natural world were often clergymen. Darwin himself was thinking about going into the clergy and that's because people thought that if they studied the natural world they could understand the essence of how things were designed because, if we could get at the essence of how things were designed, how things were sort of fitted to their environment, then of course that would give us some deep insight into the mind of God.

That's why clergymen are collecting species and doing all this. But I think one of the insights, and it's not given enough attention in the analysis of the brilliance of Darwin's theory, is to realize that things don't have an essential design! There is no essential design. So consider the notion of evolutionary fitness... Now, there's a problem! There's a technical definition of 'fitness' which means the capacity to survive long enough in order to be capable of reproduction that will allow the gene pool or species — all of these are kind of controversial terms — to propagate and exist. So if we want to useSo if we want to use that technical definition of 'fitness' then I need, or I will be talking about "fittedness", and what I mean by "fittedness" is 'what is it about the organism that makes it fit, what is it about the organism that allows it to survive long enough to reproduce?', and what I want to argue is [that] there is no essential design on fittedness.

Some things are 'fitted' in the sense precisely because they are big, some because they are small, some because they are hard, some because they are soft, some because they are long-lived, some because they are short-lived, some because they proliferate greatly, others because they take care of a few young. Some are fast, some are slow, some are single-cellular, some are multi[cellular]... like nothing, nothing! And the answer for that, of course, is deep and profound because the environment is so complex and differentiated and dynamically changing that niches in which you can fit into the environment in order to promote your survival — autopoietic — are varied and changing. See this is Darwin's insight: there is no essence to design; there is no essence to fittedness. If you try and come up with a theory of how organisms have their "design" — I'm using this in quotation marks — in terms of trying to determine or derive it from the essence of design, you are doomed because it doesn't exist. But what Darwin realises is he didn't need such a theory! He needed a theory about how what is relevant, in this biological sense, a theory about how an organism is fitted, how it is constantly being designed, re-defined by a dynamic process. See fittedness is always redefining itself, reconstituting itself. It is something that is constantly within the process of self organization because there is no essence, there is no final design on fittedness. Fittedness has to constantly be redesigning itself in a self-organizing fashion so it can constantly pick up on the way in which the world is constantly varying and dynamically changing.

There is no essence to fitedness, but I don't need a theory of fitedness. All I need is a theory of how fitedness is constantly being realized in a self-organizing fashion. That'sThat's exactly what the theory of evolution is.

Do you remember, there's a feedback cycle in reproduction (draws a circular feedback arrow), and there is a virtual engine, selection, variation (labels the circular feedback arrow with selection and variation), and that virtual engine constantly shapes and regulates how the reproductive cycle (indicates a circular motion through selection and variation around the feedback arrow) feeds back onto itself and there is no — and of course, this is why some religious people get very angry about this process, but notice that this is exactly what we need — there's no intelligent designer to this (indicates cCircular diagram on board). ThisThis is a process that is completely self-organizing. The fitedness of organisms constantly evolves out of and is constantly evolving towards other instances of fitedness. Fitness has no essence, it is not a stable phenomenon. I should not try to give a definition of a theory of fitedness, what I have is a theory of the evolution of fitedness. And again, even when I say that, you're tempted to think "what Vervaeke means is there was no fitedness and then there was evolution and it resulted in fitedness! That is not what Vervaeke is saying! Vervaeke is saying fitedness and the evolution of fitedness are the same thing.

So, what Darwin proposed, of course, it was the first Dynamical Systems Theory of how fitedness evolves, so that fitness is ongoing. That's the theory of evolution by natural selection. Now that tells us something that we need. First of all, this is a self-organizing process (indicates the circular feedback diagram on the board, the 'virtual engine'), it is not Homuncular, it can generate intelligence without itself being an intelligent process. It's doing a lot of what we need, it's doing a lot of what we need. Here's the analogy I want to propose to you: Let's make relevance analogous to biological fitedness. In fact let's call relevance Cognitive Interactional — what I mean by that [is] both in your cognition and how that cognition is expressing itself in problem-solving — Cognitive Interactional Fitedness (writes these terms on the board). And I don't need a theory of [Cognitive Interactional Fitedness], what I need is a theory of how [Cognitive Interactional Fitedness] evolves.

A Theory Of How Cognitive Interactional Fitedness (Relevance) Evolves

My ability to formulate problems, form categories, pick up on conveyance, make inferences, all this stuff... what about that ability? Because, what I'm doing.../ what do I need? I need something that constrains the search space, that constrains how I pay attention. I need systematic constraints. And what are they doing? Those systematic constraints have to regulate a feedback loop. And what's the feedback loop? The feedback loop is my Sensory-Motor Feedback Loop: I'm sensing, but I'm also acting, and my acting is integral to my sensing and my sensing is integral to my moving and so my moving and my sensing are doing this (indicates a rotation gesture with both hands, one over the other) a sensory-motor loop. I interact with the world and then that changes how I sense it and then I inter[act]... and so there's a sensory-motor loop. What if there is a virtual engine, broadly construed, that is regulating that sensory-motor loop so that it is constantly evolving it's Cognitive Interactional Fitedness to its environment? It doesn't have to come to any final essential way of framing the environment, but what it's constantly doing is evolving it's Fitedness, it's cognitive — not just it's biological fitness, although I'm going to argue, as many people do that there's important continuity between those two — it's constantly evolving it's cognitive Fitedness to the environment. Then what I need is not a theory of relevance, I need a theory of Relevance Realization. How Relevance is becoming effective, how it is altering, shaping the sensory-motor loop. I need a dynamical system for the self-organizing evolution of Cognitive Interactional Fitedness. And if I could come up with that then I would have an account of relevant realization that was not Homuncular, would be consonant and continuous with how the organ, the embodied organ, the embodied brain that is responsible for intelligence itself involved. It would plug in very nicely to what we need. Well, what do we need?

We need a set of properties, if you remember, we need a set of properties that are Sub-Semantic, sub-syntactic, that ultimately have to ground out in establishing the Agent:Arena Participation. The processes have to be Self-Organizing, they have to be Multi-Scale, they have to originally be ground out in an Autopoietic system. Well, what kind of properties are we talking about then? Well, we are talking about — and this again is deeply analogous

to the Darwinian picture — we are talking about Bio-Economical Properties (writes bio-economical on the board). And what do I mean by that? Think, again, of your Biology as ‘economic’ - this is, again, part of Darwin’s great insight. Now don’t be confused here; when a lot of times people hear ‘economic’ they hear ‘financial economy’. That’s not what an economy is! An economy is a self-organizing system that is constantly dealing with the distribution of goods and services, the allocation and use of resources, often in order to further maintain and develop that economy. So your body is a bio-economy. you have valuable resources of time, metabolic energy, processing power — think about how we say “pay attention” by the way — processing power, and what you do as an autopoietic thing is, you are organised such that the distribution of those resources serves the constitutive goal — it will serve other goals, of course — but it serves the constitutive goal of preserving the bio-economy itself. And the thing about economies is — of course it’s they’re self organizing (points to self-organizing) — [boi]economic properties are... They’re ‘bio’, they are part of [you], they come out of your biology, right? They are not semantic or syntactic properties. Now, we use semantic and syntactic terms to talk about them, blah blah, blah, Let’s not keep making that that confusion. They are multi-scaled (points at multi-scaled on the board); economies work locally and globally simultaneously, bottom-up, top-down. So bio-economic properties are great and that’s good because that comports well with the analogy because Darwin’s theory is ultimately a bio-economic theory.

Efficiency And Resiliency In Bio-Economies

So can we think about what kind of norms are at work in a bio-economy? So here we are dealing with norms, ultimately, of truth (writes truth beside sub-semantic). Here we are dealing, probably, with norms of validity, at least formal validity, in some way (writes validity beside sub-syntactic). When we are here (indicates bio-economic properties) we are not dealing with these kinds of logical, semantic norms - economies are governed by logistical norms (writes ‘logistical norms’ beside bio-economic properties) or at least regulated by logistical norms. I want to try to use the word ‘governing’ for selective constraints (indicates sub-semantic & truth and Sub-syntactic & validity) and ‘generating’ for enabling constraints (indicates bio-economic properties and logistical norms), I apologise if I sometimes flip! Economies

are regulated by Logistical Norms. Logistics is the study of the proper disposition and use of your resources. So, [for example], if you are doing a logistical analysis for the military you are trying to figure out how [your] limited resources [of] food, and ammo and personnel and time and space... how can I best use them to achieve the goals I need to achieve? So what are logistical norms? Well, logistical norms are things like efficiency (writes efficiency on the board) and resiliency (writes resilience under efficiency on the board). Efficiency and resiliency. We'll talk about each in more detail, ... A way of thinking about these is [that] resiliency is basically long-term, broadly applying efficiency. But instead of using efficiency and efficiency, which is confusing, we'll talk about efficiency and resiliency.

So what if, let's go step-by-step, this is very (does confusing gesture)... what if relevance realization is this ongoing evolution of our cognitive interactional fitedness, that there is some virtual-engine that is regulating the sensory-motor loop and it is regulating it by regulating the bio-economy and it's regulating the bio-economy in terms of logistical norms like efficiency and resiliency? Now all of this, of course, can be described scientifically, mathematically , etc., because, of course, Darwin's theory is a scientific theory; we can do calculations on these things etc... (indicates logistical norms efficiency resiliency on the board). (wipes board clean.) One more time: the fact that I use science to talk about it does not mean that it exemplifies Propositional properties. My properties of my theory and the properties that my theory is about, are not the same thing. What kind of relationship? How do we put this notion of self-organization and this notion of the logistical norms governing the bio-economy together? So one way of doing this is to think about a multi-scaled way in which your bio-economy is organised to function; a multi-scaled way, many scales of analysis. There is a way in which your bio-economy is organised to function.

Let's take your Autonomic Nervous System as an example. This is not exhaustive, in fact my point is [that] you will find this "strategy," this "design" at many levels of analysis in your biology. I'm only using this as an example. So your [autonomic] nervous system (writes this on the board)... this is part of your nervous system that is responsible for your level of arousal. That doesn't mean sexual arousal. Arousal means how — and notice how this is logistical — how much your metabolic resources are being

converted into the possibility of action; interaction. So you have a very low level of arousal when you're falling asleep. You have a very high level of arousal when you're running away from a tiger. Now think about this. You need your level of arousal.../ there is no final, perfect design on your level of arousal. There is nothing you should.../ There isn't a level that you should always shoot for! You shouldn't maximise your level of arousal. IF I'M ALWAYS ARGGHHHHH (shouting), that's not good! I'm never going to sleep, I'm never going to heal, right? If I'm just like (half lies down on the counter) always, "Okay, that's it, I'm going to sleep!" That's not good! And the Canadian solution? "Well, I'll always have a middling level of arousal!" That's not good either because I can't fall asleep and I can't run away from the tiger!!

So what does your autonomic nervous system do? Well, you're autonomic nervous system is divided into two components. There is your sympathetic, and your parasympathetic (writes these both on the board). So your sympathetic system is designed.../ it's really biased. It's designed towards interpreting the world in a way.../ it's biased — notice what I said! Remember the things that make us adoptive also make us susceptible to self-deception — it's biased, because you can't look at all of the evidence! It's biased to looking for and interpreting evidence that — and I mean, evidence non-anthropomorphically — that you should raise your level of arousal. Your parasympathetic system is biased the other way. These are both heuristic ways of processing; they work in terms of biasing the processing of data. So the parasympathetic system is constantly trying to find evidence that you should reduce your level of arousal. So they're opposed in their goal, but here's the thing: they're also interdependent in their function (writes 'opposed' and 'interdependent in their function' on the board). So the sympathetic nervous system is always trying to arouse you (hooks both hands together vertically with fingers), this is this hand pulling up, and the parasympathetic system is always trying to pull you down. And as the environment changes that tug of war shifts around your level of arousal. The Opponent Processing is when you have two systems that are opposed, but integrated. You have opponent processing (writes opponent processing on the board), the opponent processing means that your level of arousal is constantly evolving, constantly evolving to fit the environment. Is it perfect?

No, nothing can be. Any problem solving machine in order to be perfect, would have to explore the complete problem space. That's combinatorially explosive, it can't! But what is this? Well, you've seen this before! Opponent Processing is a powerful way to get optimisation (writes optimisation on the board). Remember when we talked about optimisation when we talked about Plato. You're optimising between systems that are working different goals, but are integrated in their function. And that way the system constantly self-organises and it then thereby evolves its fittedness to the environment.

So the way we can get this, I would argue, is by thinking about how the brain, and I am going to argue very importantly, the embodied, imbedded brain uses opponent processing in a multi-scale way in order to regulate your bio-economy, your autopoietic bio-economy, so that it is constantly optimising your Cognitive Interactional Fittedness to the environment. Let's think about it this way: let's think if we can get a virtual engine out of efficiency and resiliency (writes these both on the board, efficiency above resiliency), because here's the thing about them: they are in an Opponent Relationship. They pursue... — “pursue”! The problem with language, eh? It's like, Nietzsche said: "I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar", right? The problem with languages is it makes everything sound like an agent! It makes everything sound like it has intentionality. It makes everything sound like it has intelligence. And of course that's not the case. So bear with me about this! I have to speak anthropomorphically just because that's the way language makes me speak! — Let's use a financial analogy to understand the trade off relationship between efficiency and resiliency. Not all economies are financial because [-] the resource that's being disposed of in an economy is not necessarily money. It might be time, etc... Okay, I'm using a financial analogy, or at least a commercial analogy, perhaps is a better way of putting it, in order to try and get some understanding of how these are in a tradeoff relationship.

So you have a business. One of the things you might do is you might try to make your business more efficient because - 'ceteris paribus' - if your business is more efficient than that person's business, you're going to outcompete them. You're going to survive and they're going to die off - obviously the analogy to evolution. So what do I do? What I do is I try to maximise the ratio between profit and expenditure/cost. Well, we did it.../ we

keep thinking of it as the magical solution, but we've been doing it since Ronald Reagan, at least. We do massive downsizing. We fire as many people as we can in our business. And that way, what we have is we have the most profit for the least labor costs. That's surely the answer, right? So notice what efficiency is doing. Notice how efficiency is a selective constraint (writes selective constraint beside efficiency). The problem is if you are "cut to the bone", if you "reduced all the fat", if you've got all the efficiencies, and this is the magic word that people often invoke, without remembering, and forgetting the relationship, the Opponent Relationship to resiliency... See if I cut my business to the bone like that, what happens if one person is sick? Nobody can pick up the Slack because everyone is working to the max. What happens if there's an unexpected change in the environment, a new threat or a new opportunity? Nobody can take it on because everybody is worked the limit. I have no resources by which I can repair, restructure, redesign myself. I don't have any precursors to new ways of organizing because there is nothing that isn't being fully used. Notice also, if there's no Slack in my system — and this is now happening with the way AI is accelerating things — error propagates, massively and quickly. If there's no redundancy, there's no Slack in the system, there's no place, there's no wiggle room and error just floods the system. You see if I make the system too efficient, I lose resiliency. I lose the capacity to differentiate, restructure, redesign, repair, exapt new functions out of existing functions, [to] slow down how error propagates through the system. Efficiency and resiliency are in a tradeoff relationship.

Now, what resiliency is trying to do is enable you to encounter new things (writes enable beside resiliency), enable you to deal with unexpected situations of damage, or threat, or opportunity. It's enabling. These are in a tradeoff relationship. As I gained one, I lose the other. What if I set up a virtual engine in the brain that makes use of this trade-off relationship. It sets up a virtual engine between the selective constraints of efficiency and the enabling constraints of resiliency and that virtual engine bio-economically, logically shapes my sensory-motor loop with the environment, so it's constantly evolving it's fittedness. We'll take a look at that possibility and some suggestions on how that might be realized in the brain, in the next lecture.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 30 Notes

Chiappe

Dr. D.L. Chiappe

Kukla

A. Kukla

Chiappe and Kukla

an article/commentary on Behavioural Brain Sciences

J.S. Mill

John Stuart Mill, usually cited as J. S. Mill, was an English philosopher, political economist, and civil servant. One of the most influential thinkers in the history of classical liberalism, he contributed widely to social theory, political theory, and political economy.

Wilford Quine

Willard van Orman Quine was an American philosopher and logician in the analytic tradition, recognized as "one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century".

ceteris paribus

Ceteris paribus or caeteris paribus is a Latin phrase meaning "other things equal"; English translations of the phrase include "all other things being equal" or "other things held constant" or "all else unchanged".

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Ep. 31 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Embodied-Embedded RR as Dynamical- Developmental GI

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. This is episode 31. So last time we were taking a look at trying to progress in an attempt to give at least a plausible suggestion, a scientific theory, of how we could explain relevance realization. And one of the things we examined was the distinction between a theory of relevance and a theory of relevance realization. And I made the argument that we cannot have a scientific theory of relevance precisely because of a lack of systematic import, but we can have a theory of relevant realization. And then I gave you the analogy of that, which I'm building towards something stronger than an analogy of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection and that in which Darwin proposed a virtual engine that regulates the reproductive cycle so that the system constantly evolves the biological fitedness of organisms to a constantly changing environment. And then the analogy is [that] there is a virtual engine in the embodied brain - and why it's an embodied, embedded brain will become clear in this lecture - but there is a virtual engine that regulates the sensory motor loop so that my cognitive interactional fittedness is constantly being shaped. It's constantly evolving to deal with a constantly changing environment. And what I in fact need, as I argued, is a system of constraints because I'm trying to, between selective and enabling constraints, to limit and zero in on relevant information.

And then I was trying to argue that the way in which that operates - we saw that [-] needs to be sort of related to an auto poetic system - and then the way that operates the self organization, I suggested, operates in terms of a design that you see in many scales - and we need, remember, a multi-scaleular theory in terms of your biological and cognitive organization. And that's in terms of Opponent Processing. And we took a look at the opponent processing within the autonomic nervous system that is constantly, by this strong analogy, evolving your level of arousal to the environment; opposing goals, but inter-related function. Then I proposed to you that we could look

for the kinds of properties that we're going to be talking about, the level at which we're going to be pitching a theory of relevance realization, which is the theory of bioeconomic properties that are operating, not according to normativity of truth or validity, not logical normativity, but logistical normativity. And the two most important logistical norms, I would propose to you, are efficiency and resiliency.

And then I made an argument that they would be susceptible to opponent processing precisely because they are in a tradeoff relationship with each other, and that if we could get a cognitive virtual engine that regulates the sensory-motor loop by systematically playing off selective constraints on efficiency - selective logistical economic constraints on efficiency - and enabling economic constraints on resiliency, then we could give an explanation, a theory deeply analogous to Darwin's theory of the evolution across individuals of biological fitness, we could give an account of the cognitive evolution within individuals cognition of their cognitive interactional fitness; the way they are shaping the problem space so as to adaptively be well-fitted to achieving their interactional goals with the environment.

Relevance Detection VS Relevance Projection And Resisting Both

Before I move on to try and make that more specific and make some suggestions of how this might be realized in the neural machinery of brains, I want to point out why I keep emphasising this embodied embedded. And I want to say a little bit more about this, because I also want to return to something I promised to return to: why I want to resist both an empiricist notion of relevance detection and a romantic notion of relevance projection.

So the first thing is, why am I saying “embodied”? Because what I've been trying to argue is [that] there is a deep dependency, a deep connection - and the dependency runs from propositional down through to participatory - but there is a deep dependency, between your cognitive agency as an intelligent general problem solver, and the fact that your brain exists within a bio economy. The body is not Cartesian clay that we drag around and shape

according to the whims or desires of our totally self-enclosed, for Descartes, immaterial minds.

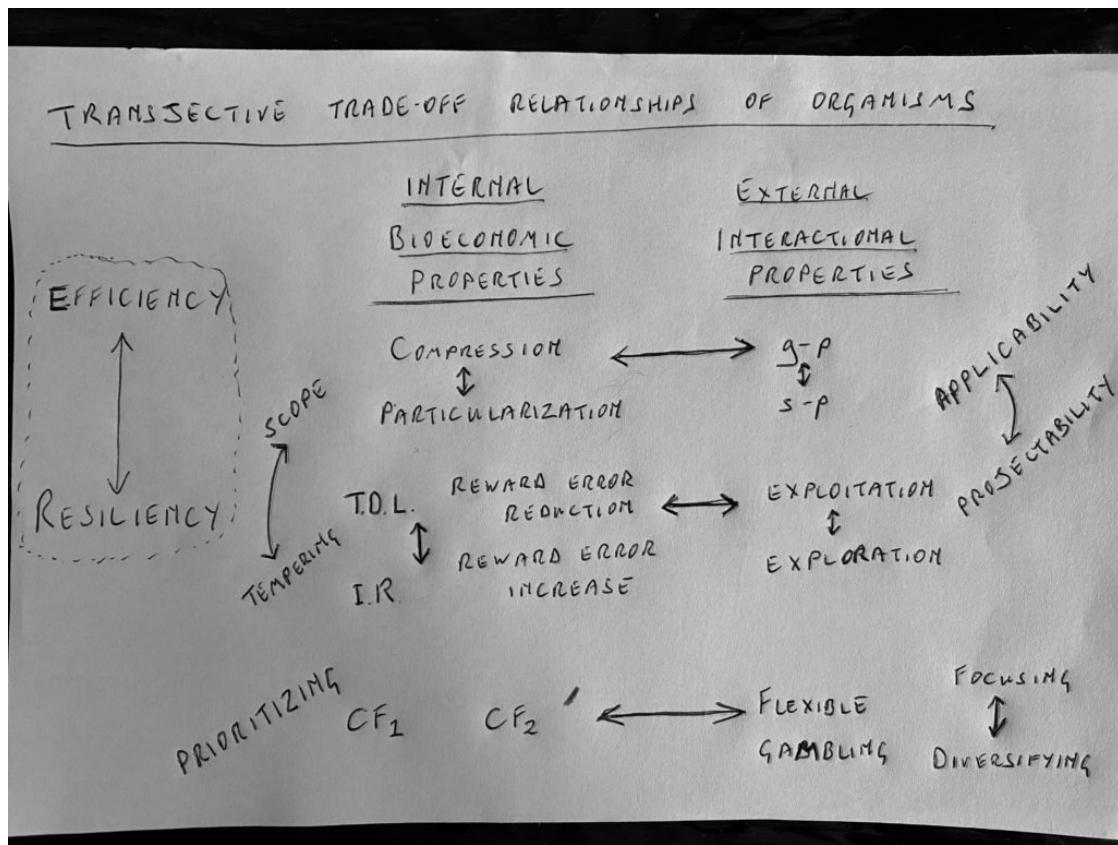
The body is not a useless appendage. It is not just a vehicle. So even here I'm criticising certain platonic models! The body is an autopoietic bio-economy that makes your cognition possible. Without an autopoietic bio-economy you do not have the machinery necessary for the ongoing evolution of relevance realization. The body is constitutive of your cognitive agency in a profound way. Why "embedded". And this will also lead us into the rejection of both an empiricist and a romantic interpretation. Why "embedded"? The biological fittedness of a creature is not a property of the creature per se. It is a real relation between the creature and its environment. Is a great white shark intrinsically adapted? No! That makes no sense to ask that question, because if I take this supposedly apex predator, really adopted, and put it in the Sahara desert, it dies within minutes, right? Its adaptivity is not a property intrinsic to it per se. Its adaptivity is not something that it detects in the environment! Its adaptivity is a real relation, an affordance, between it and the environment. In a similar way, while I would argue that relevance is not a property in the object, it is not a property of the subjectivity of my mind. It is neither a property of objectivity nor a property of subjectivity. It is precisely a property that is co-created by how the environment and the embodied brain are fitted together in a dynamic evolving fashion. It is very much like the bottle being graspable (picks up his water bottle to demonstrate); this is not a property of the bottle nor a property of my hand, but a real relation, a real relation, on how they can be fitted together, function together. So I would argue [that] we should not see relevance as something that we subjectively project, as the romantic claims. We should not see relevance as something we merely detect from the objectivity of objects, as perhaps we might if we had an empiricist bent.

I want to propose a term to you. I want to argue that relevance is in this sense, transjective (writes this on the board). It is a real relationship between the organism and its environment. We should not think of it as being projected. We should not think of it as being detected. This is why I've consistently used the term... We should think of relevance as being realized, because the point about the term realization is it has two aspects to it. And I'm trying to triangulate from those two aspects. What do I mean by that?

There is an objective sense to realization (writes Objective Realization below and to the right of transjective), which is to “make real”, and if that's not an objective thing, [then] I don't know what counts! “Making real”, that's objective! But of course there is a subjective sense to realization (writes Subjective Realization below and to the left of transjective), which is “coming into awareness”, and I'm using both these words, I'm using both these senses of the same word (connects both realisation's with a line (base of a triangle)) - I'm not equivocating - I am trying to triangulate to the transjectiveity of relevance realization (completes the triangle). That is why I'm talking about something that is both embodied, necessarily so, and embedded, necessarily so! Notice how non-, or perhaps better, anti-Cartesian this is! The connection between mind - if what you mean by ‘mind’ is your capacity for consciousness and cognition - and body is one of dependence, of constitutive need. Your mind needs your body. We're also talking, not only about it being embodied [and] embedded, it is inherently a [transactional] relation of relevance realization. The world and the organism are co-creating co-determining co-evolving the fittedness.

All right, let's now return to it: the proposal. Now... before, we return, notice what this is telling us. This is telling us that a lot of the grammar by which we try to talk about ourselves and our relationship to reality - the subjective, objective... both of these are reifying, and they are inherence claims! They are the idea that relevance is a thing that has an essence that inheres in the subject or relevance is a thing that has an essence that inheres in the object. Both of those, that standard grammar and the adversarial, partisan debates we often have, I am arguing need to be transcended (indicates ‘transjective’), need to be transcended. And I would then propose to you that that's going to have a fundamental impact on how we interpret spirituality, if again, by spirituality, we mean a sense, and a functional sense, of connectedness that affords wisdom, self-transcendence, et cetera.

Efficiency And Resiliency



So back to the idea of efficiency, resiliency, tradeoffs. I would point you to the work of Marcus Brede and he's got work sort of mathematically showing that when you're creating networks, especially neural networks, you're going to optimise - and we talked about optimisation in the previous video - you're going to optimise between efficiency and resiliency. That's how you're going to get them to function the best you can. Now what I want to try and do is try to show you the relationship, the poles of the transjectivity and how that's going to come out, or at least point towards the generative relationship that can be discussed in terms of these poles.

So I argued that, initially, the machinery of relevance realization has to be internal. Now again, this is why I just did what I did: when I say "internal", I don't mean to subjective. I don't mean inside the introspective space of the mind. When I'm talking about "the goals are internal" I mean internal to an embodied, embedded, brain/body system; an autopoietic system of adaptivity. In fact, there [are] many people who are arguing in cognitive science that those two terms are interdependent. Just like I'm arguing that relevance realization is dependent on autopoiesies being an adoptive system

and being an autopoietic system are also interdependent. The system can only be continually self making if it has some capacity to adapt to changes in its environment. And the system is only adoptive if it is trying to maintain itself. And that only makes sense if it has real needs, if it's an autopoietic thing. So these things are actually deeply interlocked: Relevance Realization, autopoesies, and adaptivity (writes out another triangle with the three of these).

So, as Markus Brede has argued and other people, and I'm giving you independent argument, you want to get a way of optimising between efficiency and resilience. You don't want... remember with the autonomic nervous system, this doesn't mean getting some average or stable mean, it means the system can move. Sometimes giving more emphasis to efficiency, sometimes giving more emphasis to resiliency; just like your autonomic nervous system is constantly evolving, constantly recalibrating your level of arousal.

Now, what I want to do is pick up on how those constraints might cash out. In particular [-] how these logistical norms, understood as constraints, can be realized in particular virtual engines (writes efficiency above resiliency on the left side of the board with a double ended arrow joining them). And I want to do this by talking about Internal Bioeconomic Properties (writes this on the board, to the right of efficiency) and then, for lack of a better way for this contrast - and again, this does not map onto the subjectivity objectivity! I don't have to keep saying that, correct (looks at audience - stern face!!)? Okay? External Interactional Properties (writes this on the board, to the right of Internal Bioeconomic Properties). By external I mean that these eventually are going to give rise to goals in the world as opposed to constituent of goals in the system. And what I want to do is show you how you go back and forth. Now it'll make sense to do this in terms of reverse engineering, because it will just help to make more sense, because I'm starting from what you understand in yourself, and then working [back]. So often I will start here (External Interactional Properties) and go this way (indicates moving right to left across the board).

So you want to be adaptive. We said, we want to be a general problem solver, and that's important, but notice that that means there's two kinds of,

and people don't like when I use this word, but I don't have an alternative word, so I'm just going to use it... There's two kinds of "machines" you can be. What I mean by that is a system that is capable of solving problems and pursuing goals in some fashion. If I want to be adaptive, what [-] kind of machine do I want to be? Well, I might want to be a general purpose machine (writes general purpose below External Interactional Properties). Now these terms are always, and I keep showing you that, are always relative; they're comparative terms and relative. I don't think anything is absolutely general or absolutely special purpose. It's always a comparative term.

Let me give you an example. My hand is a general purpose machine, right? My hand is such that it can be used in many, many different contexts for many, many different tasks. So it's very general purpose. Now, the problem with being a Jack of all trades is that you are master of none. So the problem with my hand being general purpose is that for specific tasks, it can be outcompeted by a special purpose machine. So, although this is a good general purpose machine, it is nowhere as good as a hammer for driving in a nail. Nowhere as good as a screwdriver for removing a screw, et cetera, et cetera. So, in some contexts, special purpose machines, outperform general purpose machines, but you wouldn't want the following: you wouldn't want [if, for example,] you're going to be stranded on a desert Island, like maybe Tom Hanks in Castaway, and he lost all of his special purpose tools. They sink to the bottom of the ocean, that causes him a lot of distress! Literally what he starts with at first is his hands, the general purpose machines! And the pr[oblem], and you see that, "Wow, they're not doing very good! If I just had a good knife!" But the problem is you wouldn't want well, not Tom Hanks, but his character, I forget the character's name. I think it was Jack. You wouldn't have Jack, "Jack, I'm going to cut off your hands and I can attach a knife here and a hammer here and now you have a hammer, a knife!" It's like, "no, no, no, I don't want that either. I don't want just a motley collection of special purpose machines"

So sometimes you're adaptive by being a general purpose machine. Sometimes times you're adoptive by being a special purpose machine (writes Special Purpose beside General Purpose, below External Interactional Properties). So general purpose machine, you use the same thing over and

over again. Sometimes we make a joke about somebody using a special purpose machine as a general purpose machine, right? “When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail”, right? And the joke there is, and it strikes us as a joke because we know that hammers are special purpose things and everything isn’t a nail! It’s not so much a joke if I say, “sometimes when all you have is a hand, everything looks graspable!” That’s not so weird. So what am I trying to get you to see? What I’m trying to get you to see is you want to be able to move between these (general and special purpose). This (general purpose) is very efficient. Why? Because I’m using the same thing over and over again, the same function over and over again, or at least the same set of tightly bound functions. The thing about a special purpose is I don’t use it that often. I use my hammer sometimes and my saw sometimes and my screwdriver sometimes and I have to carry around the toolbox. Now the problem with that is it gets very inefficient because a lot of the times I’m carrying my hammer around and I’m not using it. So I have to bear the cost of carrying it around and I’m not using it. So it’s very inefficient, but you know what it makes me? It makes me tremendously resilient because when there’s a lot of new things, unexpected, specific issues that my general purpose thing can’t handle, I’m ready for them! I have resiliency. I’ve got differences within my toolbox kit that allow me to deal with these special circumstances.

So notice what I want to do. I want to constantly trade between them (draws a double ended arrow between general and special purpose). I want to constantly trade between them. Now, what I’m going to do - I did that to show you this (points at External Interactional Properties, then wipes general and special purpose off the board). I’m then now going to reorganise it this way... because what I’m going to show you, what I’m arguing, is general purpose is more efficient, special purpose is making you more resilient (now writes general purpose (gp) ABOVE special purpose (sp) with a double ended arrow between them, just like efficiency and resiliency on the left side of the board) and you want to trade between them. Okay, so those are interactional properties, and you said, “so I sort of get the analogy. What does that have to do with the brain and bio economy?” So how would you try to make information processing more efficient? Well, what I want to do is I want to try and make the process I’m using, the functions I’m using, to be

as generalisable as possible. That will get me general purpose, because I can use the same function in many places. Then I'm very efficient. How do you do that? How do you do that?

Well, here's where I want to pause and I want to introduce just a tiny bit of narrative in here. When I was writing this paper with Tim Lillicrap and Blake Richards, but especially this was Tim's great insight. You've got to get in[to] ... If you're interested in cutting edge AI, you really need to pay attention to the work that Tim Lillicrap is doing. Tim's a former student of mine and his calling, in many ways of course he's greatly surpassed my knowledge and expertise. He's one of the cutting edge people in Artificial Intelligence, and he had a great insight here. I was proposing this model, this theory to him and he said, "but you know, you should reverse engineer it in a certain way!" And I said, "what do you mean?" He says, "well, you're acting as if you're just proposing this top down, but what you should see is that many of the things you're talking about are already being used within the AI community!" So the paper we published was "Relevance Realization and the Emerging Framework in Cognitive Science", namely that a lot of the strategies [that we] are going to talk about here (indicates Internal Bioeconomic Properties) are strategies that are already being developed.

Now, I'm going to have to talk about this at a very abstract level, because which one of the particular architectures or particular applications is going to turn out to be the right one, we don't know yet! That's still something in progress. But I think Tim's point is very well taken that we shouldn't be talking about this in a vacuum. We should also see that the people who are trying to make Artificial Intelligence are already implementing some of these strategies that I'm going to point out. And I think that's very telling, the fact that we're getting convergent argument that way.

Compression And Particularization

Okay, so how do I make an information processing function, more generalisable? How do I do that? Well, I want to... I mean, you know how we do it now! Because we've talked about it before! But you do it in science. So here's two variables, for example (draws and x y graph), it's not limited to two, right?! And so I have a scatter plot (puts a bunch of dots in the graph) and what they taught you to do was a line of best fit (draws a line up through

the dots, bottom left to top right through the dots - a best fit). All right, this is a standard move in Cartesian graphing. Now why do you do a line of best fit? [-] and my line of best fit might actually touch none of my data points. Does that mean I'm being ridiculously irresponsible to the data? [That] I'm just engaging in armchair speculation? No! Why do we do this? Why did we do a line of best fit? Well, why we're doing this is because it allows us to interpolate and extrapolate (extends the line far beyond the data points). It allows us to go beyond the data. Now we're taking a chance and, of course, all good science, and this was the great insight of Popper: "all good science takes good chances!", right? But here's the thing: I do this so that I can make predictions [of] what the value of Y will be when I have a certain value of X that I've never obtained. I can interpolate and extrapolate. That means I can generalise the function. So this is data compression. This is Data Compression (writes Data Compression above the graph). What I'm trying to do is basically pick up on what's invariant. The idea is that the information always contains noise, and I'm trying to pick up on what's invariant and extend that. And of course that's part and parcel of why we do this because in science, we're trying to do the inductive generalizations, et cetera, et cetera.

So the way in which I make my functionality more general, more general purpose, is if I can do a lot of data compression (writes compression under Internal Bioeconomic Properties inline with gp under external interactional properties, with a double ended arrow between compression and gp)). So if the data compression allows me to generalise my function and that generalisation is feeding through the sensory motor loop in a way that is protecting and promoting my autopoietic goals, it's going to be reinforced. But what about the opposite (draws a little double ended arrow down from compression in anticipation...)? What was interesting at the time - I think [-] some people have picked us up on a term - we didn't have a term for this, and I remember there was a whole afternoon where Tim and I were just trying to come up with, "what do we want for the trade off?" So this is making your information processing more efficient (up the little arrow towards Compression), more general purpose (across to gp). What makes it more special purpose, more resilient? And so we came up with the term Particularization writes this below Compression.

And Tim's point - and I'm not going to go into detail here - Tim's point is this is the general strategy that's at work in things like the wake-sleep algorithm that is at the heart of the deep learning promoted by Geoffrey Hinton who was at UFT, and Tim was a very significant student of Jeff's. And so, this is the abstract explanation of how that strategy that's at work in a lot of the deep learning that's at the core of a lot of successful AI. What particularization is, is I'm trying to keep more in track with the data (draws a squiggly line up through the data points in the graph, overlying the line of best fit). I'm trying to create a function that over fits in some sense to that data. That will get me more specifically in contact with "this" particular situation. So this (compression) tends to emphasise what is invariant. This (particularization) tends to get the system to pick up on more variations. So this (compression) will make the system more cross contextual. It can move across contexts because it can generalise. This (particularization) will tend to make the system more context sensitive.

And of course you don't want to maximize any one of these. You want them dynamically trading and notice how they are - is this the right word? I hope so! - obeying! It sounds so anthropomorphic. Notice how they're obeying the logistical normativity trading between efficiency and resiliency (indicates mutual double ended arrows). And then there's various ways of doing this, right? And there's lots of interesting ways of engineering this into — but it's creating a 'virtual' engine — engineering this, creating sets of constraints on this so this will oscillate in the right way and optimise that way (relationships between compression & particularization and gp & sp). And so the idea is when you've got this (compression \longleftrightarrow particularisation) as something that's following the completely internal Bioeconomic logistical norms, it will result in the evolution of sensory motor interaction that is going to make a system or an organism constantly adaptively moving between being general purpose and being special purpose. It will become very adaptive. Now different organisms will be biologically skewed one way or the other, even individuals will be biologically skewed.

Psychopathological Interpretation, Cognitive Scope And Applicability

So there are people now proposing, for example, that we might understand certain psychopathology as in terms of ‘some people are more biased towards overfitting, to particularizing’, and ‘some people are more biased towards compressing and generalising’. These people (compression) tend towards seeing many connections where there aren’t connections. And these people (particularisation) tend to be very ‘featurely’ bound. (Wipes graph off the board.)

Okay, what's another one... Oh, so this is “Compression \leftrightarrow Particularization”. We called [it] “Cognitive Scope” (writes Cognitive Scope beside Compression \leftrightarrow Particularization), and we called this (gp \leftrightarrow sp) “applicability” (writes applicability beside gp \leftrightarrow sp), how much you can apply your function or functions. And the idea is if you can get scope going the right way, it will - and there's no other way of [putting it] - it will attach to, it'll get coupled to - it's not representing - it will get coupled to this pattern of interaction (indicates gp \leftrightarrow sp), which will fit you well to the dynamics of change and stability in the environment.

Exploitation VS Exploration

Okay. What's another thing? Well, a lot of people are talking about this (writes “Exploitation \leftrightarrow Exploration” below External Interactional Properties). You'll see people even talking about this in AI very significantly. Exploitation versus exploration. So here's another trade off. This (Internal Bioeconomic Properties) tends to be in terms of the scope of your information. This (Exploration \leftrightarrow Exploitation under External Interactional Properties) has to do more with the timing. So here's the question: should I stay here and try and get as much as I can out of here? [-] That's exploiting. Or should I move and try and find new things, new potential sources of resource and reward? They are in a tradeoff relationship, because the longer I stay here, the more opportunity costs I accrue, but the more I move around, the less I can actually draw from the environment. So do I want to maximize either? No, I want to trade between them. I'm always trading between exploiting and exploring. There's different strategies that might be at work here. I've seen recent work in which [-] this (exploitation) is your reward when a system doesn't make an error and then your reward (exploration) when it makes an error. And of course those are in a tradeoff

relationship and this sort of makes it more curious (exploration). This makes it more sort of conscientious (exploitation), if I have to speak anthropomorphically!

[-] (on the left, under Internal Bioeconomical Properties) So one way you can do this is you can Reward Error [-] Reduction or Reward Error increase (writes these both on the board, separated by another double ended arrow). The way we talked about in the paper is you can trade off between what's called Temporal Displacement Learning (writes TDL level with Reward Error Reduction) and Inhibition on Return (writes IR level with Reward Error Increase). I won't go into the dynamics there. What I can say is there's different strategies being considered and being implemented. And this is Cognitive Tempering (writes tempering with TDL and IR), having to do with both temper and the relationship between 'temp' (?) and time. And this has to do with the 'projectability' of your processing (writes project ability with exploitation <-> exploration).

Now, first of all, a couple of things: are we claiming that these are exhaustive? No, they are not exhaustive. They are exemplary. They're not exhaustive. They're exemplary of the ways in which you can trade between efficiency and resiliency and create virtual engines that will adapt by setting up systems of constraints, the sensory-motor loop, the interactions (indicates External Interactional Properties) with the environment in evolving manner.

So why is exploitation efficient? Because I don't have to expend very much. I can just stay here. But it depends on things sort of staying the same. Exploration is I have to expend a lot of energy, I have to move around and it's only rewarding if there's significant difference. If I go to B and it's the same as A, you know what I should've done? Stayed at A!! Do you see what's happening? All of these in different ways - this has to do with the applicability, the scope; this has to do with the projectability, the time - but [with] all of these you're trading between [the fact] that sometimes what makes something relevant is how it's the same, how it's invariant! Sometimes what makes something relevant is how it's different, how it changes. And you have to constantly shift the balance between those, because that's what reality is doing. That's what reality is doing. (Draws a double ended arrow

left to right, joining Exploitation & Exploration and Reward Error Increase/Decrease.)

What's another one? Well, another type of one... I think there are many of these (Internal Bioeconomic Property list), and they are not going to act in an arbitrary fashion because they are all regulated by the tradeoff normativity, the opponent processing, between efficiency and resiliency. Notice, these (compression & particularisation) are both what are called different cost functions; they are dealing again with the bio-economics - how you're dealing with the cost of processing. So playing between the costs and benefits of these, et cetera. But you might also need to play between these (draws two vertical double ended arrows, one between Scope and Tempering on the left and one between Applicability & Projectability on the right). So it's also possible that we have what we called Cognitive Prioritization (written on the board, at the bottom left) in which you have cost functions being played off against each other. [-] So here's a cost function (compression <-> Particularization), here's a cost function (Reward Error Increase <-> RE Decrease) and they're play[ing]... So cost function one (writes CF1), cost function two (writes CF2), they're playing off against each other. And you may... and you have to [-] decide here - and this overlaps with what's called Signal Detection Theory, and other things I won't get into... - you have to be very flexible in how you gamble, because you may decide that you will try [to] hedge your bets and activate as many functions as you can. Or you may try to go for the big thing and say, no, I'm going to give[-] a lot of priority to just this function. Of course, you don't want that to maximize, you want flexible gambling (writes Flexible Gambling to the right of CF1 & CF2, with a double arrow between). Sometimes you're focusing. Sometimes you're diversifying. (Writes Focusing on the bottom right, above Diversifying, both next to Flexible Gambling and with an up down double arrow between them). You create a kind of integrated function. All of this can be, and if you check it in the paper, all of this can be represented mathematically. Once again, I am not claiming this is exhaustive. I'm claiming it's exemplary. I think these are important. I think scope and time cost functions and prioritising between cost functions... I think it's very plausible that they are part and parcel of our

cognitive processing. (Wipes board, except for efficiency \leftrightarrow resiliency on the left)

What I want you to think about is - I'm representing this abstractly - think about each one of these, here's scope (X axis of a graph drawn), here's tempering (Y axis), and then of course there is the prioritization that is playing between them (Z axis). I want you to think [-] of this as a [3D] space and these functions [-] are all being regulated in this fashion (circles efficiency \leftrightarrow resiliency). Relevance Realization is always taking place in this space, and at 'this' moment, it's got 'this' particular value according to tempering and scope and prioritization, and then it moves to 'this' value, and then to 'this' value and to 'this' value and then to 'this' value, and then out to 'this' value... It's moving around in a state space (joins dots throughout the 3D represented space within the graph). That's what it is. That's what's happening when you're doing Relevance Realization. But although [-] I've represented how this is dynamic, I haven't shown you how and why it would be developmental. (Wipes graph off the board.)

Compression And Particularisation, A Deeper Investigation Through To Complexification

I'm going to do this with just one of these, because I could teach an entire course just on Relevance Realization. When you're doing data compression, you're emphasising how you can integrate information - remember, like the line of best fit, you're emphasising Integration, because you're trying to pick up on what's invariant. And of course this is going to be versus Differentiation. (Writes these on the board Compression - Integration \leftrightarrow Particularization - Differentiation.) I think you can make a very clear argument that these map very well onto the two fundamental processes that are locked in opponent processing that Piaget - one of the founding figures of developmental psychology - said [-] drive development. This is what Piaget called Assimilation (writes this on the board: Compression - Integration - Assimilation). Assimilation is you have a Cognitive Schema - and what is a cognitive schema again? It is a set of constraints - and you have a cognitive schema and what that set of constraints do is it makes you integrate, it makes you treat the new information as the same as what you got, you integrate it, you assimilate it; that's compression. What's the

opposite for Piaget? Well, it's Accommodation (writes this on the board: Particularization - Differentiation - Accommodation) (NB: there are now 3 arrows on the board: Compression <-> Particularization; Integration <-> Differentiation; Assimilation <-> Accommodation. All three in line with Efficiency <-> Resiliency). And that's why, of course, when people talk about exploratory emotions, like awe, they invoke accommodation as a Piagetian principle because it opens you up. What does it do? It causes you to change your structure, your schemas. Why do we do this (assimilation)? Well, because it's very efficient. Why do we have to do this (accommodation)? Because if we just pursue efficiency, if we just assimilate, our machinery gets brittle and [distortional]. It has to go through accommodation. It has to introduce variation. It has to rewire and restructure itself so that it can, again, respond to a more complex environment.

So not only is relevance realization inherently dynamic, it is inherently developmental. When a system is self-organizing, there is no deep distinction between its function and its development. It develops by functioning, but by functioning, it develops. When a system is simultaneously integrating and differentiating it is complexifying; Complexification (labels this on the board: Integration <-> Differentiation } Complexification). A system is highly complex if it is both highly differentiated and highly integrated. Now why? But if I'm highly differentiated, I can do many different things (waves his arms about!). But if I do many different things and I'm not highly integrated, I will fly apart as a system. So I need to be both highly differentiated so I can do many different things and highly integrated so I stay together as an integrated system. As systems complexify, they self transcend; they go through qualitative development (writes Self-transcendence off of Complexification).

A Further Biological Analogy

Let me give you an analogy for this. Notice how I keep using biological analogies! That is not a coincidence. You started out life as a zygote, a fertilized cell, a singular cell. The egg and the sperm (gesticulates coming together), zygote. Initially, all that happens is the cells just reproduce, but then something very interesting starts to happen. You get cellular differentiation. Some of the cells start to become lung cells. Some of them

start to become eye cells. Some start to become organ cells. But they don't just differentiate. They integrate! They literally Self-ORGANize into a heart organ, an eye... (writes Self-organize on the board, highlighting 'organ'). You developed through a process, at least biologically, of biological complexification. What does that give you? That gives you emergent abilities (Writes Emergent off of Complexification). You transcend yourself as a system. When I was a zygote, I could not vote. I could not give this lecture. I now have those functions. In fact, when I was a zygote, I couldn't learn what I needed to learn in order to do this lecture. I did not have that qualitative competence. I did not have those functions! But as a system complexifies - notice what I'm showing you: as a system is going through relevance realization, it is also complexifying, it is getting new emergent abilities of how it can interact with the environment and then extend that relevance realization into that emergent self-transcendence. If you're a relevance realising thing, you're inherently dynamical, self-organizing, autopoietic thing, which means you are an inherently developmental thing, which means you are an inherently self transcending thing. (Wipes board completely clean.)

An Argument For Relevance Realization As A Unified Phenomenon

Now, [I] want to respond to a potential argument that you might have. It's like, "well, I get all of this, but maybe relevance, realizations is a bunch of many different functions!" First of all, I'm not disagreeing with the idea that a lot of our intelligence is carried with heuristics and some of those are more special purpose and some are more general purpose, and we need to learn how to trade off between them. However, I do want to claim that relevance realization is a unified phenomenon. And I'm going to do this in a two part way. The first is to first assert, and then I will later will substantiate that when we're talking about general intelligence - in fact that's what this whole argument has been - we're talking about relevance realization. Now this goes to work I did with Leo Ferraro, who was a psychometrist, somebody who actually does psychometric testing on people's intelligence. And one of the things we know from Spearman, way back in the twenties, is - and he discovered what's called the General Factor of Intelligence, sometimes called General Intelligence; there's a debate about whether we should

identify those or not. I'm not going to get into that right now! What Spearman found was that how kids were doing in math was actually predictive of how they were doing in English and even how they were doing - contrary to what our culture says - how they're doing in sports. [-] How I'm doing in all these different tasks (Fig. 1) (writes A B C D on the board in a square) was... how I did in A was predictive of how I did in B, and vice versa! (Connects all letters to all other letters with double ended arrows.) This is what's called a Strong Positive Manifold. There's this huge, Inter-predictability between how you do on all these very many different tasks. That is your general intelligence. Many people would argue, and I would agree that this is the capacity that underwrites you being a general problem solver.

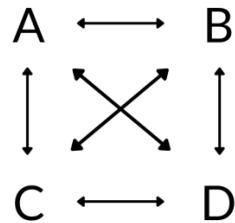


Fig. 1

Often when we're testing for intelligence, we're testing, therefore, General Intelligence (circles G.I. on the board). I'll put the panel up as we go along. (Fig. 2) What Leo showed me - he made a good argument - is that the things we study when [-] we're doing something like the Wechsler's test, or something like that, a psychometric test... So you will test things like "The Comprehension Subset".

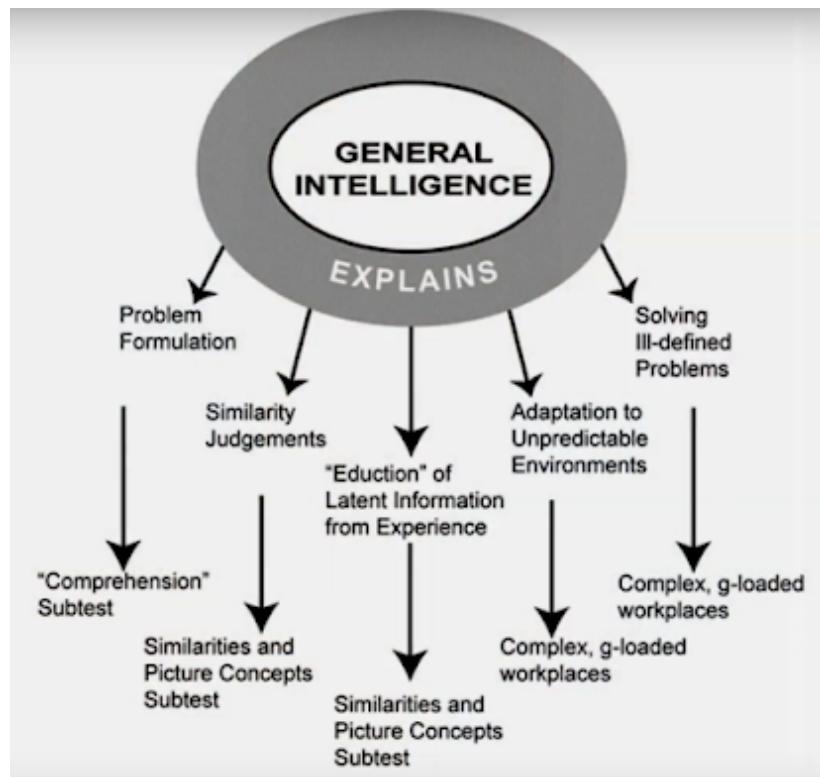


Fig. 2

And of course you'll concentrate on "Similarity Judgments", right? You'll also do "The Similarities of pictures". Okay. Other people have talked about your "Ability to Adapt to Unpredictable Environments". There's other work by (?) and others... Your "Ability to deal with complex workplaces", what are called "G-Loaded" that require a lot... (shows these all circled in the diagram onscreen, and writes a few of them off GI on the board).

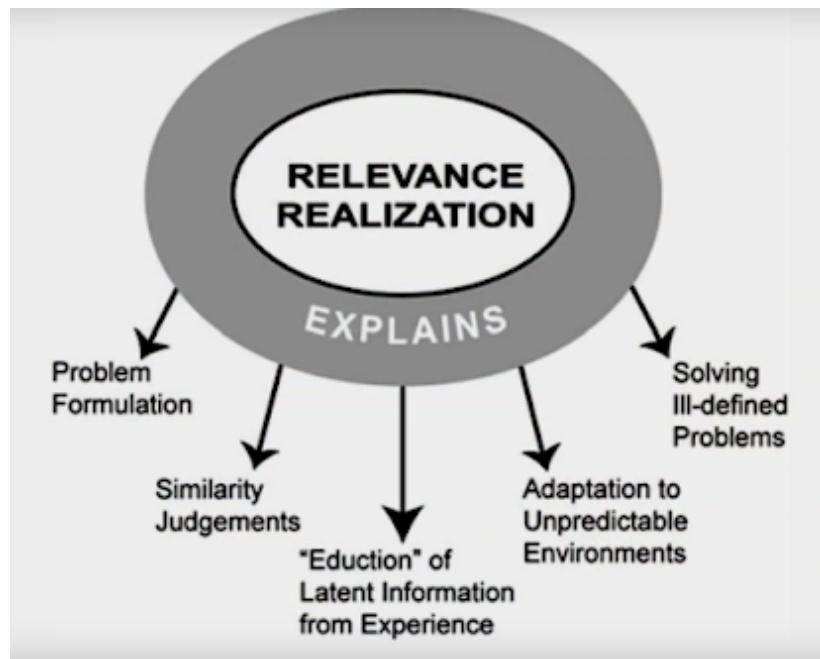


Fig. 3

Now when you trace these back, what this points to (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4) is your capacity for “Problem Formulation”, the “Similarity Judgments”, and what are called the “Eduction abilities”, the ability to draw out latent patterns. This of course is similarity judgment. This is a similarity judgment and pattern finding. The complex [workplaces] is basically dealing with very ill defined dynamic situations. [-] and adapting to complex environments. So this is general intelligence.

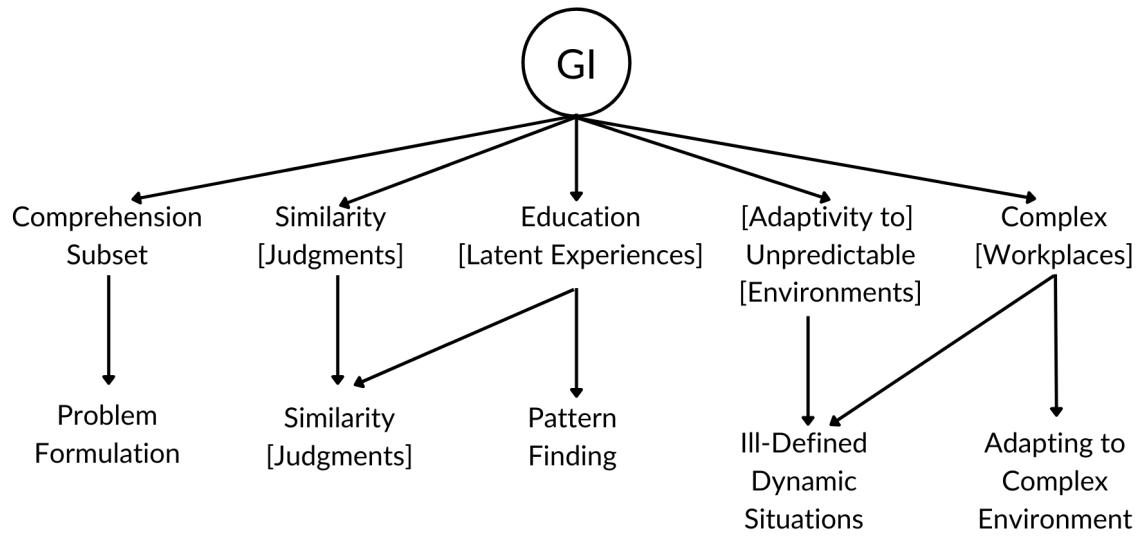


Fig. 4

This is [-] how we test general intelligence. We test people across all these different kinds of tasks and what we find is a Strong Predictive Manifold - there's some general ability behind it. But notice these: problem formulation, similarity, similarity judgments, pattern finding, dealing with ill-defined dynamic situations, adapting to complex environments... That's exactly all the places that I've argued we need relevance realization. (Fig. 5) (Completes the above diagram by bringing everything together to R.R. at the bottom.)

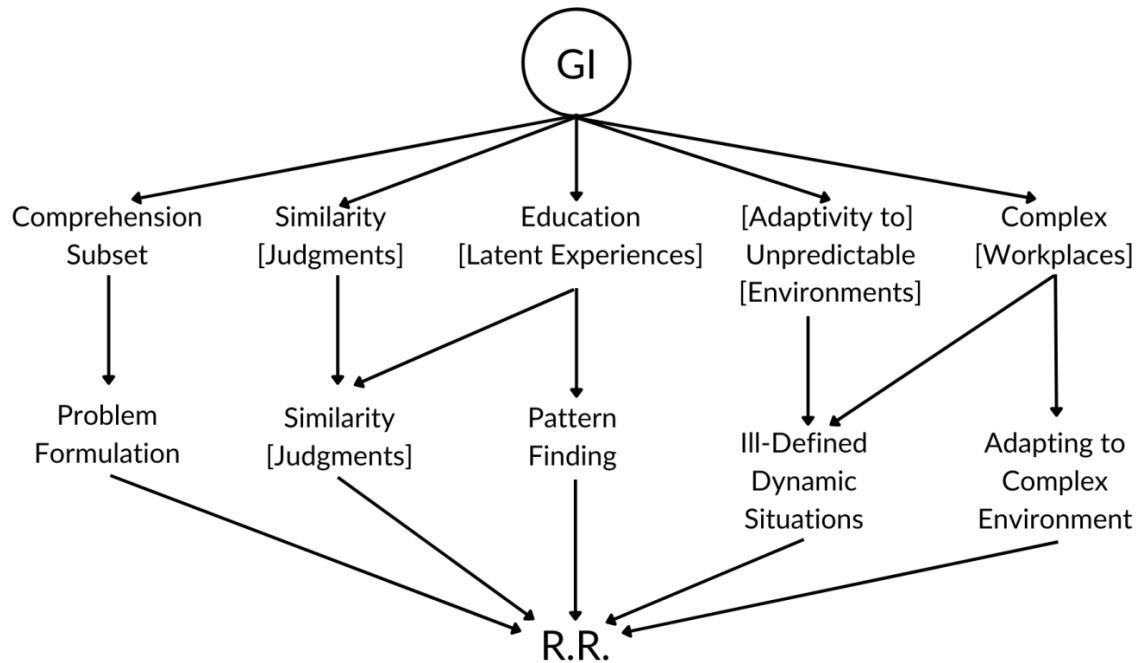


Fig. 5

Relevance Realization, what I would argue, is actually the underlying ability of your general intelligence. That's how we test for it (indicates framework on the board). This is the things that came out. And you can even see comprehension aspects in here, all kinds of things. So relevance realization, I think, is a very good candidate for your general intelligence. Insofar as general intelligence is a unified thing, and we have.../ this is, look, this is one of the most robust findings in psychology (Indicates Spearman / ABCD Manifold). It just keeps happening. There's always debates about it, blah, blah, blah, and people don't like the psychometric measures of intelligence. And I think that's because they're confusing intelligence and relevance and wisdom - we'll come back to that. The thing is, this is a very powerful measure. It's reliable! This is from the 1920s that this keeps getting replicated. This is not going through a replication crisis. And if I had to know one thing about you in order to try and predict you. The one thing that outperforms anything else is knowing this (again, taps Spearman/ABCD Manifold); this will tell me how you do in school, how you do in your relationships, how well you treat your health, how long you're likely to live, whether or not you're going to get a job. This crushes, how well you do in it

and an interview in predicting whether or not you'll get and keep a job. Is this the only thing that's predictive of you? No! And I'm going to argue later that intelligence and rationality are not identical. But is this (Spearman/Manifold) a real thing? And is it a unified thing? Yes. And can we make sense of this (G.I. on the board) as relevance realization? Yes. Is relevance realization, therefore, a unified thing? Yes. So relevance realization is your general intelligence and what I'm arguing - well at least that's what I'm arguing - and that your general intelligence can be understood as a dynamic developmental evolution of your sensory-motor fittedness that is regulated by virtual engines that are ultimately regulated by the logistical normativity of the opponent processing between efficiency and resiliency. (Wipes board clean)

So we've already integrated a lot of psychology and the beginnings of biology, with some Neuroscience, [-] and we've definitely integrated with some of the best insights from artificial intelligence. What I want to do next time to finish off this argument is to show how this might be realized in dynamical processes within the brain and how that is lining up with some of our cutting edge ideas. I'm spending so much time on this because this is the linchpin argument of the cognitive science side of the whole series. If I had to show you how everything feeds in to relevance realization (draws a convergent diagram into RR), if I can give you a good scientific explanation of this (RR) in terms of psychology, artificial intelligence, biology, neuroscientific processing, then it is legitimate and plausible to say that I have a naturalistic explanation of that. And if the history is pointing towards this, what we're going to then have the means to do is to argue how this - and we've already seen it, how it's probably embedded in your procedural, perspectival, participatory, knowing, it's embedded into your [transactional] dynamical coupling to the environment and the affordance of the Agent:Arena relationship; the connectivity between mind and body, the connectivity between mind and world. (Represents all of this with the divergent side of the diagram, coming out of RR.) We've seen it's central to your intelligence, central to [the] functionality of your consciousness. This is going to allow me to explain so much! We've already seen it as affording an account of why you're inherently self transcending.

We'll see that we can use this machinery to come up with an account of the relationship between intelligence, rationality, and wisdom. We will be able to explain so much of what's at the centre of human spirituality. We will have a strong plausibility argument for how we can integrate cognitive science and human spirituality in a way that may help us to powerfully address the meaning crisis.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

END

Episode 31 - Notes

Markus Brede

Networks that optimize a trade-off between efficiency and dynamical resilience:

Tim Lillicrap and Blake Richards (& John Vervaeke)

“Relevance Realization and the Emerging Framework in Cognitive Science”

Popper

Sir Karl Raimund Popper CH FBA FRS was an Austrian-British philosopher, academic and social commentator. One of the 20th century's most influential philosophers of science, Popper is known for his rejection of the classical inductivist views on the scientific method in favour of empirical falsification

Geoffrey Hinton

Geoffrey Everest Hinton CC FRS FRSC is a British-Canadian cognitive psychologist and computer scientist, most noted for his work on artificial neural networks. Since 2013 he divides his time working for Google and the University of Toronto.

wake-sleep algorithm that is at the heart of the deep learning promoted by Geoffrey Hinton

The wake-sleep algorithm is an unsupervised learning algorithm for a stochastic multilayer neural network. The algorithm adjusts the parameters

so as to produce a good density estimator. There are two learning phases, the “wake” phase and the “sleep” phase, which are performed alternately.

Piaget - one of the founding figures of developmental psychology

Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist known for his work on child development. Piaget's 1936 theory of cognitive development and epistemological view are together called "genetic epistemology". Piaget placed great importance on the education of children.

Spearman

Charles Edward Spearman, FRS was an English psychologist known for work in statistics, as a pioneer of factor analysis, and for Spearman's rank correlation coefficient & [General Factor of Intelligence](#)

Strong Positive Manifold

Wechsler's test

The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) is an IQ test designed to measure intelligence and cognitive ability in adults and older adolescents. The original WAIS (Form I) was published in February 1955 by David Wechsler, as a revision of the Wechsler–Bellevue Intelligence Scale, released in 1939.

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Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 32 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - RR in the Brain, Insight, and Consciousness

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. So last time we were taking a look at the centrality of Relevance Realization, [at] how many

central processes - central to our intelligence [and] possibly also to, at least the functionality of, our consciousness - presuppose, require [and] are dependent upon Relevance Realization. So we had gotten to a point where we saw how many things fed into this (convergent diagram drawn on the board, into RR), and then I made the argument that it is probably, at some fundamental level, a unified phenomenon because it comports well with the phenomenon of general intelligence, which is a very robust and reliable finding about human beings. And then I proposed to you that what we need to do is two things: we need to try and give a naturalistic account of this (RR), and then show, if we have naturalised this, can we then use it in an elegant manner to explain a lot of the central features of human spirituality. And I already indicated in the last lecture how some of that was already being strongly suggested; we got an account of self-transcendence that comes out of dynamic emergence that is being created by the ongoing complexification. And this has to do with the very nature of a Relevance Realization as this ongoing, evolving fittedness of your sensory-motor loop to its environment, under the virtual engineering of bioeconomic logistical constraints of efficiency that tends to compress and integrate and assimilate, and resiliency that tends to a particularise and differentiate. And when those are happening in such a dynamically coupled and integrated fashion within an ongoing opponent processing, then you get complexification that produces self-transcendence. But, of course, much more is needed.

Now I would like to proceed to address.../ Now I can't do this comprehensively (indicates RR in the convergence diagram on the board), not in a way that would satisfy everybody who is potentially watching this. This is very difficult because there are aspects of this argument that would get incredibly technical. Also, to make the argument comprehensive is beyond what I think I have time to do here today. [-] I'll put notes for things that you can read or point you to, if you want to read it more deeply. What I want to do is try to give an exemplary argument, an argument of an example of how you could try and bring about a plausible naturalistic account of Relevance Realization. Now we've gone a long way towards doing that because we've already got this worked out in terms of information processing processes. But could we see them potentially realized in the brain? And, one more time, I want to advertise for the brain! I understand

why people want to resist the urge of sort of a simplistic reduction that human beings are nothing but their brain. That's a very bad way of talking! That's like saying a table is nothing but it's atoms, that doesn't ultimately make any sense. It's also the structural functional organization of the atoms, the way those, that structural functional organization, interacts with the world; how it unfolds through time. So, simplistic reductionism should definitely be questioned. On the other hand, we also have to appreciate how incredibly complex, dynamic, self-creating, plastic, capable of [-] very significant qualitative development the brain actually is.

So, I proposed to you that [-] one aspect of Relevance Realization, the aspect that has to do with trading between being able to generalise and specialised, as I've argued, is a system going through compression - remember that [is] something like what you're doing with a line of best fit - and particularization - when your function is more tightly fitted to the contextually specific dataset. (Writes compression and particularisation on the board with a vertical, double ended arrow between them.) And, again, this (compression) gives you efficiency, this (particularisation) gives you resiliency. This (compression) tends to integrate and assimilate. This (particularisation) tends to differentiate and accommodate. Okay, so try to keep that all in mind. Now, what I want to try and do is argue that there is suggestive - it's by no means definitive - and I want it clearly understood that I am not proposing to prove anything here; that's not my endeavour. My endeavour is to show that there is suggestive evidence for something. And all I need is that that makes it plausible that there will be a way to empirically explain Relevance Realization.

So, let's talk about what this looks like. So there's increasing evidence that when neurones fire in synchrony together (writes => synchrony off compression), they're doing something like compression. So if you give, for example, somebody a picture that they can't quite make out and you're looking at how the brain is firing, the areas of the visual cortex for example, if it's a visual picture are firing sort of asynchronously, and then when the person gets the "Ahaaa!", you get large areas that fire in synchrony together. Interestingly, there's even increasing evidence that when human beings are cooperating in joint attention and activity, their brains are getting into patterns of synchrony. So that opens up the possibility for a very serious

account of distributed cognition. I'll come back to that much later. Now what we know what's going on in the cortex - and this is the point that's [-], I think, very important: This is scale in-variant (writes this on the board to the left of particularisation) - what that means is that [at] many levels of analysis, you will see this process happening. Why is that important? Well, if you remember, Relevance Realization has to be something that's happening very locally [and] very globally, it has to be happening pervasively throughout all of your cognitive processing. So the fact that this (compression => synchrony) process I'm describing is also scale in-variant in the brain is suggestive that it can be implementing Relevance Realization.

Now, what happens is (writes => asynchrony off particularisation, with a double ended arrow between synchrony and asynchrony), at many levels of analysis, what you [-] have is this pattern where neurones are firing in synchrony and then they become asynchronous and then they fire in synchrony and then they become asynchronous. And they're doing this in a rapidly oscillating manner. So this is an instance of what's called Self-Organizing Criticality (writes above framework on the board). It's a particular kind of opponent processing, a particular kind of self-organization. So we're getting more precision in our account of the self-organizing nature, potentially, of Relevance Realization. Okay. So let's talk a little bit about this (Self-organising Criticality) first and then we'll come back to its particular instantiation in the brain.

Self Organising Criticality

So self-organizing criticality - this [originally goes] back to the work of Per Bak. So let's say you have grains of sand falling, like in an hourglass, and initially it's random - well random from our point of view - [as to] where, within a zone, individual grains will end up somewhere in that zone. We don't know where because they'll bounce and all that, but over time what happens, because there's a virtual engine there - friction and gravity, but also the bounce - so the bouncing introduces variation, the friction and [-] the gravity put constraint[s on...] And what happens is the sand grains self-organized (draws a little mound within a circle representing the above mentioned 'zone') - there's no little elf that runs in and shapes the sand into a mound! it self-organises into a mound like that. And it keeps doing this and

keeps doing this (draws progressively bigger mounds)... Now at some point it enters a critical phase. Criticality means the system is close to, is potentially breaking down. See, when it's self-organized like this (in a mound), it demonstrates a high degree of order. Order means that as this mound takes shape the position of any one grain of sand gives me a lot of information about where the other grains are likely to be, because they're so tightly organised, it's highly ordered. But then what happens is that order breaks down and you get an avalanche, it avalanches down and the system... And if and if this is too great, if the criticality becomes too great, the system will collapse. And so there are people that argue that civilizations collapse due to [-] what's called General Systems Failure, which [-] is that these entropic forces are actually overwhelming the structure of the system and the system just collapses. So collapse is a possibility with criticality. However, what can happen is the following: the sand spreads out due to the avalanche. And then that introduces variation, important changes in the structural functional organization of the sand mound, because now what happens is [that] there is a bigger base. And what that means is now a new mound forms (draws a bigger mound on a bigger base/‘zone’), and it can go much higher than the previous mound; it has an emergent capacity that didn't exist in the previous system. And then it cycles like this, it's cycles like this. Now at any point - again, there's no telos to this - at any point it can just, the criticality can overwhelm the system and it can collapse at any point. The criticality within you can overwhelm the system and you can die.

But what you see is [-] the brain cycling in this manner: Self-organizing Criticality. The neurones structure together - that's like the mound [of sand] forming - and then they go asynchronous. This is sometimes even called the neural avalanche. And then they reconfigure into a new synchrony and then they go asynchronous. So do you see what's happening here? What's happening here is the brain is oscillating like this (sand diagrams) and what it's doing with self-organizing criticality is it's doing data compression and then it does a neural avalanche, which opens up, introduces variation into the system, which allows a new structure to reconfigure that is momentarily fitted to the situation. It breaks up... Now, do you see what it's doing? It's constantly, moment by moment - this is happening in milliseconds! - it's evolving it's fittedness, it's complexifying it's structural functional

organization. It is doing compression and particularization, which means it's constantly, moment by moment, evolving it's sensory motor fittedness to the environment. It's doing Relevance Realization, I would argue.

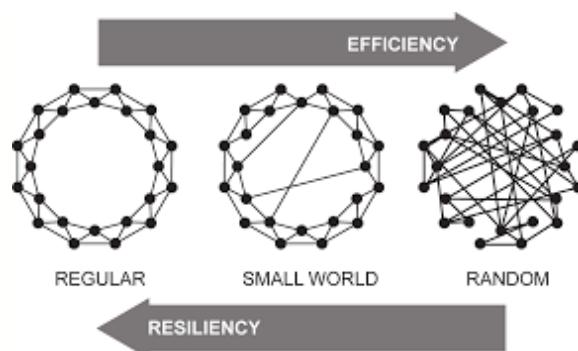
Now, what does that mean? Well, one thing that we should be careful of: when I'm doing this, again, I'm using words and gestures [-] of course, to convey and make sense, but what you have to understand is [that] this is happening at myriad of levels! There's this self-organizing criticality doing this fittedness at this level and it's interacting with another one doing it at this level all the way up to the whole brain, all the way down to individual sets of neurones. So this is a highly recursive, highly complex, very dynamic evolving fittedness. And I would argue that that is thereby implementing Relevance Realization. There is some evidence to support this. So Thatcher et al. did some important work in 2008, 2009 pointing towards this. So here's the argument I'm making: I'm making the argument that RR can be implemented - it's not completely identical to, because you remember there's also exploration and exploitation - but it can be implemented by this (writes RR - SOC). And I've also, last time, made the argument that Relevance Realization is you're general intelligence (g) (writes (g)-RR-SOC). If this is correct, then we should see measurable relationships between these two ((g) and SOC). Of course we've known how to measure this (g) psychometrically for a very long time. And now we're getting ways of measuring this (SOC) in the brain. And what Thatcher found was exactly that. They found - Thatcher et al. - found that there's a strong relationship between measures of self organization and how intelligent you are. Specifically, what they found was the more flexibility there is in this (synchrony \Leftrightarrow a-synchrony), the more intelligent you are; the more it demonstrates a kind of dynamic 'evolve-ability', the more intelligent you are.

Is this a conclusive thing? No, there's lots of controversy around this and I don't want to misrepresent this. However, I would point out that there was a very good article by Hess and Gross in 2014, doing a comprehensive review of the application of Self Organizing Criticality as a fundamental property of neural systems. And they, I think, made a very good case that [-] it's highly plausible that self-organizing criticality is functional in the brain in a fundamental way and that lines up [with], it's convergent with, this (indicates the board). So what we've got is the possibility, I mean... and this carries

with it... so I'm hesitant here because I don't want to... by drawing out the implications I don't want to there by say that this has been proven. I'm not saying that. But, so - remember the if - but if this is right, this has important implications. It says that we may be able to move from psychometric measures of intelligence to direct measures in the brain - much more, in that sense, objective measures. Secondly, if this is on the right track, it will feed - remember, a lot of these ideas were derived from sort of emerging features of artificial intelligence - if this is right, it may help then feed back into this and help develop artificial intelligence. So there's a lot of potential here, unfortunately for both good or ill! I'm hoping - if you'll allow me a brief aside - I'm hoping, by this project that I'm engaged in, to link as much as I can and the people that I work with can - my lab and my colleagues - link this emergent, scientific understanding, very tightly to the spiritual project of addressing the meaning crisis rather than letting it just run rampant, Willy nilly. Alright, so if you'll allow me, that's (convergent framework on the board) a way in which we could give a naturalistic account of RR in terms of how neurones are firing, [their] firing patterns.

Networks: From Neurones To Graph/Network Theory

Now I need another scale in-variant thing, but I need it to deal with not how neurones are firing, but how they're wiring - what kinds of networks they're forming. I'm not particularly happy with the wiring metaphor, but it has become pervasive in our culture and it's mnemonically useful because firing and wiring rhyme together. So again, there is a sort of a new way of thinking about how we can look at networks, it's called Graph Theory or Network Theory. It's gotten very complex in a very short amount of time. So I want to do just [-] the core, basic idea with you, that there's three kinds of networks.



All right (Drawing empty network points (nodes) on the board (3x6)), so this is [-] Neutral, this doesn't mean just networks in the brain. It can be networks like how the internet is a network. It could mean how an airline is a network or a railway system, et cetera. This analysis, this theoretical machinery is applicable to all kinds of networks, which is part of its power.

So you want to talk about nodes; these are things that are connected and then you have connections. So these - I'm drawing two connections here, this isn't a single thick one (connecting two nodes with two connections in the first group of 6 nodes), these are two individual ones. Okay. Two individual connections here (completes first network). So that's the same number of connections and nodes in each network (completes the other two networks differently). (Shows included diagram onscreen.) So there are three kinds of networks. This is called a Regular Network (1st). It's regular because all of the connections are short distance connections. Okay. And you'll notice that there's a lot of redundancy in this network. Everything is double connected. Okay. This is called a Random or Chaotic Network (2nd). It's a mixture of short and long connections. And then this is called a Small World Network (3rd). This comes from the Disney song, "It's A Small World After All", because this was originally discovered by Milgrom when he was studying patterns of social connectedness. And it's a small world after all.

Mutual Reinforcement Of Self Organising Criticality And Small World Networks

Now, originally people were just talking about these (indicates the three diagrams). It's now understood that these are [-] names for broad families of different kinds of networks that can be analysed into many different subspecies, and I won't get into that detail because I'm just trying to make an overarching core argument. So, remember I said that this [Regular] network has a lot of redundancy in it? [-] That's really important because that means that this network is terrifically resilient. I can do a lot of damage to this network and no node gets isolated, nothing falls out of communication. It's tremendously resilient, very resilient. But you pay a price for that, all that redundancy; this is actually a very inefficient network. Now your brain might tricky because that looks so well ordered. It looks like a nice clean room, and clean rooms look like they're really highly ordered and that's,

“Oh, this must be the most efficient, because cleanliness is orderliness and orderliness is efficient” and you can't let that mislead you! You actually measure how efficient a network is by calculating what's called its Mean Path Distance. I calculate the number of steps [-] between all the pairs. So how many [-] steps do I have to go through to get from here to here. One, two... how many do I have to go [through] to go from here to here? One, two, three, four. I do that for all the pairs, and then I get an average of it. And the Mean Path Distance measures how efficient your network is at basically communicating information. These (Regular Networks) have a very, very high Mean Path Distance. So they're very inefficient. You pay a price for all that redundancy and that's of course because redundancy and efficiency are in a tradeoff relationship.

Now this (indicates Random Network diagram) - and again here's where [-] your brain is going to like [explode] - this is so messy, right? This is so messy. Well, it turns out that this is actually efficient. It's actually very efficient because it has so many long distance connections. It's very, very efficient. It has a very low Mean Path Distance. But, because they're in a tradeoff relationship, it's not resilient. [It's] very poor in resiliency. So notice what we're getting here. These networks are being constrained in their functionality by the trade off in the bio economics of efficiency and resiliency. Markus Brede has sort of mathematical proofs about this in his work on network configuration. Now what about this one - the Small World Network? Well, it's more efficient than the Regular Network, but less efficient than the Random Network. But it's more resilient than the Random network, but less resilient than the Regular Network. But you know what it is? It's Optimal. It gets the optimal amount of both. It optimizes for efficiency and resiliency. It optimizes for efficiency and resiliency. Now that's interesting because that would mean that if your brain is doing Relevance Realization by trading between efficiency and resiliency, it's going to tend to generate small world networks. And not only that, the small world networks are going to be associated with the highest functionality in your brain. And there's increasing evidence that this is in fact the case. In fact, there was research done by Langer et al in 2012 that did the same thing, similar thing, to which Thatcher did.

So here we got this, again: RR is G ((g) - RR) and it looks like RR might be implementing - this is what I'm putting here, Small World Networks (SWN) - (writes this at the top of the board: (g) - RR - SWN). And what Langer et al. found is a relationship between these ((g) and SWN): the more your brain is wired like this, the better your intelligence. Again, is this conclusive? No, still controversial. That's precisely why it's cutting edge. However, increasingly we're finding that these kinds of patterns of organization make sense. Remember Markus Brede was doing work looking at just artificial networks, neural networks, and you want to optimise between these. So you're getting design arguments out of artificial intelligence [and] you're starting to get these arguments emerging out of neuroscience. Interestingly Langer et al. did his second experiment in 2013, when you sort of put extra effort, task demands on working memory, you see that working memory becomes even more organised, like a small world network. Hilger et al. in 2016 found that there was a specific kind of small world network having to do with efficient hubs. Their thing is entitled "Efficient hubs in the intelligent brain, nodal efficiency of hub regions in the salience network are correlated with general intelligence". So what seems to be going on is suggestive, not conclusive, but you know, you've got the Langer work, working memory goes more like this. And then you've got this very sophisticated kind, a species of this in recent research, correlated with the salient network in the brain. Do you see that? That as your brain is moving to a specific species of this (Small World Network), within the Salience Network you become more intelligent. And the salience network is precisely that network by which things are salient to you, stand out for you, grab your attention.

One more time, is this conclusive? No. I'm presenting to you stuff that's literally happening in the last two or three years, and as there should be, there's tremendous controversy in science. However, this is what I'm pretty confident of. That that controversy is progressive. It's ongoing. It's getting better and better such that it is plausible that we will be able to increasingly explain, and it will be increasingly convergent with the ongoing progress in artificial intelligence, that we will be able to increasingly explain Relevance Realization in terms of the firing and the wiring. Remember, the firing is Self-Organizing Criticality (Firing - SOC), and the wiring is Small World

Networks (Wiring - SWN). And here's something else that's really suggestive: The more a system fires this way (SOC), the more it wires this way (SWN). So the system is firing in a self organizing, critical fashion; It will tend to network as a small world network. The more it wires this way (SWN), the more it is wired like it's a small world network, the more likely it will tend to fire in this pattern (SOC).

These two things mutually reinforce each other's development. So remember - let's try to put this all together! I want you to really [try], I mean it's hard to grasp this, I get this, but remember - this (SOC) is happening at a scale invariant, massively recursive, complex, self-organizing fashion. This (SWN) is also happening, scale invariant, at a very complex, self-organizing, recursive fashion. And the two are deeply interpenetrating and affording and affecting each other in ways that have to do directly with engineering the evolving fittedness of your salience realization and your Relevance Realization within your sensory-motor interaction with the world. This is, I think, strongly suggestive that [-] this (RR) is going to be given a completely naturalistic explanation. Okay, notice what I'm doing here! I'm giving a structural, a theoretical structural functional organization (Firing - SOC \leftrightarrow Wiring - SWN) for how this (RR) can operate. So [-] the last couple of times we had the strong convergence argument to this (RR). We have a naturalistic account (above looping framework) of this, at least the rational promise that this is going to be forthcoming. And then we're getting an idea of how we can get a structural functional organization of this (RR) in terms of firing and wiring machinery.

Possible Naturalistic Accounts of General Intelligence And Consciousness

Now this is again, like I said, this is both very exciting and potentially scary because it does carry with it the real potential to give a natural explanation of the fundamental guts of our intelligence. I want to go a little bit further and suggest that not only may this help to give us a naturalistic account of general intelligence, it may point towards a naturalistic account, at least of the functionality, but perhaps also of some of the phenomenology of consciousness (writes $\rightarrow(g)$ and \rightarrow consciousness, both off the Firing \leftrightarrow Wiring framework above). This again is even more controversial. But again,

my endeavour here is not to convince you that this is the final account or theory. It's to make plausible of the possibility of a naturalistic explanation.

Okay. So let's remember a couple of things. There's a deep relationship between consciousness - remember the global workspace theory (GWT), the functionality, and that that overlaps a lot with working memory (WM) (both written off Consciousness). [-] And we already know that there are important overlaps in the [-] brain areas that have to do with general intelligence working memory (connects (g) \leftrightarrow WM), attention, salience, and also that measures of this ((g)) and measures of the functionality of this (WM) are highly correlated with each other. That's now pretty well established. We've also got that, we know from Lynn Hasher's work, that this (WM) is doing Relevance Realization. Do you remember [I] also gave you the argument when we talked about the functionality of consciousness, that many of the best accounts of the function of consciousness is that it's doing Relevance Realization. And so this (framework below Firing/Wiring loop) should all hang together. This should all hang together, such that the machinery of intelligence and the functionality of consciousness should be deeply integrated together in terms of Relevance Realization.

We do know that there seems to be some important relationships between consciousness and self organizing criticality (Consciousness - SOC). This has to do with the work of Cosmelli et al. and others ongoing. Their work was in 2004. So they did what's called the Binocular Rivalry Experiment. Basically you present two images to somebody and they're positioned in such a way that they are going to the different visual fields and they compete with each other because of their design. And then, so what happens in people's visual experiences - let's say it's a triangle and a cross - [is] that, what they'll have experientially is "I'm seeing a cross. Oh, no, I'm seeing a triangle! I'm seeing the cross and I'm seeing a triangle!!" and don't forget that that's not obscure to you. So, the Necker cube, right? (Draws a cube.) When you watch the Necker cube, it flips, right? So this can be the front and it's going back this way, where you can flip and you can see it the other way [-] where this is the front and it goes that way, right? So you are constantly flipping between these, and you can't see them both at the same time. So that's what Binocular Rivalry is. And so what you have though, is you do this [under] more controlled [conditions]. You present it to different visual

fields, so different areas of the brain... And so what you can see is what happens when the person is seeing the triangle? Well, one part of the brain goes into synchrony and then as soon as the triangle [goes], that goes asynchronous and the other part of the brain that's picking up on the crosses [goes into synchrony], because that's a different area of the brain because it's more basic [-]. And what you can see is, as the person flips back and forth in experience, different areas of the brain are going into synchrony or asynchrony. So that is suggestive of a relationship between consciousness and self-organizing criticality. Again, [only] suggestive. But, we've already got independent evidence, a lot of convergent evidence, that the functionality of consciousness is to do Relevance Realization, which explains it's strong correlation via working memory with measures of general intelligence. And so, we know that this (Consciousness <-RR (on the board)) is plausibly associated with self organizing criticality.

Back To The Machinery Of Insight

So again, convincing? No. Suggestively convergent? Yes. There's another set of experiments done by Monti et al in 2013, and what you're basically doing is you're giving people a general anaesthetic and then you're observing their brain as they pass out of consciousness and back into consciousness. And what did they find? They found that as the brain passes out of consciousness, It loses its overall structure as a Small World Network and breaks down into more local networks and that as it returns into consciousness, it goes into a Small World of Network formation again, so that consciousness seems to be strongly associated with the degree to which the brain is wiring as a Small World Network. Now I want to try and bring these together in a more concrete instance where you can see the intelligence, the consciousness, and this dynamic process of self organization, all at work.

I want to bring it back to the machinery of insight, the machinery of insight. So if you remember, we talked about this, because we talked about the use of disruptive strategies. And we talked about the work of Stephen and Dixon. Do you remember that what they found was they found a way, a very sophisticated way, but nevertheless a very reliable way, of measuring how much entropy is in people's processing when they're trying to solve the insight problem. Remember they were tracing through the gear figures? And

what they found is that entropy goes up right before the insight and then it drops and the [behavior] becomes even more organised (draws a bell curve that drops lower on the right). Now, that's plausibly - and they suggested - that's plausibly an instance of self organizing criticality; that what's happening is (works through the bell curve) you're getting the neural avalanche, it's breaking up, and then that allows a restructuring, which goes with the restructuring of the problem - remember, so you're breaking frame with the neural avalanche and then you're making frame like the new mound - as you restructure you're problem framing. And you get the insight! And you get a solution to your problem. [So, this is linking insight to SOC, very clearly.]

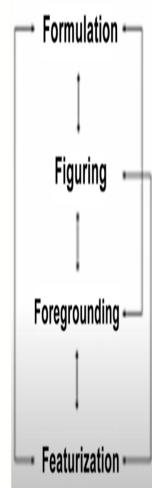
[Now, interestingly enough, Schilling has a mathematical] model from 2005 linking insight to Small World Networks. She argues quite persuasively that what's - this is very interesting, since what you can see happening in an insight is that people's information is initially organised, like in a regular network! Just think about that intuitively, like so my information is sort of integrated here, right (draws a little circle of dots)? Local organization, a regular network. Local organization. Right (draws a second little circle of dots)? So the whole thing is, right, all I've got is a regular network. But what can happen is here's my regular network (draws bigger, simple, six node diagram) and what happens is [with] one of these I get a long distance connection that forms (each node is connected to the ones beside it with double connections, except for one long one across the middle). So my regular network suddenly is altered into a Small World Network, which means I lose some resiliency, I lose some resiliency, but I gained a massive spike in efficiency. I suddenly get more powerful. So insight is when a Regular Network is being converted into a Small World Network, because that means this is a process of optimisation, (Regular Network => SWN). Because remember, this (SWN) is more optimal than this (Regular Network). And you can see that in how people's information is organised in an insight. They take two domains; here's - think about how metaphor affords insight - you take two domains, "Sam is a pig" and you suddenly [get] this connection between [them] and those two Regular Networks are now coalesced into a Small World Network.

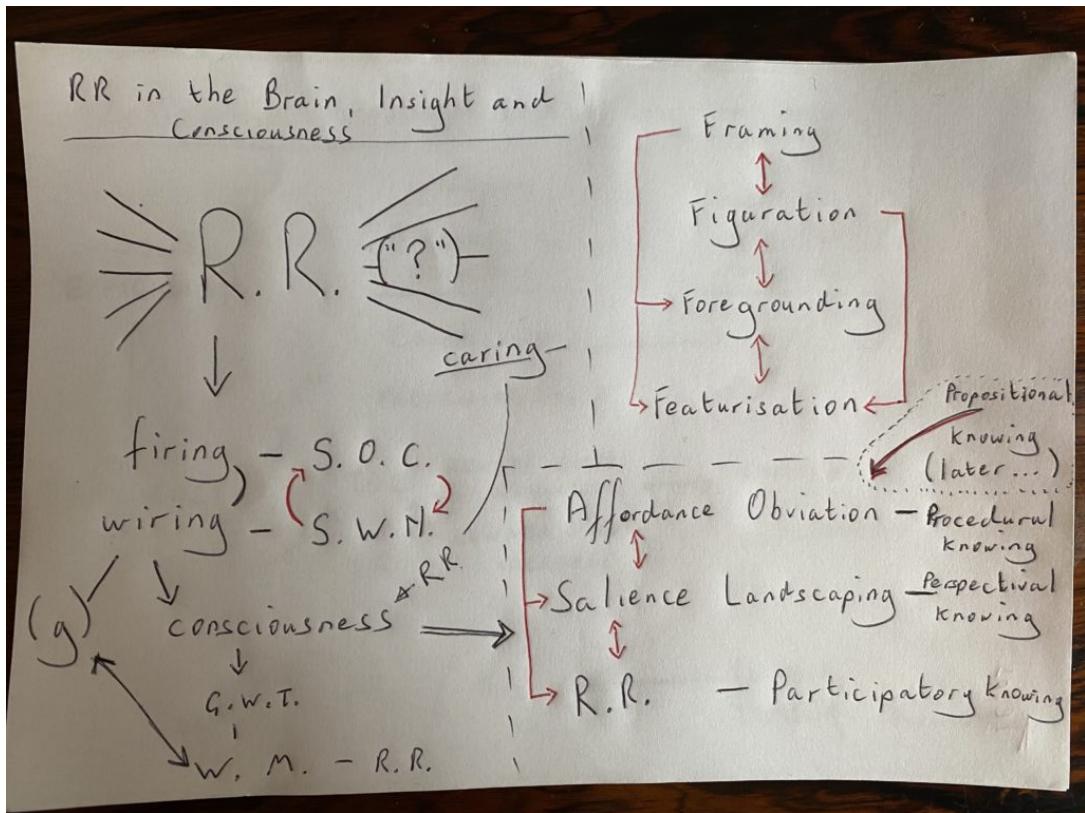
Okay, that's great! So in some of the work I've done with other people I've been suggesting because of this (SOC \Leftrightarrow SWN), the following: That what happens in insight - a la Stephen and Dixon - is you get Self-Organized Criticality, and that Self-Organizing Criticality breaks up a Regular Network and converts it into a Small World Network. So what you're getting is a sudden enhancement, increased optimisation of your Relevance Realization - and what's it accompanied with? It's accompanied with a flash in salience! Remember? And then that could be extended in the flow experience. You're getting an alteration of consciousness, an alteration of your intelligence. An optimisation of your fittedness to the problem space. Okay. (Wipes board clean except for the expanded convergence framework) Again, I'm going to say this again, right? I'm trying to give you stuff that makes this plausible. I'm sure that in specifics, it's going to turn out to be false because that's how science works, but that's not what I need right now. What I tried to show you is how progressive the project is (indicates the framework on the board), of naturalising this and how so much is converging towards it, that it is plausible that this will be something that we can scientifically explain. And more than scientifically explain, that we'll be able to create as we create autonomous Artificial General Intelligence.

RR, Consciousness And Our Salience Landscape

Okay. Let's return back. If I've at least made it plausible that there's a deep connection between Relevance Realization and Consciousness, I want to try and point out some aspects to you about Relevance Realization and why it is creating a tremendously textured, dynamically flowing, salience landscape. So remember how Relevance Realization is happening at multiple interacting levels. So we can think about this where (writes featurization on the board) you're just getting features that are getting picked up. Remember the multiple object tracking (taps a few objects around). [-] 'This', 'this', 'this' (individually holds up some pens), so basic salience assignment, right? And [-] this is based on work originally from Matson in 1976, his book on salience. I've mentioned that before, and then some work that I did with Jeff Marshman and Steve Pearce?. And then later work that I did with Anderson Todd and Richard Wu. The featurization is also feeding up into foregrounding and feeding back, right? (Writes foregrounding above featurization with a double ended arrow between.) So a bunch of 'this',

'this', 'this', all these features and then presumably I'm foregrounded and other stuff is backgrounded. This (foregrounding) then feeds up into figuration (double arrowed above foregrounding). You're configuring me together and figuring me out - think of that language, right? - so that I have a structural functional organization. I'm aspectualized for you.





That's feeding back (figuration \leftrightarrow foregrounding). And of course there's feedback down to here (figuration \leftrightarrow featurization). And then that of course feeds back to [-] framing how you're framing your problems (framing/formulation double arrowed above figuration). And we've talked a lot about that and that feeds back [to featurization]. So you've got this happening and it's giving you this very dynamic and textured salience landscape.

And then you have to think about how that's the core machinery of your Perspectival Knowing. Notice what I'm suggesting to you here: you've got the Relevance Realization that is the core machinery of your Participatory Knowing - it's how you are getting coupled to the world so that co-evolution, reciprocal realization can occur. That's your Participatory Knowing (RR - Participatory Knowing). This (RR) feeds up to/feeds back to your Salience Landscaping (RR <=> Salience Landscaping). This is your Perspectival Knowing (Salience Landscaping - Perspectival Knowing). This is what gives you your dynamic, situational awareness. Your dynamic, situational awareness; this textured, Salience Landscaping (gestures the four levelled

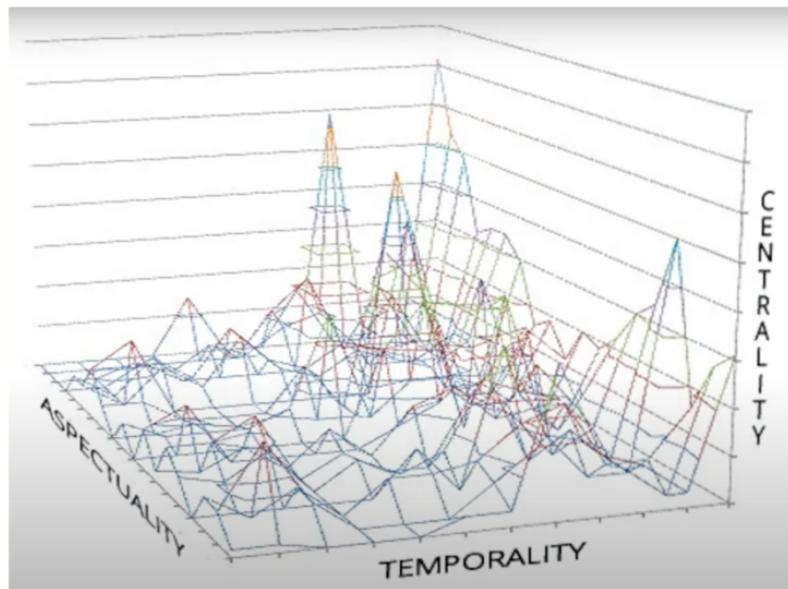
diagram above). This of course (Salience Landscaping) is going to - and we'll talk more about that - it's going to open up an affordance landscape for you. Certain connections, affordances are going to become obvious to you. And you say, "Oh man, does anybody... like, this is so abstract!" But this is how people are trying to wrestle with this now! Here's an article from *Frontiers In Human Neuroscience*: "Self-Organizing Free Energy Minimization..." - that's Kristen's work, and it has to do with, ultimately, [-] getting your processing as efficient as possible, ..."And Optimal Grip On A Field Of Affordances" using all of this language that I am using with you right now. That's by Bundaberg and Rhett Velde from 2014 "*Frontiers In Human Neuroscience*". Just as one example among many!

So this (Salience Landscaping) is feeding up and what it's basically giving you is Affordance Obviation (Salience Landscaping \Leftrightarrow Affordance Obviation). Certain affordances are being selected and made obvious to you. That of course is going to be the basis of your Procedural Knowing, knowing how to interact (Affordance Obviation - Procedural Knowing). And I think there might be a way in which that more directly interacts here (Affordance Obviation \rightarrow Salience Landscaping & \rightarrow RR), maybe through kinds of implicit learning, but I'm not going to go into that. We'll come back later on to how Propositional Knowing relates to all of this ((Affordance Obviation + \leftarrow Propositional Knowing)). I'm putting it aside because this (RR \leftrightarrow Salience Landscaping \leftrightarrow Affordance Obviation) is where we do most of our talking about consciousness. With this (Salience Landscaping), I think, at the core, the Perspectival Knowing. But it's the Perspectival Knowing that's grounded in our Participatory Knowing, and it's our Perspectival Knowing.../ look: your situational awareness that obviates affordances is what you need in order to train your skill. That's how you train your skills. And we know that consciousness is about doing this higher-order Relevance Realization because that's what this is (framework on the board) - this is higher order Relevance Realization that affords you solving your problems.

Three Dimensions of Salience Landscaping

So this is... I mean, I'm trying to say, I need all of this (gestures to include both the above frameworks) when I'm talking about your Salience Landscaping. I'm talking about it as the nexus between your Relevance

Realization [&] Participatory Knowing and your Affordance Obviation [&] Procedural Knowing - your skill development - Perspectival Knowing at the core, and that what's happening in here is this (indicates the Featurization framework). If that's the case, then you can think of your Salience Landscape as having at least three dimensions to it. (Draws X, Y, Z axis on the board as it is also shown, in detail (although with differently labelled axes), on-screen.)



So one is pretty obvious to you, which is the aspectuality (X axis). As I said, your salience landscape is aspectualizing things. Things (picks up a marker pen...) so the features are being foregrounded and configured and they're being framed. So this is a marker. It is aspectualized. Remember? Whenever I'm representing or categorizing it, I'm not capturing all of its properties, I'm just capturing an aspect. So this is aspectualized - everything is aspectualized for me.

There's another dimension here of centrality (Y axis). I'll come back to this later, but this has to do with the way Relevance Realization works.

Relevance Realization is ultimately grounded in how things are relevant to you, right? Literally, literally, how they are important to you. You “import” how they are connotative.../ At some level, the sensory-motor stuff is to get

stuff to you [that] you literally need to import materially, and then, at a higher level, you literally need to import information to be constitutive of your cognition. We'll come back to that transition later. But what you have is the Perspectival Knowing is there's 'doing aspectualized', and then everything is centred. It's not non-valanced, it's vectored on to me. And then it has temporality (Z axis) because this is a dynamic process of ongoing evolution. Timing, small differences in time, make huge impacts, huge differences in such dynamical processing. Kairos is really, really central. When you're intervening in these very com[plex], massively recursive, dynamically coupled systems, small variations can unexpectedly have major changes. So things have a central relevance in terms of their timing, not just their place in time. So think of your Salience Landscape as an unfolding, like in these three dimensions of Aspectuality, Centrality and Temporality.

There's an acronym here: ACT. This is an enACTed kind of Perspectival Knowing. All right, so you've got a consciousness and what it's doing for me, functionally, is all of this (indicates expanded convergence framework of RR), but what it's doing, in that functionality, is all of this (both other frameworks - Featurization + & RR-Participatory Knowing +). And what that's giving me is Perspectival Knowing (gestures up) that's grounded in Participatory Knowing (gestures down) that affords Procedural Training (gestures middle ground) and that it has Aspectuality, a Salience Landscape that has Aspectuality, Centrality and Temporality.

It has... look at what it has: Centrality is the 'hereness' (adds hereness to centrality on X, Y, Z) -my consciousness is 'here', because it is indexed on me. Of course it has 'nowness' because timing is central to it (addsnowness to Temporality on X, Y, Z). Now, that was intended, that move (gestures to hereness andnowness having been added to the graph). And it has 'togetherness' (adds togetherness to aspectuality on X, Y, Z), unity, how everything fits together - I don't want to say unity because unity makes it sound like there's a single thing - but how there's a 'oneness' to your consciousness; it's all together. You have the hereness, thenowness, the togetherness (indicates the X, Y, Z graph), the salience, the Perspectival Knowing (indicates RR - Perspectival + framework), how it is centred on you... A lot of the phenomenology of your consciousness is explained along with the functionality of your consciousness. Is that a complete account? No,

but it's a lot of what your consciousness does and is. It's a lot of what your consciousness does and is.

Getting Ready To Complete RR Convergent Framework (*?*)

I would argue that at least what that gives us is an account that we are going to need for the right hand of the diagram. Why altering States of consciousness can have such a profound effect on your reaching down to your identity (RR - Participatory Knowing), up into your agency (Affordance Obviation - Procedural Knowing). Why it could be linked to things like a profound sense of insight. We've talked about this before, when we talked about higher States of consciousness. How it can feel like a dramatic coupling to your environment (tapping RR - Participatory Knowing); that's that participatory coupling that we found in flow. This all, I think, hangs together extremely well, which means it looks like I have the machinery I need to talk about that right hand [part] of the [convergence] diagram (*?*).

Before I do that, I want to make a couple of important points to remind you of things. Relevance Realization is not cold calculation. It is always about how your body is making risky, affect laden choices of what to do with its precious, but limited cognitive and metabolic and temporal resources.

Relevance Realization is deeply, deeply, always - and think about how this (X, Y, Z graph) also connects to this and to consciousness - it's always, always, an aspect of caring (adds caring to the expanded RR convergence framework). That's what Read Montague argues - the neuroscientist - in his book "Your Brain Is Almost Perfect". That what makes us fundamentally different from computers, because we are in the finitary predicament, is we are caring about our information processing and caring about the information processed therein. So this is always affect. It's things are salient! They're catching your attention! They're arousing, they're changing your level of arousal - remember how arousal is an ongoing, evolving part of this? And they are constantly creating affect, motivation, moving, emotion, moving you towards action. You have to hear how at the guts of consciousness [and] intelligen[ce], there is also caring. That's very important. That's very important because that brings back, I think, a central notion, and I know

many of you are wondering why I haven't spoke about him yet, but I'm going to speak about him later - from Heidegger that at the core of our being in the world (indicates RR - Participatory Knowing +) is a foundational kind of caring. And this connection I'm making, this is not farfetched!

Look at somebody [who was] deeply influenced by Heidegger, who was central to the third generation, or 4E Cognitive science! That's the work of Dreyfus and others, and Dreyfus has had a lot of important history in reminding us that our Knowing is not just Propositional Knowing, it's also Procedural and, ultimately I think, Perspectival and Participatory - he doesn't quite use that language, but he points towards it. He talks a lot about Optimal Gripping and, importantly, if you take a look at his work "Being In The World" on Heidegger, when he's talking about things like caring, he's invoking, in central passages, the notion of relevance. Relevance. And when he talked about what computers can't do and later on what computers still can't do, what they're basically lacking is this Heideggerian machinery of caring, which he explicates in being in the world in terms of the ability to find things relevant. And this of course points again towards Heidegger's notion of Dasein; that our being in the world - to use my language - is inherently transjective. Because all of this machinery is inherently transjective. And it is something that we do not make. We, and our intelligible world co emerged from it. We participate in it, and I want to take a look more at what that means for our spirituality (gestures that this belongs in the empty part of the convergent diagram (*?*)) next time.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

END

Episode 32 - Notes

Per Bak - Self Organising Criticality

Per Bak was a Danish theoretical physicist who coauthored the 1987 academic paper that coined the term "self-organized criticality."

Self Organized Criticality

Self-organized criticality is a property of dynamical systems that have a critical point as an attractor.

Thatcher et al.

[Scholarly articles for Thatcher et al.](#)

Hess and Gross in 2014

[Scholarly articles for Hess and Gross et al 2014](#)

Langer et Al in 2012

[Scholarly articles for Langer et Al in 2012](#)

Hilger et al. in 2016 “Efficient hubs in the intelligent brain, nodal efficiency of hub regions in the salience network are correlated with general intelligence”

[Scholarly articles for Hilger et al. in 2016](#)

Lynn Hasher

Lynn Hasher is a cognitive scientist known for research on attention, working memory, and inhibitory control. Hasher is Professor Emerita in the Psychology Department at the University of Toronto and Senior Scientist at the Rotman Research Institute at Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care.

Cosmelli et al - Binocular Rivalry Experiment - 2004

[Manipulative approaches to human brain dynamics](#)

Monti et al - experiments in 2013

[Scholarly articles for Monti et al - experiments in 2013](#)

Stephan and Dixon - Disruptive Strategies

The Architecture of Cognition: Rethinking Fodor and Pylyshyns Systematicity Challenge - [Buy Here](#)

Schilling - 2005

Matson on salience 1976

"And then this is based on work originally from Matson in 1976, his book on salience"

Scholarly articles for Matson on salience 1976

Here's an article from *Frontiers In Human Neuroscience*: "**“Self-Organizing Free Energy Minimization And Optimal Grip On A Field Of Affordances”** by Bundaberg and Rhett Velde from 2014

Read Montague argues - the neuroscientist - in his book "**“Your Brain Is Almost Perfect”** - [Buy Here](#)

Heidegger

Martin Heidegger was a German philosopher who is widely regarded as one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century. He is best known for contributions to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism

Dreyfus

“Being In The World” on Heidegger - [Buy Here](#)

Heidegger uses the expression Dasein to refer to the experience of being that is peculiar to human beings. Thus it is a form of being that is aware of and must confront such issues as personhood, mortality and the dilemma or paradox of living in relationship with other humans while being ultimately alone with oneself.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

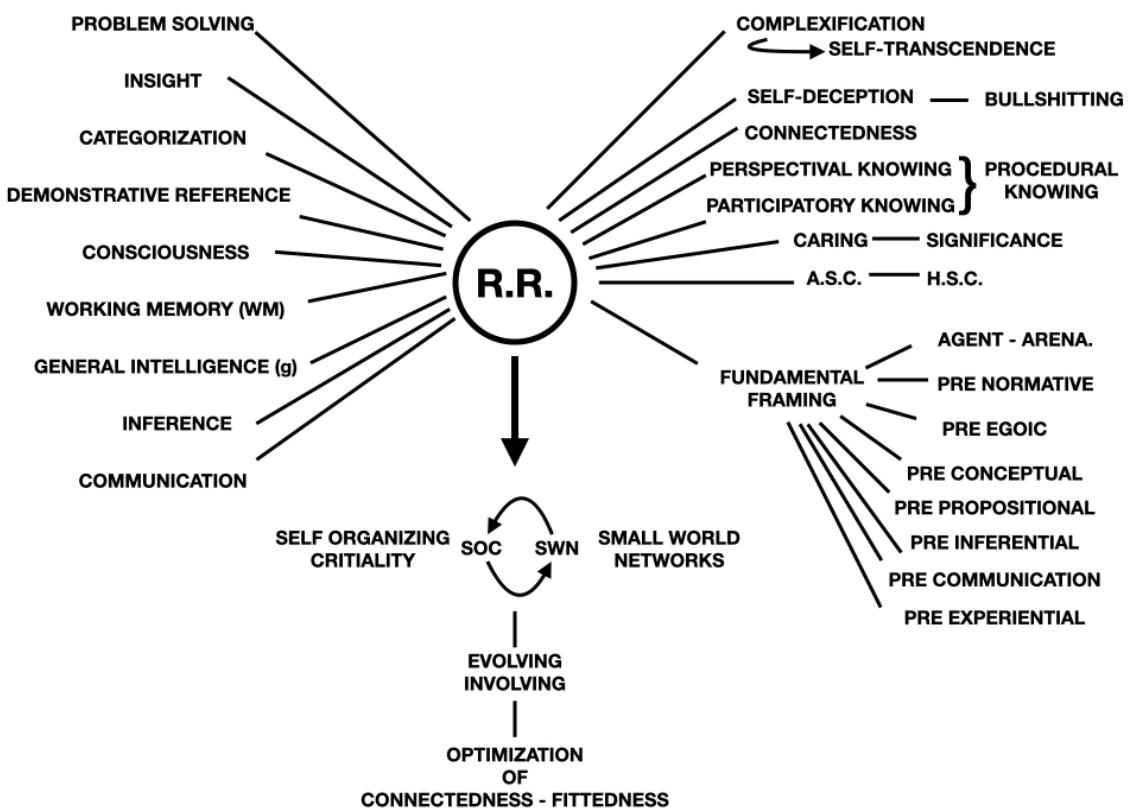
Ep. 33 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - The Spirituality of RR: Wonder/Awe/Mystery/Sacredness

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. Last time I suppose I probably taxed your attention quite a bit because we got into, I tried to keep it as accessible as possible, as jargon free as possible, but we got into some of the nitty gritty of how we could potentially give a naturalistic explanation of Relevance Realization, and see it potentially in being implemented in terms of self-organized criticality and small world networks formation in the brain. And that that in turn could help us to understand general intelligence, insight and a lot of the functionality - and I was even arguing - a lot of the phenomenological aspects of consciousness. And that gives us reason to believe that we may be able to use this machinery to elegantly explain a lot of the central features of human spirituality. We've already seen that this Relevance Realization is Transjective; it's about our fundamental connectedness. Connectedness to the world, connectedness with mind, body together. I'll have to come back to connectedness, to other people. That Relevance Realization is always deeply affective - that at the core of Relevance Realization is a caring that is integral to your cognitive commitment of your precious cognitive, metabolic and temporal resources. That we can see a lot of the stuff that Heidegger was talking about when he was trying to get us back to this primordial sense of meaning in the Transjectivity of Relevance Realization, and that that interpretation of Heidegger comes via Dreyfus and our being in the world.

The Phenomenology Of Relevance Realization

I want to pick up on that now. Instead of just being suggestive, I want to now try and carefully unpack what I want to call the phenomenology of Relevance Realization in terms of meaning making, the kind of meaning making that, ultimately, we have gathered together by the term "Spirituality. So let's gather what we've done. (Proceeds to list all the following on the board) Okay. So we had Problem Solving, and we went over this again in more detail last time. We have Insight, Categorization... all of these things seem to be pro.../ Demonstrative Reference; that's the Finsting, and we put that within the Salience Landscaping. Consciousness, and closely tied to it Working Memory (WM). And then tied to that of course, is (g) (General Intelligence). We've got Inference; that was the stuff with Cherniak. We've got Communication. All of this (draws convergence arrows from all of these) is feeding into Relevance Realization (R.R.). We could give a

naturalistic, structural functional organization of it in terms of Self-Organizing Criticality (SOC) and Small World Networks (SWN), where these are understood to mean families of processes, and these are deeply related together (draws circular feedback arrows between SOC and SWN). And as I've said, we've already got that this is inherently a Transactive. We've got [that] this is an ongoing Evolving [and] Involving - that's what I'm trying to get with caring and participation and how [-] the knowhow is grounded in the situational awareness of Perspectival Knowing, that's grounded in the Participatory, Transjective coupling to the world. So it's this Evolving, Involving Optimization process of your Connectedness; your Fittedness to yourself, to the world, to other people in communication, for example.



All right. (Begins a list on the RIGHT side of the diagram - the post RR divergent side.) I've already given you an argument about how, via Complexification this gives us an account of our capacity for Self

Transcendence, our capacity to produce emergent functions. And we saw that even connected with insight. And we can see that at work directly out of this now (Indicates SOC \Leftrightarrow SWN + (Naturalistic Account of RR)), why self-transcendence, the capacity for self-transcendence to overcom[e] self-deception is actually endemic to your meaning making machinery. In connection with that, of course, this would also explain - these two are related - your tremendous capacity for Self Deception, for bullshitting yourself! Because this has to do with, ultimately, your Salience Landscaping, et cetera. As I mentioned - and that's part of here (SOC \Leftrightarrow SWN +) - the Connectedness that's so central to people's sense of meaning in life - being connected to something that is in some sense greater than them, other than them in an important way, but to whom their identity is nevertheless coupled. I've tried to show you how it gives us a nice account of Perspectival Knowing and Participatory Knowing, and how these two can come together in Procedural Knowing - we'll talk a bit more about that - but the creating of affordances, we've talked multiple times how affordances are the obviation of a transjective relationship within which my skills, my capacity to solve problems, can be reliably trained and developed. [We] talked about, like I said, that this has an aspect of deep Caring in it, so you're going to find the sense of Significance here; this is something that you care about, you bind yourself to, you commit yourself to in a very important way. I already suggested, and I tried to give you that with the account, last time, of insight, how this can help explain what's going on in Altered States of Consciousness (ASC), while you're getting both a change in your salience landscaping, the change in your Relevance Realization machinery, how it can be altering your optimal grip. Optimal gripping is also a case of optimization that fits within this (SOC \Leftrightarrow SWN +), helped to explain our Higher States of Consciousness (HSC).

Now I want to start pointing out some other aspects of it that I think contribute to it being - how do I want to say this? - represented, understood, grasped as spiritual in nature. Let's take a look at some of the features of Relevance Realization that have come out of this argument. (Continuing the list on the RIGHT side of the diagram.) So these are all going to be ways in which we experience this as our Fundamental Framing of reality. But I..., [-] but that's good, but it has a sense of us standing outside! We're inside the

framing! We are participating in it. Okay? It has to do with the framing is at the level of the Agent:Arena. It's not just looking out. It's the inclusive relationship. But I want to point to the fundamentality of this, what I would argue this as a way of interpreting what Heidegger means by the Primordiality of what he was talking about. I'll criticise Heidegger later - I have criticisms of him - but I'm also trying to point out how this work (indicates the entire board), which seems so technical in some sense, can be connected to some very, well, deeply existential and phenomenological philosophy.

The Fundamentality Of Spirituality

Okay, so first of all, the Fundamentality of this: So notice that this (RR) is ultimately Pre-conceptual in nature (adds Pre-conceptual to the list, off of Fundamental Framing). It has to be, because it's below your level of propositional processing: In order to have concepts, you have to categorize (left side). In order to categorize, you have to have Relevance Realization. Also, in order to categorize, you have to first have demonstrative reference (also left side), which is pure pre-conceptual Relevance Realization... So this (Fundamental Framing) is ultimately pre-conceptual in a deep way.

And in that important sense, it's ultimately Pre-Propositional. If what we mean by Belief - and it's often what we mean by belief - is the assertion of propositions and their implications, then Relevance Realization is taking place at a level fundamentally deeper than the level of belief. Now, you understand that I'm not proposing that this is just a bottom up process! Of course, how we conceptualise things and how we have beliefs about things feeds back down! That's why all those diagrams have feedback down arrows in them. But, we're talking about belief ultimately as an effect, it feeds back and effects, but it is ultimately have an effect of Relevance Realization because, of course, this fundamental framing is Pre-Inferential in a deep way because inference [(indicates bottom of the list on the left)]. It's Pre-Communication. That means you can.../ “oh well, I learned this from other people!” Well, no, you can’t! There's a sense in which you can refine it from other people, but you can't ultimately learn it from other people, because (indicates left side of the diagram) learning presupposes it! Being able to pay attention to your mother and pick up on how she's communicating with you,

and make inferences from that so that you start to categorize the world and figure out that this is a bottle, presupposes this (RR). And that points to something else: this is Pre-Experiential. Not in the sense that it's happening to you before you have, like, in some previous life! What I mean is that your meaningfully structured experience, the level of common sense obviousness is a result of it. It is not generated by the level of common sense, obvious, meaningful world. It is generated... That world (SOC \leftrightarrow SWN +) is generated out of Relevance Realization being coupled to the environment. So it is pre-experiential.

It is Pre-Egoic - I think in some important ways it's also Post-Egoic, but I'll come back to that - because your agency and the world as an arena in which you have a narratively structured, reliably acting ego, emerges - these co-emerge out of Relevance Realization. That's why they are primordially connected together in Participatory Knowing. So Relevance Realization is Pre-Egoic. By the time you have 'you' in a 'commonsensically', obviated world of meaningful objects and situations, Relevance Realization has already done a tremendous, tremendous amount of work. So it's Pre-Egoic. It's Pre-Normative, and that's gonna, "Oooooh!!!" some people are not going to like that. Let me... I'm going to qualify that. It's Pre-Normative in the sense that it's your primordial normativity. Before you can assess truth, things have to be meaningful to you. Before you can assess beauty, they have to be aspectualized for you. Before you can assess goodness, you have to have agency and arena. This makes possible your normative judgments as to what is true, what is good and what is beautiful. I'm not saying that those judgments are reducible. That's ridiculous. I'm not saying that, but I'm saying this is primordial to them. That was part of what I think Heidegger was going on about.

So, what I want to talk about now is doing a little bit more of filling out... Putting all of this together (indicates all of the right side of the diagram). Notice how much this points to aspects of human spirituality. You have self-transcendence but you also have foolishness. You have the connectedness, you have the perspectival and participatory knowing you have the co-creation, the co-emergence, the core determination of the agent:arena. You have the core binding together of your agency, your caring and your cognition. Think about Plato. It helps to explain the association of Altered

States of Consciousness and especially Higher States of Consciousness with human spirituality and notice a lot of the features that our spirit is somehow it's deeper, it's deep! Like we have all these deepness metaphors and profundity metaphors, because, well, look what I'm showing you: that it's deeper than your ego, it's deeper than your judgements of truth, goodness and beauty. It's deeper than your propositional thinking. It's deeper than your conceptualisation. The Way that can be spoken of is not the Way! It is pre-inferential. It is pre-communication. It is pre-experiential. It is a fundamental grounding of your being, and you're being connected. Because I'm arguing that those are one and the same.

Religio And “The Joy Of Secularism”

A lot of what is captured by your spirituality is captured by this, the way this machinery unfolds phenomenologically, prospectively, in a participatory fashion. There's these aspects of this that [are] therefore, in a fundamental sense, unconscious, but there are deep aspects of this in our consciousness and there are deep aspects in this, in how our cognition and our consciousness are connected to the world. I want to use a term here, and then I'm going to develop it, for the whole right hand side. I want a term for all of this (gesturing and flinging his arms in a semi-organised fashion at the board). So that I don't have to keep just gesturing and flinging my arms in a semi-organised fashion at the board. I'm going to use a term here. I'm going to use the term Religio, and I'm using it deliberately. Let me explain why! First of all, as soon as you see that many of you are hearing “Religion”, but I'm not using the word religion, I'm using the word Religio, but I want the associations with religion, nevertheless, to be there. Religio is one of the purported etymological origins of the word religion: ‘religare’, which means to read back - which is importantly similar. This (Religio) means to bind together, to bind together, to connect. So it obviously is pointing to this (RR), but it carries with it many of these aspects (right side of the diagram); the primordiality, the fundamental framing of Relevance Realization and all of this machinery. So when I invoke Religio, I am basically invoking the right hand of this diagram. So Religio is in that sense, I'm using the term, I'm using it in a spiritual sense but... okay! So the thing here Paul Vanderclay would probably say that this is a word that fudges ‘spiritual’ and I don't want to be fudging! I am trying to specify how I'm using this word in detail and in

organization. Religio is... I'm using it in a spiritual sense, [in] the sense of a pre-egoic, ultimately a post-egoic, binding that simultaneously grounds the self and its world.

Now I want to pick up on that, and pick up on the evolving, involvement, caring, participant... like all of this (right side of the diagram). And I want to read you a couple of quotes from an article by Paolo Costa in a book called "The Joy of Secularism." He has a fantastic article there called "A Secular Wonder", and he wants to try and explain what's going on in wonder - and think about wonder; think about how it's pointing towards the insight, the sense of opening up, but also the connectedness, how it's perspectival and participatory, how it involves your caring, how it often can merge with awe and altered States and potentially higher States!

So 'wonder' is central, right? But notice [-] the machinery he uses to explain wonder, this is a quote: "The very ordinary fact that things always 'matter'..." and he puts [matter] in quotes "...in some way or other to us, and that we cannot help but be affected by things as if we were immersed in a sort of bubble of meaningfulness..." Notice it's the Relevance Realization, how things matter to us, and he uses the word 'matter' because it's that importance, that constitutive kind of Relevance Realization; and we're immersed in it. (Indicates SOC <=> SWN + on the board) We're immersed in it. "...we're immersed in sort of a bubble of meaningfulness, or better in an atmosphere of significance..." an atmosphere of significance (points at the board) "...an import..." notice the word import is already here! "...that we do not create from scratch..." We do not create it, but are absorbed by! "...the metaphor of the atmosphere should suggest that it's not only the image of a global container, but also of a rhythm of breathing..." Breathing (indicates SOC <=> SWN +) - the compression and particularization, the generalisation and the [-] specialisation, the assimilation and the accommodation... The breathing are the lifeblood of our spirit. "...The metaphor of the atmosphere should suggest not only the image of a global container, but also that of a rhythm of breathing and of a light refraction..." It's doing Relevance Realization! It's refracting the light, structuring the intelligibility! "...to which a living being must..." listen to this word, "...must attune or adjust herself." All the Participatory Knowing! This is from somebody who's commenting on secularism.

He goes on to point out there's a central consequence of what he calls a 'bubble of significance'. This is another quote, "The experience of having a world..." hear the Heidegger in here? "...has its roots, not in a head on and focused relationship with a clearcut object..." it is not something that we have as a focal object, something that we can objectify with an 'I:it' conceptualisation "...the experience of having a world has its roots, not in a head on and focused relationship with a clearcut object, but in the emergence of a bubble of significance that for a Sentient Being plays the same role that is played by the atmosphere with regard to the earth." You participate in the atmosphere; you contribute to it, but you emerge from it and you did not make it. "...It creates, that is, 'special' conditions of life where existentially crucial distinctions between inside and outside are drawn." That primordial ground makes all the distinctions between the inner and the outer possible for us. The Transjectivity is deeper than our subjectivity and our objectivity because the constitution of subjectivity and objectivity require all of this machinery (indicates the left side of the diagram).

Wonder And Awe

He then goes on to argue that because we aren't aware of the atmosphere in a focal, objectified way - I mean, as a perceptually focalised object, I don't mean as an object of thought, right? - he then goes on to argue that "The atmospheric nature of the bubble of significance means that we don't experience it as a focal object, but through non-focal states such as..." and here's the point of his article "...wonder and awe." Or, I would add, their opposites, which we'll talk about later, absurdity and horror. So 'wonder' is that state in which we become aware, in a Participatory and Perspectival way, not in a focal way, but in a Perspectival and Participatory way, of the significance (indicates middle section of the diagram on the board) and our involvement and our indebtedness to, and our participation from, and our committedness to the atmosphere of Relevance Realization.

One is tempted here - and I'm worried here about being sacrilegious, so I'm using this analogously, please! But the analogy is meant to be a strong one also - this 'atmosphere'.../ you see what Costa is doing here? He's invoking what Saint Paul said: "God is in whom we live and move and have our being." I'm not claiming that Relevance Realization is God, that's ridiculous.

I'm not doing that. But what I'm saying is [that] wonder and awe - which are often directed towards things like God - are ways that Costa is arguing in which we disclose the Relevance Realization and its spiritual significance to us (indicates central and right side of the diagram respectively), the way in which within it, we live and move and have our being. Again, this is from a person who is trying to articulate a secular sense of spirituality.

Now, somebody who is aligned with this, but I don't think is secular, is the masterful work by Robert Fuller on Wonder. His book on Wonder (called "Wonder: From Emotion To Spirituality") is just a fantastic book, and he also argues how central wonder is! Now what's interesting [is] he does two things that align with this (Religio) so well, and I highly recommend this book, [-] because it's a book "From Emotion To Spirituality", and what he argues, what Fuller argues, is that of course wonder is responsible for some of our deepest spiritual experiences, our deepest experiences of what I'm calling Religio. But he does that by precisely explaining the fundamental functionality of things like wonder. See wonder is basically in the Being mode, where curiosity is in the Having mode. And curiosity - now I'm using these terms in their prototypical senses. We use these terms in various slippery fashions, so I'm not claiming that *every* time we use the word wonder, or *every* time we use the word curiosity... but I'm talking about the kind of wonder that can overlap very readily and prototypically with 'awe,' and I'm talking about the kind of curiosity that overlaps prototypically with our solving our problems and are manipulating the world in a way that we find powerful and efficacious. See, and again, remember what I said, and it's not the one mode is good and the other mode is bad, but you've got curiosity within the Having mode, and that's great. Right? Because curiosity is problem solving. It's focused, it has a focal object. Curiosity is directed: "What is that? What does that do? How does that work?" Wonder is (big gasp!!! Arms outstretched); it's non-focal, it's the opening up. It's the awe, it's the sense of the atmosphere. It's the perspectival and participatory sense of (gasping again) "Oh! Oh! Ahhh!" And what Fuller argues is - and he makes use of [-] people like Fredrickson and others - it's this emotion, the point of wonder is, if curiosity gets you to focus in on specific features of the world, specific objects, wonder tries to get you to participate in the gestalt, the whole, how does it all fit together? Awe pushes you towards an opening,

an ongoing accommodation, a sense of the inexhaustibleness, the combinatorially explosive nature of reality, and the ongoing, evolving adaptability of your Relevance Realization to that explosive potential within reality itself. That's what wonder does. Wonder isn't about solving a problem. Wonder is about remembering Sati, your Being, by putting you deeply in touch - notice the language - in touch with Religio.

Mystery

Now, that brings me to another aspect that overlaps with the primordiality, or what I'm calling the Fundamentality, the Fundamental Framing. But [-] think about how wonder gives you something like Da'ath again, it gives you the sense of participating, emerging from, co-creating with the ongoing course of your world. Not as a story though. But something you can talk about with a story, like we talk about evolution as a story, but it isn't itself a story, it's grounded in something deeper. So, Wonder, Awe... it's not about solving problems. Remember the Having mode is about solving problems, the Being mode is about confronting a Mystery.

Okay, I'm going to take it that this (diagram) has been now etched into your brain, and I am going to [-] rely on the word Religio to invoke all of the right side and the fact that [that] is dependent on the argument that came from the left side as well (wipes the board clean). So think about, wonder, think about awe (writes these on the board, Awe above Wonder) and what we've been talking about and this remembering of the Being mode - which is so central to spirituality, right? So that's another aspect of this. Okay, so think about this (Awe) as Accommodation, that 'opening up', [-] when I accommodate, I come to know something by how I am transformed in order to come into contact with it, and in [-] my self-knowing of how I've changed and [-] the disclosure, my realization of that, what that is, are bound together. Like prototypically, when you're in love with somebody, Da'ath. Okay, so this is accommodation and it's in the being mode (underlines accommodation and adds Being mode), you're remembering Sati. And in the Being mode, you're confronting a mystery (adds mystery, off of Being mode). Do you remember, [we] talked about Marcel's idea about how a mystery - and notice the machine - we've got (draws a little box), here's how I framed my problem, and then I realized - there's a kind of insight - that my, so there's an insight

that “Oh, that framing is, it's problematic!” And I moved to a more encompassing frame (draws another slightly bigger box around the first), and “Oh, no!” And then what starts to happen is (draws yet another encompassing box with an arrow going from inside the first box to the outer box), [Gasp!!], I'm opening up, “Ahhhhh”, right? I'm opening up, and my insight goes from a reframing to a transframing, because I stopped having insights about my focal problem [and] I start getting an insight, not about just the problem or the world, I also - remember of the sensibility transcendence; I'm also getting an insight into the inadequacies of my style of framing, my way of framing - I'm getting a trans-framing happening.

You get this Trajectory Of Transframing. It doesn't stabilise, and that's the point! It can't land on a focal object! All it's disclosing in the trajectory of transforming is the machinery of Religio. And yet you find that - like flow - you find that deeply meaningful. To a point. If it's pushed too far it becomes deeply meaningful in a negative sense, of horror. Now think about this. Think about how - and we have to be really careful here - I want to talk about the mystery of Religio (writes Religio off of mystery). But I need to make a distinction here and it's a distinction I've discussed before, but let's go over it very carefully. There's a distinction between something being a phenomenological mystery, and it being something that I cannot theoretically explain. To equivocate them is to equivocate between Propositional and Perspectival Knowing, for example, and we should not equivocate between them because they're not identical. So for example, it is phenomenologically impossible for me to Perspectively know what it is like to be dead, because whenever I try to conjure up a frame (indicates the smallest, central box in the diagram), “Oh, I'm in a dark room! But wait, I'm still there in the dark room. There's the hereness and the nowness... Oh well, then I'm nowhere! Well, then I'm just an empty...!” No matter what I do, I can't get a framing that has within it my own non-existence, perspectively. But that is not proof that I'm immortal. It is not proof that I've existed for all time. Of course not. That's ridiculous! That's a mistake. That's an equivocation. So when I'm talking about mystery, I'm not talking automatically...you need an additional argument. You need an additional argument to go from phenomenological mystery to the claim of theoretical inexplicability. They do not follow, because they are not identical for the

deep reason that Propositional and Perspectival Knowing are not identical. That is an equivocation.

So I'm talking about a phenomenological mystery here. Well, what is at the core of Religio? Well, the death example actually points to something more primordial! It points to the fact that I can never make a focal object of my framing, my capacity for Relevance Realization. I mean, Perspectively. What I mean by that is whenever I am thinking or doing anything, [-] it's always framed because if I'm unframed, I'm facing combinatorial explosion, which is not intelligible to me. So whatever I'm thinking of is inside the frame (draws another little frame/box). But what is precisely not inside the frame is the framing process (draws a little arrow connecting to the frame/box). So here's the frame, or here's the framed - even better! (Writes framed inside the box.) And here's the framing (the arrow), and what's not in there is the framing! "OH!!!" you say, "Oh, what I'll do is I'll do this. (Draws a bigger frame around the framing + framed diagram, encompassing it all) HAHA! That was easy, John!!! HAAA, John! I got you! That was easy!!!" NO! You didn't get me because (changes Framing to another Framed and draws another arrow outside the bigger box, connecting to it) what's outside here still is... what is framing that? You cannot have this... You can't have it as a focal object. It is mysterious. It is phenomenologically mysterious. James pointed to this in a wonderful distinction between the I and the Me (I: Me). These are the aspects of you that you can bring into view. "Well, who am I? Well, I'm John Vervaeke and this is what I look like" - here's an image in my mind - and what's not there is whatever it is that's generating that name and that image. And then I go deeper and say, "Ah, but here's the part [-] that was generating the part that was... (gesticulates a regression)" [-] I can never see - and the pun again, right!? - "I can never see the "I," I'm always seeing by means of the "I." It is phenomenologically mysterious to [us], but it doesn't mean that I'm unaware of it. I always have - to use older language, from the course I mean - I always have a subsidiary awareness. I'm always aware through my "I" of my "me". I'm always aware through my framing of my framed. I'm not completely out of touch with it. It is not inaccessible to me, but I cannot focalised it. I can not make it a focal object. I cannot frame it. The machinery of Relevance Realization is in that sense, deeply phenomenologically mysterious to me. It doesn't mean I can't talk

about it theoretically. I've just been doing it! But it has a deep phenomenological mystery to me! The fact that it grounds, it makes possible my subjectivity and the objectivity, where what I mean by that is things constellated into objects that we can make inferences about, et cetera (writes subjectivity and objectivity on the board and triangulates them with RR transjectivity). I can't use the grammar of subjects and objects, subjects and predicates, conceptual categories to talk about this (RR transjectivity) in the sense of exemplifying it! I can use words to talk about it in the sense of pointing to it, but I can't produce it in subjective and objective categories, precisely because the whole argument points towards its transjective nature. Again, that only [-] makes it phenomenologically mysterious. It doesn't make it a theoretical inexplicability.

I can... look, you cannot confuse properties of your theory with properties of what your theory is about. If I have a theory of light, it itself isn't light! If I have a theory of war, my theory isn't itself an instance of war. If I have a theory of gravity, my theory isn't itself generating gravity! My theory of vagueness doesn't itself have to be vague! In fact, my theory of vagueness should be clear. My theory doesn't have to exemplify what it's talking about, and there are cases where it cannot exemplify what it is talking about. But that doesn't mean I can't talk about what I'm talking about. It has to be that I have to understand the limitations that are given by the differences between the kinds of Knowing, and also the ways in which I can and cannot bridge between these kinds of Knowing.

So there's something deeply phenomenologically mysterious. And in that mystery, the mystery opens up an affordance of a trajectory of transframing that allows us to participate in, perspectively, the kind of wonder and awe of Religio. You can get into something very much like a transjective trajectory flow state, in which we are basically celebrating, in flow, our participation in Religio. And we do this, I would argue, for the very good reason that to make significant, to reflect upon, to celebrate and enact Religio is to fundamentally enhance our agency, the disclosure of the world, and our connectedness to it. And what else could be more valuable to us? What else could be more valuable to us? (Board is wiped clean.)

The Sacred and Sacredness

So I think there is now a major objection that could be levelled against the argument that I am building. And I take this objection very seriously. This is the argument that, “Yes, John, I will grant you [that] with Costa there's all kinds of wonderful, spiritual, meaningful things on this side. And you're capturing a lot about mystery and self-transcendence and also the negative capacity of bullshitting ourselves and reciprocal narrowing and falling into despair and addiction. You're capturing all of that! I'll grant you all of that. Perhaps you're not, but just for the sake of the argument... So I'm granting you all of that...” But there's still something missing that I think is central to how I use the word “spirituality,” and what I would say [is] missing from Religio that's found in religion is to confront The Sacred (writes The Sacred on the board). I'm trying to use a term as neutral as possible here because it's unclear, I think, if we should apply the term “divinity,” for example, to the Buddhist notion of Śūnyatā or the Taoist notion of the Tao. I don't think calling it divine is a plausible interpretation. Whereas God is divine, I don't think you should call the Tao divine, but the Tao is clearly sacred in an important way. And I think for many versions of Buddhism, the Śūnyatā has a kind of important kind of sacredness.

So the thing here is, there's two things we have to talk about, and we have to talk about them carefully; keep them distinct, but also show how they're connected (writes The Sacred and Sacredness on the board). So The Sacred is typically when we want some account of the metaphysics of what grounds our experience of sacredness. So this is basically a metaphysical proposal (writes this under The Sacred). A standard Western proposal - although I've already given you an indication that it's not universal; it's not in things like Buddhism or Taoism - is that the sacredness[-] is grounded, the metaphysical proposal, is grounded in being supernatural in some sense, and of course that's a very loaded term (adds Supernatural under metaphysical proposal). I'm going to use it in the way I've argued for in this video series, something that is historically constructed, running through people like Aquinas and beyond.

[-] So [that] is the metaphysical proposal, and then you ultimately have a psycho-existential proposal over here (writes psycho-existential proposal under Sacredness) which is... well, this is what it's like to experience sacredness. This distinction comes to the fore, for example, historically - and

there's so many people, right? I wish I could talk about more. I need, I need three more series! But if I tried to run this for 150 episodes, my crew would kill me and then, then there'd be a tragedy! They'd end up in jail! It would just be a mess! So I'm going to stick to the 50, right? - But [these] proposal[s], pulling these apart, you find this, of course, prototypically, in the work of Schleiermacher, where he puts aside this proposal (The Sacred/Metaphysical Proposal) because it's coming into serious disrepute because of the advent of the scientific revolution, and he shifts towards, "well, but what's the psychological, existential experience of sacredness?" and his proposal that it's the experience of absolute dependence coupled, I would argue, with things like wonder and awe. But that distinction came to the fore in work by Schleiermacher. And you can see a lot of theological debate, I would argue - I can't do the argument here - but you could see [a lot of the] theological debate as the debate between a side that wants to emphasise Sacredness and a side that wants to emphasise The Sacred.

So I want to talk about this (Psycho-Existential Proposal), but I want to talk about this in a way that reflects back on that (Metaphysical Proposal). Why do I start here (Psycho-Existential Proposal)? I start here because, of course, I've argued that Religio is exactly a psycho existential. Very powerfully read this though (underlines existential boldly). This has to do with modal, with the Being mode, it has to do with your modal existence. It has to do with transjectivity, it has to do with primordiality. You have to read this in a deeply Heideggerian sense, but that's what I mean... And psycho (underlines also) meaning having to do with cognitive processing, all the kinds of knowing, your embodiment, your 'embededness'... So reading psycho - psychological - in also a very comprehensive way. But I'm clearly arguing that Religio [is going] on here (psycho-existential properties). So first of all, I should start here because that's where I'm starting from (Sacredness). And I want to talk about Sacredness within a psycho-existential sense. And then if I can, if - because I've already done this (Religio); [I've] ground this in RR (writes RR beside Religio), Relevance Realization - then I'm going to make proposals about what this (indicates Metaphysical Proposal & Supernatural) tells us about the kinds of constraints that are available to us in our metaphysical proposal. And I'm going to propose an alternative to this (again indicates Metaphysical Proposal & Supernatural) which I imagine will be

controversial, but I hope that the controversy will be constructive rather than merely adversarial. All right, [-] I'm going to start here (Psycho-Existential) and I'm trying to be honest with you, I'm trying to be clear about what I'm trying to do. I'm not trying... I don't want to be shuffling any cards from the bottom of the deck here. Right. I'm trying to be as upfront as I possibly can be. Of course I'm not unbiased, or any kind of magical claim like that, but I'm trying my best to put the machinery that I'm aware of using and that I'm deliberately putting into play out front so that we can talk about this as clearly, and as honestly as possible. (Cleans board.)

Okay. So let's talk about Sacredness as a psycho-existential thing. And where I want to start is in the machinery of the Agent:Arena relationship (writes agent - arena on the board). And I want to bring back the work of Geertz, and we talked about the work of Brian Walsh and we talked about this when we talked about homicide, and homicide as the loss of something. And this points to a very central feature of sacredness, that is so central that we can... it's so backgrounded that we can, I think inappropriately, trivialise it. But remember [-] how disastrous homicide is, remember what happens if you actually experienced homicide: if [-] I fling you into another culture and you experienced deep culture shock, or I isolate you in solitary confinement. So that deep loneliness, that deep homesickness, that deep cultural shock, that's homicide. And so part of sacredness, Geertz argues, part of sacredness is 'to home the world'. I understand why he puts it [that way], but it's not homing the world, it's homing us and the world together. Right? [-] We are homed into the world, and the world homes around us, very much like Costa's atmospheric bubble. So this is the idea that one of the functions of sacredness is what Geertz called a Meta-Meaning Function. Now he talks about this in his work on religion, but he's definitely in the Schleiermacher side of things. So this is not inappropriate for me to do it this way. And this is something that fits in with our argument very well. Geertz argues - and be careful here because people jump.../ - he argues that religion isn't a system of meaning - "Ooooooooh no!" Okay, wait, wait! He thinks it's a system of Meta-Meaning. So, whatever distinct meaning systems we make - here's a legal system, here's a moral system, here's a fashion system, here's an entertainment system - we have all these meaning systems, but notice the argument that we've already made: those are all dependent on the

primordiality of the transjective relationship between the agent and the arena. If that relationship doesn't hold, none of those other systems can work, which is why when, if you go to another culture and you don't go through the participatory transformation, right? If you don't, and you're just experiencing culture shock - homicide - the Agent:Arena relationship isn't in place! Then none of those other meaning systems can work for you. They'll be absurd. They won't make sense. That's what he means by it being a Meta-Meaning system. What it does, he argued, [is] that religion - I would argue what the experience of sacredness is because, again, the word religion fudges between, 'are we talking about the Schleiermachian sense', or are we talking about 'the Metaphysical Referent'? Okay? So, remember, I'm pulling these apart to try and avoid that confusion. So, but what Geertz is talking about here is that if you don't have that (agent/arena), that none of your individual meaning systems work, and 'religion', in the sense of the experience, the cultural and individual experience of sacredness, is what gives us the Meta-Meaning system that protects us from homicide. It protects us from the horrors and the absurdities of homicide. So one of the functions of sacredness is the Meta-Meaning process of homing us against horror (Meta-Meaning => Sacredness => Homing Against Horror) where horror would be to be overwhelmed by loneliness, . Would be overwhelmed by homesickness, cultural shock and a tremendous sense of alienation, absurdity, and anxiety.

Now that's important! I think that's a very important function of sacredness. What we do when we go into a sacred setting, is we play with Meta-... We have psycho-technologies - and I'll come back and give a [-] clear definition as we work that out, of a psycho-technology - but we have psycho-technologies that allow us to do this serious play with sacredness, so that we are constantly being homed against horror. And of course, many of you are aware of all the research showing that people that belong to religious communities or spiritual pathways are much more resilient in the face of the tragedies and horrors of life. That's a reliable finding. [-] You have to seriously consider the other costs, but one of the ways in which you can improve your capacity to make your way through the world is to be committed to a spiritual community and a spiritual path. And presumably it also has a history behind it. It has institutions, et cetera, and that would make

it, more prototypically, like a religion. Again, you know me by now, I'm not advocating for a nostalgic return to religion! I'm trying to point out, though, the functionality. So, Worldview Attunement (adds this: Meta-Meaning => Sacredness => Homing Against Horror=>Worldview Attunement). Homing us against horror. Remember Costa even used the word attune in there. That's definitely a function of [Sacredness].

Now here's where I want to criticise Geertz. I think that while this is definitely an important part of... [-] I think that there is a mistake if we think that sacredness can be reduced to, or identified solely with, the machinery of Worldview Attunement and homing us against horror. It's very plausible to me that this is a necessary feature of Sacredness, but I do not think it is a sufficient feature. So if we go back to Hellenistic homicide, if you remember, we talked about the different kinds of responses. There was syncretism, and then there was things like stoicism and the remembering of the Being mode. But there was also Gnosticism. And Gnosticism keeps reverberating, right? It keeps reverberating through everything we're doing here. And Gnosticism, of course, is a way of trying to awaken us to the primordiality of, and the mystery in some important sense, of Religio. That's definitely what's going on, but there's something interesting about the Gnostics, and that's the element that Decoda emphasised: that the trajectory of reframing is ultimately understood as transgressive. It's trying to overturn the grammar of a worldview. It is transgressive in a deep, deep sense. And I think that that points towards something else that the sacred does for us. And this goes towards the work of Otto - deeply influenced by Kant! I hope you see how, in a way, my work is deeply influenced by Kant, also by Hegel.

But Otto, in his book, which [has] translated the idea of The Holy - [a] very bad translation! Many people argue [that] a better translation would be something like the experience of the Numinous, because Otto's argument is precisely [that] this notion (Holy) has become very clouded for us. Okay. It is plausibly related to notions of wholeness and completeness. There's probably connections to words like "health," which people wouldn't automatically think of. But we know that people typically think about this connected now in terms of a moral term or righteousness (writes both health and moral righteousness off of Holy on the board). But this association

(health) says “well, something else is going on here.” Again, the etymologies are contested. Of course, with a word like that (Holy). We know that this (Holy) is also weirdly associated with this (Glory), and I mentioned this before: glory; the “glory of God”, which is the predicate most often applied to him in the old Testament. And that's not a moral term.

So what we've got to get to is what's going on here in this experience of the Holy (circles Holy with Health, Moral Righteousness and Glory coming off it) and Otto created this term, the Numinous - picked up of course, by Jung - to describe what the original, the primordial experience of the numinous is. Before all of these (circled terms), but what this (Glory) is most pointed towards. A little bit of this (Health), not so much this (moral righteousness). What the numinous is, is the fundamental experience.

And here's what I'm going to talk about next time: that the experience of the numinous is ultimately to experience the transgressive side of the sacredness, how it opens us up in wonder and awe, and even takes us to the horizon of horror.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

END

Episode 33 - Notes

[Cherniak](#) (3:49)

Christopher Cherniak is an American neuroscientist, a member of the University of Maryland Philosophy Department.

[Paul Vanderclay / Vanderklay?](#)

[Paolo Costa](#)

"Paolo Costa [contributing to] a book called the joy of secularism"

Book Mentioned: The Joy of Secularism - by George Levine - [Buy Here](#)

He has a fantastic article there called a secular wonder: [\(PDF\) A Secular Wonder | Paolo Costa - Academia.edu](#)

Book Mentioned: Robert Fuller; his book on Wonder - [Buy Here](#)

Gabriel Marcel

"Marcel's idea about how a mystery..."

Marcel argued that scientific egoism replaces the "mystery" of being with a false scenario of human life composed of technical "problems" and "solutions".

Book Mentioned: **The Mystery of Being: Reflection and Mystery** - [Buy Here](#)

The Mystery of Being contains the most systematic exposition of the philosophical thought of Gabriel Marcel, a convert to Catholicism and the most distinguished ...

William James

"James pointed to this in a wonderful distinction between the I and the me (I: Me)"

William James was an American philosopher and psychologist, and the first educator to offer a psychology course in the United States. James is considered to be a leading thinker of the late nineteenth century, one of the most influential philosophers of the United States, and the "Father of American psychology".

Schleiermacher

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher was a German Reformed theologian, philosopher, and biblical scholar known for his attempt to reconcile the criticisms of the Enlightenment with traditional Protestant Christianity.

Geertz

Clifford James Geertz was an American anthropologist who is remembered mostly for his ... Worldview and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols", writing that "the drive to make sense out of experience, to give it form and order, is evidently as real...

Brian Walsh

Brian J. Walsh serves as the Christian Reformed Church chaplain to the University of Toronto. With Richard J. Middleton, he wrote The Transforming Vision and Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be

Book Mentioned: Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be - [Buy Here](#)

“there's something interesting about the Gnostics and that's the element that Decoda emphasized”

Otto

Rudolf Otto was an eminent German Lutheran theologian, philosopher, and comparative religionist. He is regarded as one of the most influential scholars of religion in the early twentieth century and is ...

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Ep. 34 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Sacredness: Horror, Music, and the Symbol

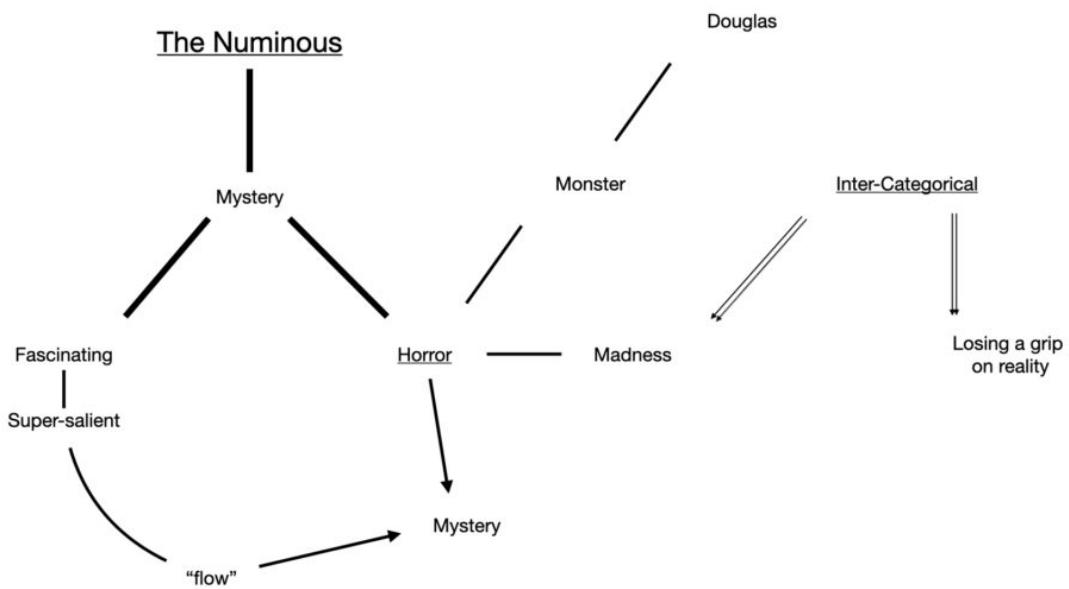
Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. So last time I tried to develop with you the right side of the plausibility argument I'm making, and tried to give an account of central features of human spirituality and to try not to use that term, therefore, in a vague, indefinite way. And then I made an argument for how Relevance Realization can explain many of the facets that are found within the normal attribution of human spirituality. And I proposed a term, “Religio”, to cover all of those aspects of spirituality that can be explained by the machinery of relevance realization. There was, of course, an important lacuna; there was something that was still missing from that account and this was the account of the Sacred. And then I propose to you, in order to avoid confusion, especially post-Schleiermacher, that we should make a distinction between the metaphysical proposal of the ground or the cause of the experience of sacredness, where Schleiermacher is emphasising the experience. And then for reasons of the way my argument

has unfolded, since I'm talking about the psycho-existential machinery of sacredness, as opposed to the metaphysical proposal, at least initially that is where I should begin.

So I'm talking now, we began to speak about, a way of using the theoretical machinery we have developed here in order to talk about Sacredness, and we began by going to the work that we'd already talked about, about Domicide, back to the work of Giertz. We talked about [how in] Sacredness, one of the ways it functions, one of the ways we can experience it is that it functions as a meta-meaning system that affords a worldview attunement and thereby homes us against horror. But then I noted that, of course, in the Hellenistic Domicide there was not only the machinery that attempted to re-home us like the syncretic religions and, one could probably argue, also Stoicism as I've already argued. But there was also an alternative response which was the transgressive response of the Gnostics, ultimately.

And I then said that gives us an opening into another aspect of Sacredness, and this is the work of Otto and his book that, as I mentioned, was typically entitled "The Idea Of The Holy," and I said a better translation would perhaps be The Experience Of The Numinous. And what Otto was proposing is that before we had a moral interpretation of holiness, there was a pre-moral view of what I'm calling sacredness, [-] or at least an aspect of sacredness, I should say. And what Otto was pointing to was the experience of the Numinous, which is closely related to the adjective that is most applied to God, for example in the Old Testament, which is "Glorious". God is shining and overwhelming and powerful, but Glory does not carry with it any moral sense. In fact, one way of interpreting what's going on in the book of Job is a contrast between some of Job's moral arguments about his suffering, and God's response is to present his Glory and how Numinous he is. And so you're seeing sort of a conflict between these different aspects of holiness in Job. Of course, that's not all that's happening in the book of Job, and perhaps when I speak of Jung we'll get back to that.

The Numinous



But right now what I want to pick up on is this insight by Otto that a part of sacredness seems to be the experience of the Numinous (writes the numinous on the board). And the numinous seems to be transgressive in important ways. In fact, it seems to be taking us into the heart of the very thing that the Giertzian model of sacredness was supposed to home us against, which is experiences that border on horror. Now Otto describes this experience of the numinous as having three central aspects to it. It is a Mystery (writes mystery off of the numinous) very much in the way I argued last time; the sense that we got from Marcel of something that brings about sensibility transcendence, that sort of trajectory of transframing. And then it has two opposing poles in it which make a lot of sense, I think, given what we've built together. One is that it is deeply Fascinating (writes fascinating off of mystery), it compels. So a good way [-], I think a very plausible way of understanding this is [that this is] super-salient to you (labels fascinating with super-salient). It is really grabbing your attention, involving you, you can't pull away. So it's super-salient. And then the other is, he said, it's terrifying! It's horrifying! There's an aspect of Horror to this (writes horror off of mystery).

Now I've got to stop for a minute. I don't want to use the word terror! It goes back to his original term, but the problem with terror is, of course, it has

become deeply enmeshed with us with notions of terrorism. And I want to put that aside. I'm gonna use the word Horror because it doesn't have that kind of association, but I have to now distance how I want to use this word from how it's become typically used by us.

So I [once] mentioned to you that most mystery novels and mystery movies aren't mysterious at all, that they don't have you confront mystery. They give you just a difficult problem to solve. And in that sense, they're instances of a kind of important modal confusion that is pervasive in our culture. Same thing with many horror movies. Many horror movies do not actually expose you to horror. Many horror movies actually expose you to being deeply startled with fear. So deeply startled with fear. So much of what passes for horror movies are movies that prey on our sort of ancestral fear of predation. Where there is some monster that - although the monster points towards something, and I'll come back to that, and this is [-] good work done by Jonathan Pageot on how we should think about monsters; we'll come back to that (writes monster off horror) - and the monster is basically hidden in some way or unknown and it's preying upon people, and most of what's called Horror is the surprising way in which the monster will suddenly appear and prey upon its victims, and then they get ripped apart! So you were startled: "Oh no, no. Ahh!" right? And most of that is not horror.! I mean, I imagine it has... I find those movies boring, actually. I understand why some people - this is just a statement of taste - I don't find them very interesting. The sort of "startle and puncture" movies don't appeal to me. And they're often enmeshed also with sort of crypto-messages about sexuality and things like that, that need to be challenged. Putting all of that aside, when I say Horror, you have to... There's a few movies that capture it. Because horror has to do with what we talked about with respect to Giertz. Horror is when your sense of contact with reality is being challenged, undermined. Where you feel you have a grasp on things and then it's slipping away. So horror, therefore, is often prototypically not associated with fear or directly with fear, it's associated with insanity or madness. And of course there is the primordial fear of becoming insane (writes madness off of horror).

Horror Out Of The Inter-Categorical

Now, the monster points to something very, very interesting. And this goes back to the work of Mary Douglas: that we often find creatures that are inter-categorical for us, monstrous, (writes inter-categorical off of monsters), because that's on a continuum with another important feature of things being inter-categorical. So what is meant by inter-categorical? Inter-categorical are things that don't fall into our ready-made categories, and therefore we typically regard them as 'weird'. [Douglas] talks about how they're 'unclean'. She does an interesting discussion about [how], in the Bible, the book of Leviticus, all the animals that are unclean, they're very weird! It's a very weird collection. If you tried to find some sort of essence, like why owls are unclean and crocodiles are unclean and whatever, and certain birds are unclean... It doesn't make any sense! And then she goes in and argues, well, no, what happens is, [-] there's ways in which people have categorized things, and those categories have a certain pattern. And when that pattern is being broken, then these things challenge our grip on the world.

They challenge our grip on the world. For example, there's an idea, Douglas argues, that you should have an interconnection between a creature's shape - its morphology, its means of locomotion, and its location, like where it lives (writes shape, locomotion and location in a triangle). So if it lives in the sea, it should swim and therefore it should have a fish shape. So you have things that are in the sea that don't seem to be swimming, like the "Crawley's Shellfish, and therefore they're kind of weird, and they turn out to be unclean. Right? And then you also have this same, she argues, this same schema is applied (indicating the above triangle). Now we think, "Ooooh, those archaic ancient people." No, but remember, don't do that, because we talked about how we also have purity codes.

We find things unclean that thwart our system of categorisation. Remember, if I take this (picks up his water bottle) and spit into it repeatedly, and then swirl it around and drink it back, you're grossed out! That's unclean to you, because I have this whole structural functional organization, a way of categorizing myself, and my self's relationship to my body, and how that's other than the environment. And then there's important boundaries that shouldn't be crossed. And when the spirit comes out of me, it becomes inter-categorical. It's me, but it's not me because it's not inside me, it's outside of me, but somehow it was produced... and ahhhhh! It's inter-categorical, it's

yucky and get rid of it! So this is not a feature of ancient thought. This is a way in which we respond to things that violate our core categorical ways of making sense of the world.

Now, some of those things we just regard as yucky or gross or unclean. But if the inner-categorical thing is inter-categorical between really, really central categories, and it is represented as threatening to us, then it [-] originally invoked horror for us. So if you take a look at many horror creatures, they're prototypically inter-categorical. The Wolfman is inter-categorical between the beastial and the personal. The ghost is into categorical between the living and the dead. The vampire is also inter-categorical between the living and the dead, and also between being alive in the sense of consuming, and being alive in the sense of being able to be generative. Because of course the vampires consume and do not produce. And of course there's the work that Christopher Mastropietro and Filip Miscevic and I did, and Jonathan Pageau [-] independently did work on the zombie, and how the zombie is an inter-categorical monster to represent our current situation, the Meaning Crisis, and you're going to see a video of Chris Mastropietro and I talking about all of that, so I won't get that into detail. So the fact that the monster is inter-categorical points [to] - and that inner-categoricalness can be on a spectrum from just "eww, yucky!" to, "AHHHHH!", losing a grip on reality, and intelligibility, because of the deep connectedness between realness and intelligibility - this [inter-categorical] points, again, to the connection to madness; and all of this points to losing a grip, losing that contact, that comprehensive grip, losing that optimal grip on reality.

An Example Of Horror From Fiction

So you can create pretty significant horror without having to do the startle and puncture moment. I want to relate one to you where I've had the most, for me, the most prototypical and salient example of an experience of horror that had nothing to do with the prototypical 'something jumping out the shadow with sharp, pointy bits!' I was watching Kubrick's "The Shining." Many of you have probably seen it. If you haven't seen it, of course, there's been 10,000 memes about it, and it's pervasive throughout popular media. And I guess my own intellectual arrogance contributed to the aesthetics of the horror. I was watching this movie - and spoilers here, but this movie has

been around for a long time, so I think it's fair game - as I was watching this movie, I'm watching this character and he seems to be going mad, the Jack Nicholson character, and that in and of itself is very interesting; it's of course evocative of all of this. And then I'm getting, "Oh, right... Stephen King has some deep criticisms of alcoholism. And so this is a very extended metaphor for the descent through alcoholism into madness." And then I was patting myself on my back, I get this movie, this movie is just a symbolic way of talking about alcoholism and everything. And he's hearing voices in his head, and that's a clear sense of madness. And I had it all well-structured; well in-hand, as we say, and then there's a scene where [-] his wife actually traps Jack Nicholson inside some sort of pantry and locks it from the outside. And then I remember coming to a full stop, and I thought, "Well, what's going to happen now? She's trapped him. He's locked in. That's it!" Then the voices are talking to him in his head, and I'm sort of dismissing that because "yeah, yeah, he's mad. He's going to talk to the voices! But so what?" And the voices in his head are sort of chiding him, "What are you doing? How'd you let it get to this..." and I'm thinking, "Yeah, yeah, you're mad and you're going to spiral into insanity. Great, great and everything." And then the voices say, "Okay, it's time to go!" And then the voices say, "Now we're going to let you out." And then they open the door [expresses surprise] from the outside... the voices in his head! And a chill went down my spine, because I realized, "Oh, I'm in a much different world than I thought I was in." I thought I had this completely down. And no, no, these voices have an independent reality, and there is something else going on here. Now, nothing startling was happening. All they were doing was opening the door so he could get out, but it was an absolute chill of horror going through me [-].

And that's the most profound experience of horror I've ever had in a movie, precisely because what had happened there was, I went from being out here, looking at all of this to, "I don't know what's going on!" And I was suddenly participating in his madness, because I didn't know what was going on, and I was losing a grip on this situation, and there were forces at work here that I didn't understand! That's horror. That's horror. And, I think there's situations that bring people into genuine horror, but I think it's much rarer than we realize.

All right, so given that (inter-categorical discussion), and like I said, we will return to talk about this (monster) later... Given the sense of horror as being the polar extreme of this continuum of the weirdness, the eeriness, the yuckiness of the inter-categorical; the spaces in our grip on reality, through which things can slip. We can return to this (horror).

An Example Of Horror From Every Day Life

So the numinous is super-salient. There's almost something like a flow state, in that we're being drawn into it. But it also has with it, aspects of horror. It shakes at the structure of our worldview. Now you say, "Wow, what's an example of this?" Okay. So here's an example of where I think people brush up against the numinous, and it's fairly widespread, so many of you will have encountered it. It's one that I find, I guess, annoying, because I find it dangerous.

So this happens, you're driving home and there's been an accident on the highway. And people are slowing down. It's very dangerous to slow down. Everybody knows you shouldn't slow down like that, because it's dangerous to slow down, because the chances are you're going to cause another accident, which does in fact frequently happen. But nevertheless, people feel compelled to slow down. They are fascinated by this, because they hope to see something horrifying. Not just disgusting; they're hoping that they will see death. That they'll somehow get a confrontation with this. And that, of course, is horrifying because death has the capacity to... the confrontation with the threat of death, the presence of death, has the possibility to completely sever your grip on reality. Literally, in fact. But they can't look away! But if they see something, they have the potential of being very unpleasantly horrified. But of course, there's something also missing in this because they can't actually see death. Right? They can see the fact of death, in the sense of the result of something or someone dying. But that won't actually put them into something we've already discussed; that won't actually give them what they want: a grip on the mystery of death, the phenomenological mystery of death. And that tells you something. Wonder and awe have us open up to mystery. But if the mystery becomes overwhelming, if it causes us to lose any potential sense, any sense of our potential ability to get an insight or an understanding that typically comes

with wonder... Awe is sort of liminal, but with horror, it's like, "ahhhh" (gasping) and it's expanding so fast and "ahhhhh!" (gasping again), I'm getting overwhelmed so fast, I'm being forced to accommodate so fast, this is like the absolute worst culture shock, and I'm experiencing horror.

Horror From a Fascination-Like Flow State

We can think of horror [as] when... notice what you've got here (indicates fascination/super-salient); you've got all the indications of flow, right? Or something like flow, at least the beginning of it, where you're getting drawn in [to] this accelerating loop. Something like it, at least. It's super-salient to you, but it's super salient - and this is why I'm hesitating to just call it straight out flow - it's super salient, but not in the fact that you're deeply coupled; it's super salient in the way that you're seeking to be deeply coupled. And your machinery is going faster and faster, but it's not actually getting a purchase. Because what's happening is, you're getting horrified by mystery. Now it's like, "Wow! That's... that's an experience of the numinous?" And if you read parts of the Bible - or like, or you can read other literature too, but the Bible of course is prototypical for a lot of these people, these researchers like Otto - like there's passages in the Old Testament in which God is like this. Right? ...it's just weird and strange and horrifying aspects of God. Fascinating, super-salient and you're drawn in, and it's like - like I said, I don't want to call it anti-flow because anti-flow is depression - but it's like the shadow of flow, you're trying to (gasps), and you're getting drawn in and all the machinery of coupling is speeding up to try and get what it can get, which is a stable relationship. And so wonder... you don't get wonder... you might not even get awe! If it's too much, it can pass into horror.

Awe, Bordering On Horror And Our Ultimate Insignificance

So it's plausible that this is one of the ways of interpreting certain commands in the Bible. [-] It's often translated as you're supposed to "fear God." This doesn't make any sense for a lot of reasons, because God is prototypically not the object that you can run away from or fight. Like, your fear would be absurd. It doesn't make any sense. But I think a better account of this is [that] you're supposed to have Awe for God. And notice how [awe] is the basis of

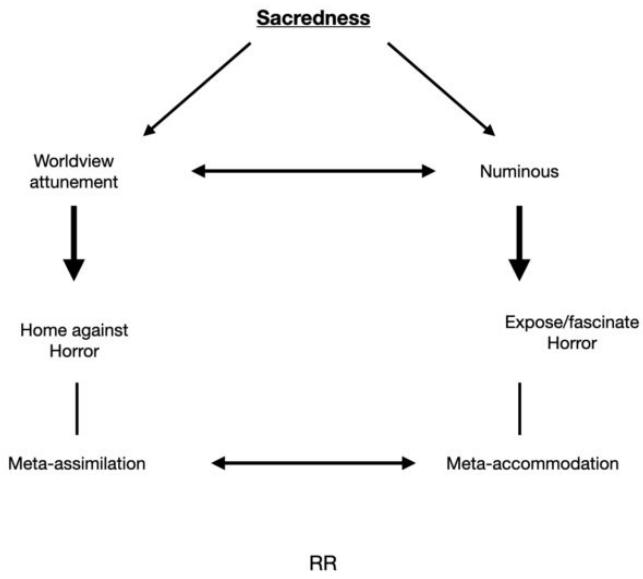
this word “Awesome”. But it's also the basis of this word, “Awful,” right? Because it borders - awe borders on horror. So there's a sense of the experience of sacredness that is supposed to take us to the very horizon of our intelligibility. The very, very precipice of our ability to make sense and make meaning of the world. It's supposed to take us, I would say, it's supposed to draw us in; and the hope is not to just throw us into horror, but to take us towards horror until we experience that boundary between awe and horror, where we are forced into a situation of confrontation with a demand to change. A demand to change who and what we are. And in that sense, this will overlap with the higher States of consciousness, in that this carries with it a sense of being terrifically real - and I mean that, ‘terrifically real’ - and that it is putting a demand on us to accommodate, to expand our capacity for framing, that it is pushing us to our very, very limits. And the aspect of horror is the sense - a stronger word is needed here! - the realization that we are indeed finally, ultimately, limited. That no matter how much we grow, we can't grow enough to encompass the mysteries that we are confronting. So the point of the horror, I think, is to get us not only to grow, but to remember that our growth will always be the growth of a mortal, limited being. A being that is always caught up in Relevance Realization.

So, notice how I've been pushing how much this is taking you to the deepest powerful accommodation, the deepest opening up, right? Forcing tremendous change on you. Varying who you are. This is also an aspect of the sacred. Now think about how you can relate [to] this on the continuum that we've been talking about. This is the ultimate frame breaking! But this isn't just breaking any frame. This is trans-frame breaking! This is breaking your capacity for framing, or at least taking it to the very, as I said, the very limits where you are forced into a trajectory of trans-framing that is also acknowledging that you are ultimately insufficient. It's supposed to, in this - and I'm using this in a technical sense - it is supposed to humiliate you. The problem for us is that we can only hear this negatively. But of course, humility - a deep, deep appreciation of one's inescapable limitations - is part of, I've argued, the function of horror. It is to bring you to that state of accommodation, maximal accommodation, while also deeply reminding you - sati - that you can never become anything beyond a finite meaning. It is to

prevent inflation. It is to prevent you ever assuming that you are more than you can ultimately be. So it's a deep kind of reminding that's put at the heart of this [-]... Look, if I could just sort of accommodate in wonder and awe, there's a temptation that I would inflate and think "I am..." (gestures with opening arms). (Wipes board clean)

The High Order Opponent Processing Of Sacredness

Now, the numinous therefore puts you into contact, confrontation with something that is much greater than yourself, and also that has an existence, by definition, independent of you precisely because of the way that it can threaten you. So notice what we've got here. We've got over here... (Making a mistake between Sacred/Sacredness Vervaeke says: "Sorry, I keep slipping on that - it's just the way language drives you, eh? 'I feel we're not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar'!") Okay, so sacredness (writes Sacredness at the top of the board). Over here (down to the left, off of Sacredness) we have Worldview Attunement, and it's very clear why that would be regarded as sacred - this homes us against horror (writes this below Worldview Attunement). But we've got this other notion of sacredness, which is the numinous (writes this below and to the right of Sacredness), which is designed to do the opposite! It's designed to expose us, to fascinate us with horror (writes these below Numinous). So over here (on the left) we have, basically, what I'm going to argue is meta-assimilation (writes this below the list on the left). We had that meta-meaning that is designed to get everything to fit together, to belong together. The agent and the arena fit together. But then you have the opponent process (draws a double ended arrow between the left and the right), the opponent process. And this is, as I've already argued, this is meta-accommodation (writes this below the list on the right).



Sacredness is doing a very powerful at - not at the level even of your individual projects or problems - this is doing it at the level of your existential being in the world. It is doing higher order relevance realization. It is pushing the machinery of relevance realization, again, down through all of the levels of your knowing into your existential modes, into the depths, the primordial depths of the Agent:Arena relationship, and then it's blowing it apart, setting it in motion with opponent processing, that's doing powerful, powerful, higher order relevance realization. Sacredness, I think, is a deep way in which we are seriously playing with - and now the seriousness is at the level of awe and horror and also home, which is also deeply serious to you - we are seriously playing with the machinery of relevance realization and pushing it towards a greater and greater development of optimising it, improving it, enhancing it.

So if that's right, if sacredness is the experience of this machinery (gestures full diagram on the board), as opposed to either one of its poles (left side or right), [then] that tells us again about a deep functionality; that what we're doing in sacredness is, we're playing with the machinery of relevance realization in order to try and create states of mind, states of body, states of interaction with the world that optimise - in a comprehensive and profound manner - the machinery of relevance realization, our connectedness to the world, to ourselves and to each other.

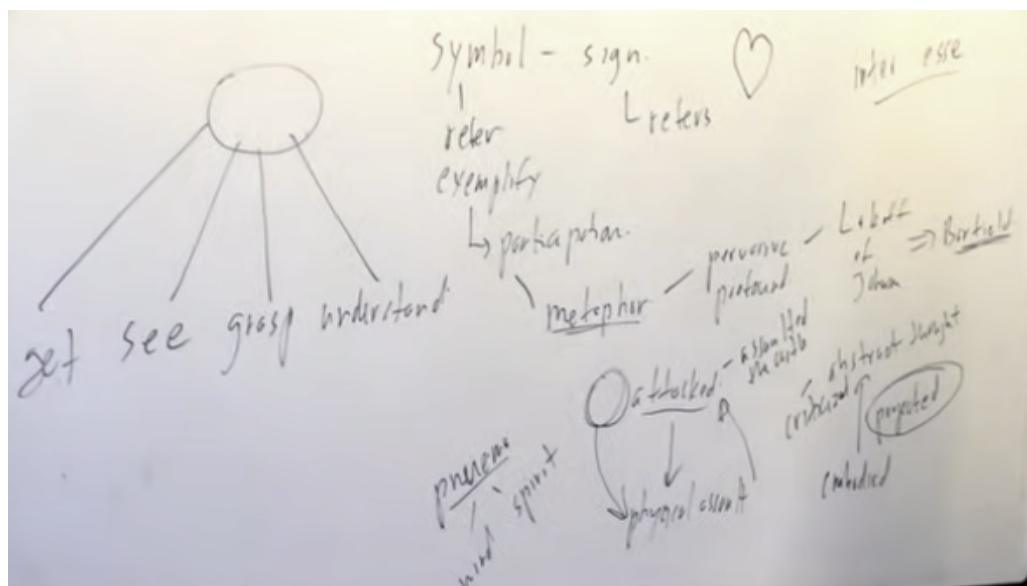
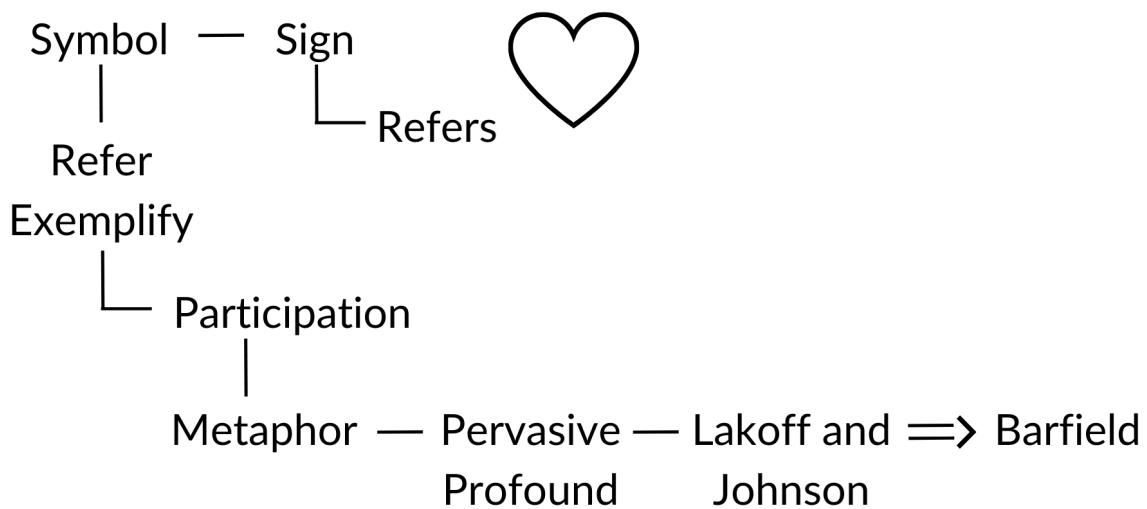
Considering Music

This would, for example, explain why music is so deeply associated with sacredness. I mean, music isn't 'about' anything, not in a conceptual referential sense! Nevertheless, as Nietzsche said, "Life would be a mistake without music," because in music we are playing just with the machinery of salience landscaping, just with all of this machinery in a powerful way, for no other reason than for its own sake! We try to get into a flow state in which we are - just for its own sake - seriously playing with this machinery. And that's why music is such a pivotal way in which we try to convey and represent the Sacred, and why music strikes us so perspectively, in such a participatory way. We don't just think about music; [-] it insinuates its way into our perspective of salience landscape and we embody it, the rhythms and what's happening in the music becomes sewn into our processes of co-identification; the way the world as an arena is disclosed to me, and the way my agency is being structured, are being deeply transformed by music. One of the great difficulties with our culture, of course - and I suppose we need to do work on this, how it contributes to the meaning crisis - is the degree to which we have trivialised music, and the degree to which we have severed it from, at least explicitly and consciously, from its connection to The Sacred. I think why many people still are so deeply dependent on music, especially when they're going through any transformative period in their life, is precisely because of the way it puts them back in touch and helps them remember, at least intuitively, some of this machinery of seriously playing with the higher order relevance realization machinery of Sacredness.

Symbols

Now that opens up something that we need to talk about, because I'm now invoking how we can use something that's - and we're gonna have to do work on this - something that's symbolic, like music, in order to play, in order to activate, accentuate and play with this machinery in a powerfully transformative manner. And of course Religions, which have these aspects to them, also are rich with the symbolic machinery that is designed to activate and seriously play with this. So I want to talk about the relationship or the role that symbols have in our experience of sacredness. (Cleans the board)

So the important thing is how we're going to use this word, and 'symbol', originally means to put two things together (writes Symbol - Sign on the board). And I want to distinguish this - and the talk that I did with Chris that you'll see on one of the talks also distinguishes - between a symbol and a sign. So I'm not going into great detail here; this is sort of central and semiotic. Because we use this term (symbol) in multiple ways, like we talk about abstract symbolic thought, but then we talk about the cross as an important religious symbol and we can get very quickly confused.



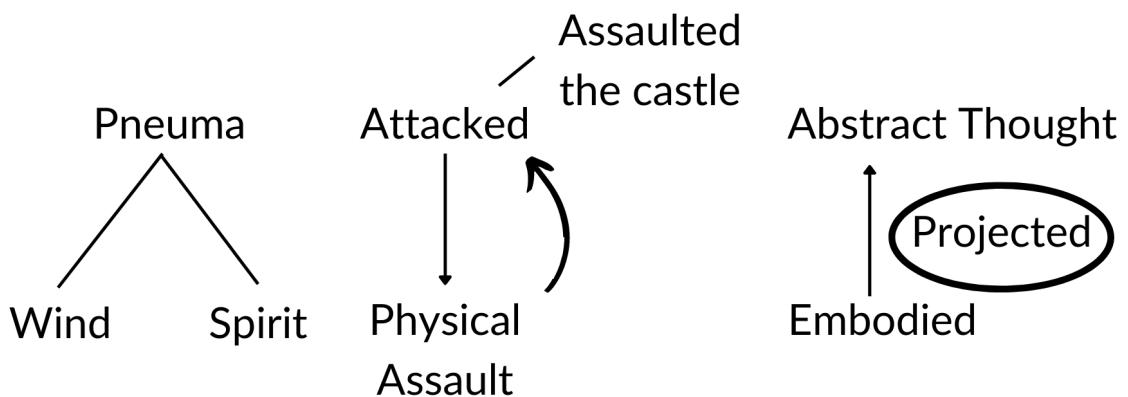
And so a sign refers (writes refers off of Sign)... So, by looking at it, we can look through it to look at something else. So I can use this (draws a heart) as a sign for love, because when you see this, it helps you to think of love. But this doesn't actually exemplify. Symbols refer (writes refer off of symbol), but more importantly, they exemplify (adds exemplify to refer under symbol) in a particular way: they exemplify by getting you to participate in that to which they refer (adds participation off of refer/exemplify). They're going to invoke, of course, participatory knowing because they have to do, ultimately, with getting down to the machinery of the Agent:Arena, participatory relationship.

So compare this (the heart) as a sign for love, and this (symbol side) is something - as I said that Chris and I did - [a-likened] to kissing someone, because kissing someone doesn't just make you think of love, it actually gets you to participate. It activates and gets the machinery.../ kissing is, and I mean this, carefully, is a serious play with the machinery of the Agent:Arena relationship so that we can participate in a reciprocal relationship with another human being, where [-] there's reciprocal realization occurring between us; we can together remember the Being mode, et cetera. So there's a difference there.

Bringing Metaphor Back In

I want to try and unpack this a little bit more. Symbols do this sort of double job (indicating refer/exemplify [by] participation). And they do this by having at their core, a metaphor (writes metaphor off of participation). Now, we've got to slow down here because this is also something that needs to be understand a little bit more carefully. And we've talked about this before. About [how] the word metaphor is itself a metaphor. It means 'to carry over' or 'carry across'. What I'm doing in a metaphor is I have two different domains (draws a circle and a square) and I want to see this domain (the square) differently. So I basically look through - this was, at least, the theory of Black - I look through this thing (circle) to look at this (square). So I'm saying that 'Sam is a pig'! Here's Sam (the square), here's a pig (the circle), I put on sort of 'pig glasses' - sorry for that - and then I look at Sam differently (draws an arrow through the circle to the square) and the salience topography of Sam is altered - Ortony talks about this in salience imbalance

- and that reconfiguration of what I find salient in Sam allows me to see Sam differently. I get an insight into Sam. And of course I'm not actually claiming that Sam is a pig, and I'm not just comparing and saying, Sam was like a pig. I'm doing this act of looking through and seeing this and thereby getting an insight into it in an important way. That's fine. Okay, now we have to understand, first of all, how pervasive and profound metaphor is (writes these off of metaphor) because we have a tendency to think of it, again, as largely ornamental. Our culture is so beset, comprehensively, by patterns of trivialization. Again, and again, again, you hear me say, we have trivialised this, we have trivialized that.

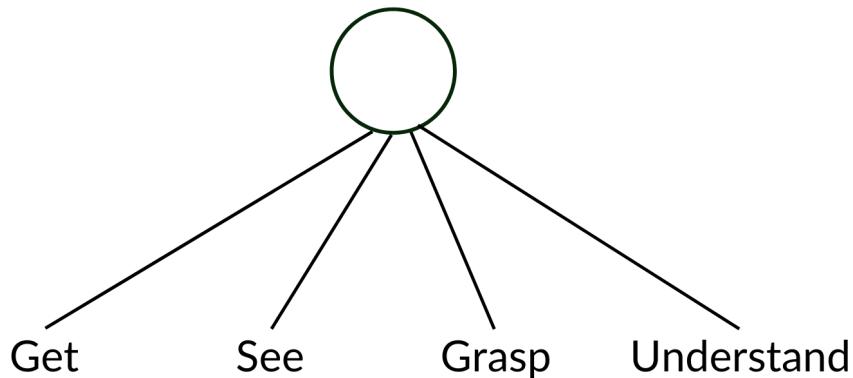


Okay, we've talked about this, but I want to bring it back and develop it a little bit, how much of our thinking - and this goes to the work of Lakoff and Johnson, but I'll criticise it in a minute, and also somebody who I'm going to talk about later, Barfield - that we don't realize how much of our cognition, our ways of thinking and interacting with the world, are being structured by metaphor. So to use an example "I'm halfway through this lecture" as if I was moving through a space, but I hope you get my point (holds up a bottle (half full?)). Or at least see what I'm saying (points to his eyes). But you might not be able to, because some of this stuff I'm saying is really hard (presses down firmly on the desktop), it's really hard! It's really hard to get my point (picks up a pen and taps the pointy end), but I hope you 'understand' me! It used to be "understand," by the way, "stand within"; but we changed it to "understand - stand under." It's interesting. Even words that you don't realize are metaphorical, have a metaphorical origin like "interest." Remember this? 'Inter esse', to be within something? So we're much more

naturally poetic than we realize. We are constantly trying to do this! Use one thing, look through one thing at another.

Now I have some criticisms of Lakoff and Johnson because they argue that what it is, is [that] I have some embodied practice, and then that just gets projected up into abstract thought (details this on the board: ‘embodied’ UP via ‘projected’ to ‘abstract thought’). And so one of their prototypical examples is [that] we'll say things like, “he attacked my argument!” And that's supposed to be from the hallmark of abstract thought that's from argumentation where we're at our most rational, but we're actually using this word ‘attacked’ which goes back [down] to physical assault (has now detailed attacked DOWN to physical assault). And the idea is we take what we have [DOWN] here and we project it [UP] onto here (physical assault up to attacked). I think this notion of projection is too simplistic. But this is the basic idea: I know what this is, because it's embodied physical interaction (does lots of moving with his arms); it's participatory. I know what it is to attack somebody (throws some punches) and then I use that, I sort of just project that onto the abstract conceptual domain. And that's how I get “he attacked my argument”. This reminds me of a point in Barfield. Barfield says you read in the old texts, and they'll use words like pneuma - which stands either for wind or spirit - and we can only hear it one way or the other, and that's why we break it into two words. I sort of get what Barfield is saying here, but the point is [that] we use this word (attack) and we move between these without realising it: “we attacked the castle” [and] “he attacked my argument”, and those aren't the same, but we may actually not notice that we're using them differently.

Now why do I say that? Well, this is work that I published - a couple articles with John Kennedy - where we said this simple model of just projecting (up) doesn't seem quite right! Because this (attacked), for example, carries with it, I can say “I attack the castle” or “I assaulted the castle.” Right? But if I say “I assaulted his argument”, it's like, what?? What does that mean? That's weird!! The near synonym doesn't transfer! And notice the reverse [starting with] abstract thought. Instead of saying, “I attacked his argument”, I can say “I criticised his argument”. But if I say, “ah, let's criticise the castle”, you don't... what? WHAT? That sounds like a weird Monty Python routine.

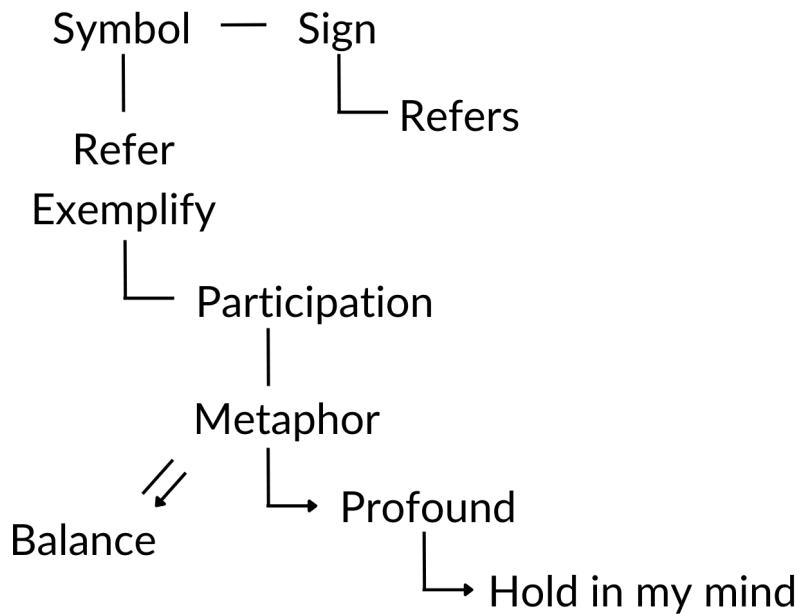


See, what I'm trying to show you is [that] there isn't a simple sort of identity relation, we didn't just project this (indicates relation between attacked and physical assault). And it's not that we're just sort of trapped between two meanings. We seem to clearly have a sense of this (attacked) that points downward towards the physical assault, and then points upwards - if you'll allow me these metaphors! - towards the conceptual. Notice also something else. Notice the [four] things I used earlier: I used "Did you see my point?", "Do you grasp what I'm saying?", "Do you understand it?", "Do you get it?" Okay? (Writes these four things out together) These are very different interactions! These are very different things! There's seeing, there's understanding, there's getting, and there's grasping (physically demonstrates these four different things). And yet all of those independently converge towards making something intelligible, right? (Draws four converging lines up from these different things to a common circle) The act of making something intelligible - what selected these four very different things and drew them up to their common converged meaning (the circle)? See, what I'm trying to show you is [that] it's not simply that this (physical assault) gets projected up. There's also something up here (draws a similar circle beside attacked) that's constraining and acting downward, helping us select which of all of our embodied existence we are going to use for our more abstract, conceptual topics.

So why is that important? Because I think that points towards a different way of understanding what the metaphor is doing. There, of course, is an element of projecting - if projecting means to throw - but I think there's something much more complicated and interesting going on in a metaphor that isn't simply projection, which is of course itself a metaphor.

So I think that symbols are going to tap into these deeper kinds of metaphors, not just the metaphors that are the ornamentations of language. These are the metaphors - these more profound metaphors - that are structuring our cognition; and I'm trying to point out to you that they have not only a bottom up emergence, they have a top down emanation going on in them [too]. There's a sense in which both sides are interacting in a powerful way. We need a much more dynamic account of what's at work in metaphor. So let's build towards that dynamic account; and we've already gained something, that symbols are going to be making use of these profound metaphors - the metaphors that are not just metaphors of speech, but are structuring the way we are making sense, making meaning of the world.

Holding In Mind



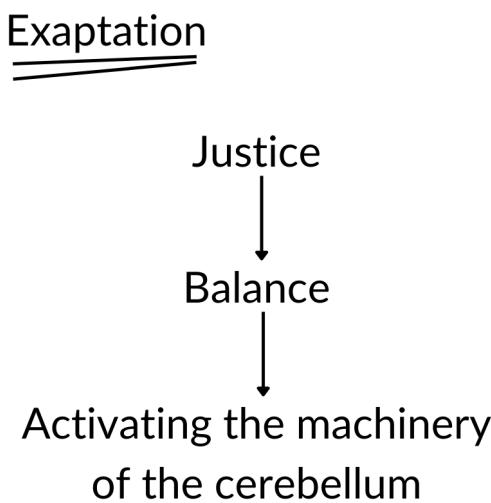
Now, one important point of these kinds of metaphors that triggers on the participation gets into the profundity, but is doing something with it is one of the jobs of these metaphors is to hold in mind. So let me give you an example of this. We care about justice. We really do. It's important to us. Our culture in fact is really wrestling with what does justice mean, and how do we best serve it? How do we best realize? But that means you need to be able to reflect on justice. You need to be able to contemplate it, to think

about it. If you're going to think about it - and not just emote or assert about it - if you're going to think about it, you need to hold it in mind. But how do you hold it in mind? If I were to ask you, without repeating the word justice, hold justice in mind. Do it! Hold it! What are you doing? You might be holding sort of a prototypical instance. But when I do this, and I do this repeatedly with my class, what people tell me is, well, when they want to contemplate justice so [that] they can reflect on it and get clear about what it means to them, they often invoke a symbol. They invoke the symbol of the woman, blindfolded, holding a sword, [-] holding the scales. So one of the things you notice is that this, of course, is a profound metaphor. We use the notions of balance all throughout our talk about justice. We also use the sword as deciding, cutting, right? But let's stick with the balance. This allows us to hold justice in mind. That's like... Stop. Pause. If that's all a symbol was doing that in and of itself is such a valuable thing. We need to pause and appreciate. If I can't relate to justice in a participatory fashion where I can engage in it and I'm trying to internalise it and I'm trying to get clearer about it, I can't do any of that unless I can activate it and hold it in mind. And I need a symbol to do that. Well, the symbol is metaphorical. Justice isn't literally a scale, a balance.

What's going on here, and how does it plug into where I'm trying to argue? There's something more than just projection going on. And this gets me to a notion that I've mentioned to you before: Exaptation. [There's] really, really important work - you gotta read his book - by Michael Anderson ("After Phrenology" - Neural Reuse and the Interactive Brain) on this. This is the idea that your brain is a self-exaptation machine, not only across species evolutionarily, but more recently in his work within a brain and its own development. So to remember the example, my tongue has been exapted for speech. It has a structural functional organization for doing a particular set of tasks, but of course it has - remember, the robot and the battery? - it has all kinds of side effects. And those side effects are an ongoing reservoir of sets of capacities that I can tap into and make a new structural functional organization to do a new thing, which is what I'm doing right now. I'm speaking. So the tongue has been exapted for speech. And what he's arguing is that a lot of what we see in our cognition is what he calls "circuit reuse." Circuits that have been used for one thing get reused, can get exapted in the

way I've just described, by reconfiguring their structural functional organization so that side effects become central effects. And what you do is you get a new machine, a new capacity created that way.

So let's try and think about this. We've got a clear example in the cerebellum. The cerebellum originally evolved for helping you to keep your physical balance. And what it does is, it takes information from many different sense modalities and is constantly looking for how to find patterns of contingency, patterns of relationship between what's happening in my vision, what's happening in my body. And it's really helping to do all this sophisticated coordination and smoothing out so that they start to coordinate together much better. That's your cerebellum. It's centrally involved in your balance. But you know what you've done? The cerebellum has been exapted to... It's [-] used not only for finding balance between my seeing and my moving, it's been exapted to find deeper coordination between any different areas of domain in your brain. The cerebellum also allows you to integrate your vision with your working memory, so that you can do visual imagery.



Now let's put this together carefully. You've got this machinery of exaptation, you've got balance, and now what you're doing when you call up the balance idea, is you're actually - notice your cerebellum has been exapted up to helping to manage massively complex contingencies between variables

- you know what you have to do to be a just person? You have to know how to balance! You have to optimise the relationship between, you have to pick up on and coordinate and smooth out the complex interaction between multiple variables! That's justice. You know what you can do if you invoke balance and don't just talk about it, but try and participate in it? You can actually do the reverse of this. You can go back through balance, and trigger, activate... You can go from justice, through balance, back to activating the machinery of the cerebellum (writes, top down, Justice => balance => activating the machinery of the cerebellum).

Normally I am looking through all of that machinery at something. But what I can do with the symbol is “No, no! I want to actually, sort of retrace, reactivate, go back through exaptation and activate the machinery of balance, so that I can then use that machinery in order to get an optimal grip on this other domain, which is justice.” See this isn't just simple projection. There is not only a projecting up, there is an emanating back down. You're also reversing and going down and trying to reactivate this machinery in important ways. There's a top-down guidance that is intersecting with the bottom-up projection. And so the symbol is, in that sense, deeply participatory.

You are trying to participate in this activation of the very cognitive machinery that is used both in participating in balance - you don't just look at balance, you have to be balanced, perspectively [and] participatory - and then taking that machinery into being just, having your perspectival and participatory machinery aligned in a certain way. That's what the symbol is doing for you. It is deeply participatory. It allows you to hold in mind and then look back through to activate, and then bring that back up to have insight - participatory and perspectival insight - into something like justice. We're going to talk more next time about the Symbol and how it relates to our experience of Sacredness.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

END

Episode 34 - Notes

The Idea of the Holy

"Otto and his book that, as I mentioned, was typically entitled The Idea Of The Holy"

“The Idea of the Holy”: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational is a book by the German theologian and philosopher Rudolf Otto, published in 1917. It argues that the defining element of the holy is the experience of a phenomenon which Otto calls the numinous.

Book mentioned: The Idea of Holy - [Buy Here](#)

Mary Douglas

"The monster points to something very, very interesting. And this goes back to the work of Mary Douglas"

Dame Mary Douglas, DBE FBA was a British anthropologist, known for her writings on human culture and symbolism, whose area of speciality was social anthropology. Douglas was considered a follower of Émile Durkheim and a proponent of structuralist analysis, with a strong interest in comparative religion.

Max Black

"Metaphor - this was, at least, the theory of Black"

Max Black was a British-American philosopher, who was a leading figure in analytic philosophy in the years after World War II. He made contributions to the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mathematics and science, and the philosophy of art, also publishing studies of the work of philosophers such as Frege.

Andrew Ortony

Ortony talks about this in salience imbalance

[Andrew Ortony - Google Scholar](#)

Lakoff and Johnson

“Metaphors We Live By” is a book by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson published in 1980. The book suggests metaphor is a tool that enables people

to use what they know about their direct physical and social experiences to understand more abstract things like work, time, mental activity and feelings.

Book Mentioned: Metaphors We Live By - [Buy Here](#)

Barfield

Arthur Owen Barfield (9 November 1898 – 14 December 1997) was a British philosopher, author, poet, critic, and member of the Inklings.

John Kennedy

"Well, this is work that I published - a couple articles with John Kennedy"

[Kennedy, J. M. and Vervaeke, J. \(2008\) How does body ground mind?](#)

Michael Anderson “After Phrenology” - Neural Reuse and the Interactive Brain

A proposal for a fully post-phrenological neuroscience that details the evolutionary roots of functional diversity in brain regions and networks. The computer analogy of the mind has been as widely adopted in contemporary cognitive neuroscience as was the analogy of the brain as a collection of organs in phrenology.

Book Mentioned: After Phrenology: Neural Reuse and the Interactive Brain - [Buy Here](#)

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 35 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - The Symbol, Sacredness, and the Sacred

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. Last time we were continuing our exploration of Sacredness and I talked about that in contrast, but also in concert with, Geertz's notion of Sacredness as homing us against horror we have the proposal from Otto that Sacredness puts us into contact with the Numinous, which basically exposes us to what is horrifying. At least at the limits of us, because it has an aspect of awe with a little bit more which is to remind us - humiliation in the original sense of the word - to keep us, to give us humility to remember that as we are feeling that sense of expansiveness with awe that we are precisely, ultimately, limited creatures. And so I propose to you that these two opponent aspects of sacredness can be seen very readily within the light of the machinery of relevance realization, where the Worldview Attunement is a form of meta-meaning and therefore meta-assimilation; ultimately compression, integration, things fitting together. We get an opposite, which is the meta-accommodation afforded by confronting the numinous in awe and potentially horror; and we talked about how horror is about exactly the demand, the confrontation with that which demands from us unanswerable, unachievable accommodation.

So I propose to you that what sacredness is, is to play with, seriously play with the machinery of relevance realization as found within the primordial aspects of Religio, and that doing this would be deeply advantageous to us because it is so foundational to our agency, to the world as an arena for our action, to our capacities for self-transcendence, and so forth. But caught up with that, when I invoked music as an example of this, was the idea that we often do this serious play by engaging in symbolic behavior. And so I'm putting the 'Symbol' here as something that has the capacity to function both ways: it can bring us into meta-accommodation, but of course it can also bring meta-assimilation (writes "Meta-Assimilation — Symbol — Meta-Accommodation" on the board See Fig. 1).

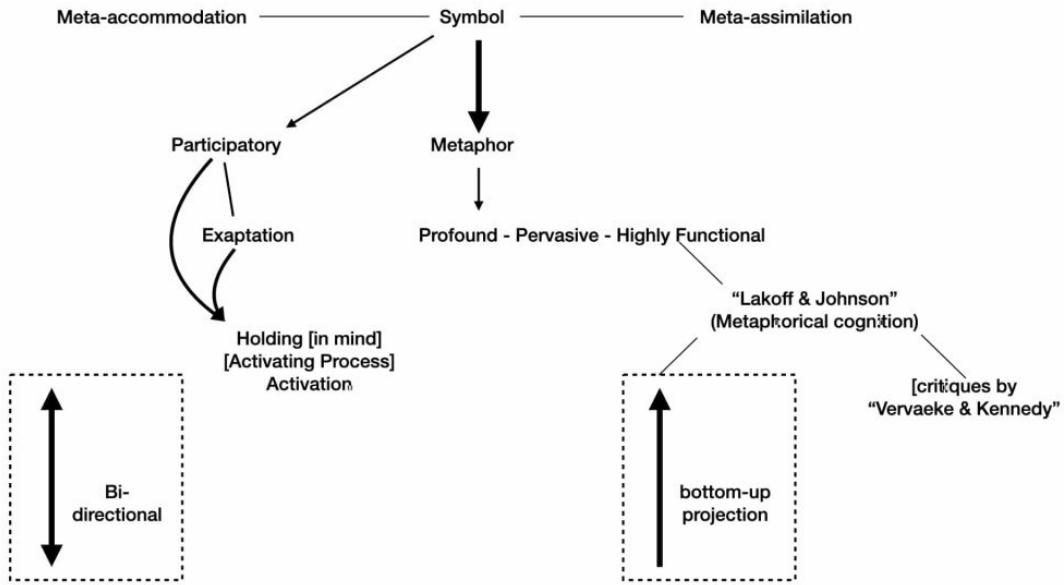


Fig. 1

It can bridge between these two and it can go in both directions. And so we were starting to unpack what the symbol is (draws a big downward arrow from Symbol). And then I propose to you to, first of all, [I] emphasized its distinction from a mere sign: a Symbol doesn't just refer, a Symbol exemplifies, it has a participatory aspect to it right from the beginning. And as I've already mentioned that's going to be central to what we're talking about here, because these (both "meta's") are at the level of our, ultimately, our participation in the Agent:Arena transactive evolution of our relevance realization processes.

So I suggested to you that at the core of a symbol is a metaphor (adds this to the arrow down from Symbol). Already we know that this (Symbol) has to be participatory (adds this to another arrow coming down and to the left of Symbol, below meta-assimilation); we'll come back to that. And I pointed out that the metaphors we're talking about here are profound in the sense that they are pervasive in our cognition, and they are highly functional (adds "profound - pervasive - highly functional" to an arrow down from Metaphor) and pointed here to the work of Lakoff and Johnson, and their idea about, their work in metaphors we live by, and a whole bunch of other books about how much our cognition is metaphorical. I then said there's some issues here - and this goes to some critiques made by Vervaeke and Kennedy, and

Kennedy and Vervaeke - basically saying that they have this purely bottom-up notion that the physical, sensory motor domain is just projected up into the conceptual. I suggested that it's more complex than that, and we took a look at that, and I suggested to you that instead of just the machinery of projection, which tends to be this one way, that we should think of the participatory relation as reflecting our capacity to play with exaptation (adds exaptation to participatory on the board); we can go both ways with our exaptive machinery.

Then I tried to bring all these ideas together: the notion of participatory knowing, the notion of exaptation (brings two arrows down from both to a single point), with this idea that what a Symbol is, it's a metaphor that allows me to hold something in mind that I normally can't hold in mind. So that I can activate the machinery - the machinery that was at work in exaptation - and I can, in a sense, reverse, go back through it. I can have a symbol of a scale, and I could just stay there and think that, or what I can do is, I can actually try to participate, perspectively; I can engage with actually 'balancing.' And then what I can do is reverse that process, to some degree, by which my capacity for balance has been exapted via some exaptive processing on my cerebellum, so that I actually use it to find complex contingency relationships between any areas of my brain.

So what's been happening, in fact, in neuroscience over the last 10 - 15 years is this revolution of our understanding of the cerebellum. We used to think the cerebellum was primarily about balance. And now we know that the cerebellum has all these terrific cognitive functions, because what it does is it basically... here's (gesticulating) two areas of the brain that are often correlated together. The cerebellum picks up on trying to improve, smooth out, find the patterns of contingency and dependency between them. And so what I can do is, I can activate - if you'll allow me this way of talking - my cerebellum and that machinery which is precisely the machinery I need to practice the skill of being more 'just'; I need the ability to coordinate, to find, to sense complex contingencies between multiple variables and make that better. The cerebellum is exactly the machinery I want to activate - I'm using activation as like the reverse of exaptation - I want to activate it because that will actually allow me to participate in the processing, that will

allow me to cultivate the skills that will make me ‘just’, that will then ultimately ground my conception of ‘justice.’

So this holding in mind (adds “holding - activation” to the double arrow), activating process allows me to deeply participate in justice, because I'm literally becoming more just! The symbol is affording me, by making use of the exaptation machinery, which is - do you see that this (participatory side) is bi-directional in a way in which the projection (bottom-up side) isn't - The Symbol is doing that for me in a powerful way. And you're saying, “Wow, this is so... Ahhhggg, really? Come on.” Okay... You are much more symbolic, in a participatory fashion, than you might think. Okay, look at these quickly:

Without thinking, which one is “Buba” and which one is “Kiki”? Which one is Buba, which one is Kiki?

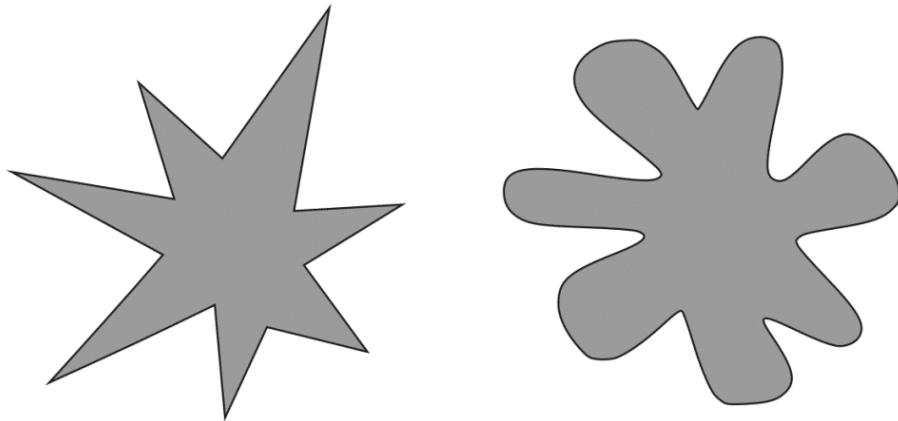


Fig. 2

Overwhelmingly - and I mean [overwhelmingly] because this experiment has been done by Ramachandran (The Emerging Mind & The Tell Tale Brain) and others - this is Buba and this is Kiki (indicates which is which on the board - you intuitively know which is which!). I do this all the time in my class! What's going on there? Why is this Buba and this Kiki? You've never heard these words before! They don't mean anything to you! And people will say things like, “Well, this is sharp and spiky (the ‘star’). And so is this (the word Kiki).” And I say to them, “what do you mean? How is this sharp? I can't cut myself on it. And how is this sharp and spiky (the word)?”

And they're doing all this bridging and this cerebellar coordination between different sense modalities and different ways of acting, and you're doing it like that (dramatically claps hands)! There it is! Now, this is playful, right? I'm just activating it to no purpose, but of course I can activate this machinery to a purpose. That's what I'm doing when I'm holding up the scales! But you have to participate in it, you have to live with the symbol. You have to internalise it. It's almost like you have to savour it. One of the things we need to pay more attention to, I would argue, is the work of Jonathan Pageau. I mean, his work on the symbolic world is largely about trying to get us to remember the symbolic aspects of our existence. And I mean this in a deeply respectful way, and I hope Jonathan takes it that way: to get us to savour the symbolic and how deeply functional and active it is in us.

So symbols are participatory in this fashion that I've tried to explain to you, and then because of that, symbols have a capacity to put us into this relationship with something. So here's justice, here's the symbol, here's me (writes: "Me Symbol justice" (Fig. 3)), and as I've tried to argue, we've got the symbol, and what it's doing is it's actually transforming me in a powerful way (see Fig. 3, arrow 1). It is reactivating, reconfiguring my machinery so that I become capable of interacting with the world, so that I now start to be able to see through this symbol (Fig. 3, arrow 2) - here's the original m[etaphor]; remember how you're looking through the pig at Sam? - I'm looking through, which means beyond and by means of, the symbol (gestures along arrow 2). I get to see more and realize and make more justice. So, I'm becoming (gestures along arrow 1), I'm activating the machinery of balance that's allowing me that perspectival awareness that's sensitizing me to the contingent relationships between variables; it's actually helping me to cultivate the skills of justice. And of course, as I start to get better contact with [justice], [it] is disclosing itself in a new way (fig 1, arrow 3) and it discloses itself more through the processing I'm doing.

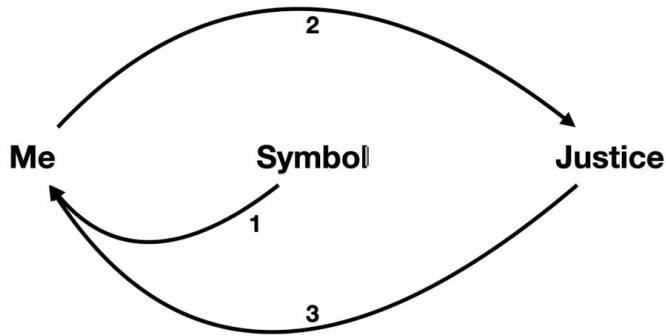


Fig. 3

Meditation As An Example Of Breath As A Symbol

And so what starts to happen is this interesting thing that's going on. So let me try and give you another example of this, and let's use something at the other end, something that's not so conceptual, at least in one sense. So I'm meditating and I'm following my breath in meditation, breathing in and out following my breath. Some of you have seen, perhaps, the videos I've given on the instruction on how to practice Vipassana. Now what's happening is, normally I am focusing on my breath, and that act of focusing and following my breath is helping me to scale down, and we've talked about that; [to] scale down my attention. And for a long time, it can stay that way. But what can happen is, I can become sensitized by scaling down - because you increase your sensitivity - to how much in process my mind is. So I'm normally thinking of my mind as a thing. I might even think that my mind is a container that contains things. Like, here's my mind (gesticulating) and in it is an experience of pain, for example.

But when I practice watching my breath, I start to realize that that's not actually how my mind is unfolding. My mind really isn't like a container in that sense. It's much more like my mind is a very fine-grained process! And even something like pain isn't a thing; there's 'paining'. And it's multiple. When I'm watching my pain, for example I've got a pain in my leg while I'm meditating, there's all these different layers. There's all these things unfolding and happening in a complex fashion. It really isn't a noun; it's much more like a verb. And it's really not something I possess. It's really much more something I participate in. So, do you see what I'm saying? The

breath starts to become a participatory symbol of the impermanence of things, how much they are interconnected and flowing. And that can then have an impact on my sense of myself... that maybe *I* am much more impermanent and interconnected. And so the breath can become, in that sense, symbolic for me. I can start to see... look through the breath (Fig. 3, arrow 2) into impermanence and interconnectedness, and I start to look back (Fig. 3, arrow 3). And so what's happening - now, you can also train this deliberately – is, in addition to scaling down, I might suddenly find myself scaling up, and seeing how all of reality, including myself, is impermanent and interconnected.

Flags And Patriotism As Another Example

So notice what the symbol is doing for you here. And here I want to go back to Michael Polanyi again. Let's take another symbol. Here's the Patriot looking at the [American] Flag. [-]. So Polanyi says: when you're looking at a flag - of course, you're always doing that thing he talked about: all their subsidiary awareness (SA) is being integrated together into your focal awareness (FA) (draws many instances of SA converging together onto the flag (FA)). Now, normally, [-] I'm [-] doing all of this [convergence/SA] because what I'm interested in is what I'm focially aware of (FA); I'm interested [in the flag] (circles the flag). So [-] normally, when I [-] want to drink, I'm doing all of this subsidiary integration into my focal awareness of the bottle, because what I'm actually interested in is the bottle. I need to get the bottle to drink. But sometimes - and again, notice my language - we play with this. We look at the flag - not because we're actually intrinsically interested in using the flag in some fashion - we're using the flag symbolically. I'm looking at the flag, because by looking at the flag I'm actually integrating (Fig. 4a, a) different aspects of myself together. So although I'm doing this process (indicates the convergence flow), normally what I'm inherently interested in is the focal object (flag). But sometimes, when I'm acting symbolically [-] - although I'm focusing my attention on [the flag], like focusing my attention on the breath - what I'm actually interested in is playing with the process (the convergence SA arrows - see Fig 4a - a).

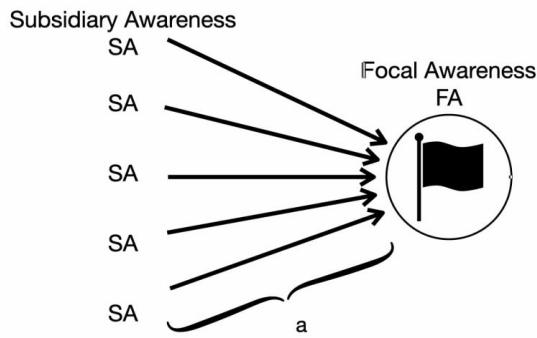


Fig. 4a

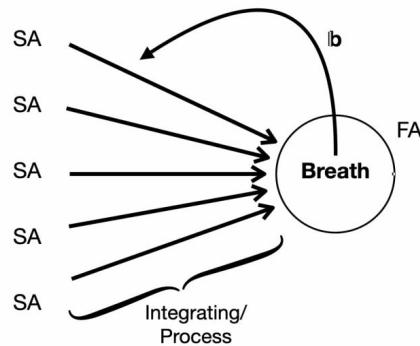


Fig. 4b

So by contemplating the flag, the Patriot is bringing up all kinds of emotions and associations and other things - and think about the cerebellar activity here - and integrating them together. By looking through all of these - and think about the metaphor; “by looking through” - by looking through all of these things, like (demonstrates on the board through Fig. 4a, a) I'm looking through all of these different subsidiary things onto the flag, and by doing that I'm actually integrating all of these aspects of myself together, and I'm becoming more patriotic. I'm actually participating in patriotism.

Focusing On The Breath

That's powerful. Now, put that together with what I just did: I'm looking at my breath (changes the flag in the diagram to “breath” (See Fig. 4b), and I'm doing all this, and the point about all of this is to integrate all of my processing together. But what can happen... And that's one way in which my breath is symbolic. So one way in which my breath is symbolic is, it gives

me a focal thing that I'm aware of, I can activate all of this stuff, and I can integrate myself onto the thing; I'm becoming somebody else. But, as I just said a few minutes ago, the thing is, the breath can also suddenly disclose reality to me (Fig 4b, b). The breath can also reveal an aspect of reality. Okay, let's try and put this together very carefully here. (Wipes board clean.)

At one stage, I'm doing this (Fig 5a - draws converging arrows as in Fig. 4a&b) and what I'm interested in is this, this is my Inherent Interest (labels these arrows "I.I."). Although my Focal Awareness is here (circle - FA), I'm focusing precisely because I'm trying to, via a metaphorical process by looking through all of these subsidiary elements, I'm actually integrating them together. I'm not actually trying to get an insight like I normally do in metaphor, but what can happen is [that] I can actually get an insight! This (Fig 5b, circle) can suddenly reveal aspects of the world to me (Fig 5b arrows), the impermanence and interconnectedness. And now I'm actually interested in my breath, because my breath is a symbol in another sense. My breath is a symbol in that it allows me to see into the impermanence and interconnectedness of reality. Notice what could happen is I can resonate between these (Fig 5, arrow r).

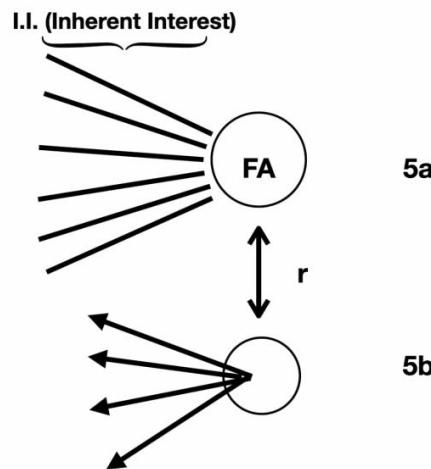


Fig. 5

Okay, let's do it: I'm looking at my breath. I become more integrated and precisely because I'm much more integrated, my processing becomes more powerful. And then suddenly what happens is, I see something in my breath. I get a realization. The world is disclosed to me, and that opens me up in

powerful ways. And then now, when I refocus on the breath again, now I'm reintegrating all of that. But then what can happen is [that] now, as I reintegrate and re-coordinate again, I can more deeply see into what the reality of my breath is disclosing to me, and I move more deeply. Do you see what I'm saying? You get this symbolic resonance that's going on. As I see more deeply into the object, it draws me in, and then that affords much more powerful integration. But the much more powerful integration actually coordinates my cognition much more so [that] I can see more deeply into the reality, if I'm relating to it symbolically.

Symbols are, in this sense, capable of affording Anagoge. They are capable of giving you this capacity whereby I get inner-optimization, and then I see more deeply into the thing. And then by seeing more deeply into the thing, I get more inner optimization, and the whole process flows Anagogically.

So I'm looking at the balance, and then I activate all of this machinery, and then I look through it at the symbol, and I'm looking through it at justice and coordinating all the things. But then I start to see aspects in the balance that I hadn't seen before, precisely because of how sensitized I am to the symbol. I start to see how it's actually never completely stable; if you look at the pictures of the scales, they are often always off! Balance is very much a process, not a thing. And then that causes me to activate different aspects of myself. This is like, if you remember, when the mother-in-law has the bi-directional insight; the Sensibility Transcendence. Not only seeing her daughter-in-law differently, but seeing her own seeing differently; that transframing.

So symbols have the capacity to do this. Let's return back to something that I think is purely symbolic, in the sense that I mean, which is music. So you're listening to the music, but it's not like when you're listening to a sound and you're trying to make out like, "What's that? What's causing that sound? Is it a tiger? Is it a noise in the bush?" You're listening the music and although you're focusing on it, you're not trying to get behind it. You're focusing on it because the way in which you're being integrated in, together by, onto the music, is crucial. But then what happens of course, is that aspects of the music are disclosed to you and you realize things, you see things that you haven't seen before, and that changes and alters how you can then

understand and listen to the music. And so you get drawn in, in a very powerful way.

Symbols And The Mysterious

Now let's put [-] all of this machinery together with another aspect of the symbol that I've already hinted at which is, of course, the way in which symbols are putting you into confrontation with what is potentially mysterious. So here's your frame (draws box - Fig 6, box 1), and here is a frame you aspire to, a more comprehensive one (draws larger, dotted box - Fig 6, box 3), and you need something that can reach you inside this frame (Fig 6, arrow 1), but it can't be totally captured by this frame (box 1), because if it's captured by this frame, you'll stay in this frame. It has to insinuate itself into this, but change stuff such that it actually drives you to expanding your frame (Fig 6, arrow & box 2). So it has to both activate you, but draw you beyond yourself to a state of trajec— (pauses) I'm trying not to use some technical terms here.

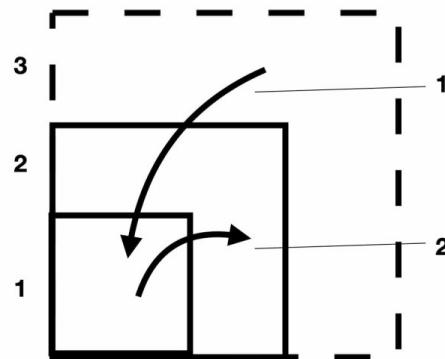


Fig. 6

What a symbol has to do is, it has to reach into your world view, but remember what the Gnostics we're talking about here. Remember how you're existentially entrapped. You want to be in another worldview, you want to find that world view viable. You need something that can come into this worldview, but won't be stable within it; it has to be transgressive, it has to shake things up, and then put you into all of this machinery - all of this machinery that we've been talking about - but in a way that is making you move to, and become capable of dwelling within, that more expansive

worldview. In this sense, symbols are deeply ecstatic (writes ek-stasis on the board) - we got our word ecstasy from this - but what this literally means is, a symbol helps you to stand beyond yourself.

So let's go back to the example... I'm trying to use as many examples as possible. I've got the scales, I'm activating balance, that allows me to start doing the skills that gets me some sense of justice. I start to be able to see justice, and realize justice in the world, that I couldn't before because of my sensibility change, my skill acquisition, my sensibility transcendence. And that starts to make me more just. And then what's happening is, my world is being opened up and, in a coordinated fashion, I'm being transformed to fit that expanding world. This is of course why symbols often are associated with wonder and awe, et cetera. So symbols are ecstatic in that fashion. As I've tried to show you throughout this, they're Participatory (writes this on the board below ek-stasis). And I've tried to show you how they're Integrative, not just in a simple part: whole, but in the Anagogic sense - Sensibility Transcendence (writes Integrative - anagogic below Participatory). They're integrating you together, they're integrating a new world together, and they're integrating that new world together as they're integrating you together in an integrated fashion.

So when a Christian sees the cross, first of all the cross is tapping into that exaptive machinery; it's taking all this perceptual machinery and it's playing with it - the vertical and the horizontal. That's being exapted, and all of that machinery that we normally look through is being exapted and is being used, and then we're looking into there... and if we are receptive - and of course the question is why some people are and why some people aren't - but if we're receptive, then that interaction starts to affect us. We start to become a different kind of person as we're integrated in our attention on the cross.

But that, of course, starts to also disclose to us aspects of reality that we normally might not be able to hold in mind; like suffering, like the relationship between eternity and time. And those goes from being ideas to things that we are confronting, engaging with, and they can draw us in, which then of course integrates me more powerfully, while disclosing a world. And if I'm willing to play the serious play with the symbol, I will start to be transformed in a coupled fashion to my world, such that, perhaps,

Christianity becomes viable for me, for example. This is how symbols work. So they're integrative in the Anagogic sense. This is of course, if you remember, why people do things like Jeepform.

Finally, symbols are Complex (writes Complex below Integrative). And we have to remember: I'm using the scales to stand for justice, but justice isn't a single thing. And even when I talk about the breath and it's showing me impermanence and interconnectedness, those aren't single static things. They are complex unfolding realities. So symbols often are multifaceted. You'll get Athena, she's the symbol of wisdom, but she's also the symbol of weaving. She's the symbol of warfare. All these different areas are actually being drawn together, because the symbol is also the potential for radically reconfiguring the shape of your salience landscape, connecting things that you normally do not connect together, such that you might have an insight into reality.

Notice how the symbol is trying to do all of this. Because it's trying to set you in motion. It's trying to get you to do this. (Draws out fig. 7 from the small box to the large, then the arrow - See Fig 7a). And in that sense, if you'll forgive the little bit of playfulness, it's 'Epic'; it's trying to draw you into something E.P.I.C. (circles the acronym for Ek-Stasis, Participatory, Integrative & Complex. See Fig 7b).

It's trying to afford a way in which you can radically open up your world in meta-accommodation - triggering it, participating in it, confronting it - but also trigger your best machinery for being able to draw it into, relate it to who and what you are, so that you can become capable of dwelling within that expanded world. So meta-accommodation and meta-assimilation are both at work within the symbol.

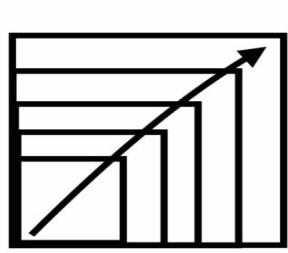


Fig. 7a



Fig. 7b

How Symbols Relate To Sacredness

So, symbols are inherently transjective (indicates the dynamic in Fig.6) because they are between two worlds: the world you're in/the framing you're in and the world you're trying to move to/the world that you aspire to. They are transgressive in all the ways I've tried to suggest to you. They try to trigger transframing. They're transformative.

Now, how does all of that machinery relate to sacredness? Well, I've already shown you how it can be bound up with awe and horror and wonder, but let's try [to] make this a little bit more precise (cleans the board). I'm going to propose something to you. I'm going to propose that we can use this term, "Mythos" [differently] - as I have been throughout the series (writes Mythos on the board). I'm going to use Mythos rather than Myth, to keep that distinction! By Mythos, I mean something that's always deeply connected to ritual, where ritual - and I've already argued this - doesn't mean some neurotic routine that I engage in. Ritual means enactive analogy, enactive Anagoge (writes ritual below mythos). It means the processes by which I try to activate the machinery of transformation. So when I'm saying 'mythos', don't just hear 'patterns of representation,' hear 'patterns of interaction'; these are deeply enmeshed together. And then what we have are symbols - in the way that I'm describing - and these symbols are always going to be enmeshed with story, because you have to bring in the Perspectival Participatory knowing - and we've talked a bunch about how important narrative is for participatory and perspectival knowing. And of course the story connects to the ritual, because if its 'storied', you can enact it (writes

symbols to the right of mythos and story completing the square on the bottom right, with mythos also connecting to story - see Fig. 8a). Okay. So this is what I mean by mythos. (indicating the whole of Fig 8a). When we have a mythos that is about Religio, such that we can activate Religio and seriously play with it in order to enhance it - enhance its capacities for meta-assimilation [and] meta-accommodation... That's Sacredness (Fig 8b).

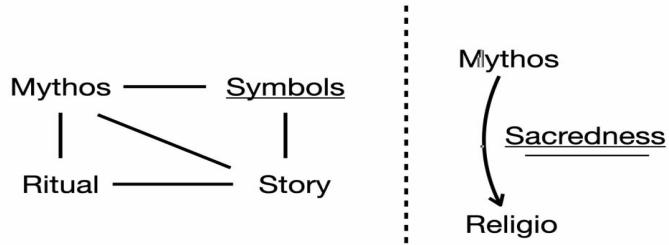


Fig. 8a

Fig. 8b

Of course we can invoke, we can make use of Mythos for other things, for other patterns that we care about. Of course our Religio is always at work just in our day to day interactions with the world. But when we want to activate, accentuate, articulate Religio itself, we rely on Mythos to do that, because our relationship to Religio is one that can only be born symbolically, because of the primordial, participatory nature of Religio.

Now here's something else: Of course, at the core of Religio, as I've argued, is Relevance Realization, and one of the things we know, because of the phenomenon of insight and the phenomenon of flow, is one of the things that relevance realization is intrinsically interested in, is itself. Relevance Realization, because it is a self-organizing, self-transcending, self-correcting process - remember, in insight you are correcting for a misleading salience pattern, given an incorrect problem formulation - Relevance Realization is intrinsically set up to be interested in itself. This is part of its structural design. If your Relevance Realization machinery is not directed to be interested in itself, it's ultimately not a self-organizing, self-correcting, self-developing process, which would mean it would cease to be relevance realization. It is constitutively necessary of relevance realization that it finds itself inherently interesting (see Fig 9).

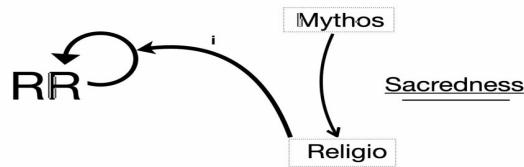


Fig. 9

So we can find the process... So this (draws a box around Religio in Fig 9) is just deeply valuable to us because it's constitutive of our being in the world. We can use Mythos (boxes mythos) to activate, articulate, accentuate, celebrate Religio. And of course, we find that a deeply interesting thing to do (Fig. 9 arrow i) because relevance realization is set up, by it's evolutionary heritage, to be intrinsically interested in itself. And so we are going to find all of this deeply valuable, deeply meaningful. This is the machinery of meaning making (indicates Religio in Fig 9), and then we're using mythos to celebrate it and trigger the fact that relevance realization is constituted to finding itself interesting.

So what we have is, I think, a way of talking about a lot of the aspects of Sacredness. We get the experience of Sacredness out of the deep machinery of Religio, and when we're using the centrally important machinery of Mythos to activate it, accentuate it, articulate it, celebrate it; and that in itself is developmentally important to us, but serious play is the way in which we go through development. But we also find that process intrinsically interesting - like an insight, or the flow state - precisely because relevance realization is constituted to reflectively be interested in itself as a process.

Now, the question is: "Yes, okay, maybe all of that is right. Maybe what I'm doing in sacredness is using Mythos in order to celebrate and appreciate and accentuate Religio, and I'm going to find that valuable because Religio is inherently valuable to me, and relevance realization is inherently interested in itself.... I get all of that. And I get why this can be so deeply transformative of people and why it can open up their world, and open up themselves in this way that feels like making love with reality. But still, you're not getting the essence of Sacredness. Because the essence of

Sacredness is in The Sacred (writes The Sacred on a cleaned board). And The Sacred takes us back to the metaphysical proposal.

The Metaphysical Proposal & Distinguishing Product From Process

The metaphysical proposal is the proposal that what ultimately generates the experience of Sacredness is something that has an absolute value, because it has a particular metaphysical status, namely it is Supernatural (Fig. 10) - it is above nature - and it's 'above-ness' means that it is always inherently valuable to us. And therefore we will find it sacred, because of its absolute value. Now this carries with it a particular way of understanding the process of meaning making. It's to claim that, ultimately - I think that's what people are claiming - that there are things - maybe that's the wrong word, I don't [know], language is failing me... I'll use this word as neutrally as I can - there are 'things' that are always of relevance to us. What I'm suggesting to you is that this is the claim that there is an essence to relevance (writes this to the right of the list). That there is a final formula for being relevant, and that that essence inheres in some particular thing/object (Fig. 10 arrow i). And so if I come into a relationship with that object, the relevance, the essence of relevance is inhering in it and I will therefore find that object sacred.

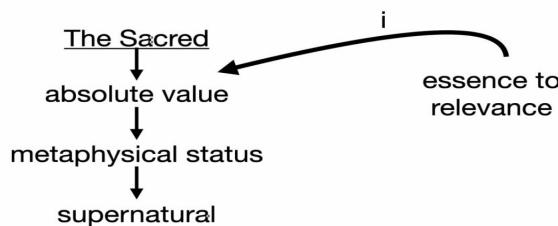


Fig. 10

I'm trying to be respectful here, but I think this is ultimately a mistake. The reason why I think it's a mistake is because there is no essence to relevance. There isn't even a thing, there is only the ongoing process of relevance realization. There is nothing other than itself that is intrinsically interesting to relevance realization. And the relevance realization isn't even absolutely

interesting to relevance realization because, of course, your salience machinery can actually lead you to kill yourself! You may even find your own existence is no longer relevant or salient to you. So again, to say it's intrinsic, even that is not to say that it's absolute. The notion of sacredness here seems, to me, to be a category mistake. It seems to me to be saying that there is some-thing, some-one, some-place that essentially, absolutely, always, is relevant! But that is to misunderstand the nature of relevance. It's to confuse the products of relevance realization with the process of relevance realization. And that, of course, is a hallmark of one of the ways in which we make mistakes. We get fixated on the products of our cognition and not paying attention to the process.

Let's go back to the Gnostics. Remember that one of the things that their contemporary apostolic Christians criticised them for, is that they were constantly inventing new myths, in this sense of Mythos, because they saw the relationship to sacredness as an evolving one, a deeply transgressive one, a one that was supposed to always be launching you into a trajectory of trans-framing. Might that suggest another way of understanding sacredness? [One] that, I think, would be respectful to a lot of the texts considered sacred, without committing us to, or needing the supernatural as a category. Or maybe it means a significant transformation of what we've ever meant by this term "supernatural", I don't know.

There's an inexhaustibleness in this whole process. There's a sense in which Reality can continue to disclose itself to me; it's inexhaustible. And that's ultimately, I think, because of the reality that Reality is itself combinatorially explosive. There's an inexhaustibleness to the process of relevance realization, not in the sense that I'm infinite - that's ridiculous - but in the sense that the process is constantly evolving; it is constituted by its evolution, it is not something other than its evolution. What if sacredness is not about finding the completion, the essence, the stabilised final form? What if sacredness is actually an experience of the inexhaustibleness of reality, and the inexhaustibleness of the relevance realization machinery and its coupled response to that reality? What does that look like more concretely?

Let me give you an example of where you could see these two concretely distinguishing from each other. For me, Plato is Sacred. That doesn't mean that I think Plato has some absolute or supernatural value; that he has an unquestionable authority. Or that my understanding of Plato should be stabilised or finished or complete. Instead, what happens is exactly the opposite: I read some Plato and I understand some Plato - I get some insight - and that has an impact on me. And that does all of this (gestures to the board) to me, and then I go out in the world, and that understanding - in a perspectival and participatory way - transforms me, and I engage and I become, and the world discloses in a certain way. And after that process I return to Plato, and then I can see in Plato what I did not see before. I can realize things I did not see before, and those realizations reach deeply into me again. And then again, there's that engagement, there's that transformation, and then I go out in the world... You see how I'm doing the Anagogic thing, right? I go out in the world and the world is disclosed to me in ways I hadn't seen before, and then I go through transformation: I become something different, the world becomes different at the level of co-identification. Agent and Arena are being opened up. And then I go back and when I read Plato I see something again that I didn't see before... And that has happened to me throughout my life! There isn't some final form there! I'm meaning this very carefully: this is a "Gnostic" - not in the sense of the two world mythology or something like that - there's Gnosis here: I am constantly finding Plato to be an inexhaustible fount of insight, transformation, an inexhaustible source of trans-framing of my world and who I am. If it's ongoing, it's filled with a kind of developmental wonder for me. I don't think Plato is supernatural. I don't think Plato is absolute. I don't think Plato has the final account. I don't think Plato can give me a final definition of what is relevant. But nevertheless, again and again and again, I get into symbolic resonance with the text; I see through it, and then the world reaches back through it to me.

I mean, even Nietzsche has this, right? "If you stare long enough into the abyss, it begins to stare back through you." He has a kind of sacredness around that. But it's, of course, open-ended, it's deeply symbolic - read "Also sprach Zarathustra". But as I said, I think it's bound up with a problematic grammar of simply inverting Christianity. I don't want to invert Christianity.

That's not what I'm proposing to you at all. I'm trying to suggest to you that the idea I propose to you about what Sacredness is, can be connected to an alternative proposal of what The Sacred is. The sacred is the Transjective relationship between the combinatorially explosive nature of Reality - that reality is ultimately a no-thing-ness, that ultimately it is not a thing that you can frame. Reality will always transcend your framing. That's what 'combinatorial [explosion]' says. And this is linked to the no-thing-ness of yourself! The 'I' that can never be captured, the framing that can never be captured in the frame, the ongoing, never ending - not in you, particularly, but as a process... it doesn't come to a completion, is what I meant by 'never ending' - process of Relevance Realization. There's a deep, non-logical identity, a deep symbolic resonance between these two (Fig 11. Arrow i). I think it's what a lot of the mystics were talking about. This is a deep, participatory identification: the inexhaustibleness of Reality, and the inexhaustibleness of Relevance Realization are deeply, deeply coupled at the primordial levels of Religio. This is The Sacred as this (gestures to the board - See Fig 11), the inexhaustible that powers the experience of Sacredness in a deeply, profoundly, participatory fashion.

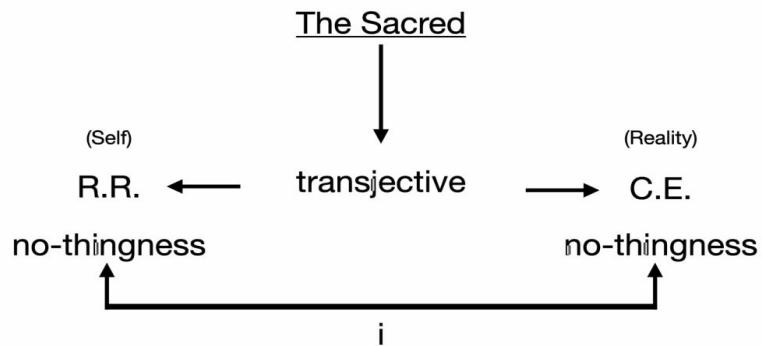


Fig 11

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Ep. 35 - Notes

Vilayanur Subramanian Ramachandran

Vilayanur Subramanian Ramachandran (born 10 August 1951) is an Indian-American neuroscientist. Ramachandran is known for his wide-ranging experiments and theories in behavioral neurology, including the invention of the mirror box.

Book Mentioned:

The Emerging Mind: The BBC Reith Lectures - [Buy Here](#)

The Tell Tale Brain: Unlocking the Mystery of Human Nature - [Buy Here](#)

Michael Polanyi (flags as symbols)

Book Mentioned: Charles Taylor, Michael Polanyi and the Critique of Modernity - [Buy Here](#)

FOUND INSIDE – PAGE 184

Here, again, I believe Taylor's approach could benefit from Polanyi's explication of how symbols work in Meanings (with ... a unity and project it beyond the symbol, which may have no intrinsic interest in itself (e.g., the flag; metaphors, however, ...

ek-stasis

Ekstasis (ἔκστασις) is the Ancient Greek word for ecstasy.

Ecstasy (from the Ancient Greek ἔκστασις ekstasis, "to be or stand outside oneself, a removal to elsewhere" from ek- "out," and stasis "a stand, or a standoff of forces".

[Also sprach Zarathustra - Nietzsche](#)

Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None(German: Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen, also translated as Thus Spake Zarathustra) is a philosophical novel by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, composed in four parts written and published between 1883 and 1885.

Book Mentioned: Also sprach Zarathustra - [Buy Here](#)

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 36 – Awakening from the Meaning Crisis – Relgio/Perennial Problems/Reverse Engineering Enlightenment

Welcome back to awakening from the meaning crisis. So last time we were continuing our examination of sacredness, the experience of sacredness, the Schleiermacher side of things, and I was trying to develop an account of what symbols are – at least symbols insofar as they are distinct from signs – as a way of trying to understand the role that symbols have in our understanding of sacredness. So I was presenting to you the view that symbols are a participatory [-] act. And that that participation has a connection to the activation of a profound kind of metaphor. By activating that metaphor, we are reaching backwards through our exaptation and reactivating that material, so that we can re-exapt our cognitive processes, and re-experience, re-appreciate, re-see, re-understand some aspect of reality. And that re-exaptation makes the use of a symbol a deeply participatory, transformative thing that we do and that with a symbol, we are activating all that exaptive machinery, in order to hold something in mind so that we can see more deeply into it, be more in contact with it. And then I argued [that] the point of that is ultimately to set up an anagogic process by which I am transformed, so I can see through the symbol into reality, and so that reality can speak through the symbol to me, and that we get an anagogic flow happening, and I'm becoming deeply integrated, the world is becoming disclosed, and that *mutual, reciprocal realization* feels deeply like love coupling to reality in a profound way.

And so [I argued] that symbols are in that sense designed to get me into a trajectory of trans-framing; they're designed to, in wonder, open up the world, and also grow me, so that I can be in that larger world. And that points to how symbols are ecstatic; they're participatory, they're integrative. They're complex because they help to complexify me and disclose the complexity of the world in a coordinated fashion. And then I suggested to you that we understand symbols as Mythos; that it's always a symbol and a story together, and that the story points to the ritual, and the ritual is also... because the Mythos is always enacted, if it's going to bring about the transformations that it wants to bring about, or that we want to use it to bring about. I think both of those are right.

We can use Mythos to activate, accelerate, articulate, and appreciate Religio. Religio is inherently valuable to us; so even that alone is going to be very valuable to us. But in addition, the act of seriously playing, not only is it developmental of what we find intrinsically valuable, because it's constitutive of our ability to value anything else or interact with anything we consider valuable – because it's primordial – not only is that the case, but Relevance Realization – which is at the heart of Religio, and I'm giving you an argument for that – is constituted to it, it functions, it is structured to function, it functions by being interested in itself, correcting itself, transcending itself, developing itself. So that's why we love the flow state, right? Not only is it optimal in this 'playing with Religio,' like the flow state it's not only optimal in that it's getting us to be our best, [but] we also find it to be an optimal experience, because we're seriously playing with this intrinsically valuable machinery in a way that is constituent, intrinsically significant to us. And I propose that when we are using the symbol to get us to play with the machinery, the Meta-assimilation, the Meta-accommodation of sacredness – or at least the Meta-assimilation, the Meta-accommodation of the higher order Relevance Realization within sacredness – then that's what we deeply mean by the experience of Sacredness.

The New Proposal: Relevance Does Not Have An Essence

And then I propose to you a proposal I need to return to now. Because I only initiated it last time. I proposed to you that we move off of sacredness and

onto the sacred, in a particular proposal as to what is the cause or the source of sacred-ness, “The Sacred”. And again, I’m using that term because it’s as neutral as I can find. And the proposal, which, again, you don’t find in some accounts of sacredness: The Sacred that is the Tao, I do not think is supernatural or absolute. The sacredness of Shunyata is definitely not.

Right? So when Prince Wu asked Bodhidharma what was Holy about his doctrine, and he keeps pressing Bodhidharma. and he keeps saying, “No, no, not that!” and then the Prince gets upset and says, “well, what is Holy about your doctrine?”, Bodhidharma says, “Nothing holy! Vast emptiness!”.

Shunyata is, in that sense, sacred. But it is not Holy. At least not in the sense of a supernatural source of righteousness.

So I proposed an alternative to that idea, born from a critique. The critique was [that] there is something wrong about trying to essentialize ‘Sacredness’ in The Sacred. To say that the source of sacredness is something that is essentially relevant to us, absolutely, unquestionably, undeniably relevant to us, and that it is the origin and the culmination of relevance. And then I proposed to you that that just struck me, ultimately – and I do mean this with as much respect as, I mean, this is, hopefully regarded as a respectful criticism, but nevertheless, it’s a criticism – I regard that as a category mistake. Relevance Realization is not about detecting, finding something that’s inherently relevant, in the sense that it absolutely commands our attention. Relevance does not have an essence. It doesn’t work that way. Relevance Realization is, intrinsically, an evolving process. It functions by evolving and it evolves in its functioning. Does that mean we should just dispense? No, because I propose to you a couple [of things]. Well, I propose one thing and then I want to add another thing to it. I proposed to you that there’s a different way of thinking about sacredness that comports well with this idea of sacredness; there’s an idea, a way of thinking about the source of sacredness, that comports well with the picture of sacredness that I’ve tried to argue for, which is, namely, the idea of sacredness as the inexhaustible. The inexhaustible aspects of this reality (knocks the wall and the desk).

It’s kind of like turning Kant on its head. This reality is always a source of wonder for me, not because there is an object that specifically or absolutely has the claim on me of being the source of wonder! Every object, every thing is combinatorially explosive: vast emptiness! Ultimately, there is a ‘no-

thingness' to reality because everything is combinatorially explosive in terms of what it is. But my processing, precisely because of the way it operates, has an inexhaustibleness to it too – a no-thingness to it! The “I” that is never reducible! There is always the framing that can never be captured in the frame, because the process of Relevance Realization is ongoing, it's inexhaustible because it can't stop. It's like a shark that if it stops swimming, it drowns. And there's a deep transjectivity, there's a deep participatory identification between the inexhaustible no-thingness in me, and the inexhaustible no-thingness of reality: vast emptiness. The Tao that can be spoken is not the Tao! And so I can return again and again and again to the world. And again and again and again, there is the real potential, in the world, of sacredness.

Symbols As Being Indispensable

Now, why might people – now this is a conjecture on my part. I'm trying to offer an explanation and it is not intended to be a justification because that would be inconsistent with what I'm saying – but why is it that we might get this way, where we get ‘this’ (uses his bottle as an example), this is where it is to be found! And this is where I think we do need to be more charitable. Oh man, and I don't want to sound condescending! There is a real sense in which particular symbols, particular Mythos, is indispensable for people (writes indispensable on the board, with Mythos off it). It might be, and in fact it's highly plausible if you think about it: given my own personal history, the way Relevance Realization has unfolded, the way Religio is for “here, now, me”, that certain symbols are indispensable for me to activate, articulate, appreciate, accelerate my Religio. Those symbols may be indispensable for me because of the way my Relevance Realization machinery is evolving. They may be indispensable to my Religio because of the Kairos that is always part of my ongoing – see, the problem with ‘Religio’ is it's a Noun, right? – but my ongoing Religio – even saying ‘my’ is wrong, right? Because that makes it sound like something I possess; the Religio that my world and I participated in and co-emerge from. It may be to a certain set of individuals that these sets of symbols are indispensable. That makes sense to me. That is how Relevance Realization works.

You may say that only through this Mythos (draws arrows through Mythos; Fig. 1 arrows), do I get the access I need to activate, accentuate, appreciate, accelerate, articulate my Religio. I think that is a completely plausible hypothesis. I think, therefore, it makes sense to say, for example, that given the way this person's evolved fittedness has unfolded, and the particular timing – the historical context – that only this Mythos gives them the access they need. And in that sense – maybe it's a Christian Mythos, maybe it's a Hindu Mythos – that Mythos is indispensable to them. But here's what we shouldn't do. We shouldn't confuse 'indispensable' to an individual, to a community, to a group, to a tradition. We shouldn't confuse psycho-cultural, cognitive cultural indispensability with metaphysical necessity.

Metaphysical necessity. English is indispensable to me; I cannot communicate to you without it. Given this time, this place, my own history, where we are, the timing of things, English is indispensable to me! That doesn't mean that English is metaphysically necessary! It didn't exist, and it will not exist at some point! And it is not some final, complete or absolute version. It is not the perfect language. It is not the final language. In fact, it performs precisely because it's continually evolving as a language, so that it stays, at least to some degree, in touch with the world.

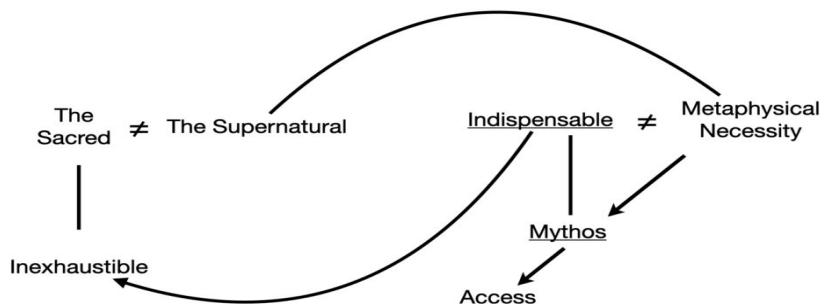


Fig. 1

The First Step Towards Solving The Meaning Crisis

I don't think we should confuse these (adds \neq Metaphysical Necessity to the board); they are not the same. I do not think we should understand the sacred... We shouldn't do 'this' (writes **The Sacred** \neq **The Supernatural**). Of course, these are linked (links **The Supernatural** with **Metaphysical**

Necessity). The inexhaustible source of perspectival, participatory, procedural, and ultimately propositional intelligibility (writes Inexhaustible off The Sacred). (Connects Indispensable to Inexhaustible) We may have, I think it's reasonable that – in fact I think it's highly plausible that – a certain Mythos is indispensable for an individual, a group, a community, a tradition. But that should not be confused with metaphysical necessity, nor should it license the idea that that inheres in some supernatural entity or thing (indicates the link between Metaphysical Necessity and The Supernatural). The shark, being the way the shark is, is indispensable to the shark's capacity for survival. But that doesn't mean that that is the final finished absolute form of fittedness. The world, and the capacity for biological adaptation, the process of evolution, means that there's an inexhaustibleness to life's capacity for fittedness. That to me is a reasonable alternative to understanding sacredness, than to think of it as inhering in some final absolute.

So if we could give up the confusion of indispensability with metaphysical necessity, if we could give up identifying The Sacred – that which generates sacredness as the supernatural, then we would not have to be committed to a two-worlds mythology for accessing sacredness, the deep connectedness of Religio. Now that in and of itself is not... well, that's not the response to the Meaning Crisis. That's insufficient. That is, and I mean this seriously: This is the first step. The first step is to try to understand the machinery of connectedness and understand it in a way that allows us to disconnect it from a metaphysical essentialism, disconnect it from the supernatural and its commitment to a two-worlds mythology. Instead, understand it in a fashion that is completely integratable with science. Because if you remember, this is all grounded in a naturalistic interpretation of Relevance Realization. This would be an account that re-situates us back within that scientific worldview, while also giving us a way – a deep way – of talking about, experiencing, sacredness, deep connectedness, deep self-transcendence, deep transformation, et cetera. Now I need to do a lot more work. And that's why this series is not yet finished. I need to show how this model of Relevance Realization does address the historical issues. I've already [been] suggesting that to you, but how does it help to address where we got to historically, the historical factors?

But there's another thing that I've been alluding to, that we also have to address, and they are integrated together. And now that I have this theoretical machinery, I can talk about it better. (wipes board clean) Because we now have, I think, a more careful way of understanding the meaning crisis (writes Meaning Crisis on the board). So we have, and we did this in the first half of the series, we have the historical factors (writes this off to the side of Meaning Crisis, pointing below it) that basically have un-homed us, thwarted worldview attunement, all the stuff we've been talking about. And of course they need to be addressed. And part of how we can awaken from the meaning crisis is, we have to respond to these historical factors. We have to come up with a way of re-articulating our worldview, in which we can get back that sense of deep connectedness; what I've been calling, in the last couple of lectures, sacredness. That kind of deep connectedness that affords the satisfaction of our sense of being in contact with the world, affords self-transcendence, affords meaning in life in a profound way.

So can this view give us something analogous to what the three orders [give]? We've got to get to that; that's how we respond to the historical factors. But you're starting to see how it might do that. We're starting to see how we can get an account of sacredness that can fit into the scientific worldview, and fit us back into it. We need to do more on that; you're getting a beginning of that. But there's something else now that's coming to the fore that we need to address (adds another arrow, mirroring the one from Historical Factors), which is the structural functional analysis of meaning making – what I've been calling the scientific analysis, because I think that's fair in contrast to the historical analysis – is also disclosing something else. And we've seen this all the way along and I've been hinting at it. Because the machinery of Meaning Making, of course, also, is the machinery that is going awry when people are experiencing a sense of meaninglessness.

Perennial Problems

Remember the core argument: that the very machinery that makes you adaptive, is the machinery that makes you vulnerable to self deceptive, self-destructive processing. The very machinery of RR, Relevance Realization (indicates the convergence point between the two arrows, below Meaning

Crisis), that is making all of this deep connectedness possible for us, is also the machinery that can go horribly wrong. We've already seen that.

I want to start talking about the perennial problems (labels the second arrow on the right with Perennial Problems). You've seen examples along the way, but I want to bring them out more. I want to develop that thesis about how the very machinery that makes us adaptive is the machinery that makes us prone to self-deceptive, self-destructive behaviour. Here's what I want to argue. I want to argue that all cultures, all people – all people in the sense of being participants in their culture, not necessarily every single individual – but all cultures, across time, place, history, right? People are prone to perennial problems. These are ways in which the machinery of Relevance Realization can drive them into meaninglessness, despair.

So the idea is that, inherent in the machinery that makes us adaptive, is inescapable vulnerabilities to self-deceptive, self-destructive patterns that can deeply undermine our Religio – the Agent:Arena relationship – such that we experience meaninglessness, absurdity, alienation, et cetera. We fall into despair. These are perennial because they are inherent in our machinery. Now, cultures – and individuals, communities, at multiple scales – what people have developed is they have developed sets of psycho-technologies (draws a big arrow back up towards Perennial Problems), ecologies of practices that help alleviate the suffering of these perennial problems. So for example, in India, you have the rise of Buddhism as a set of psycho-technologies for dealing with Duka, et cetera, dealing with modal confusion. This is, broadly, we have practices for cultivating wisdom and pursuing enlightenment or salvation (adds these to this big arrow). The meaning crisis emerges, I would argue, when historical factors have undermined – and that's what I've tried to show you in the history – have undermined a worldview, a tradition; de-legitimized a language, a cognitive grammar; made obsolete or made dismissive practices, sets of psycho-technologies, so that this (Historical Factors) undermines this (puts a big X through Wisdom, Enlightenment, Salvation – See Fig. 2). The historical factors lead to the undermining of the whole ecology of practices and psycho-technologies and cognitive cultural grammar that people have created in order to respond to the perennial problems.

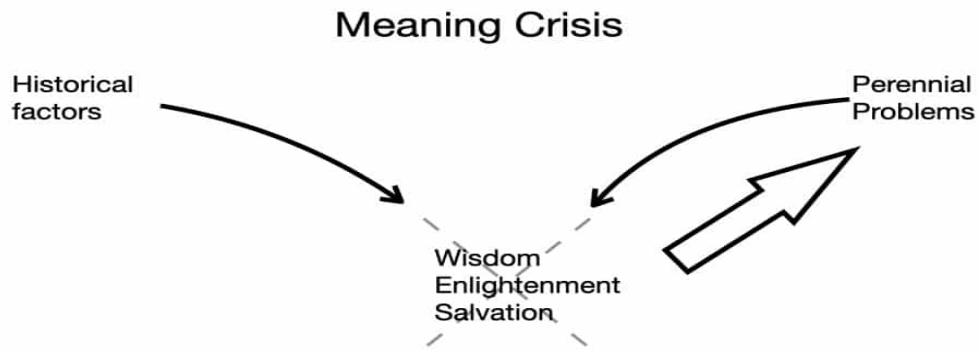


Fig. 2

So we need to do two things. And now this is where we're going to start drawing the historical and the scientific together. Is this account that I'm trying to argue for – for Relevance Realization as our meaning making machinery, and for understanding sacredness in terms of Religio, a higher order form of Relevance Realization – can I also use that machinery to give – and I've tried to suggest how this is possible – to give a response to the historical factors? (See Fig. 3) I'm going to try and do that in terms of what's called third generation or 4E Cognitive Science. And I'm already doing that. And I've already been exemplifying it to you throughout this course.

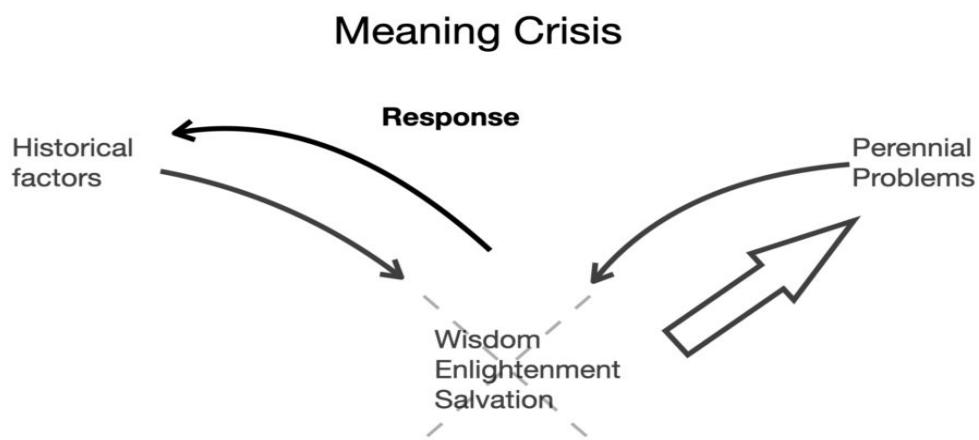


Fig. 3

Reverse-Engineering Enlightenment

But right now I want to do something else. I want to take all this machinery of Relevance Realization (RR) and Religio and Sacredness (adds the circle – Fig. 4) and I want to use it to talk about how we can address the perennial problems.

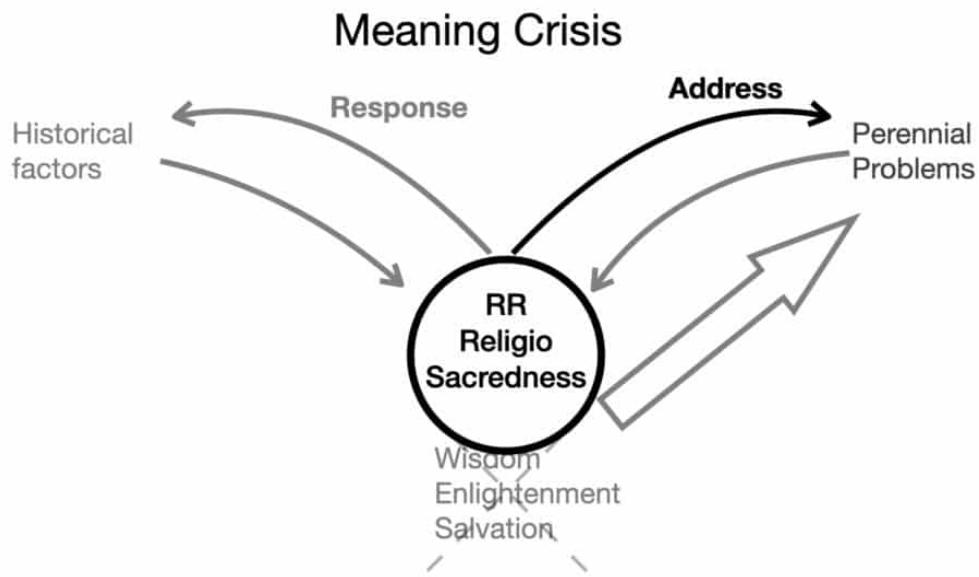


Fig. 4

I want to do something that's at the core of a cognitive scientific project. This sounds pretentious and maybe hubristic and I hope it's not! I want to reverse-engineer enlightenment. I want to understand what the perennial problems are, and using this machinery (indicates RR, Religio, Sacredness), what are the practices (indicates Wisdom, Enlightenment, Salvation), what are the processes we can use in order to address the perennial problems? In fact that's what I'm going to take enlightenment to mean. Enlightenment is the set of practices that ameliorate the perennial problems and alleviate us from the distress and the suffering that they inflict upon us.

I already suggested the possibility of that when we talked about higher States of consciousness, and trying to give a cognitive scientific account. But now I want to take that deeper. Because to awaken from the meaning crisis is not just to have a theory! It is not even to have a good scientific historical theory! It is to have an understanding that helps afford and facilitate the

process of transformation that we need to undergo in order to awaken from the meaning crisis. (Wipes board clean.)

I have failed if what I'm doing will not ultimately lead to ways in which you, in your life, can respond to how the perennial problems might be gnawing away at the fabric of meaning in your life. So I want to concentrate on that. I want to concentrate on trying to reverse-engineer enlightenment, and then if I can take that and situate it into this account of sacredness and Relevance Realization and show how that fits into our scientific worldview – and you can see how this [is] potentially coming together – then we have a way of awakening from the meaning crisis. Not as an absolute final answer; that's ridiculous. But as a way of maybe getting the process of awakening from the meaning crisis started.

All right, let's think of Relevance Realization and Religio... We can think about [how] there's a functional aspect, a structural aspect, and a developmental [aspect] (lists these three on the board – See Fig. 5a). All of this has been seen throughout the series. Of course the Functional aspect is ultimately the Relevance Realization [and] there [are] three central features [of this]: the way in which it is self-organizing, and then there's aspects of self-identification and self-reflection. The Structural has to do with the whole Meta-meaning of the Agent:Arena relationship. Developmental: I'll come back to because I need to unpack these more (the above two) before I can talk more about that, but we've already seen how an intrinsically developmental Relevance Realization and Religio are.

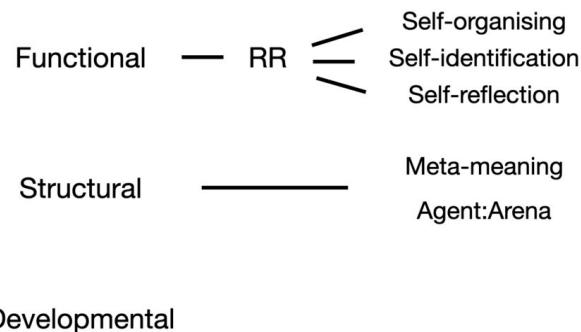


Fig. 5a

Okay, the self-organizing aspect. How can that go awry? Well, I've already made, I think, a very good case for that for you. That's Parasitic Processing — when we get into those complex cycles that take on a life of their own, and take life from us; complex patterns of self-deception and self-destruction. Self-identification: Well, we know what that is, that's Modal Confusion. What about Self-reflection? Well, I haven't talked about that very much, so I need to talk about that now.

The Problem Of The Reflectiveness Gap

This goes to some important work done by Velleman and others. So we have to go back again to the work of Harry Frankfurt and Frankfurt's notion of a "Wanton". A Wanton is a being who acts in a wanton fashion, that acts completely impulsively. And so the idea is, if I just act completely impulsively, I'll actually lose my agency because my impulses are often in conflict with each other, they undermine each other. Think about Plato and the inner conflict. So what I need to do is I need to step back and reflect in order to try and get a coordination and integration, and reflection actually helps reduce my wantonness. See when I'm enmeshed in a perspective — here's a particular perspective (Fig. 6a) — I am enmeshed in its salience landscape, how it's making me care, how it's motivating and arousing me. So when I'm thirsty, I'm seeing the world 'thirstfully' right? So things having to do with water [-] become salient and I'm drawn [to them]. That's to see the world 'thirstfully'.

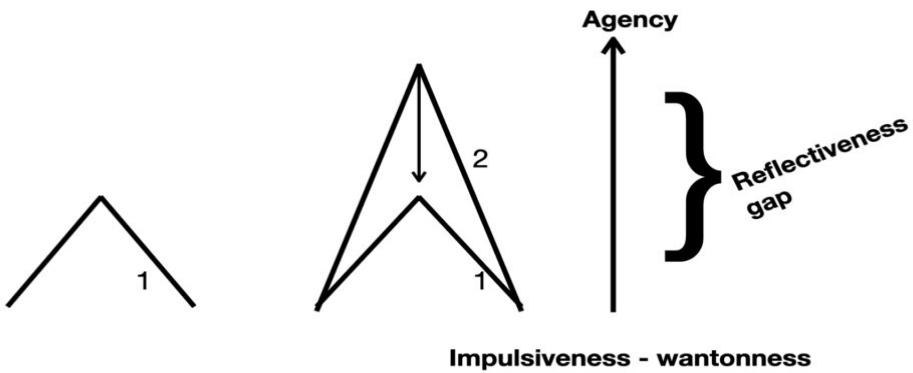


Fig. 6a

Fig. 6b

Fig. 6c

But I can do a transparency-opacity shift. I can actually step to a different perspective in which I'm aware of my thirst (Fig. 6b). This perspective is not thirsty (Fig. 6b 2). This is thirsty (Fig. 6b 1)! But this perspective (Fig. 6b 2), for example, is curious: "Oh, that's what thirst is like!" Now my motivational machinery is not driven just by thirst. It is driven by, perhaps, curiosity! And what happens is, I start to gain some relief from the compulsion of immediacy and urgency of my thirst. I'm using thirst, by the way, because that's also a metaphor in Buddhism for craving. So if you're at the bottom, and if you don't do any self-transcendence, you are awash in impulsiveness, and self-destructive wantonness! And as I start to move up, away, as I self-transcend, I start to regain agency (Fig. 6c). But as you may expect, you can't simply maximize this, and this is Velleman's point and it's an excellent point. As I open up, this is the Reflectiveness Gap. I get a gap by reflection. As I open up this reflectiveness gap, I'm gaining agency. But if I keep opening it up, do I keep enhancing agency? No! Because then you get into the problem that is typified, beautifully by the way, in one of our great tragedies, namely Hamlet.

Hamlet is always reflecting, and he's always reflecting on his reflection. And so he's always stepping back and looking at, always stepping back and looking at. And so he becomes incapable of acting! His tremendous – because he is gifted, right? – his tremendous powers of reflection and self-transcendence are actually making him incapable of acting. As Velleman says, he becomes disconnected from the motivational machinery of interacting with the world. He loses agency. See, as I open up – here's Agency, here's the Reflectiveness Gap (R.G.): as I opened it up, I gain Agency, but as I push it too far, I lose it (Fig. 7). Now, of course, you're tempted to the Canadian response, "Oh, I'll just stay in the middle!" (Fig. 7 m). And remember, that never works because how much I need to be towards this end, and how much I need to be towards that end, is going to be very contextually sensitive.

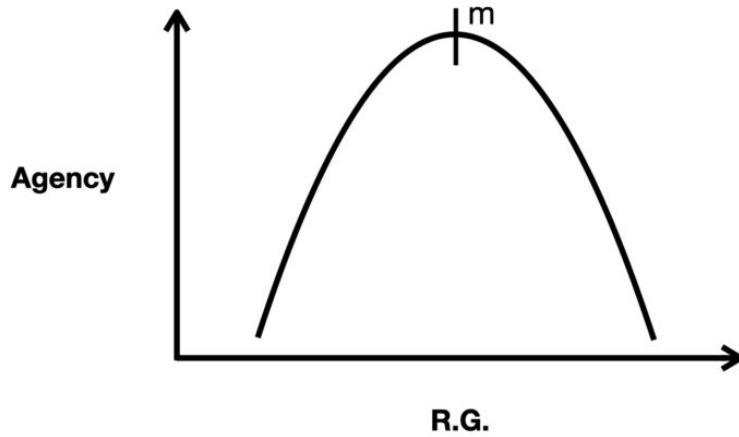


Fig. 7

The problem with this is: How do I optimise this? How do I get the involvement, the immersion of the wanton? How do I get the flexibility, the self-correcting capacity of Hamlet? How do I get them together? How do I optimize them together? So this is the problem of the Reflectiveness Gap (adds this to Fig. 5b below).

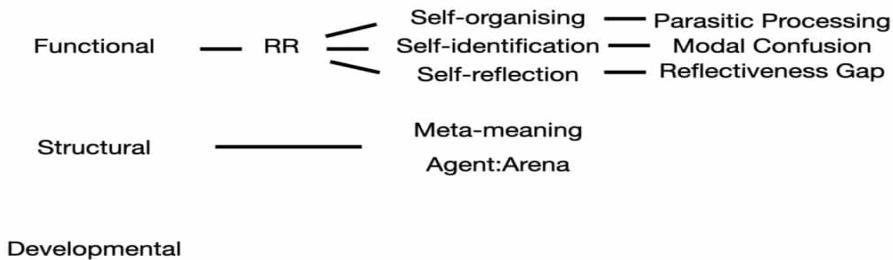


Fig. 5b

And of course, the fact that it's an optimization problem tells you that it's immediately enmeshed with Relevance Realization. because another trade off that... Remember, there's tradeoffs, we've seen, between exploring and exploiting. There is tradeoffs between generalizing and specializing. Another tradeoff is [when] you're constantly trading between stepping back and looking at your cognition to monitor it, and stepping through and being

involved with intervening in the world. There's a tradeoff relationship between them that's also part of Relevance Realization.

What about Meta-meaning? Well, there's three I want to talk about: Absurdity. We've talked about [-] this one already: Anxiety. Alienation (adds these to the board – Fig. 5c). All of these, of course, show up in Domicide, because Domicide is the loss of the Agent:Arena relationship.

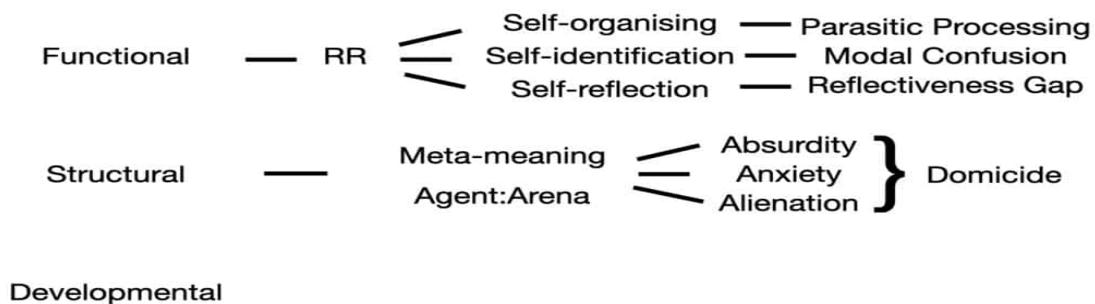


Fig. 5c

So alienation is when the connectedness between you and other people is lost. Absurdity is when the connectedness between you and the world is lost; and absurdity can be pushed into horror. When you're finding a particular absurdity deeply mysterious, so it's drawing you in, [-] such that your ability to make sense and get a grip on the world is being deeply thwarted. That's horror! And of course anxiety... remember, it's not the same as fear. Anxiety is ultimately when you are disconnected from yourself in an important way.

The two problems we face down here (Developmental) are ones we've talked [about] already before. This is Existential Inertia; when you're trapped in a worldview and you can't get out of it, you can't activate Anagoge and move to a new worldview. Or Existential Ignorance; you're indecisive, you don't know what you're going to lose if you go through the transformation, you don't know what you're going to miss if you don't. This is Existential Entrapment (Fig. 5d)

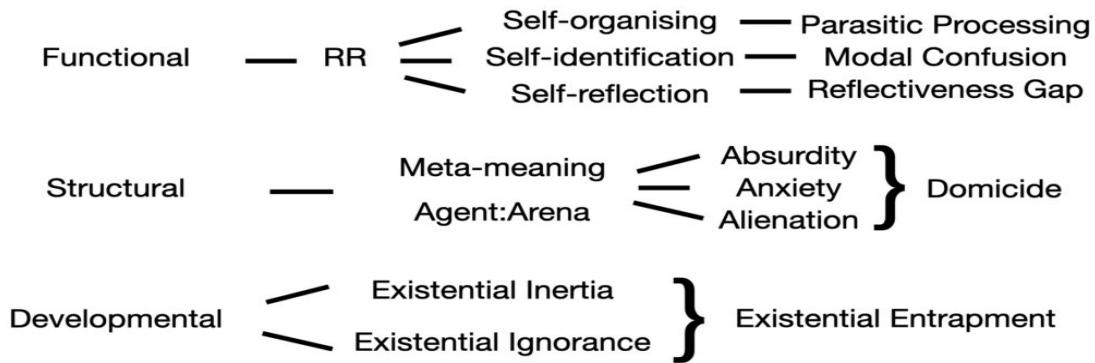


Fig. 5d

Absurdity

So let's talk a little bit about [Absurdity]. I talked a lot about [Parasitic Processing] and [Modal Confusion], I explained [Reflectiveness Gap]. We know a lot about anxiety, the inner conflict. We've got aspects of the alienation I've been talking about. I've talked about [Existential Entrapment] already. But [Absurdity], which I've alluded to many times, we need to talk about this because it points to something really central and important. A very important article on this is by Thomas Nagel, it's called The Absurd. It's also talked about in his book, The View From Nowhere. And what I want to try and show you is how much absurdity is a perspectival, participatory [knowing]. All of this (Fig. 5d) is at the level of perspectival, participatory knowing, but [Absurdity] in particular. First of all, Nagel does something very, very important in the absurd. He talks about how we behave as if the absurd is a result of our inferential processing. And we purport to give arguments that lead to the conclusion of absurdity. So we give an argument like, "Well, what I do now doesn't matter, because it won't make any difference to people a million years from now." This is [the] "I'm made insignificant by the vast expanse of time". And Nagel points out that that argument doesn't work. Because if what's happening now is irrelevant – notice my language – to people a million years from now, the symmetry applies. Their opinion of me a million years in the future is irrelevant to me! It is [-] a symmetry. If I make no difference to them, they also should make no difference to me! It can't matter to me because I can't matter to it.

“Well, you know, what, what people are pointing to is, they’re so small. They’re so brief!” Well, Nagel says, “Well, if you existed for millions and millions of years, would that make your life more meaningful? In fact, isn’t it a very real possibility that existing for a very long period of time would make your life absolutely absurd!?”

If your smallness in reality makes you feel absurd, makes you insignificant, then would your life be more meaningful to you if I blew you up to the size of a galaxy? Why would that do anything? And as [Susan] Wolf has argued in her book, *Meaning In Life And Why It Matters*, this sense of being bigger is actually a metaphor for being connected to something larger than oneself. And that’s ultimately a metaphor for being connected to something that has a value independent of my valuing of it. And we’re going to come back to that because that’s at the core of sacredness. Because there’s a problem for all of these (gesturing to the whole board – Fig. 5d).

So what’s going on with absurdity? If it’s not really being generated by these arguments, what are the arguments doing? Well, he’s basically saying the arguments are ‘after the fact’ expressions of absurdity, not ‘before the fact’ generators of absurdity. “Well, I might, Whoa, my life is made absurd by the fact that I’m going to die!” You can’t experience being dead! How can that be relevant to you? “Well, I won’t exist!” You didn’t exist a million years ago! Is that particularly relevant to you?

Now notice what I’m doing: I’m not trivialising your experience, I’m trying to say that the arguments aren’t generating it because the arguments are ultimately invalid. So let’s drop out of propositional knowing. Don’t we know that that’s right? We’ve had this whole argument that Relevance Realization, the meaning making processes, are below the propositional level, below the level of our inferences and our beliefs. It’s at the level of procedural and ultimately perspectival and participatory knowing.

Let’s take an example. So Nagel gives an example. Now he wrote the article in the 80’s, and that was way before cell phones, and people had voice recorders, which is a very different time! A very, very different time. But he gives the example of what he calls everyday absurdity, and the example goes like this: Tom is on the phone and he calls – he’s been all day just, “ahhhh, I got to do this, I gotta do this. I’m going to call Susan. I’m going to tell her

that I love her. I've gotta do it. I've been working on this all day here..." working himself up and it's "Ohhhhh, [-] we got a friendship, but I might be losing a friendship, but I might be gaining a lover..." and all this is happening (Fig. 5), right? So he picks up and calls Susan, dials, he hears the phone picked up, click, and he goes, "Susan, don't say anything. Don't say anything at all! Before you can say anything I have to tell you, I love you. I love you, Susan!" And then he hears, "Susan is not here right now. Please leave a message at the tone. Beeeeep!" and it's kind of funny and it's kind of sad at the same time!

And humour has... humour can overlap with absurdity! In fact, you can get a lot of humour by playing with absurdity: Monty Python, [-] those guys, that troop was talented in that! Because what's going on in humour points to what's going on in absurdity. What's happening is a clash of perspectives. We have Tom's perspective, and from within his perspective, his action is deeply meaningful. But the machine gives us an impersonal, mechanical perspective in which his actions make no sense. They have no meaning.

Absurdity is a clash of perspectives. Because, of course, that's why it overlaps with humour. Because in humour, what you do is you play between a clash of perspectives and then you resolve it by a trick, by an equivocation. You play with two different perspectives. That's why it's a 'punch' line. You were in this perspective, and then you're suddenly shifted to this one! But not in some incongruous way; in a way that you can ultimately make sense of. But of course, absurdity doesn't always, and very often does not overlap with humour, because the perspectival clash can be one that we can't ultimately resolve with humour and make sense of. The clash instead is a raw clash of perspectives! And we experienced just the incoherency, just the loss of connectedness. So absurdity is this clash of perspectives. That's why it can become horror! Because this perspective (gestures holding a small ball), the perspective that I'm looking at, if I look at this perspective, from the perspective of all of time in history (gestures a massive ball), what's relevant here (small), is undermined there (massive). There's a clash in these perspectives.

So what do we need to do? We can see how all of this machinery, all of this (Fig. 5), is ways in which the adaptive nature of Religio and Relevance

Realization is also making us prey to, vulnerable to losing our agency, to suffering distress, to experiencing horror, meaninglessness, absurdity, being trapped, being deeply confused, overwhelmed by parasitic processing. These are perennial problems, because the very machinery that is making us adaptive is making us always susceptible to them. We can't jump over our own shadows.

Now, what I want to do next time with you is, can we use the very same machinery of Relevance Realization and see how we could engineer a comprehensive response to all of these perennial problems? Because I would propose to you that any developmental change, any development of our perspectival, participatory and procedural knowing, that affords a response, a reliable response that ameliorates and even alleviates the perennial problems, [then] that is a good candidate for enlightenment. Instead of making enlightenment as this unachievable superlative that only the superhuman beings in the distant past can achieve... What's the use of that!? Let's make enlightenment what it... It might be difficult, but let's not "do that". Let's acknowledge the difficulty with an understanding that actually facilitates us being able to respond. I'm going to stipulate that enlightenment is the developmental process that gives us reliable amelioration and alleviation of the perennial problems.

And I'm going to show you next time, how that can be explained with the theoretical machinery of Relevance Realization, and Religion. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

— END —

Ep. 36 – Notes

JD Velleman

“What about Self-reflection? Well, I haven't talked about that very much, so I need to talk about that now. This goes to some important work done by Velleman”

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Harry Frankfurt

Harry Gordon Frankfurt is an American philosopher. He is professor emeritus of philosophy at Princeton University, where he taught from 1990 until 2002. Frankfurt has also taught at Yale University, Rockefeller University, and Ohio State University.

Thomas Nagel

“A very important article on this is by Thomas Nagel, it’s called the absurd. It also talks about in his book, the view from nowhere”

Thomas Nagel is an American philosopher. He is a University Professor of Philosophy and Law, Emeritus, at New York University, where he taught from 1980 to 2016. His main areas of philosophical interest are legal philosophy, political philosophy, and ethics.

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Susan Rose Wolf

“And as [Susan] Wolf has argued in her book, Meaning In Life And Why It Matters”

Susan Rose Wolf is an American moral philosopher and philosopher of action who is currently the Edna J. Koury Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She taught previously at Johns Hopkins University, the University of Maryland and Harvard University.

Meaning in Life and Why It Matters:: 40 (The University Center for Human Values Series) – [Buy Here](#)

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Ep. 37 – Awakening from the Meaning Crisis – Reverse Engineering Enlightenment: Part 2

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. So last time we were taking a look at a proposal that we could now understand the sacred, that which causes the experience of sacredness, in terms of a transjective inexhaustibility and kind of deep Anagoge between the no-thingness of your ever evolving Relevance Realization, and its mysterious depths; and the no-thingness of reality that is ultimately combinatorially explosive and dynamically changing itself.

We can acknowledge the important role of the symbolic. The way it helps us to engage and activate the primordial aspects of Religio and go through processes of re-exaptation, causing new emergent abilities so that as we are opening up the world, we are also opening up ourselves in response to that. But I cautioned against confusing indispensability – your own, or our collective, at times, indispensability with any kind of claims of metaphysical necessity, or an absolute essence. And that was part of the larger critique: that relevance can't have an absolute essence. And therefore we shouldn't think of the sacred ultimately as a supernaturally endowed, absolutely essential form of relevance.

So I then proposed to you that part of what we saw, at least the experience of sacredness doing was helping to facilitate the higher order Relevance Realization, that meta-realization between homing us against Domicide, the meta-assimilation, but also causing us to confront the numinous, the meta-accommodation. So the Sacred is doing that. But I also proposed that we needed to look at this more deeply. We needed to look at how the Sacred helps us address perennial problems. So that took us into opening up and becoming a little bit more analytic about the Meaning Crisis.

There's two components to the Meaning Crisis. There are the historical factors, which we traced in detail at the beginning of the first half of the series. And an issue that is now one we need to focus on: the perennial problems. Because, in some sense, the experience of sacredness, the attempt to activate, accentuate, accelerate, articulate, and appreciate Religio, should

address our perennial problems. The perennial problems are, of course, perennial because the very machinery of Religio that makes us adaptive, also makes us perpetually vulnerable to self-deceptive, self-destructive behavior.

Most cultures cultivate an ecology of psycho-technologies, typically in the form of a religion for addressing the perennial problems. But that set of psycho-technologies has to be fitted into a legitimizing and sustaining worldview. In some sense, the psycho-technologies have to be integrated with sacredness. What's of course, happening for us is – and we'll come back to this in more detail – here, the historical factors have undermined that possibility for us. Undermined the experience of sacredness, all of the ways in which we can cultivate an ecology of psycho-technologies for enhancing Religio, because we do not have a worldview within which that project of meaning making, self-transcendence, the cultivation of wisdom, the affordance of higher states of consciousness, the realization of gnosis... We do not have a worldview that legitimates or encourages that. And so, people are forced, as I said, to cobble together in a dangerously autodidactic fashion, their own personal responses to perennial problems without traditions, guidance, communities, well-worked-out sets of practices, well-vetted, well-developed. And so that means they're often bereft when they face the perennial problems.

So responding to the Meaning Crisis has two components to it. And that's why I call it 'awakening' from the Meaning Crisis, because it has not only the response of trying to rearticulate a new worldview in which the project of enhancing Religio again, gets validation, is properly situated, encouraged, facilitated, legitimated, et cetera. But we also need to understand what the set of practices the ecology of psycho-technology would look like, that would allow us to address the perennial problems. And I'm proposing that the scientific account of Relevance Realization and Religio – and I've already tried to give you some illusions to that... we're going to come back to it full force – will give us a way of articulating a worldview in which we can resituate the project of meaning making. And of course the linchpin of that argument is the idea that at the core of the meaning making is Relevance Realization, and Relevance Realization can be given a naturalistic explanation. One that, hopefully, still does full justice to the experience of sacredness.

But I want to concentrate, as we began last time, on the perennial problems. Because, ultimately, that's the final thing. If I come up with a historical response and it does not actually afford the addressing of the perennial problems, that helps people to ameliorate and perhaps alleviate the perennial problems, then this project has failed. So we need to start discussing the perennial problems and developing this thesis more extensively – that the very machinery that makes us adaptive, makes us susceptible to self-deceptive, self-destructive patterns of behavior.

Different Aspects Of Religio

So we talked about looking at some of the core features of Religio, right? So we've got functional features (writes Functional – Self-organization) (Fig. 1), and here we have, of course, self-organization; and I tried to develop that very explicitly. It's not just vague self-organization it's opponent processing. Opponent processing that's making use of self-organizing criticality, the relationship between compression, particularization, and other such tradeoff relationships, et cetera. We've got self-identification (writes Self-identification below Self-organization), that process by which you're creating an identity; and you've got self-reflection (writes Self-reflection below Self-identification), your ability to step back and reflect on your own cognition, which, of course, was made so powerfully present in the Axial Revolution with the advent of second-order thinking.

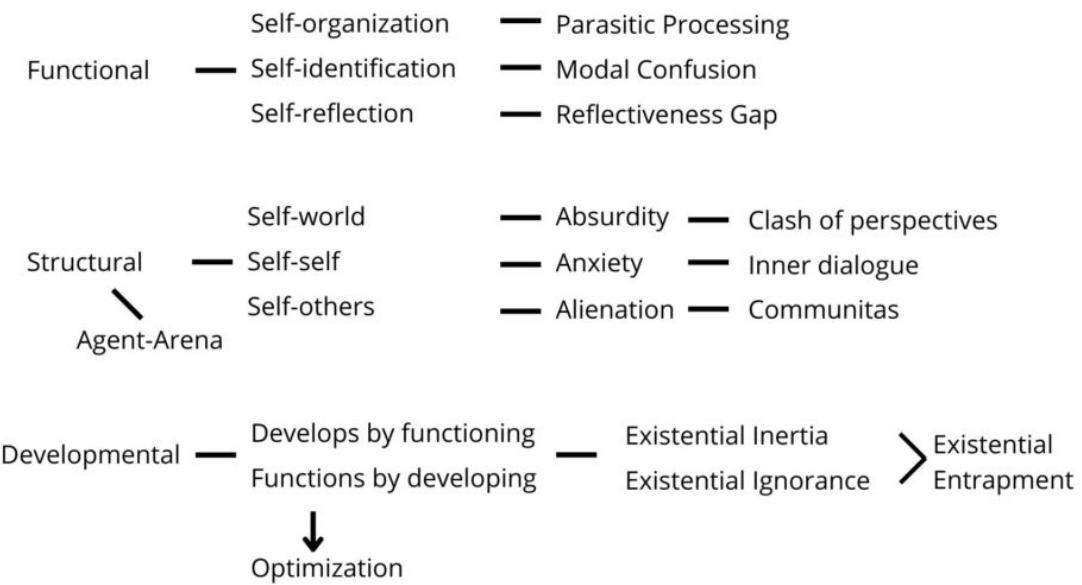


Fig. 1

We took a look at the structural (writes Structural). This has to do with the components of the Agent:Arena relationship. The ways in which self is connected to the world (writes Self-world beside Structural), self is connected to self (writes Self-self below Self-world, and self is connected to others (writes Self-others below Self-self), right?

And then we looked at the developmental (writes Developmental). And I sort of left that as a placeholder, because I just wanted to give a quick overview last time, but I want to go in and draw this together. Because what we've been talking about throughout the last few lectures is the idea that your cognition is inherently developmental. It functions by developing; it develops by functioning. So because it's inherently self-organizing, it develops by functioning (writes Develops by functioning beside Developmental). It functions by developing (writes Functions by developing below Develops by functioning), and this is qualitative development. What I mean is you get the capacity for self-transcendence. There's not only an increase in what you know, but an increase in the kinds of things you can know, the kinds of things you can do. And this is ultimately some kind of process of optimization (writes Optimization below Functions by developing). So there's a developmental trajectory.

And then what you can see is some of the problems we've already talked about: the parasitic processing (writes Parasitic Processing beside Self-organization). In the notes for this lecture, I will put references to the previous lectures, in which I have talked about these in detail. So in order to avoid useless repetition, you can go back and look at the presentation. But if you remember, there's a bad event, and it spirals off, and it gets this very complex self-organizing system that takes on a life of its own, becomes very adaptively resistant to our attempts at intervention, et cetera.

Okay, so this is modal confusion (writes Modal Confusion beside Self-identification). Okay. This is from, but very much you can also see it being addressed by, the Stoics. You can see it being addressed by Buddhism, as Bachelor argues. This is to get into confusion between the Having and the Being modes, the kind of "I" that you are; are you in an "I:it", "I:thou" et cetera.

Self-reflection, last time we talked about this (writes Reflectiveness Gap beside Self-reflection). This is the reflectiveness gap. This comes from the fact that what we can do is we can step back and look at our own processing. And this affords us, this gap affords us, regaining our agency from the chaos of being the impulsive Wanton. But when we open up the reflectiveness gap too much, we get also a loss of agency, we get the tragedy of Hamlet and, of course, some middling position is not the answer there, because at times you have to be highly reflective, at times you have to be highly immersed. How do we answer that?

The problem here with the Self-World relationship is absurdity (writes Absurdity beside Self-world). As I said, this is the Agent:Arena relationship (writes Agent:Arena below Structural). And we talked about absurdity here, and made clear that all of the arguments for absurdity, like what happens a million years from now, it doesn't matter. "I'm so small, I will die." None of these things actually are arguments that can legitimately lead to a conclusion of absurdity, because they are, in many ways – and this was Nagel's point – they're just bad arguments! They're fallacious arguments.

Now, dismissing the arguments is not to dismiss the person who makes the argument. I hope I made that clear last time! If not, I'm trying to do that now, because people are trying to articulate with these pseudo-arguments,

something real that is happening to them, something that is very important. So the arguments are after-the-fact expressions rather than the generators. And the main theme here, and this of course goes into right... (writes Clash of perspectives beside Absurdity) You can see how all of this (indicates parasitic processing, modal confusion, reflectiveness gap) is our perspectival, participatory ways of being, ways of knowing. But what's here (back to absurdity) is a clash of perspectives. It's a clash of perspectives. And then we did the example of Tom who's calling Susan, and how we've humored that clash of perspectives can be resolved usually by playing, like equivocating, between terms or meanings, or getting people to make a connection they hadn't made before. But in absurdity – and I think there's an overlap like this (Fig. 2) (draws two overlapping circles) where you have humor (circle on the left) as a resolvable clash of perspectives, and then you have absurdity here (circle on the right). And then there's an overlap zone (shades in the overlap). And like I said, there's a lot of humor [here] (indicating the shaded overlap) – my prototypical example, [which] tells my age, when I was growing up is the humor of Monty Python, in which you get a lot of absurdity. But then you get what becomes [an] irresolvable clash (shades in the absurdity/circle on the right); it's undermining Relgio in some way, undermining your Agency in some way. And that's sort of pure absurdity.

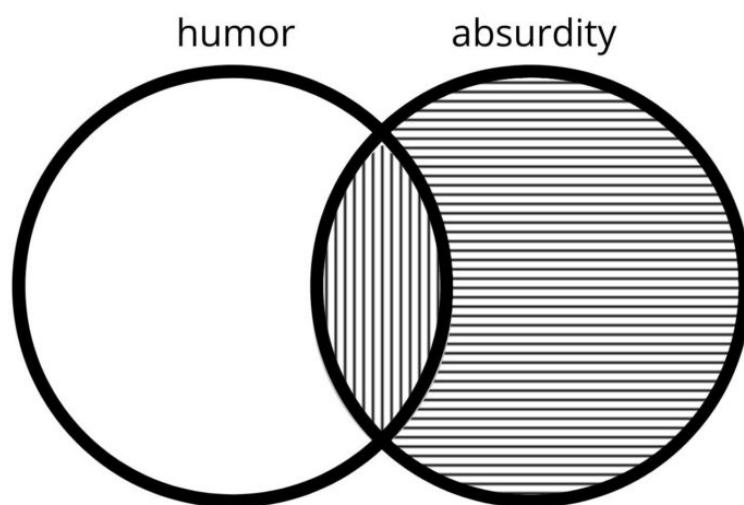


Fig. 2

Self with Self (back to Fig. 1): this goes back to what we talked about with Tillich and anxiety, inner conflict, and what we need here is to, again, think about the ways in which this is connected to self-deception. Because the inner conflict – remember Plato – often skews your salience landscape and makes you susceptible to bullshitting. I'll talk about bullshitting in connection to this, overall. Of course, this is alienation (writes Alienation beside Self-others). This is our inability to connect to other people.

Something that is often exacerbated through social media by the way these other perennial problems in self-deceptive behavior can be magnified in social media. So we can be modally confused and think [that] by having a lot of connections, we're overcoming our alienation and loneliness, but of course that's not the case. We can exacerbate the social media by falling into a sort of pretend narrative and things like that.

Here we talked about existential inertia (writes Existential Inertia beside Develops by function and Functions by developing). This is when you need to move between worldviews, make a worldview viable that you're not currently in. We're going to talk a lot more about the work of Agnes Callard and aspiration. But the point here, and going back again to the seminal work of LA Paul, [is that] this is basically a need for Anagoge. How do I Anagoge my way out of this worldview into another worldview? And then of course there's existential ignorance (writes Existential Ignorance below Existential Intertia), a point made salient by LA Paul and also picked up by Agnes Callard in her book on Aspiration, that we can't reason our way through this. We can't infer our way from a weaker logic to a stronger logic. We can't infer, we can't propositionally come up with the perspectival knowledge that we're lacking, with the participatory knowing that we do not currently possess, and the identity that we are not currently cultivating. So all of that, of course, can come together and this was mythologized – and I mean that in a complimentary sense, right? Remember how I'm using Mythos – but this is mythologized by the Gnostics of “existential entrapment,” feeling trapped.

Now, a couple of things before we move towards starting to address this. This is analytic. This is for theoretical purposes that these things are being distinguished and laid out. It is often the case, as I've already tried to indicate, that these things are interacting and exacerbating each other. That you can be experiencing absurdity and it can be really contributing to your

existential inertia. Right? You could be overthinking things, and getting sort of stuck, and that might be also contributing to your existential ignorance, or it might be contributing to your modal confusion because you can't remember the Being mode because you caught up in having a lot of thoughts and trying to have a lot of beliefs. Right? I'm not going to try and map this out, because the permutations of the ways in which these interact and afford and exacerbate each other is very complex, which, of course, is why the perennial problems are so pressing on people.

Now, what I want to try and do is to show you...(hesitates!) I want to try and show you how we can salvage from the legacy, so many psycho-technologies for addressing the Meaning Crisis. The reason why I'm hesitating is because, again, I'm – this, this is genuine – I am, there's a hubristic element here and I'm not just trying to say, "Oh, you know, taking it from you and leaving that behind"! But again, I'm trying to get a balance between respecting where we really are and what our situation really is and respecting all of the tremendous heritage and legacy that has been given to us, and trying to get that balance is always in my mind. It's very difficult! But, I'm going to go through these, each one... First of all I'm just going to name so you can get an overall schematic and then I'll erase the board and I'll talk about each one in greater detail. Okay, so be patient, please, I'm asking for your patience. I'm just going to give some indications about how we address each one of these schematically so you can see on the board and then I'll step back and go through each one in more detail. And then, how they're integrated together. And what's also missing from this, in an important sense.

Ways Of Addressing The Perennial Problems

So what I'm going to propose here is the way you deal with parasitic processing is – and this is why this is number one, in some sense, schematically; it's overarching. You've heard me talk about it before with the idea of an ecology of practices, an ecology of psycho-technologies, right? What you want to do is you want to cultivate a counteractive dynamical system. See, Parasitic Processing is a very complex dynamical system, and if you try and do one shot interventions, it just reconfigures itself. What you need is to cultivate a counter.../ that you internalize... It

can't just be something you think about it; it can't just be some ideological structure. It has to actually be an active dynamical system in you. And so what you're going to do – and again, I'll come back to this in more detail – you're going to try and cultivate a counteractive dynamical system, because that is how you will be able to respond to the dynamical systems of Parasitic Processing. And I'm going to propose to you that a prototypical – by no means exclusive! So that's how I'm using it – but a prototypical example of this is the cultivation of the eightfold path in Buddhism (Fig. 3) (draws a wheel beside Parasitic Processing on the board), which is very, very perspicaciously represented by an eight spoke wheel; the integration, it revolves, it evolves, et cetera. So what we're looking for here is a Counteractive Dynamical System (writes Counteractive D.S. on the board).

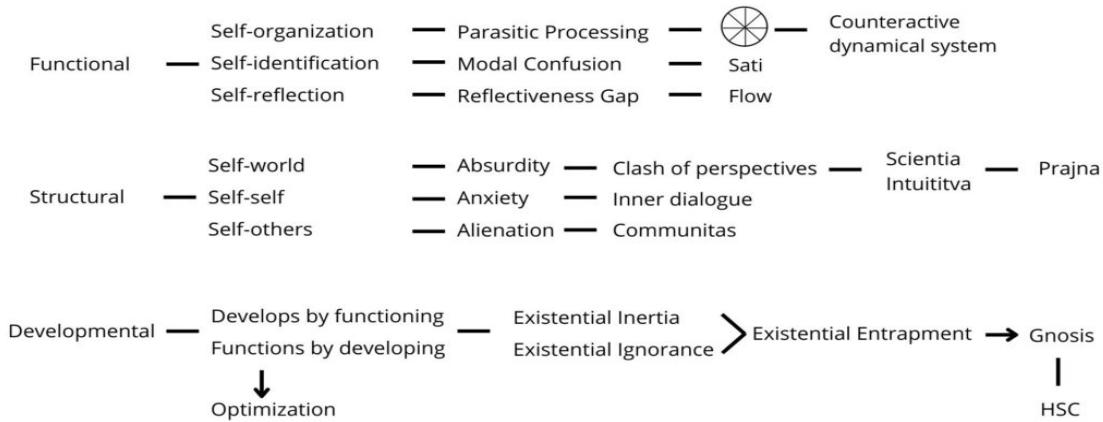


Fig. 3

Okay, Modal Confusion (writes Sati beside Modal Confusion): we've already talked about this and this is Sati. Practices that are designed to invoke a deep remembrance of the Being Mode.

Okay, The Reflectiveness Gap: you need the combination, the integration, the dynamic integration. Not just a settled median point, you need the dynamic integration of immersion and creative flexibility. We know a state that does that, we're going to come back to this (writes Flow beside the Reflectiveness Gap), but that's the Flow state. You need to be cultivating the flow state in an important way.

Okay, the Clash of Perspectives: this is going to take – again, so what I put on the board right now, initially, it's going to seem like “what?”; so again, give me some time. I'm just going to put it on here – this is what Spinoza in the West called ‘scientia intuitiva’, or what in Buddhism in the East refers to as Prajñā. This is a state, in which you get the deep interpenetration of the perspectives. Alright, so I'm just going to put [it] up here (writes Scientia Intuitiva beside clash of perspectives), and you're like, “wow, what does that mean? How you do that?”! Scientia intuitiva, Prajñā (writes Prajñā beside Scientia Intuitiva)... but if you remember, just to foreshadow it, we talked about [how] I can scale down, I can scale up, and then I can get this state of non-duality that is simultaneously scaling up and scaling down. And that actually alleviates the clash of perspectives. So we'll come back to this.

Okay, so Anxiety: this is inner dialogue (writes Inner Dialogue beside Anxiety). So this is to pick up the idea of internalizing the Sage: as the child is to the adult, the adult is to sage. [-] So an example of this is the Christian's “it's not I who lives, but Christ who lives in me”, or the Buddhist's “you have to realize your Buddha nature”, or the Stoics' “I have to internalize Socrates”. And again, if you turn these into ideas to be believed rather than practices that have actually been internalized and are integrated into the development of your identity, then you're not hearing what I'm saying!

Okay. So Alienation: I haven't talked as much about this, but I'm going to come back to this more. This is to cultivate what Turner (writes Communitas beside Alienation) and other people called Communitas. This is the sense of connectedness to other. And part of that is to try and recover what we had in Platonic dialogue. And what's happening right now is a whole movement called Authentic Discourse; I'm going to talk a lot more about that – the Authentic Discourse Movement, right? (Writes AD beside Communitas) Authentic Discourse Movement, but we just need authentic discourse (AD) here. Something like what we had in Platonic dialogue, something like therapy, sort of “both/ beyond”; I'll come back to that, because this is a primary way of doing this (indicates Alienation).

I gave you an extended argument (draws an arrow beside Existential Entrapment) for how you respond to Existential Entrapment, and of course this is Gnosis (writes Gnosis beside the arrow) and that this Gnosis is going

to have a connection to higher states of consciousness (HSC) (writes HSC below Gnosis).

There's something that's missing, right? And what's missing is, we need, of course, an overall framing of these things, the way we're pursuing all of these, and the way we're trying to integrate them together. [-] All of this (draws a bracket on the left side of the diagram) has to be within a Wisdom framing. We're going to talk more explicitly (writes Wisdom beside the bracket); we're going to devote quite a bit of time to try and get at what can we now think about wisdom, given all the current work within psychology and cognitive science, and even neuroscience, on wisdom. (Fig. 4). Because throughout all of this, we have to have a cognitive style in which the amelioration of self-deception and the affordance of self-optimization are paramount. Okay? So I want to go through each one of these in more detail. This is the overarching structure, and then trying to bring it together...

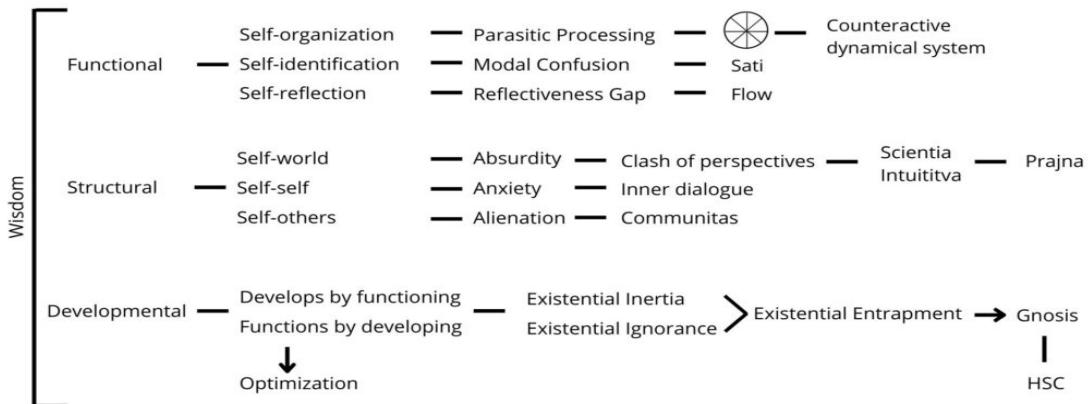


Fig. 4

Reverse Engineering Enlightenment

What is it I'm proposing to you? And see, here's where my concern about hubris is here, although I think there is a legitimate point I'm making. I'm trying to argue for a way in which we can reverse engineer enlightenment. Instead of keeping enlightenment as an obscure state surrounded by mystique and nostalgia, we need an account that recognizes what that mystique pointed to, but exaggerates, which is the difficulty of enlightenment. Right?

But ultimately, if we have a kind of Being, an ecology or psycho-technology that reliably and systematically, individually and collectively, allows us to address the perennial problems, I'm going to propose to you that that's what we should call Enlightenment. If enlightenment is something above and beyond that, then I don't know what its value is. And if enlightenment is not directed towards this (gestures towards the board), I would say it is not something of value. So I'm going to propose to you that, insofar as we can give – using the theoretical tools we've cultivated together; Relevance Realization, [-] the work we've done on mindfulness, the work we've done on flow, et cetera, right? All of it (gestures towards the board) – insofar as we can give an account of this in terms that are ultimately naturalistic, that can be subject to scientific investigation, we will have – and is this the final 'challenge' to the division given to us in the Enlightenment? – we will have a scientific theory of enlightenment and what it can mean for us. (erases the board)

Cultivating A Counteractive Dynamical System

Alright. So let's talk about – some of these, I'll talk about it at length because they're more novel; others, I'll talk about more briefly because there's an extended discussion of them. So again, let's start with this notion of dealing with Parasitic Processing, which is an overarching thing. And the idea here is, as I said: to cultivate a set of practices, and that's what you have with something like the eightfold path (draws a wheel) (Fig. 5) where you're trying to remember all of these: right aspiration, right mindfulness, right concentration, et cetera. Remember that the "right" is not moral righteousness; the right is "right-handedness," it's dexterity. And now to use language that we've developed: it's "right-fittedness," it's optimal fittedness. It's enhanced Relevance Realization within each one of these. And what you have is a set of practices that are interdependent with each other, mutually supporting, and self-rolling, becoming a self-rolling wheel. And if I have a set of practices that can take on a life of its own, and you have the metaphors in Buddhism like where you enter the stream, it takes on a life of its own. And initially what I'm doing is, I'm cultivating this practice and this practice and this practice – but then they start to implicitly interact, reinforce, develop, and it starts to become a counteractive dynamical system in me.

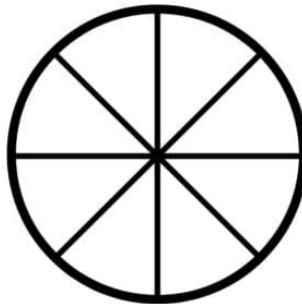


Fig. 5

The Buddha told the famous parable about how to understand this (indicates Fig. 5). He talks about the goldsmith; and the gold is something inherently valuable and you should think of your mind as something inherently valuable, right? And he says, okay, so take a look at the goldsmith. The goldsmith just looks at the gold; no change is wrought, right? So if you're just sort of doing meditation and reflecting, nothing happens, right? The goldsmith has to heat up the gold there, right. There has to be this right effort, the energy put in, maybe something like flow. But if the goldsmith just heats up the gold, the gold just melts and goes away, right? And then also there has to be the shaping. There has to be the reconfiguration. There has to be the cultivation of new skills, new abilities, new virtues. If you just hammer the gold, you'll smash it and wreck it. If you just heat it, it will melt. If you just look at it, you won't notice its imperfections – sorry, you will do nothing but notice its imperfections, but nothing will change.

So I need to look in order to notice, but I need to balance that, integrate that dynamically with heating and with hammering – and notice what I'm doing: I'm creating this higher order skill of being a smith by getting a set of practices that have a complementary relationship to them. Each one has strengths and weaknesses, and the strengths and weaknesses are fitted together. So you get something overall that can produce something that the individual skills can't do. So by getting this fluid ecology of looking, of heating, and of shaping, then the gold becomes well-shaped, and it becomes, as he says, wieldy. You can wield it very well. You can, It fits your hand and extends your capacity so well.

So what you're getting there is a strong recommendation for looking at this as cultivating an ecology of practices, getting sets of practices, sets of psycho-technologies that have complementary relationships to each other,

and organizing them together. And we do this all the time. We constantly take constellations of lower order skills and techniques to build higher order skills and techniques, but we build it as a dynamical system, the counteractive dynamical system that can operate in many ways, on many levels of our cognition and our consciousness and our being. So the way to deal with parasitic processing is to cultivate a counteractive dynamical system. (erases the board) And this is why this is an overarching thing.

Remembering Sati

So Modal Confusion — We've already talked about this. We've already talked about the way in which mindfulness practices and other practices like that can be drawn from stoicism. Like the view from above, or objective seeing, can help us to remember Sati, the Being-mode. Again, not as an idea, not as a belief, but as an existential mode that we can reliably reactivate and reenter into in a viable and enriching manner.

Getting Into The Flow State

Okay. The Reflectiveness Gap and Flow — So if I were to just speak this lecture impulsively, wantonly, it'll become chaotic, right? It'll tend to probably fall into self-contradiction. It will be confused, and therefore confusing. But if I'm constantly stepping back and reflecting on what I'm saying and engaging in self-criticism, and then thinking — I'll choke.

So what do I do? Well, I try to get into the flow state because the flow state is a state in which I am both — and Velleman, by the way, argues for something very similar, he proposes Taoism and Taoism as a solution to the reflectiveness gap. And, of course, as I've argued, Taoism is basically the religion of flow in many ways, the yin and yang, the out and the in, the making frame and breaking frame, et cetera. So what you're trying to do is set up the practices that will afford flow, set up the conditions that will afford flow. And remember, we talked about the right kinds of conditions. And also — and this is where we're going to have to come back to wisdom — wisely cultivate your flow; where and when and in what domains are you learning to flow?

So I'm trying to get into the flow state here that will keep me sort of immersed and engaged with the material, but also, make me, hopefully, very

sort of flexible, and capable when needed. I don't mean to be self-congratulatory, but you know, when it's needed, hopefully insightful, that this is not just mechanical, that there's an element of flow to it. Almost like jazz; jazz with concepts, and jazz with argumentation.

Practicing Prajñā

Okay. So let's come back to absurdity and come back to Prajñā – talk about this again. We did talk about this before, but I want to remind you of it, and that you are very capable of this. Because your cognition is capable, because of the way attention works. Because attention, I've put it up multiple times – the cat and everything. Your attention is simultaneously bottom-up from the features, and top-down from the Gestalt, right? And your attention – the way you are related to the world is one in which the world and you can be co-creating. This is actually something that Spinoza talks quite a bit about in *The Ethics*. How your experience is co-created by the body and by the world.

So if you remember, Spinoza talks about this idea. When you're reading an argument, and his whole book *The Ethics* is an attempt to bring back blessedness and a sense of, I would argue, sacredness within a Cartesian scientific worldview. That's why it's called *The Ethics*. It means ethics in the older sense of becoming the best person leading the best kind of life, not just doing the morally correct thing. But Spinoza talks about this kind of knowing. And what I realized when I was reading *The Ethics* – well, studying the ethics, you have to almost do *Lectio Divina* with *The Ethics*. You have to read it. You have to really let it soak into you. You have to try and get that worldview attuned – what's it like to see the world as Spinoza did? So you have to sort of study and practice *The Ethics*. So it's an extended period. And then he talks about this. And then I realized that the ethics was actually designed to do this. You have this tremendously tight logical structure, but the logical structure is trying to afford what he called *scientia intuitiva*, this sort of deeply intuitive knowing.

And what he means by that is that you've got this tremendous argument that reaches up to the sort of the largest scale of reality. But there's individual premises along the way. And the idea here is – here's the analogy (Fig. 6). So the premises are like the letters (writes Premises – Letters), the premises

are like the letters. And the argument of arguments, all the arguments constellated together (writes Meta-argument). So I'm going to call this the Meta-argument, the arguments of argument. So these (indicates Premises) go up into arguments (draws an upward arrow from Premises and writes Arguments above) and then the arguments (draws an arrow from Argument to Meta-Arguments) go up into the meta-argument. And this (draws an upward arrow from letters) of course is like the words (writes words beside the upward arrow) into sentences kind of thing (writes sentences above the upward arrow). Remember we talked about how your attention is multiply-layered in this way. And what can happen is, if you practice The Ethics, you get to a place where you see the whole of the argument in each meta-argument, in each premise (draws an arrow from Meta-argument to Premises), and you see how each premise and each argument fit into and contribute to the whole (draws an arrow from Premises to Meta-argument), just like you're seeing the words in terms of the sentence, and the letters in terms of the words. And it's simultaneously bottom-up and top-down in a completely interpenetrating fashion. And what you get is you get a cosmic perspective that is interpenetrating with the perspective of your individual moment of thought. That's *scientia intuitiva*. There is a complete interleaving of the perspectival knowing.

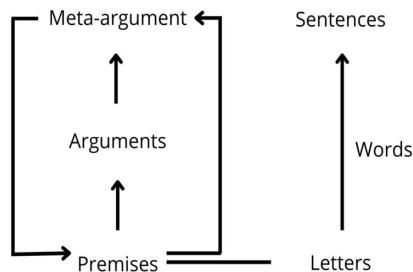


Fig. 6

The Buddhists talk about something similar to this: Prajñā, a kind of self-liberating state of wisdom. And it's a state, in which, as DT Suzuki says, you're sort of simultaneously looking as deeply *in* as you can, and simultaneously looking *out* as deeply as you can. And he quotes Eckhart, a Christian Neoplatonist, as a way of explaining this: "The eye by which I see God is the same eye by which God sees me." So the perspective that reaches out and upwards to what's ultimate, is the same as the perspective that is

coming deeply into me. And what you get is, you practice sort of scaling down as deeply as you possibly can towards something like the pure consciousness event, and scaling down. And you practice scaling up to this sense of profound resonant at-one-ment with everything. And then what happens is, you get – I mean – when in practice, you’re alternating between them. But then, as I mentioned, what eventually happens is you get non-duality. You’re simultaneously as deeply in, and as deeply down – sorry for these metaphors – as you can be. But as I said, they’re often indispensable. You’re simultaneously as deeply down and as deeply in, and as simultaneously as out and as up as you can be. You’re sort of at maximal breaking frame and maximal making frame, and they are optimally, dynamically integrated, like they are in the most optimal, profound insight you can have.

So that state (indicates Prajñā) is a place that addresses absurdity. And you say, “But it doesn’t answer any of the arguments for absurdity.” But that’s the point. There is no argumentative response to absurdity, because the arguments that are supposed to be generating absurdity, don’t generate absurdity. They’re after-the-fact expressions of absurdity. What drives absurdity is perspectival clash. And you can reliably realize a state in which you overcome the perspectival clash. And remember, you can overcome lower order perspectival clash in humor; and humor has at the core of it, a kind of insight and a kind of joy in that insight. You can have something like that. There’s a continuum. You can have the overcoming of the perspectival clash with this Prajnic state of non-duality that carries with it a kind of joy, a kind of insight, a kind of scientia intuitiva, a deep, intuitive knowing. And so that is very doable for us. (erases the board)

Indwelling The Sage

So anxiety. Anxiety — So what anxiety is about is, there’s a nebulous sense that something is wrong, and it’s connected to inner conflict. We see both. We see this in Christianity, the inner conflict of Paul. We see it in Plato with the inner conflict. There’s different centers working according to different goals, and they’re at war with each other, and we suffer. And it’s a dramatic sense of threat. But it has no specific target, of course, as fear does, because with anxiety, the threat is endemic to you. So no matter where you go,

you're sensing the threat, but there's nothing that the threat can particularly attach to, because the threat has to do with the state of being at war within yourself.

So we see across the traditions, the idea of internalizing the sage, to create an inner dialogue that helps to coordinate the various centers, gets them to talk to each other. And I think this is something where cognitive science can actually give us tremendous help. We've had a lot of increase in our knowledge of the various different areas of cognition, even different kinds of centers processing in the brain, and how they work, and how they're operating. And what we need is an internalized representation. A model. A role model. A role is a way of taking on a new identity, right? We need a role model for how we can engage in dialogue. And the proposal here – which is, of course, the platonic proposal we already saw – that if I can internalize my capacity and, developed by the Stoics - my capacity to interact with the sage, eventually I get that ability that I have only with the sage. I can have it with myself, within myself. And it means, therefore, that it becomes part of my metacognitive machinery, the way I dialogue with myself, and get the various aspects of myself, the very centers, to dialogue with each other. And you can see various versions of this. You can see Jung's use of active imagination as a way of trying to create an inner dialogue between different centers of the psyche. You can see practices like Lectio Divina, where I am reading the text, and I am trying to get the text to speak to me, is also allowing aspects of the different aspects of the psyche to talk to each other through the text. So there is a lot we can do.

So, as I mentioned to you, the process of identification (writes Identification), where you're identifying with something like the sage, right? Obviously, it makes use of our capacity for internalizing the perspective of others (Fig. 7) (draws an arrow from Identification and writes Internalization below it), but it also requires what Polanyi called the capacity for indwelling (draws an arrow from Identification and writes Indwelling below it), right? So remember indwelling is when (taps his whiteboard marker against the whiteboard eraser) I'm proceeding through the pen, I'm indwelling it. So you not only have to internalize the sage, but you have to indwell – you have to practice and that fits within with others – to practice trying to – what does it look like, right? What is it like to see things the way the sage does? You

have to seriously play at being the sage without pretense or arrogance or inflation.

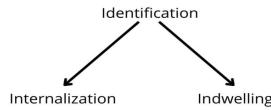


Fig. 7

That's why wisdom is going to matter to all of this, right? So I practice indwelling the sage, right? And yet, people like, what would Socrates do? What would Aristotle do? What would Jesus do, right? And you have to regularly practice. So you practice indwelling, and then you practice internalizing; and you practice indwelling, and then you practice internalizing. And that is (indicating Fig. 7) how you basically start to afford the internalization of the sage, and the creation of your ability, (erases the board), as Antisthenes said, what he learned from Socrates so long ago: to converse with yourself, to get, to enter into something like platonic dialogue with yourself.

Participating In Communitas

Alright. What about alienation? So alienation takes us towards something talked about by Émile Durkheim and Victor Turner and others: Communitas (writes Communitas). Communitas is what you feel when you're watching with other people – what's happened recently, the Toronto Raptors, and everybody was gathered together, and we have shared attention, and we are getting in sync together, and we have that sense of communing and communicating with each other. And there is a shared spirit amongst us all. That's communitas. That's communitas. Communitas is basically a way of getting collective flow going, but it's also something else. It's a collective flow in which we feel like there is real communication between people and something deeper. There's real communion. There's a sense of participating in a shared identity of some kind. So this has to do with taking a careful look at the way in which our practices of communication and communing have been so undermined by bullshitting and modal confusion and an adversarial, political culture, et cetera.

And so what's been happening. And as I said, part of the gift of the video series is, I've gotten to meet more and more people who are trying to do this. They're trying to – they're putting real time and talent into cultivating individual and communal responses to the Meaning Crisis. So I've gotten to interact with, for example, Peter Limberg, who's been introducing me to authentic discourse, authentic relating practices. I will talk a little bit about this in a minute.

And then, for example, I've got to meet, and have some interesting dialogue – the one interview – not one interview, sort of one dialogue with him is out and there's another one coming. Because what Jordan Hall is trying to do is he's trying to do two things in an integrated fashion. I see him trying to do – he's trying to free communication from the cultural grammar that has got us where we are. In that sense, he's trying to respond deeply to the history, not in theory, but in the actual practice. And that is bound up with, as my argument has tried to show, that is bound up with the project of trying to reaccess, in a powerful and perspicacious manner, these other kinds of knowing; and that making our communication or our communion not just a matter of propositional exchange or conflict, but trying to tap into the underlying procedural knowing. And how that procedural knowing is dependent on the underlying perspectival situational awareness, the perspectival knowing, and how that is ultimately dependent on the participatory process of our ongoing evolving attunement from which the agent and the arena co-emerge. And so I see him trying to do that. I see him trying to create a way in which we can get what he calls coherence. A kind of communitas, I would say, that is directed towards engaging the collective intelligence of distributed cognition; and remember that most of our real world problem solving, contrary to the bullshit we tell ourselves about how we're self-made individuals, most of our problem solving is done in concert – serious play, concert music – is done in concert with other people. And so what he is trying to do is create a stance towards a state called coherence in which we are creating a kind of communitas that is marshaling distributed cognition and its collective intelligence for simultaneously freeing us from the ways in which we are boxed in, like the nine dot problem, by our historical, cultural, cognitive grammar. Access the other kinds of knowing, and bring that to bear on the problems that we are facing.

So I want to talk a little bit, I'll just introduce the idea. There's a book, *Cohering the Integral We Space: Enabling Collective Emergence, Wisdom and Healing in Groups*. I've gone to a circling practice already. I'm not an expert in it. I want to become one. I want to take it seriously. So I'm only gesturing towards it, but it is a communal practice in which – this is my best way of trying to explain it to – you're engaging in a mindfulness practice, something like platonic dialogue. And you're creating something like a collective flow state, so that what emerges is a dynamical system. And as I basically have been proposing throughout this, the last few lectures, that the word Spirit is basically pointing towards dynamical systems that are evolving.

We create a dynamical system that gives people the resources to address their capacity for being in touch with themselves in each other. It's not therapy, although it overlaps with some of the gnosis in therapy as well. You know this, you know that when things are right and you get in sync with another person or another group of people there's – and we talked about this with platonic dialogue – something emerges. There's a collective that emerges there that takes your cognition, and everybody else's, [to] places that you can't go individually. You participate in that, but you don't make it. You're not just a passive recipient of it. You're not just a patient of it. You're participating in it. And so I want to know – I want to learn more about this, but there is a growing – and the circling practice overlaps with other practices that Peter and I are learning about, where Peter talks about a process he calls the anti-debate, where we turn adversarial debating, we have techniques for turning it into authentic relating, where we're trying to get insight, rather than victory in our debating processes. There's lots of books coming out on this, like, *Verbal Aikido* and *Verbal Judo*. So there is the beginning of a whole set of practices for bringing about authentic discourse that can really address the issues of alienation. Okay.

Gnosis

Now, of course, as I said, the response to existential entrapment is gnosis, and we had extended discussion about that and its interconnection with higher states of consciousness. So I'm not going to talk about that at great length, please go back and look at that: that gnosis. But what I would say is

that gnosis seems to need, and you see this with Jeepform and you see this in therapy. It needs that open-ended mythos that the Gnostics talked about. I'm not advocating their particular mythos. I'm not saying their metaphysics is correct – but that transgressive, the open-ended ongoing symbol, the ongoing mythos, these seem to be needed for the cultivation of gnosis. And so I would recommend that to you.

So what I want to do next time is come back and put this all together, what it looks like, and then start talking about the overall framing of this, the way we frame, how we cultivate the individual psycho-technologies, the individual practices, and how we constellate the ecology of those in a state of enlightenment within a wisdom framing.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

– END –

Episode 37 Notes

[**Eightfold path in Buddhism**](#)

The Noble Eightfold Path is an early summary of the path of Buddhist practices leading to liberation from samsara, the painful cycle of rebirth, in the form of nirvana. The Eightfold Path consists of eight practices: right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right samadhi ('meditative absorption or union')

[**Spinoza**](#)

(Other names: Benedictus de Spinoza)

Spinoza, Baruch (1632–77), Dutch philosopher, of Portuguese-Jewish descent; also called Benedict de Spinoza. Spinoza espoused a pantheistic system, seeing 'God or nature' as a single infinite substance, with mind and matter being two incommensurable ways of conceiving the one reality.

Book Mentioned:

[**Ethics – Buy Here**](#)

[**Prajñā**](#)

Prajñā is a Buddhist term often translated as “wisdom”, “intelligence”, or “understanding”. It is described in Buddhist commentaries as the understanding of the true nature of phenomena.

Lectio Divina

In Western Christianity, Lectio Divina (Latin for “Divine Reading”) is a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God’s word. In the view of one commentator, it does not treat scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word.

Communitas

Communitas is a Latin noun commonly referring either to an unstructured community in which people are equal, or to the very spirit of community. It also has special significance as a loanword in cultural anthropology and the social sciences.

Victor Turner

Victor Witter Turner was a British cultural anthropologist best known for his work on symbols, rituals, and rites of passage. His work, along with that of Clifford Geertz and others, is often referred to as symbolic and interpretive anthropology.

Edith Turner

Edith Turner was an English-American anthropologist, poet, and post-secondary educator. In addition to collaborating with her husband, Victor Witter Turner, on a number of early socio-cultural research projects concerning healing, ritual and communitas, she continued to develop these topics following his death in 1983, especially communitas.

Book Mentioned:

Communitas – [Buy Here](#)

L. A. Paul

Laurie Ann Paul is a professor of philosophy and cognitive science at Yale University. She previously taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Arizona. She is best known for her research on the counterfactual analysis of causation and the concept of “transformative experience.”

Book Mentioned:

A Transformative Experience – [Buy Here](#)

[Agnes Callard](#)

Agnes Callard is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago. Her primary areas of specialization are ancient philosophy and ethics. She is also noted for her popular writings and work on public philosophy.

Book Mentioned:

Aspiration: The Agency of Becoming – [Buy Here](#)

JEEPFORM

Jeepform is a label used for contained, experimental and sometimes controversial roleplaying games in the freeform tradition, as designed by the larpwright group Vi åker jeep. Many jeepform games are documented by manuals, allowing them to be re-run at the convenience of the reader

[J. David Velleman](#)

J. David Velleman is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Bioethics at New York University and Miller Research Professor of Philosophy at Johns Hopkins University. He primarily works in the areas of ethics, moral psychology, and related areas such as the philosophy of action, and practical reasoning.

Article Mentioned:

[The Way of the Wanton](#)

[DT Suzuki](#)

Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki was a Japanese scholar and author of books and essays on Buddhism, Zen and Shin that were instrumental in spreading interest in both Zen and Shin to the West.

Book Mentioned:

Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist – [Buy Here](#)

Meister Eckhart

Eckhart von Hochheim OP commonly known as Meister Eckhart or Eckehart, was a German theologian, philosopher and mystic, born near Gotha in the Landgraviate of Thuringia in the Holy Roman Empire.

Paul the Apostle

Paul the Apostle, commonly known as Saint Paul and also known by his Hebrew name Saul of Tarsus, was a Christian apostle who spread the teachings of Jesus in the first-century world.

Plato

Plato was an Athenian philosopher during the Classical period in Ancient Greece, founder of the Platonist school of thought and the Academy, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world.

Carl Jung

Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology. Jung's work was influential in the fields of psychiatry, anthropology, archaeology, literature, philosophy, and religious studies. Jung worked as a research scientist at the famous Burghölzli hospital, under Eugen Bleuler

Active imagination

Active imagination is a conscious method of experimentation. It employs creative imagination as an organ for “perceiving outside your own mental boxes.”

Michael Polanyi

Michael Polanyi was a Hungarian-British polymath, who made important theoretical contributions to physical chemistry, economics, and philosophy.

Antisthenes

Antisthenes was a Greek philosopher and a pupil of Socrates. Antisthenes first learned rhetoric under Gorgias before becoming an ardent disciple of Socrates. He adopted and developed the ethical side of Socrates' teachings, advocating an ascetic life lived in accordance with virtue. Later writers regarded him as the founder of Cynic philosophy.

Émile Durkheim

Émile Durkheim or David Émile Durkheim, was a French sociologist. He formally established the academic discipline of sociology and, with Max Weber, is commonly cited as the principal architect of modern social science.

Article Mentioned:

[Collective Effervescence and Communitas: Processual Models of Ritual and Society in Émile Durkheim and Victor Turner](#)

Jordan Hall

Cohering the Integral We Space: Enabling Collective Emergence, Wisdom and Healing in Groups

This peer-reviewed anthology brings together an overview of we-space practice within the global integral world. Intended to catalyze and further clarify this emerging field, the book offers an in-depth look into current practitioner voices and international perspectives on the subject.

Book Mentioned:

Cohering the Integral We Space: Enabling Collective Emergence, Wisdom and Healing in Groups.” – [Buy Here](#)

Peter Limberg

Peter Limberg is a writer from Toronto, Ontario who co-founded Stoicism Toronto.

Verbal Aikido

Verbal Aikido or Verbal self-defense is the art of using one's words to prevent, de-escalate, or end an attempted assault.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 38 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Agape and 4E Cognitive Science

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis.

So last time we were taking a look at the perennial problems that are endemic to us, precisely because of the functioning and structuring and development of our adaptive religio. The very processes that make us intelligently adaptive also make us vulnerable to self-deceptive, self-destructive behavior.

And I proposed to you that we can address parasitic processing with a counteractive dynamical system. We can address modal confusion by the cultivation of Sati. We can address the reflectiveness gap by the cultivation of flow. We can address absurdity by cultivating Prajñā. We can address anxiety by cultivating inner dialogue, by internalizing the sage through a process of internalization and indwelling that allows us to identify with the sage. We can address the process of alienation through the cultivation of communitas. And I mentioned to you some new sets of communal psycho-technologies that are emerging, and people who are trying to develop

thinking about how to make use of authentic relating, circling, trying to break through our current cultural grammar to a form of authentic discourse and relating. So that's on offer. And that we can respond to existential entrapment by the cultivation of gnosis, which can be empowered by a core capacity for realizing higher states of consciousness.

So what you have is basically a higher state of consciousness that is empowering gnosis (Fig. 1a) (writes HSC with an arrow pointing to gnosis and draws a box around it). And that (indicates Fig. 1a) is, of course, set within part of Gnosticism. As you remember, I argued that it has to be set within a proper ritual context, et cetera. I remind you all of that. And that this (indicates Fig. 1a) is being used to cultivate (Fig. 1b) (draws a double-headed arrow from Fig. 1a) And, of course, it's being reflectively transformed by (draws an 8-spoke wheel) a counteractive dynamical system that is going to, of course, get you sets of practices for cultivating Sati, cultivating flow, cultivating Prajñā, cultivating communitas, cultivating inner dialogue, et cetera.

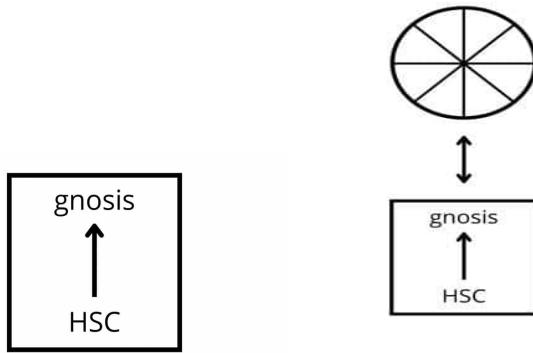


Fig. 1a Fig. 1b

When this is set within a wisdom framing (Fig. 1c) (draws a bracket to the left of Fig. 1b and writes Wisdom Framing) so that comprehensively that person is developing interlocking sets of virtues for addressing self-deception and for affording self-optimization, and this results in a reliable response of amelioration and alleviation of the perennial problems (draws an arrow to the right of Fig. 1b and writes Reliable response amelioration and alleviation of the PP), I would say that's enlightenment, at least enlightenment that I'm trying to reverse engineer. The components can each

ultimately be explained and understood by our best cognitive science, I believe — at least I've given you reason that we can rationally hope that. What, of course, needs to be done is to still try and articulate (underlines wisdom) Wisdom from a scientific perspective. And, of course, that is one of the most exciting things that's happening right now. Something that I am privileged to participate in— all of the ongoing scientific work with a psychological, cognitive scientific, and even neuroscientific work on what does wisdom mean, and how can we cultivate it? And there's just so many people, and we're going to talk about that at length.

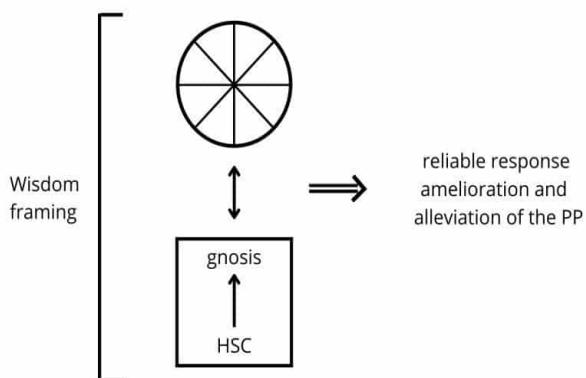


Fig. 1c

But we need to do something else, because we need to talk about the way in which this whole project, as I said, can be delegitimized, undermined, eroded if these whole sets of practices can't be situated within an encompassing and welcoming worldview. So having a ecology of psychotechnologies for addressing the perennial problems is necessary, but, of course, not sufficient for responding to the meaning crisis.

I've been encouraged by meeting so many people that are trying to set up—I'm trying to—I keep worrying—I want my language to be responsive to the creativity of these individuals who are trying to create these ecologies of psychotechnologies. I've talked to Rafe Kelley, for example. He's done some amazing work on trying to bring together aspects of parkour, the martial arts, people doing something like the circling practice and again, create this ecology of practices. Talking to Michael Nathan, and he's trying to integrate ideas about the training and cultivation of wisdom into the training of martial

arts, in order, again, to try and realize an ecology of practices for responding to the meaning crisis. And so there's many people out there already doing this. So I want to indicate that I'm pointing to something that people are already doing. I'm not trying to take credit for it, but I'm hoping that I'd be getting some supportive feedback though — that the work I'm doing here with you, of trying to articulate that, can help facilitate these groups and help them coordinate and communicate and potentially commune with each other in a mutually beneficial fashion.

So a couple more things. We need to go back to this (indicates Wisdom framing in Fig. 1c). We need to talk about the integration with the historical forces, because there's a particular issue that comes to the fore. (Erases the board) So this is the plan for going forward. Let's talk about the interaction between the historical forces and the perennial problems. And let's talk about, more explicitly, can we respond to the loss of the three orders and the worldview misattunement?

And then what that would look like. And again, I'm not proposing to found —I'm trying to just talk about what I see emerging and hopefully give some suggestive steps towards: can we get that religion that's not a religion? And then, put that into dialogue with other people who have engaged in similar project, people like Tillich and Jung and Corbin and Barfield. And so that we've got at least, I hope, a very rich dialogue with a lot of momentum to it, for trying to get to this religion that's not a religion. Okay.

Interaction Between Historical Forces and Perennial Problems

So the historical forces, the loss of the three orders; let's remember this (Fig. 2a) (writes Historical forces) and why it matters. So you've lost the three orders you've, we've lost the nomological and the nomological basically gives us this deep sense of coherence (writes -nomological-coherence) and connectedness (writes connectedness below coherence) that is so central. We know from our current work on meaning in life. We lost the normative order (writes normative-significance), which gives us, I would argue, that sense of significance, depth (writes depth below significance) that we get through self-transcendence. And of course we've lost the narrative order, which gives

us a sense of purpose or direction (writes narrative-purpose). And then, as we've lost this (Fig. 2a), we have a worldview again, in which we don't belong and in which our projects don't belong, et cetera. And, of course, that will interact with (Fig. 2b) (draws a double-headed arrow to the right of Historical Forces)—It will exacerbate any attempts that individuals or groups have in addressing perennial problems (writes Perennial problems). And when you get that (indicates Historical forces and Perennial Problems in Fig. 2b) going, that's when the meaning crisis really bites you individually. It really gnaws at you as a person or as a community or as a group.

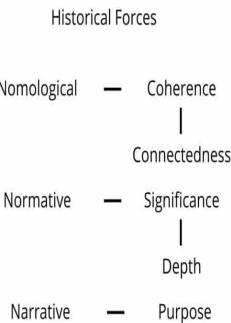


Fig. 2a

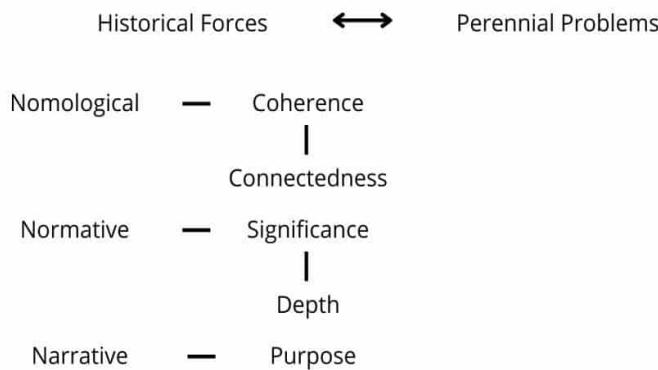


Fig. 2b

Now, I want to talk about, first of all, this interaction (indicates the area beside Connectedness and Significance), because it brings up a particular problem. And here again, I'm going to point to the seminal work of Wolf

(writes Wolf) on her book on Meaning in Life and Why It Matters. So I was interviewed by Leandro on a podcast: Manifested Wellbeing, and then he, he then later, recently interviewed Wolf and her work on Meaning in Life. So I recommend you going to that to take a look at her work, also reading her book. If you remember, she says that meaning in life is ultimately about a kind of deep connectedness that we want. So we have all these metaphors we want to be, we want to be connected to something larger than ourselves, bigger than ourselves, et cetera. And that's what makes our life meaningful. And of course, it's this notion of connectedness of which she says those are metaphors. They're what I would call their symbolic expressions of what people are really saying is—they want this.

She talks about it this way, and think about how this just sings to everything we've been doing here. We want Subjective Attraction (writes Subjective attraction) to find salience and to be drawn into. We want subjective attraction to, that meets to, that connects with, that conforms to Objective Attractiveness (writes = Objective Attractiveness to the right of Subjective attraction). So notice here (Fig. 2c) (indicates Subjective Attraction = Objective Attractiveness), but, of course, the transjectivity here—that it's actually in here (indicates =), that the meaning is to be found. And notice also the connectivity and how much of this is the relevance realizing, the deep connection, the deep caring, the deep involvement, the deep participation.

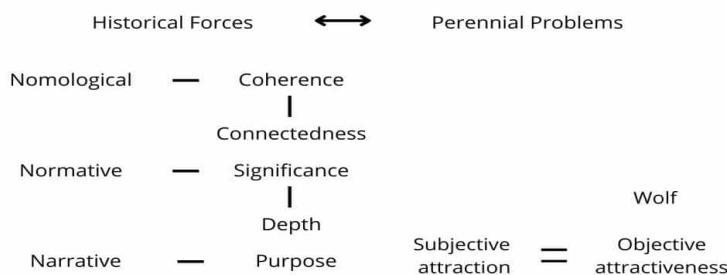


Fig. 2c

Okay, so that all winds up. But then, of course, and here's where this (taps Historical Forces) and this (taps Perennial problems) interact, right? What happens is, she says, "Ah, because of this (indicates Historical Forces), we know (creates an arrow from below Purpose to objective attractiveness)

there's no such thing as this (crosses out Objective attractiveness)." (Fig 2d) We know there's no such thing as this. The scientific revolution... there is nothing that is Objectively attractive. This is a particular grammar, right? This is the grammar again. [-] There's no meaning or relevance in this thing (holds up the whiteboard eraser) in itself. This is ultimately a sort of a Kantian argument.

And Wolf sort of leaves it there. She does allude to ways in which we can bullshit ourselves. We can pretend we have objective attraction just by finding a group of people who agree to value the same things we do. And that is a kind of bullshitting, because the salience of the group is actually masking whether or not it's given us what we're looking for. And she criticizes all of those attempts—I think quite rightly. And that's where she sort of leaves it, at least when I read the book. I don't know if more recent work she's got an answer to it.

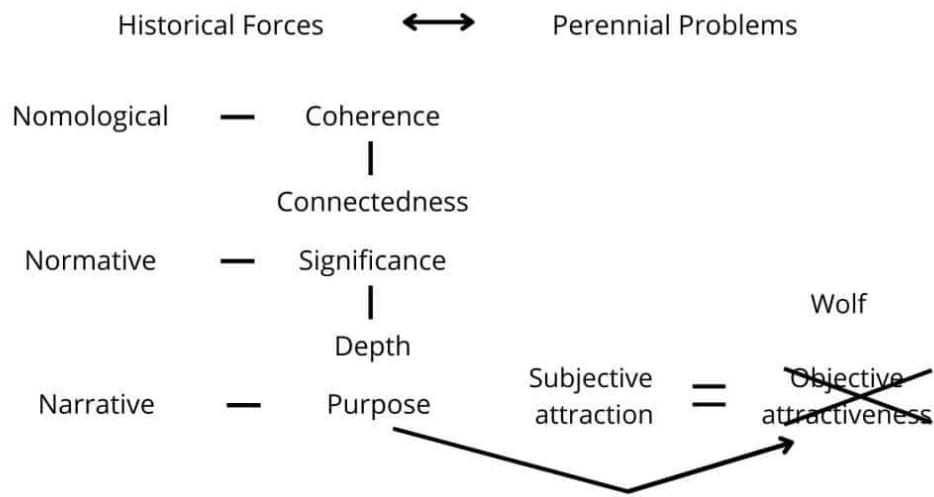


Fig. 2d

So work I'm doing with Thalia Vrantsidis, Juensung Kim, Phillip Riswick: we're really trying to say: is there a way addressing this problem (indicates the crossed out Objective attractiveness) using the current cognitive science, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, et cetera. I won't keep saying everything that's in cognitive science, philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, machine learning. Can we use all of that—the best of that, to address (indicates Subjective attraction = Objective attractiveness) this issue. So notice that

again, this issue (indicates Subjective attraction = Objective attractiveness) is an issue in which Historical forces (indicates Historical forces) prevent sort of the fundamental legitimization of the whole project that we would try to use (indicates Perennial problems) to address the Perennial problems.

Cultivating, Realizing, and Appreciating Agape

Okay. So what can we think about this? Well, part of it is, I think, to ask, do we need things to be objectively valuable? So what that means is that things would have a value independent about how I would value them or how you would value them. And there is a particular move that you can make that doesn't require that the thing has objective value, right? Instead, you could think about: the set of characteristics that need to exist in order for meaning to be created. So what I'm trying to point you towards— we have to go very delicately, right?—I'm trying to point you towards that it's actually the transjectivity of the relationship (encircles =) that we need, and we don't really need objective attractiveness. (encircles attractiveness) That's not quite right.

So let's think about this: Relevance realization is inherently interested in itself because, as I've argued, that's constitutive of it being a self-organizing, self-correcting, self-optimizing, self-developing, evolving process.

Relevance realization is not something in me. It's not something in the world. It emerges in the affordances that are co-created by the world in myself. It's bi-directional in that fashion. So what I need to be connected to, I would argue, is I need to be connected to those conditions that afford relevance realization itself. Those conditions that satisfy my inherent valuing of the relevance realization process itself. So what does that mean? What that means is, I ultimately want to care about the conditions that afford meaning making itself. Those conditions, right, are universal in a sense; not in the sense that they are the same environmental conditions or the same psychological, but the same set of conditions that make possible and afford meaning making itself.

And this sounds all very abstract. And now I want to try and turn it around. And this is something that I'm arguing for: That when we care to create the conditions of meaning making— because we find them inherently valuable, because that is constitutive of our capacity to be agents and to value

anything else— when we're doing that, what we're actually engaging in, is agape.

Agape is to love, for its own sake, the process of meaning making; and the process of meaning making is the process of being a person, ultimately. This is agape. That's why, of course, the things that contribute most significantly to meaning in life, is our sense of being connected to other people, agapically. What I'm saying to you is that there is a way of responding to this (Fig. 2e) (writes agape with an arrow pointing to Wolf), which is the cultivation, the realization, the appreciation of agape.

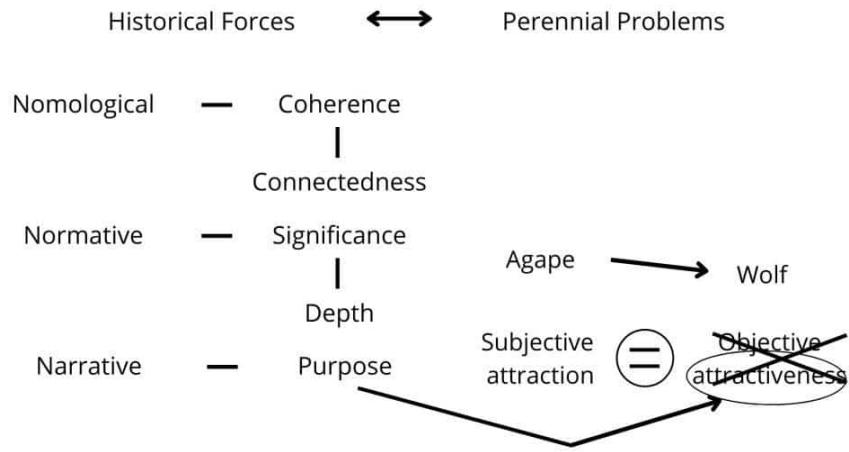


Fig. 2e

And you say, "But there's no objective value to meaning making." Of course there isn't, but it's not subjective or arbitrary. It is transjective, and it is in that sense, transcendental in a Kantian sense. [-] What I'm involved with are the very conditions on the possibility of meaning making itself. So to agapically love people, of course, is not just to be directed at that body and mind, it's to be directed at their conditions, their community, their environment, their development, their education. That's agape! That exists independently of me, of you, of us, of a group; because agape proceeds, permeates, and follows us!

So part of what it means, therefore—and this, of course, this is also part of the tradition, but it becomes especially pertinent for us—part of how enlightenment has to be for us, is that whatever machinery (Fig. 2f) (encircles perennial problems) we craft together for addressing the perennial problems has to be integrated (draws a double-headed arrow between agape and perennial problems), grounded in an agapic way of being. And then that of course makes sense, too, if you think about being within the Being mode, having an I/Thou relationship, et cetera. We have to care about the conditions that make any caring possible. Part of what we need to do is to address this issue (indicates Objective attractiveness) with agape (indicates agape). The cultivation of agape.

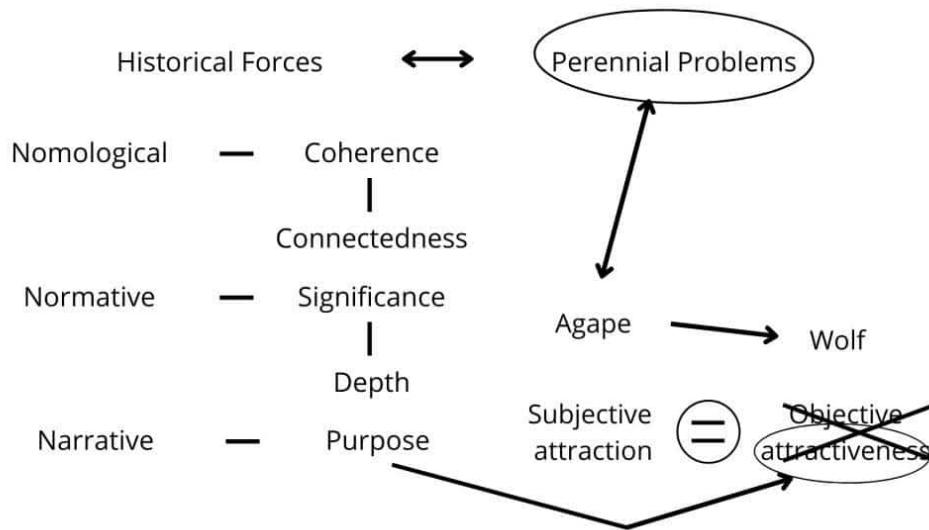


Fig. 2f

(erases the right half of the board) I think we should ultimately see agape as our deepest appreciation for the caring that is intrinsic, constitutive to the relevance realization that makes both the agent and the arena possible.

Is that pointing to something in the physics of reality? No, but it is pointing something. Is it therefore just pointing to something that's romantically dwelling within my subjectivity? No. It's pointing to caring about something that is inherently transjective, and has a value independent of my valuing of it, because my valuing of it does not constitute it into existence. I emerge from it, and participate in it. I am not the source or maker of it.

4E Cognitive Science: Embodiment, Embeddedness, Enactive, Extended

What about the historical factors? The historical forces? So we've lost the three orders. (erases Historical factors) [-] I would argue, we can make use of what's happening in third generation cog sci, 4E cog sci in conjunction with the theoretical machinery we've been developing on the cognitive scientific side of things to address that.

The way I want to do this, is I want to make use of an article by Francisco Varela (writes Varela). This is not me saying that I think that everything that Varela has to say, or all of his particular theories are right, or something like that. But Varela is one of the founding figures of a third generation 4E cognitive science. Of course, that work has been developed significantly since him. And that's why it's important to only see him as a founding figure, not as the final figure. The seminal work of Evan Thompson. If you want to see this, these ideas taken into a depth, get Evan's book, *Mind in Life*. It's just [a] fantastic book. We talked about this: the deep continuity hypothesis and how it really situates us into an order. Because there's a continuity between the principles of cognition and the principles of biology, and then the principles of dynamical self-organizing physical systems.

Okay, but I want to pick up on this because I want to pick up on something that he said, because he writes this piece and it's simultaneously argumentative and autobiographical. And he wrote it in 2000. It's in a book called *The Psychology of Awakening*. And he talks about steps towards a science of interbeing: unfolding the Dharma implicit in cognitive science. So he relates the following thing: [-] he had been asked to write an article [-]—and around 2000 is when third generation cog sci was really starting to develop. And he was asked to write an article: what are the main insights or claims about this? And I want to go through that and sort of unpack them a bit, and then also unpack the elements. So, sort of what are the insights of third generation cog sci? (writes - 3rd Gen below Varela) I have been trying to exemplify them for you. I've been trying to exemplify them in all of the lectures throughout the whole of the series, but especially since episode 25, third generation cog sci (writes Cog sci) and unpack the 4E's (Fig. 3a)

(Writes 4E below 3rd Gen cog sci)—I actually think there's sort of 5E's, but that's also called 5E cognitive science.

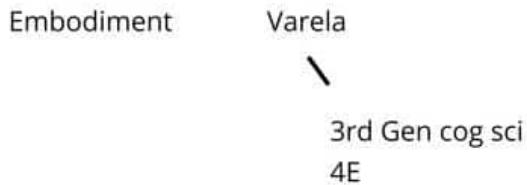


Fig. 3a

And how does it address the three orders? (indicates Nomological, Normative, Narrative in Fig. 2a) (erases the left side of the board) He says as he was doing this, what kept happening to him is he kept—as he kept articulating to himself the insights that were central to cognitive science, he found that he was constantly saying things that he found consonant with the Dharma, the central teachings of Buddhism. So he found this deep resonance between the science and a particular path about—whereby individuals and communities actually cultivate meaning, wisdom, et cetera.

So he listed the first one, and this is one of the 4E's of cognitive science, the issue of Embodiment (writes Embodiment) (Fig. 3a). That we're deeply embodied. We're deeply embodied. So here's a quote from that 2001—oh sorry, that 2000 article, "Mind is not programmed software or rule-bound manipulation of symbols." He means symbols in the mathematical sense, not in the spiritual sense that we've been developing here. "Mind is not programmed software or rule-bound manipulation of symbols. Instead, the mind arises through immediate coping with the world." So the idea here is that we understand intelligence—and this is something I've been trying to articulate, right?—we understand intelligence as our coping with the world, the way we are evolving the sensory motor loop, right? So that we deal with what—we deal with the problems at hand that directly afford our interaction with the world at large.

So he uses the word 'coping' because he's trying to get us out of a fascination and a fixation with our capacity for theorizing. Not because he thinks that theorizing is wrong [-]—because that would be a self-contradictory act; he's offering a theory. But he's trying to [-] get us to remember the other kinds of knowing, and the way in which, ultimately, to be a general problem solver,

to be an intelligent cognitive agent is to have this ongoing, evolving fittedness; to coping with my immediate interactions with the world. And that this is the defining features, he would argue—and I would agree—with being a cognitive agent. And he calls that embodiment. Many people might see that— Evan Thompson— as Enaction, right?

So there's a bunch of these E's here (Fig. 3b). There's Embodiment (writes Embodiment below 4E). Other people might say what Varela is talking about there is Embeddedness (writes Embeddedness below Embodiment), the way we are embedded. Enactive (writes Enactive below Embeddedness). This is Evan Thompson's idea that cognition is inherently something we enact, right? Extended (writes Extended below Enactive) — That our cognition is not in our head, but it's extended through our interactions, through the world, through our psycho-technologies, through distributed cognition. So those are the 4E's.

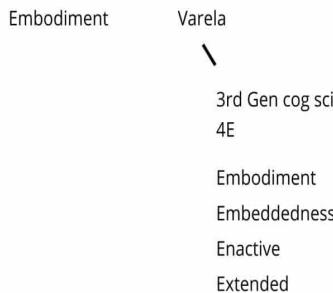


Fig. 3b

Deep Continuity In Embeddedness And Enactive Processing

Whether or not we should pin this (indicated the word Embodiment on the left) specifically to this (indicates Embodiment on the right), or maybe it overlaps with some of these other ones (indicates Embeddedness, Enactive, Extended). That's fine. We're going to see more of this with Varela anyways, but notice what this is about. The embodiment is about the idea that there is a deep continuity between your most abstract cognitive abilities and your most[-] embodied sensory motor action. I've tried to argue that you can see this in the following way: that [-] your cognition (writes Cognition) is

ultimately depended on, grounded in the relevance realization (writes RR and draws an arrow pointing down from Cognition to RR) and the relevance realization is ultimately grounded in (draws a downward arrow from RR) your bioeconomy (writes Bioeconomy below the arrow) (Fig. 4a). Your body is not some clay that you drag around in a Cartesian fashion. Your body is a bioeconomy that enacts logistical norms of efficiency and resiliency that constrain (indicates RR) your cognition, so that it continually evolves its fittedness to the world. There's a deep continuity between cognition and biology. And, of course, the biology is deeply embedded. You are engaging in what biologists talk about as continual niche construction (writes Niche construction).

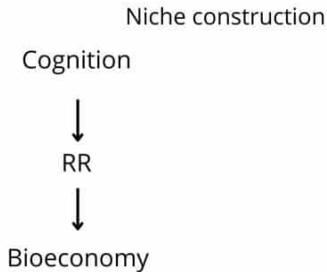


Fig. 4a

So the new biology that's emerging. I'm privileged to know and I get to interact with Dennis Walsh here at the University of Toronto. If you want to see some people that are doing the cutting edge work on the philosophy of biology, take a look at Dennis's work and the work of other people. There's an anthology—I think—I'm trying to remember what it's called. I think it's criticizing or reflecting on the grand synthesis, the synthesis between Darwinian evolution and Mendelian genetics. I'll get the right book panel to come up—but there is this idea about the importance of processes, like niche construction for understanding evolution and the idea here is, right—and you see how I've been making use of this (writes Organism Environment). There's the organism and the environment, right? And the idea is the organism is (draws an arrow from Organism to Environment) shaping the environment, shaping and selecting the environment, and the environment is shaping and selecting the organism (Fig. 5). And so, the organisms get involved with affecting the environments so that it is conducive to their way of being, but they also evolve both biologically and behaviorally, right, to

exploit and make good use of that changed environment. And you've got this transjective evolving loop going on—niche construction.

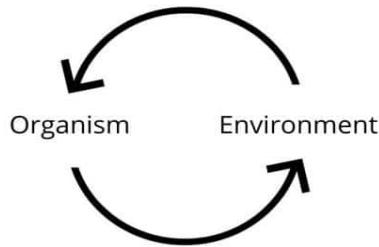


Fig. 5

We do this, of course, on a broad scale through culture, because what culture is we do this thing where we massively shape the environment, and then massively shape ourselves to fit that environment, right? So culture is about both fitting people to an environment, and fitting the environment to the people, in this ongoing fashion. And so (erases Fig. 5) that takes us right into this notion, of course, that we are deeply embedded (draws an arrow pointing to Embeddedness in Fig. 3b). We're deeply embedded. So embodiment leads to—and there are some people that argue that embeddedness sort of reduces to embodiment; Rowland seems to be arguing that in one of his books on, "The New Science of the Mind." But anyways, the idea here is the deep continuity. We are deeply embodied; we are deeply embedded.

Now notice how that is going—it's undermining the way in which Descartes severed everything, right? [-] So this (Fig. 4b) (draws an arrow from Niche construction to RR in Fig. 4a) is obviously a species of niche construction, the comprehensive one—and if this (draws an arrow away from RR and writes Consciousness), as I've tried to argue, can even tell us something important about consciousness, both its function and its phenomenology, then we can seriously respond to Descartes and say, "No, no. The mind and body are not disconnected." They are in a deep continuity and the mind and the world are not disconnected. They are in a deep continuity of embeddedness and enactive processing. (erases Fig. 4b)

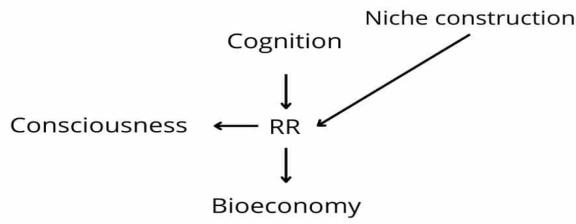


Fig. 4b

The Emergence Of The Mind

So. What's the second insight that Varela brings up? Emergence (writes Emergence), which is a major term now. And this is something that has been invoked throughout the series, the idea that a system—the system, especially the system itself—organizing, it can produce properties as a system that the component parts can't possess. And so the idea is the mind in this sense, it emerges (underlines Emergence) out of the embodied, embedded brain coupled to a living environment, right? I tried to give you ways of understanding that emergence, and how it is reflected in your spirituality by your capacity for self-transcendence; and how that could be understood, at least in part, a significant part, by the complexification (draws an arrow from Emergence) that is inherent in your relevance realization machinery (Fig. 6) (writes Complexification - RR) in your religio.

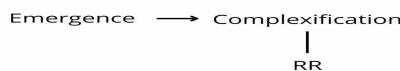


Fig. 6

So what does this mean for us? This means that we are starting to get something like a vertical dimension back to our ontology, not a two worlds vertical dimension, but the idea of emergence through complexification of things like biology—so you've got self-organizing things (Fig. 7) (writes Self-organizing), [-] like the processes of combustion is self-organizing. A tornado is self-organizing, erosion is self-organizing, evolution (writes Evolution beside Self-organizing) is self-organizing. And the thing is, particular kinds of self organization, like evolution could produce (draws an arrow away from Self-organizing) things that are more than self-organizing.

They are self-making (writes Self-Making - Auto-poietic above Self-organization). This is Varela's notion of auto-poietic system.

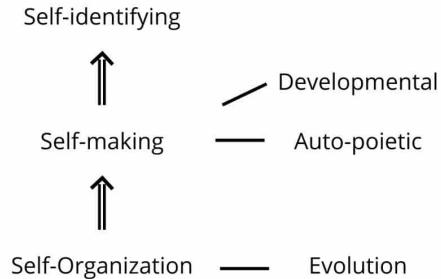


Fig. 7

There's lots of controversies around this, and I don't think (erases Fig. 6) it solves everything that Varela thinks it solves, but it is definitely the case that, unlike a tornado, I am a self-organizing thing that self-organizes such that I seek out those conditions that protect and promote my agency, right? And then, of course, the self-making things (draws an arrow away from Self-making), they can become more than just self-making things. They can become self-identifying things (writes Self-identifying above Self-making). You can become a reflective, self-making thing. You can become aware of, come to some understanding and appreciation of your self-making, of the way in which you are inherently developmental (writes Developmental connected to Self-making), because that's what we're talking about when we talk about development, the way in which you're self-making. And then you can (indicates Self-identifying) interact with that in ways that I've tried to show to you, and so on and so forth. And so self-transcendence—and notice what's happening here: a normative order is being given a metaphysical backing.

Now I want to come back later towards the end of this series and talk about this bottom-up emergence, and does it need to be complemented by a metaphysical idea of a top-down emanation? And what might that mean? I'm going to be very tentative about that because this is something that is really trying to break free from some of the deepest grammar that has gotten us into the meaning crisis.

Emotions Bring Relevance Realization Into Your Salience Landscaping

But right now, I'm going to continue with Varela. Okay. So you've definitely got emergence. What's the third one? So there's all these E's (Indicates Fig. 3b). So he's got embodiment (writes Embodiment), which is shared with 4E cognitive science. And I think whatever you think about some of his claims about autopoiesis and others, he helped to really bring this (indicates Embodiment) to the fore for cognitive science. And this is now informing experimental psychology. We're seeing how much your embodiment affects your cognition, right? And then he gave the next one—was emergence (writes Emergence). And then the third one is emotion (Fig. 3c) (writes Emotion).

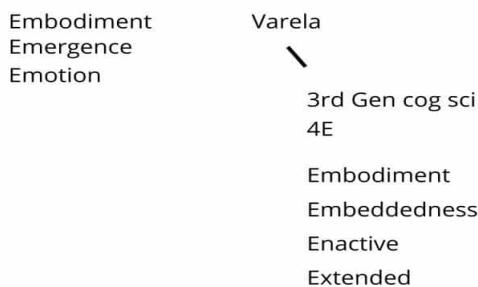


Fig. 3c

This is really interesting because the deep divide between emotion and reason, a divide that I think is enshrined, ossified in our cognitive grammar, cognitive cultural grammar, and the ongoing battle between the empiricists and the romantics, between John Locke and Rousseau, is being addressed. And we went back to this; and so we can think of the work of Damasio (writes Damasio) here, in Descartes' Error, and we've talked about this. And now you see this (indicates Damasio), right? Damasio is basically showing that people without emotion, even though all of the calculative machinery may be operating normally/well, means [-]—you remember in Descartes' Error—that although all the calculative machinery is operating well, they're disconnected from their emotions. They are incapacitated as cognitive agents. Why? Because without emotion, without the caring that is integral (writes Caring below Damasio) to relevance realization (writes RR below

Caring). Remember what Reed said, that we're different from communities and computers, that we have to *care* about emotion. And [-] we have to care about information. Why do we have to care about information? Because we ultimately have to take care of our selves (writes an arrow from Caring and writes Take care) because of the kind of beings we are (Fig. 8) (draws an arrow from Take care to Auto-poietic), right? When you don't have that (indicates Caring), you face combinatorial explosion (writes C.E. beside Damasio).

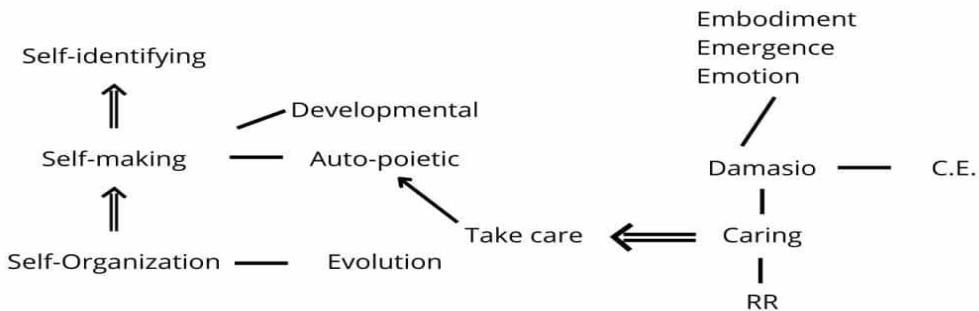


Fig. 8

There's a deep interconnection between being embodied, being a relevance realizer, and having emotions. Emotions is the way in which relevance realization is brought up into the level of your salience landscaping. And what emotions do is, they shape and sculpt the salience landscaping, such that an Agent:Arena relationship becomes obvious and apparent to you. When you are angry, you assume a particular role (points inward). You assign a bunch of identities (gestures outwards), and it's obvious to you what you should be doing.

I would make this prediction: that as we move towards making—and we're going to come back to this issue about artificial general intelligence—as we move towards making artificial general intelligence, we more and more—we're already having to give these machines something deeply analogous to “attention,” and we're going to, I would predict, have to give them something analogous to emotion (erases half of the board).

So I think it's better to talk about this. I would put the two together, right? That within religio (writes Religio), you always have caring/coping (Fig. 9)

(writes Caring - Coping below Relgio). Caring/coping. And that's the core of your cognitive agency. The emotion also carries up to the relationship and of course, this goes back to agape. That emotion is how we coordinate the attachment—I don't mean it in the Buddhist sense. I mean, in the psychological sense—the attachment relationships between individuals, such that we create persons. That we create persons who are capable of dwelling within and coordinating their efforts within distributed cognition. We create persons within communities of persons that shape themselves, their community, and their world to fit together in an ongoing Agent:Arena fashion.



Fig. 9

Wisdom Helps Cultivate Responses To Perennial Problems Through The Use Of Cognitive Science

The last it points to is a kind of excellence (Fig. 3d) (writes Excellence below Emotion in . This has to do with connections between third generation 4E cognitive science, dynamical systems, self-optimization, and an aspect of psychology that has become known as positive psychology (writes Positive Psychology).

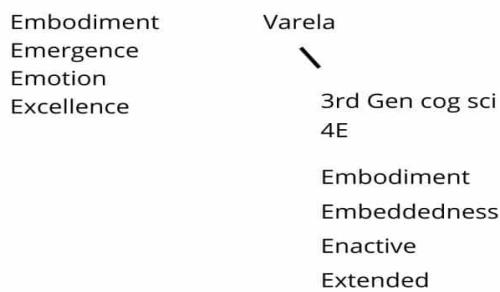


Fig. 3d

Positive psychology is a way of doing psychology that is complementary to our standard way. Our standard way of doing psychology is to see how

things break down, how they fall apart. And there's two [-] I'm not, and I believe most people in positive psychology are also not trying to dismiss or debunk or any crazy thing like that sort of standard psychology, because standard, psychology studies the mind by how it breaks down for two very good reasons. One is by studying how it breaks down, we can analyze it and we can thereby understand its parts, and how they might be working together. And also by understanding how the mind breaks down, how the psyche breaks down, we can potentially therapeutically and pedagogically intervene to fix it. Repair it. Therapeutic intervention. Therapeutic and pedagogical intervention. So that's very noble, and I'm not trying to diss that in any way. But what positive psychology says is, you shouldn't study the mind only in terms of how it breaks down. You should also study the mind in terms of how it excels beyond the norm (Fig. 10a) (draws an arrow from Positive Psychology pointing down to Excels beyond the norm).

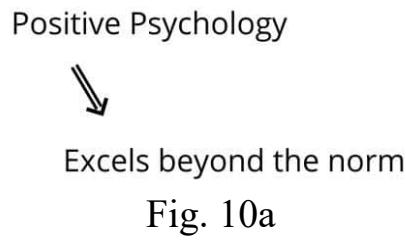


Fig. 10a

How do all the pieces fit together in a way—see, your brain is a machine of machines that can make itself into a new kind of machine. How can the brain put—how does the brain—the embodied, enactive, embedded brain, body, sensory motor loop, mind—how does it transcend itself? How does it excel? We should study individuals who have optimized their cognition better than the norm. Because here's the idea: Very often, you can only understand something deeply, not only in terms of its parts and how it breaks down, but you can only understand in terms of the whole, and how it excels, because that reveals properties and powers that you don't see in the norm.

So positive psychology studies things like, happiness, meaning in life, importantly—and this is where 4E cog sci (indicates 4E cog sci) and positive psychology really come together (draws an arrow from Excels beyond the norm and another arrow from 4E cog sci): Wisdom (Fig. 10b) (writes Wisdom). Wisdom is the term we give for people who are excellent in their

cognitive capacities for coping and caring. And for, I would argue, responding to issues of self-deception, helping people deal with the perennial problems of human existence. And so this becomes a topic—a topic to which we are going to shortly turn, because as I argued in the end, we need an account of wisdom, both for cultivating [a response to] the perennial problems, and also for how to make the best use of this science. It's one thing to have the knowledge that's coming from this science, but we need the wisdom of how to use it best, how to understand it and use it best.

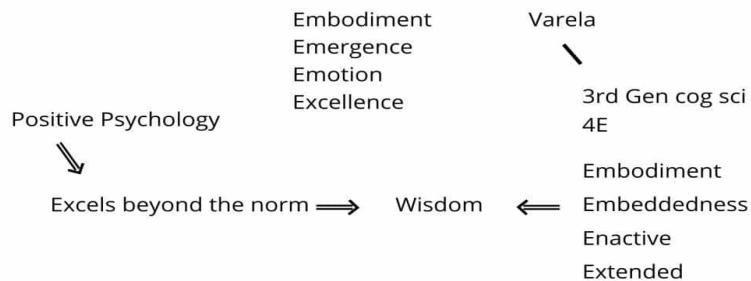


Fig. 10b

The deep continuity and emergence and development: they give us back our nomological order. We see how we fit in, how we belong. And we see how our meaning making belongs/fits in. We see a normative order. We see what it is to self-transcend. We have to do more on this, especially with the topic of wisdom, but how it is we can cultivate enlightenment, how it is we can respond to the perennial problems. How it is that we can bring about the best internal optimization, the best external reciprocal realization, how we can afford anagoge.

I think this brings with it an important point (writes Transcendence). This is the work of Goodenough (writes Goodenough to the upper right of Transcendence), which is a perfect name, and her work on The Sacred Depths of Nature. And she talks about how as a scientist, and she's trying to recover that sacred depths of nature—sacredness, awe, and wonder, in a way that helps her cultivate wisdom. And of course, transcendence is integral to this, and she talks about that and you can see what she's doing. She's trying to challenge the fundamental grammar that we've inherited from the Axial Age. She talks about a new sense of transcendence. Instead of transcendence

above (writes Above beside Transcendence)—which of course invokes the two worlds mythology—what she talks about, is we need this new sense: Transcendence into (Fig. 11) (writes Transcendence into below Transcendence). Transcendence into the depths of nature. Transcendence, I would also argue, and I don't see her as opposed to this. I see her enacting transcendence into the depths of the psyche and the two deeply integrated and coordinated together in reciprocal realization. Remember, the opposite of reciprocal narrowing, the reciprocal opening up the mutual disclosing, which is experienced as a kind of love. Transcendence into (encloses Transcendence into a box).

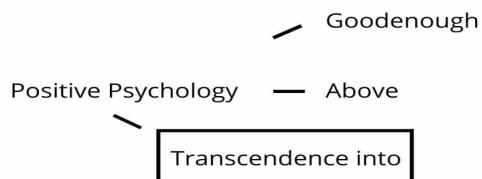


Fig. 11

Moving To A Post-Narrative, Open-Ended Optimization

So the one that remains—The order that remains unconnected for us to this argument is the narrative order, because the narrative order points us towards a telos, a cosmic telos. And evolution and relevance realization are non-teleological. They're open-ended. So if we're looking to find something that will bring back the narrative order, in that sense, I don't think we can find it. But perhaps we should think differently about the narrative order. Perhaps we should think of the narrative order now as more to do with gnosis. We should think of it as an open-ended optimization, an open-ended optimization. And that we may have indispensable need for symbols and stories to afford that. But we do not need to think of those symbols and stories as existing independently in the structure of reality. We certainly don't want to get back to utopic visions or their antithesis in nostalgic visions, because both of those have been the source of a lot of suffering and distress.

Is it possible, because you see this in Stoicism, you see this in Buddhism, you see this in Taoism, is it possible to move to a post-narrative way of

being, in which we are concerned not with our historical narrative, our horizontal identity, but we're concerned with the depths to which we are capable of living. That perhaps what we need is not a grand purpose, a narrative of a grand purpose that is connected with the history of the cosmos. Perhaps instead, we can move to getting beyond a narrative way of conforming to reality, to a post-narrative, the kind of experience people have in higher states of consciousness, where the narrative drops away. And nevertheless, they experience themselves as deeply connected, deeply at one with themselves and with reality, and that this seems to have given their life, these moments, a significance to it. And again, there's no mystery to these higher states of consciousness — no theoretical mystery —because there's a cognitive continuum from Fluency to Insight (writes Fluency - Insight). We're just exapting the machinery over and over again... to Flow (writes Flow and draws an arrow from Insight to Flow), to Mystical Experiences (writes M.E. and draws an arrow from Flow to the M.E.), to Mystical Experiences that drive transformative development, to Higher States of Consciousness (Fig. 12).

Fluency → Insight → Flow → M.E. → H.S.C
Fig. 12

We'll take a look at this proposal, drawing this all together, coming back to talking about the religion that is not a religion, to setting up the discourse with people like Tillich and Barfield and Jung and Corbin. And we also need to come back and take a look at the cognitive science of wisdom because all of this is being done within a wisdom framing. The wisdom that captures the excellence, which was the fourth insight of Varela.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 38 Notes:

[**Rafe Kelley**](#)

Rafe Kelley is the founder of Evolve Move Play, a natural movement training for the body and mind. He advocates a culture of movement in the natural environment.

Paul Johannes Tillich

Paul Johannes Tillich was a German-American Christian existentialist philosopher and Lutheran Protestant theologian who is widely regarded as one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century.

Carl Gustav Jung

Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology.

Henry Corbin

Henry Corbin was a philosopher, theologian, Iranologist and professor of Islamic Studies at the École pratique des hautes études in Paris, France.

Owen Barfield

Arthur Owen Barfield was a British philosopher, author, poet, critic, and member of the Inklings.

Susan Wolf

Susan Rose Wolf is an American moral philosopher and philosopher of action who is currently the Edna J. Koury Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Book Mentioned: Meaning In Life and Why If Matters - [Buy Here](#)

Manifested Wellbeing

Wellbeing and Nutrition coach providing content on health, mindset and nutrition.

Podcast Mentioned:

Meaning in Life and Wisdom | John Vervaeke: [Listen Here](#)

Meaning In Life and Why It Matters | Susan Wolf: [Listen Here](#)

Francisco Varela

Francisco Javier Varela García was a Chilean biologist, philosopher, cybernetician, and neuroscientist who, together with his mentor Humberto Maturana, is best known for introducing the concept of autopoiesis to biology, and for co-founding the Mind and Life Institute to promote dialog between science and Buddhism.

Book Mentioned: The Psychology of Awakening - [Buy Here](#)

Evan Thompson

Evan Thompson is a professor of philosophy at the University of British Columbia. He writes about cognitive science, phenomenology, the philosophy of mind, and cross-cultural philosophy, especially Buddhist philosophy in dialogue with Western philosophy of mind and cognitive science.

Book Mentioned: Mind In Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind - [Buy Here](#)

Dennis Walsh

Book Mentioned: Challenging the Modern Synthesis: Adaptation, Development, and Inheritance - [Buy Here](#)

Mark Rowlands

Mark Rowlands is a Welsh writer and philosopher. He is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Miami, and the author of several books on the philosophy of mind, the moral status of non-human animals, and cultural criticism.

Book Mentioned: The New Science of the Mind: From Extended Mind to Embodied Phenomenology - [Buy Here](#)

Antonio Damasio

Antonio Damasio is a Portuguese-American neuroscientist.

Book Mentioned: Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain - [Buy Here](#)

Ursula Goodenough

Ursula W. Goodenough is a Professor of Biology Emerita Washington University in St. Louis where she engaged in research on eukaryotic algae.

Book Mentioned: The Sacred Depths of Nature - [Buy Here](#)

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[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

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Ep. 39 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - The Religion of No Religion

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. So last time, I was making a proposal to you of how we could address the perennial problems. And I gave you a systematic set of things that could be cultivated in an integrated fashion for addressing perennial problems. And then we saw how that interacts with our attempts to ameliorate and alleviate the perennial problems, interact with the historical forces, and that we get the fundamental undermining of meaning in life, and that problem set by Wolf. And then I proposed to you that there was a response to that in terms of the notion of agape. And then I moved into the direct addressing of the historical forces looking about for recovery of something like what the three orders did for us. And then I propose to you that if we took a look at 4E cognitive science, third generation cog sci, and, in particular, some of the insights afforded by 4E cognitive science, third generation cog sci, and that were pointed out by Varela in his article, we can see ways in which we can get a worldview that strongly situates our meaning making processes within it, legitimates it. We talked about how we can recover something like the nomological order, and the normative order, and how, perhaps, we can move to something post-narrative, an open-ended optimization that is seeking for a depth of realization rather than a historical combination. And I proposed to you

bringing with it the notion [of] Goodenough, bringing with that whole project of responding to the historical forces and trying to bring with it a new notion from Goodenough's work on transcendence into rather than transcendence above or beyond and how that is resonant and consonant with the picture that we've been working on together.

Couple things remain that are central. One, of course, is to give [-] a cognitive scientific account, of wisdom because of the wisdom framing that is needed for both the cultivation of the responses to the meaning crisis, and the use of, interpretation of, grasping the significance of, the cognitive scientific framework. So we need to develop an account of wisdom together. And I also said, we need to talk about this notion of getting something that's a religion, that's not a religion. And what might that look like?

So I want to address the second point first because I have less to say about it, not because it's not important. I've less to say about it because it's very tentative. And I want to try and talk about it in, ultimately, a suggestive fashion. I'm not trying to found a movement or anything ridiculous or pretentious like that. There are many people, though, who are writing books about this idea. I recommend to you James Carse's book, *The Religious Case Against Belief*, which I've already recommended. There's Unger's book on *[The Religion of the Future]*. There's a book like *A Religion for Atheists* [by Alain de Botton] in which people are, I think—and I mean this in a serious sense, but they're trying to play with what this might look like: a religion that's not a religion and how can it help us to address it? Even people like Richard Dawkins are trying to propose that we should get a cultivated ability, ultimately poetic ability, to engender wonder and awe that is consonant with the scientific worldview. So a lot of people are trying to get some conceptual vocabulary and theoretical grammar going for this. So I do not see myself as offering anything definitive or authoritative. But on the basis of what we have done together, I'd like to try and offer some suggestions of what this would look like.

Remember, why are we setting this problem? [-] For many of us... and the group that I self-identify as the Nones, having no religion, nevertheless, a large majority of those people are still spiritually hungry in important ways. Returning to organized religion is not a viable option. And part of that has to

do with a lot of the history that we've traced out, and pursuing pseudo-religious political ideologies and utopic visions is also not viable, precisely because of the trauma of the 20th century and parts of the 21st century, and the clash of the pseudo-religious ideologies and the way they drenched the world with blood and torture and horror.

And so I propose to you that, nevertheless, we need to do something like what religion used to do. We need a comprehensive set of psychotechnologies that are set within communities of practices, that allow for the comprehensive transformations of consciousness, cognition, character, and culture in a way, that is analogous to religion —that is what we're looking for. Something that can do all of that, because that is what we need. That kind of transformation is needed today to address what Tomas Björkman calls the meta-crisis of all the various crises that we are facing and that are interacting with each other, in what looks to be an increasingly accelerating fashion, and having an increasingly deleterious effect on us, individually and collectively. So that is part of the problem. And what would it look like: the religion that is not a religion? (writes Religion that is not a religion) Again, as I said, there are many people who are taking a stab at this or trying to get a grip on this. And so I am just seeing myself as contributing, hopefully helpfully, to that dialogue.

Religion vs. Credo

So part of it, I think is, and this is of course, what I've tried to do is to acknowledge the centrality of Religio. (writes Religio below Religion that is not a religion) And that there is an important role for indispensable mythos in the activation, accentuation, acceleration, appreciation of religio. And so I think that is something that should be acknowledged as what we would be looking for. And this brings out an important contrast (writes = beside Religio) I want to discuss (erases equal sign). Sorry, not equal. Religio versus credo (Fig. 1a) (writes Vs. Credo beside Religio). Let us talk about this a little bit and try and get clearer about it, 'cause we have this idea of an open-ended mythos analogous to the transgressive mythology of the Gnostics.

Religion that is not a religion

Religio vs Credo

Fig. 1a

So credo, of course, means ‘I believe.’ And it's the word behind things like the Nicene Creed or the Apostolic Creed. A notion of credo is a notion of, sort of, a paradigmatic set of propositions that state what the essence of a religion is in terms of the truth content that is supposed to be believed. And so what has happened to some degree in various ways—and I tried to show you this (indicates Credo)—as—this (continues to indicate Credo), of course, is linked to propositional knowing. And as propositional knowing (writes Propositional knowing beside Credo) has come into ascendance, right? And as the Having mode (writes Having mode below Propositional knowing) has come into ascendance, the having of propositions that are asserted, right. And, of course, willful assertion. (writes Willful Assertion below Having mode). We've seen all of this has come into ascension. This (Credo) has tended to become dominant. So as I've mentioned, we often think about religions or speak of them as if they are belief systems—systems of beliefs. And so you have propositional knowing, you have the having of those propositions and the way you have them is ultimately to assert them in some fashion, usually in a willful fashion (indicates Willful assertion), where I mean that very broadly in the way that we've discussed here, where it is not something that is ultimately derived from reason, but it is something that is being asserted nevertheless.

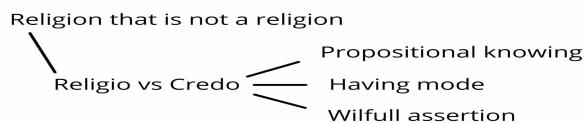


Fig. 1b

Now, I think there's an important role for credo. And so I want to make a distinction between credo and this credal assertion (indicates Propositional knowing, Having mode, Willful assertion), credo dominance. So let's talk (draws a downward arrow from Willful Assertion and a line from Credo)

about this set of things as credal dominance (Fig. 1c) (writes Credal dominance below Willful assertion). (draws an arrow from Credo) But let's talk about perhaps a way of understanding the functionality of this (writes Functionality).

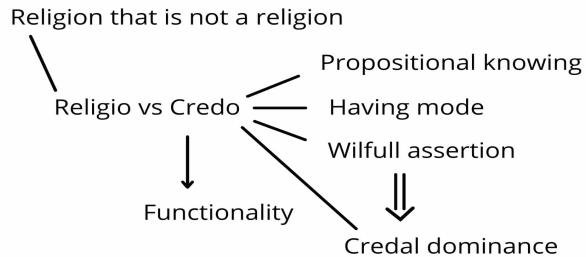


Fig. 1c

Now, first of all, I'm, of course, aware of the postmodern critique and I will have towards the final end of the series, I'll come back and talk about postmodernism, but I'm aware of the postmodern critique in that a lot of this is, and that makes sense, given credal dominance (indicates Credo), that this is enmeshed with power, with dominance, with control, with creating sort of purity codes where we have boundaries of identity, of the us and the other, all of that. I think it's a legitimate form of argument and something I take seriously, but I would put that under credal dominance, and I would want to try and take out of what remains, what function can we see for people doing this and how might we understand it?

Well, first of all, like I said, we can think of people (draws arrow from Credo) having paradigmatic statements and pictures that this might be a function of indispensability (Fig. 1d) (writes Indispensability mythos below Credo) to them so they can understand it. We can understand it as indispensable mythos. Again, it's highly plausible that there is a mythos for you or for groups of people that is indispensable, given the contextual sensitivity, the dynamic coupling of religio, that there's sets of symbols and stories and celebrations and shows and souvenirs and all the things associated with mythos that are indispensable for getting the kind of sacredness out of religio that people want and need, in response to, for example, the perennial problems. So again, this, of course, is part of the philosophical reason—there's also an independent moral reason, but this is

part of my philosophical reason why I try to be deeply respectful to religious creeds, precisely because even though I think all of these criticisms, or all the criticisms associated with this, criticisms that I've added to in this series, I think they're all legitimate—I think this (Indispensability mythos) is also a very legitimate thing. Now, of course, the problem is, is to confuse indispensability with metaphysical necessity, and to confuse need with authority. And we've talked about all of that.

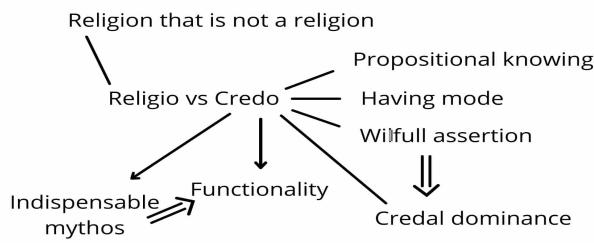


Fig. 1d

What I think we can sync this to is not only indispensability (indicates Indispensability mythos) that's idiosyncratic to people or the group. We can also talk about an indispensable functionality that might be more universal in nature. And this has to do with the basic idea from all of information processing, from what's called signal detection theory (writes Signal detection theory).

Signal Detection Theory

So signal detection theory is a theory that basically argues that we're always facing perennial problems when—and, I mean that to allude to the perennial problems that I've talked about here— whenever we're doing information processing, there's aspects in which the information is there's, and this is no contradiction, there's simultaneously too much information, but there's often inadequate information. Like you're not seeing all of my body right now. So the information is simultaneously overwhelming and partial. The information is often ambiguous. It's unclear if that information is the information you need, or you're being misled in some way by information that's similar, but not in the relevant way to the information you're looking for.

So all of these things, point to an important point—an important general conclusion. Now I'm going to have to use two terms here. I'm going to use the word signal (Fig. 2) (writes Signal) and this means information (writes Information beside Signal) I want. Information I want or need (writes I want below Information). And then noise (writes Noise below Signal). Noise does not mean audible distortion. Audible distortion is one kind of it what this means is this means information I do not want (writes Information I do not want beside Noise). It's in some way distracting, right? It's in some way misleading, et cetera.

Signal — Information I want

Noise — Information I do not want

Fig. 2

So here's the idea. Here's the population of events (Fig. 3) (draws a bell curve) that constitute Signal that you're looking for (writes S above the bell curve). And the idea is there's always a significant overlap with Noise (draws another bell curve overlapping the first bell curve and writes N above it). Again, where noise doesn't mean audible distortion. It means any information that you don't want, that it can be confused with—look at—con"fused" (indicates the area where the bell curve overlaps;) with—can be confused with Signal.

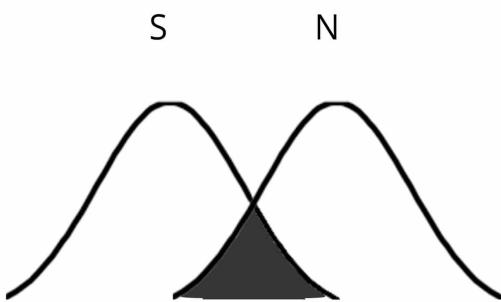


Fig. 3

So let's take a prototypical example, right? The prototypical example is this: you're a gazelle and you hear a noise in the Bush. Now that could be [an] important signal. It could be information that you want because it's

information telling you that a leopard is near or the noise in the Bush could be noise in this technical sense. It could just be the rustling of the leaves caused by the wind. And that is, and this is the important term here: that's irrelevant to you. That's irrelevant to you. That might be a signal for somebody else or something else. But for you as the gazelle, it's irrelevant. See, being signal and noise, of course, is a matter of relevance realization.

So you're, sort of, caught here, right? Because if you're the gazelle, what you're experiencing is this zone right here (shades the overlapped area of the bell curve; grey area in Fig. 3), right. This zone of overlap between the signal and the noise. You don't know what it is. Now, what you can say is, well, what I'll do is, I'll get more information. And there's a sense in which that helps, but you have to also understand that there's a diminishing return here. Because any new information that I try to get to resolve this will also suffer from this problem (draws another 2 bell curves that overlaps). And this, of course, goes again towards: you can't ultimately get certainty, et cetera, et cetera. Also the more I regress and try to get signal about my signal, about my signal, about my signal, the more time I'm taking, and often time is an important constraint. So first of all, you can't ever escape this (overlapping bell curve) problem. And as you try to reduce it, you have to put in a lot of time and effort that can ultimately be too costly for you. So the idea is, there's a sense in which every act, even an act of perception is, to some degree, risky; it's a gamble. And this is part again—and we talked about this—Tim Lillicrap, Blake Richards, and I in the paper on relevance realization. This is part again of the issue of trading off between various contingencies.

Setting the Criterion

What's the trade off here? Well, the trade off is, I have to set the criterion. So the criterion is basically—what I do is I put a dividing line (draws line c in Fig. 4), a decision line. Remember, to decide ultimately means to cut. And I'm going to include everything to the left as signal (indicates the left bell curve) and exclude everything to the right. Now what's the problem with that? Well, the problem with that is, I'm now opening myself up to different kinds of errors. So one of the things I can do here is, if I set my criterion too high, for example, I will [-] treat a lot of noise as signal. If I set my criterion

way down here—"I don't want to ever be wrong. I'm going to set my criterion really low (erases line c in Fig. 4) here. [-] (draws line a in Fig. 4) —the problem is if I set my criterion so I exclude all possible noise, (indicates the area to the right of the new dividing line a) I'm going to miss a lot of valuable signal. The other issue that comes up (erases line a in Fig. 4) ... so where do you set the criteria? Well, I mean, there isn't an algorithm for that, because part of the problem is, those different kinds of errors are differentially relevant to you, depending on the context.

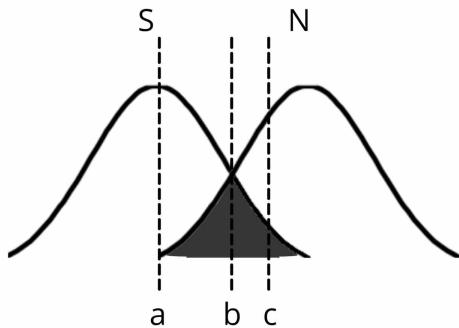


Fig. 4

Let's go back to the gazelle. You have two gazelles: you have Bill the happy gazelle. And what Bill wants to do is, basically, avoid leopards, right? So Bill says, "Well, I'm going to set my criterion very high (draws line c in Fig. 4), because that way, most of the time I'm going to treat the noise as a leopard in the bush. And that way my chances of missing a leopard are very small." Now the problem with Bill is, [-] he runs away a lot. Every [rustle of] wind, he runs away, and all the other gazelles laugh at Bill, "Look at Bill, he's running [away] again." And if Bill does this too much, of course, it's exhausting, right?

Now in contrast to Bill the gazelle, there is (erases line c in Fig. 4) Tom. And Tom is the really epistemically-oriented gazelle. Tom will only act on the basis of what Tom truly believes. And so Tom is going to be very skeptical and set their criteria and very low. (draws line a in Fig. 4) And Tom says, "I'm only going to believe what I am really confident in and certain of." And that way... you know, this is what's going to happen. So what happens for Tom is, all the instances where the wind is blowing and Bill runs away, Tom laughs at Bill. "Haha, silly Bill." The problem is, Tom is missing signal by

setting his criterion so low. And one of these times there's a noise in the bush. Bill runs, Tom begins to laugh, and as he's mid-laugh, there is a leopard on his back, sinking its jaws in a death grip on his neck. Because you see, in this context, not in all contexts, but in this context, missing signal is much worse than mistaking noise for signal. See, there's two kinds of errors.

I can miss signal (Fig. 5) (writes miss-signal). I can mistake noise for signal (writes mistake noise for signal). When I do this (indicates Mistake noise for signal) that's Bill; everybody laughs at me; that's a cost and I'm using a lot of energy. But if I miss (indicates miss-signal), if I missed the leopard, I'm dead, and that's much, much worse. So that's why most gazelles are like Bill rather than like Tom. They set the criterion (erases line a in Fig. 4) way over here (draws line c in Fig. 4), they're willing to make a lot of mistakes, so that they do not make very many misses.

Miss — Signal
Mistake noise for signal

Fig. 5

Now there's other situations where it will be reversed, where a mistake is much more costly to you than a miss. And so what you need (erases line c in Fig. 4) what you need is you need to be flexibly setting your criterion in a way that is deeply, contextually sensitive, deeply situationally aware. This is again why perspectival knowing is so crucial. Perspectival knowing is your situational awareness, and your situational awareness should be your primary guide to: What is the context? And how do I set the criterion in this context?

In fact, there's a neuroscientist—cognitive scientist, Lau (writes Lau) who argues that one of the functions of consciousness is exactly to set the criterion for perception. So what you're paying attention to is how you're situationally aware. So how you're paying attention, how you're situationally aware, how you're setting the criterion, is actually the job of consciousness. Now as you may have realized—myself and Richard Wu and Anderson Todd argued—this again is another argument that one of the main functions

of consciousness is to do relevance realization within perspectival knowing, yet another converging argument.

Now, the point about this is two things, and both of them have to be remembered. What does this have to do with credo? Well, I would argue that [-] credo is setting the criterion (draws line *b* in Fig. 4) on religio (writes Religio beside the bell curve). What it's trying to do is determine what behaviors, what things are putting me really into contact with religio. And then what is dysfunctional? What is mad, et cetera?

Now the issue is: we have to set the criterion. That's inescapable. And one way to do this is to do it in an absolutist way. One way to do this is to say, there is a final way, a final place, an absolute place to set the criterion. I think you can see from the argument given here, why that is a perilous thing to do.

You can see again, why the open-endedness of relevance realization undermines these—the attempt to absolutely set the criterion. So you have to set the criterion, but it is dangerous to set the criterion in an absolute fashion. So if we can acknowledge this, we can acknowledge that we will set the criterion with our mythos, and that's one half of credo. But we should not ever try to set the criterion in an absolute or final manner, which is what happens in credal dominance, because that is ultimately to misunderstand the functionality of setting the criterion. The point is not to set the criterion conclusively. The point is to continually reset the criterion optimally. Again, open-ended relevance realization, rather than a final solution. So a way of thinking about that is, the religion that's not a religion would always, always have credo in the service of religio.

Now I'm sure that there are many religious people would say, well, that is, that is what we do in practice. And we have our creeds, but they're constantly being historically interpreted. And I think that's sort of right in practice, but there's often been a lot of conflict between de facto and de jure in the history of the religious discussions around orthodoxy and creed, et cetera. And I point to you again to the work of Arthur Versluis [The New Inquisitions] and his work on the way in which the West's history of pursuing and persecuting heretics, people who do not set the criterion as we do, has actually helped to foreshadow and train the West for totalitarian

regimes and totalitarian ideologies. So I point you again to his historical argument for how that came about. So for that reason, we should always be thinking of making credo clearly and comprehensively, always in the service of religio. That would be helped, as I think you can see, by being linked to a notion of sacredness as being grounded in an inexhaustible, open-ended optimization, rather than in some absolute state of perfection.

Mythos beholden to three levels

Next, I think that the religion that's not a religion should, when it's crafting its mythos and understanding that credo is always in the service of religio, it should always understand the mythos as being beholden to sort of the three levels that we've been talking about here.

So you have the Unconscious level (Fig. 6a) (writes Unconscious). This is the level at which relevance realization (writes RR beside Unconscious) is taking place. Most of the relevance realization that's going on for me, I do not have introspective access to in any way. And this of course is the grounding of my participatory knowing. (writes Participatory knowing beside RR) Of course, you can become conscious of your participation, but that's not what I'm saying here. I'm saying that the processes from which I emerge as an autobiographical ego, and the world emerges as an unfolding arena, are ultimately below the level of consciousness, and that's where the participatory knowing is happening.

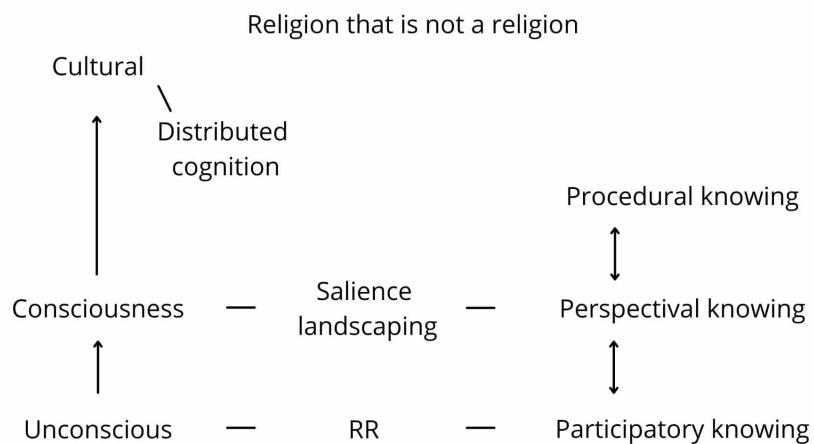


Fig. 6a

And then of course there is the level of consciousness (writes Consciousness above Unconscious) and this is the level of salience landscaping (writes Salience landscaping beside Consciousness). And of course, this is the level of perspectival knowing (writes Perspectival knowing). The perspectival knowing is grounded in (draws an arrow from Perspectival to Participatory) the participatory. And the perspectival knowing with the situational awareness that I've just talked about, of course, makes possible the procedural knowing (writes Procedural above Perspectival knowing with a double-headed arrow between them) these are tightly intermeshed as well (draws a double-headed arrow between Perspectival knowing and Participatory knowing). This is where I am consciously directing my interactions in order to appropriate affordances given to me at this level (indicates Participatory knowing). And I'm appropriating those affordances by cultivating skills, so that my coping turns into skillful interaction. My coping-caring becomes a skillful action and apt sensibility.

And then of course, this passes into the Cultural level (writes Cultural). This is the level of distributed cognition (writes Distributed cognition). And this is the level at which we are trying to communicate.

So this is the level (indicates RR) at which connections are being made. This is the level (indicates Salience landscaping) at which connections are being sensed and internalized. And then this is the level (indicates Distributed cognition) at which connections are being shared. And so, what we have here, of course, is the whole machinery of Mythos (Fig. 6b) (writes Mythos beside Cultural). And, of course, the machinery of Science (writes Science below Mythos) and other things such as that. [-] Although that's at the cultural level, I'm taking it out (erases science) because what I want to concentrate on here is addressing this (indicates Religion that is not a religion). So this will pick up on our propositional knowing (writes Propositional knowing beside Mythos), but, of course, the mythos also points down towards (draws an arrow from Mythos to Procedural knowing, another arrow from Mythos to Perspectival knowing, and another arrow towards Participatory knowing) all of these, because here we have credo in the service of religio (writes Credo in the service of religio beside Propositional).

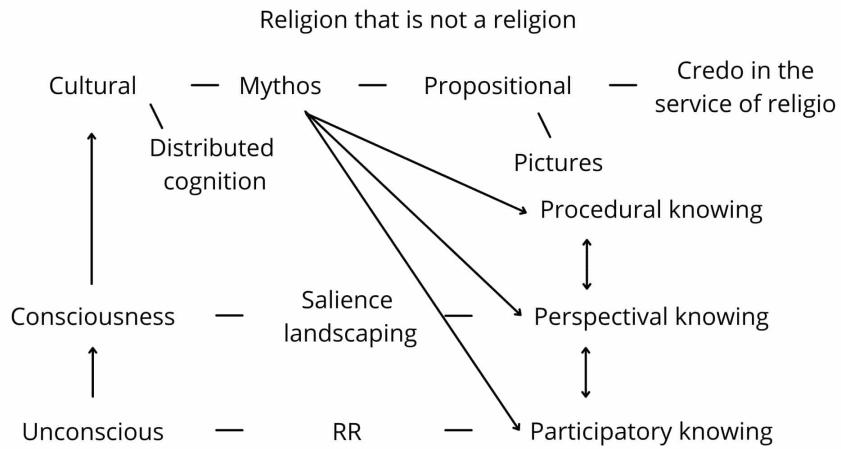


Fig. 6b

Any mythos is going to understand itself this way (indicates Propositional - credo in the service of religio). If I put it horizontally as always in the service of religio, which means it is always going to also be directed, if you'll allow me, downwards to the procedural knowing the perspectival knowing and the participatory knowing.

So it should be a mythos that is explicitly committed to both of those (Propositional - Credo) in an integrated fashion. That the credo, the paradigmatic propositions, the paradigmatic pictures (writes Pictures under Propositional) are always in the service of religio, and that the mythos therefore is directed towards accessing, activating, accentuating, appreciating the procedural knowing, the perspectival knowing, the participatory knowing.

Ecology of Psychotechnologies

So it should be, given the argument—it's very tentative here—what it should be doing is, once you've got this programmatic framework in mind, that what it should be doing is (erases the board) cultivating an ecology of psychotechnologies (writes Ecology of psychotechnologies). An ecology that is designed to be both top-down — it reaches from the propositional down (Fig 7) (draws a downward arrow) to the participatory — but also is open to (draws an upward arrow beside the downward arrow) and allows bottom-up emergence from the participatory up through the perspectival, through the procedural, and into the propositional.



Fig. 7

So I've tried to indicate to you what that ecology should look like. You should be setting up psychotechnologies, sets of practices and cognitive styles that have complimentary relationships to each other, that have sets of corresponding checks and balances, strengths, and weaknesses. So that you have a dynamical system that is reliably complexifying in a reliably self-correcting manner, which means we need to do something very important.

And this is an idea that emerged in a discussion with Jordan Hall (draws an upward arrow from Ecology of psychotechnologies) and he put it this way—I think, which is a very interesting way of putting it. We need a meta-psychotechnology (Fig. 8) (writes Meta-psychotechnology above Ecology of psychotechnologies) that is designed to give us—move us (draws an arrow from Meta-psychotechnology to Ecology of psychotechnologies) out of the intuitive construction of psychotechnologies into the more explicit. So two points here: the more explicit creation of psychotechnologies (indicates Ecology of psychotechnologies) and explicitly the task of trying to cultivate an ecology of more explicitly engineered psychotechnologies.



Fig. 8

So this would be the meta-psychotechnology (indicates Meta-psychotechnology). So this religion that is not a religion should give people ways of cultivating this meta-psychotechnology as a way of crafting the ecology of practices for addressing the perennial problems in a way that is always [-] coherent with worldview attunement.

I think that there are deep connections between the capacity for collectively creating the meta-psychologies — and you have to do this collectively (indicates Meta-psychotechnology), because that's how psychotechnologies are created (Text overlay appears: John will explore the nature of this meta-psychotechnology in a forthcoming series). The capacity for creating this collectively (indicates psychotechnology) (draws an arrow from Meta-psychotechnology) and the individual virtue (writes Wisdom beside Meta-psychotechnology), meta-virtue, because that's what it is: the meta-virtue of wisdom (writes meta-virtue below Wisdom). There's deep connections for that. The more that people are individually cultivating—cause wisdom is basically a way of cultivating and coordinating the individual virtues, we'll come back to that. So you need individual wisdom (indicates Wisdom - Meta-virtue), the meta-virtue, in order to collectively (indicates meta-psychotechnology) pursue the creation and the ongoing cultivation of the meta-psychotechnology (taps Ecology of psychotechnologies) that will allow us to engineer individual psychotechnologies and to cultivate an ecology of psychotech that reaches comprehensively down to our participatory knowing (indicates the downward arrow) and affords comprehensively the emergence up (indicates the upward arrow) from our participatory knowing.

So I think those are some very general structural features. Some things we might be wanting to do at a more organizational level is, and this is extremely tentative—extremely. So what might it be to create that open-ended credo?

A Credo Analogous to Wiki

Well, we have something like that already because of the emergence of the cyber technologies that are being increasingly integrated with the psychotechnologies. And I'm using this just as an analogy, but we have something like Wikipedia. And what's interesting about Wikipedia is the way it's generated, the way it's maintained, the way it's revised. It's done in this collective cooperative fashion. And it has both quite reliable stability, but also a quite reliable evolution. And what's interesting is I've recently [-] created something like this for one of my courses. And what we did there in one of the courses at the university was we got former students to basically

create a Wiki of some of the main ideas, main themes, main arguments in the course. And what happens is people, of course, get much more involved in a participatory fashion with the generation of sort of the credo for the course. And what they also do is they create something like the Wikipedia that gives people much more interactional and evolving content to work with. So you get sort of this presentation of what's paradigmatic and prototypical for the course, but in this collective dynamic and ongoing fashion.

So perhaps we could think about creating a credo analogous to that, where we create something like a Wiki—a credo Wiki, for example — by which groups of people that are interested in creating ecologies of practices and psychotechnologies can communicate with each other for how to adaptively set the criterion, and how to constantly re-engineer the creation of the meta-psychotechnology that will help to guarantee— maybe that's too strong, a word—help to promote, reliably promote both the bottom-up and top-down functionality of this ecology of psychotechnology. Maybe that could be set in conjunction with a co-op structure of these various communities, where they are co-opting together to create a shared curriculum, a shared credo in this Wiki manner, and which they are also trying to afford a kind of synoptic integration, a shared vocabulary, not imposed as an ideology, but to allow for transformative and bridging insights and discourse between the various groups, so that they might be able to afford each other's development and enhancement.

Now, as I've said, all of that is not—this—I am not presenting a utopic vision. That's not what's going on. What's going on is: people are already doing this. They are already trying to create these ecologies of practices. They're trying to create ways of talking to each other, setting the criterion, and they're making use of social media. They're making use of the internet. They're making use of cooperative dynamic forms of social organization. I think all of those could be appropriated in a way to help bring about this religion that's not a religion. And what I've tried to do is offer some suggestions on things to keep in mind, and at least some potential methods for helping to bring this about. Whether or not this functions, whether or not any of this takes root, again, it's not even up to me, I'm not some sort of linchpin or pivotal figure. I'm just trying—this sounds so insufficient. I'm just trying to help. I'm really just trying to help. I want to give people some

way of how to go about starting to make this work more and more powerfully and perspicaciously.

All right. So I have tried to show how in three interrelated ways we can respond to the meaning crisis. I've tried to show that [-] there are sets of practices that we can cultivate as an ecology for addressing the perennial problems. We can set those perennial problems into a legitimating worldview via the theoretical, scientific machinery given to us by third generation cognitive science, 4E cognitive science. And that all of that can be set practically within the project of trying to bring about the religion that is not a religion, in terms of, like I said, some suggestions about some structural features of what we're looking for, and some organizational features of how to try and initiate that and get that going. This is ultimately going to come back to the dialogue that I'm going to set up between what I've argued for here, and some of the other prophets of this religion beyond a religion, that's not a religion like, Tillich, Jung—I would argue, also Corbin and perhaps aspects of Barfield, and the godfather of all of that, of course, are people like Heidegger. So that's going to be something we're going to come back to.

But we need to do something else now that I've constantly been putting aside, because it also is going to be involved in the process that I have been proposing to you, and we've said it throughout, which is the cultivation of wisdom. And as we've seen the cultivation of wisdom as a meta-virtue is deeply resonant with the communitas' cultivation of the meta-psychology that is needed for the ecology of psychotechnology. And, of course, wisdom is also needed for the project of enlightenment, as I've already mentioned. And finally, wisdom has always been associated since the Axial Revolution with satisfying those deep connectedness, the connectedness to oneself, the connectedness to the world, the connectedness to others that makes for a meaningful life.

Cognitive Science of Wisdom

So I want to start talking now about the cognitive science of wisdom. [-] This is a very exciting and hot area in cognitive sci. There's lots going on about this right now, and it's becoming very, very pervasive. And the discussion of wisdom in the culture at large is coming to the fore again. [-] I

would like to have a series at some point that's just on wisdom. I can't do that right now. What I want to do is try and give again, sort of a very quick overview of [some] of the key players—if you'll allow serious players in the cognitive science of wisdom business—and what we can glean from that. And how we can integrate it into the model and picture we've been building here.

So this really took off in the 1990s with an anthology by Robert Sternberg [Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins and Development]. The psychologist Robert Sternberg has done a tremendous amount of work to bring back the notion of wisdom within psychology, within cognitive science in general, and even within pedagogy and the understanding of education. And that anthology really started to bring out some of the initial work that was being done, the seminal work; and also promote a lot of work that has expanded since on this.

I want to talk about work that was happening at around the same time as this, shortly thereafter. [-] The first Sternberg anthology on wisdom (there's been another one since: The Wisdom Handbook) was in 1990. And then, what I consider a really important article came out in 1999 by McKee and Barber (writes 1999 and McKee and Barber). It was important because it was basically retrospective reflection on sort of the first decade of work on wisdom. But it was doing something more than that. So it was definitely doing that retrospective, but it was also doing something very important. Something that is so resonant with what we've been doing here together. Because what they wanted to do was, they wanted to try and link two things together in a very powerful convergence argument.

A Reflective Equilibrium

They wanted to look at all (draws an oval) of what they call the a priori theories of wisdom. Our way of understanding that and I think that it's very easy just by seeing what they looked at. They wanted to look at all the philosophical theories (Fig. 9) (writes Philosophical above the oval) and we've looked at quite a few of them. So we have an understanding of what they're talking about. We saw the Socratic theory, and Aristotelian, and the Stoic, and the Platonic. So you have the philosophical theories of wisdom (adds Theories to Philosophical) and, of course, that's appropriate because

philosophy is the love of wisdom. But they also wanted to look at (draws another oval beside the first). And there had been about 15 years, because the anthology comes out in 1990. Some work had been going on in the eighties and then it starts to really take off, but you've got the psychological theories (writes Psychology theories above the second oval).



Fig. 9a

Now, these (indicates Philosophical theories) are very conceptually-driven. They're very sort of top-down. These (indicates Psychology theories), of course, are much more empirically-driven, bottom-up. And what they were trying to do was they were trying to set up [-] (draws an arrow from the first oval to the second oval), a reflective equilibrium (draws an arrow from the second oval to the first oval) between them.

They're trying to find... they're trying to find through a coordinated investigation, a convergent theme. Both from all of the philosophical work and all of the psychological work. So looking at all of the philosophical work (draws converging lines below the first oval), what does it converge on? Same thing with the psychological work (draws converging lines below the second oval) and then can we draw it altogether (Fig. 9b) (draws another set of converging lines joining the first two sets) in a reflectively coherent fashion?

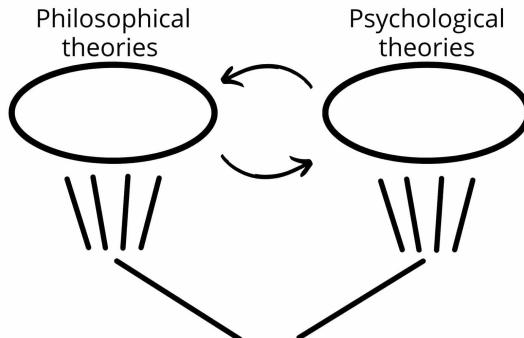


Fig. 9b

And they did. They make a very powerful argument. They go through and they make an argument that what all of these theories converge on is seeing through illusion (Fig. 9c) (writes Seeing through illusion). That the core of wisdom is the ability to see through illusion, where this means, of course, much more broadly. They're not meaning primarily here visual illusion, they're meaning (writes Self-Deception above Seeing through illusion) cognitive and existential illusion that is caused by self-deception. So seeing through this (indicates Seeing through illusion). [-] Of course, because wisdom is a systematic notion, and this is something they are going to explicitly argue about, this is systematical (writes (Systematical)). So not just this illusion or this self-deception, but a systematic seeing through of self-deception. And then in something that Leo and I published in—Leo Ferraro and I published in 2013, we argued that this (indicates Seeing through illusion), of course, has a strong implication that should be filled out here. Seeing through illusion and into (writes And into reality) some sense of what's reality or, at least, what's more real (writes More real above Reality). And because you can only know if you're seeing through illusion, if you come to something that you regard as being less illusory in nature. So this is directly (indicates Systematical)—the systematic—seeing through illusion and into reality.

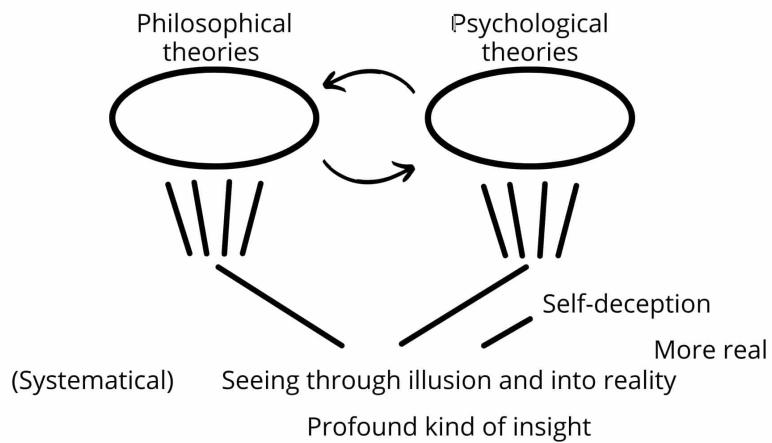


Fig. 9c

Now, notice what this is. This is a very profound, meaning both deep and pervasive, meaning across many different instances of where you're trying to solve your problems, achieving your goal. This is a very profound kind of insight (writes Profound kind of insight below Seeing through illusion). It's a

systematic insight that we talked about when we talked about higher states of consciousness. And we'll see that McKee and Barber are using exactly this idea. It's to find across many areas (Fig. 10) (draws six circles in a line) in which you have been misframing problems (draws lines from each circle that converges on a single point above them) to see them, to realize them as systematically related, such that you can come up with an insight (draws a circle where the line converges) that intervenes not just on this problem (indicates the circle where the lines converge) but in all of these problems (indicates the different converging lines) in a systematic fashion and thereby you start to see (indicates (Systematical) systematically through illusion (indicates Seeing through illusion) and into (draws a bracket with a downward arrow below the circle with converging lines) what is more real. So this is a key idea as to what you're trying to cultivate when you cultivate wisdom.

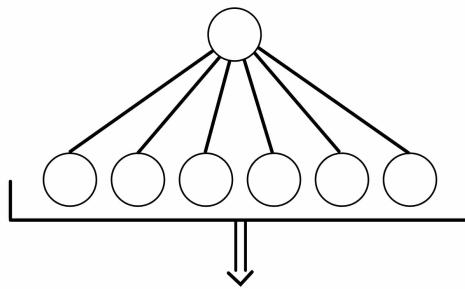


Fig. 10

And what we're going to do next time is, we're going to continue to look at —we're going to follow this (indicates Fig. 9c) about putting the psychological theories and the philosophical theories into dialogue and to continue developing what is it that we're talking about when we're talking about wisdom and, relatedly, what is it we're doing when we're proposing the cultivation of wisdom?

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 39 Notes:
James Carse

James P. Carse was an American academic who was Professor Emeritus of history and literature of religion at New York University.

Book Mentioned: The Religious Case Against Belief - [Buy Here](#)

Roberto Mangabeira Unger

Roberto Mangabeira Unger is a Brazilian philosopher and politician.

Book Mentioned: The Religion of the Future - [Buy Here](#)

Alain de Botton

Alain de Botton, FRSL is a Swiss-born British philosopher and author.

Book Mentioned: Religion for Atheists - [Buy Here](#)

Richard Dawkins

Richard Dawkins FRS FRSL is a British ethologist, evolutionary biologist, atheist thinker, and author.

Nones

Irreligion, or nonreligion, is the absence or rejection of religion, or indifference to it. According to the Pew Research Center's 2012 global study of 230 countries and territories, 16% of the world's population is not affiliated with any religion. The population of religiously unidentifying people, sometimes referred to as "nones", grew significantly in recent years, though its future growth is uncertain.

Tomas Björkman

Tomas Björkman (born March 3, 1958 in Borås, Sweden) is a Swedish financier, social entrepreneur and author.

Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is a Christian statement of belief widely used in liturgy. It is the defining creed of Nicene Christianity.

Apostolic Creed

The Apostles' Creed, sometimes titled the Apostolic Creed or the Symbol of the Apostles is a Christian creed or "symbol of faith".

Credo

In Christian liturgy, the credo is the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (or less often, the Apostles' Creed or the Athanasian Creed) in the Mass, either as spoken text, or sung as Gregorian chant or other musical settings of the Mass.

Timothy Lillicrap

Timothy P. Lillicrap is a Canadian neuroscientist and AI researcher, adjunct professor at University College London, and staff research scientist at Google DeepMind, where he has been involved in the AlphaGo and AlphaZero projects mastering the games of Go, Chess and Shogi. His research focuses on machine learning and statistics for optimal control and decision making, as well as using these mathematical frameworks to understand how the brain learns.

Blake Richards

Blake Richards is an Assistant Professor in the Montreal Neurological Institute and the School of Computer Science at McGill University and a Core Faculty Member at the Quebec Artificial Intelligence Institute.

Article Mentioned: [Relevance Realization and the Emerging Framework in Cognitive Science](#)

Arthur Versluis

Arthur Versluis is a professor and Department Chair of Religious Studies in the College of Arts & Letters at Michigan State University.

Book Mentioned: The New Inquisitions - [Buy Here](#)

Robert J Sternberg

Robert J. Sternberg (born December 8, 1949) is an American psychologist and psychometrician. He is Professor of Human Development at Cornell University.

Book Mentioned:

Wisdom: It's nature, origins and development - [Buy Here](#)

A Handbook of Wisdom: Psychological Perspectives - [Buy Here](#)

The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom - [Buy Here](#)

Michel Ferrari

Nic Westrate

Book Mentioned: the Scientific Study of Personal Wisdom - [Buy Here](#)

Patrick McKee

Clifton E. Barber

Article Mentioned: [On Defining Wisdom](#)

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 40 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Wisdom and Rationality

Welcome back to Awakening from Meaning Crisis.

So last time, I tried to make some tentative suggestions as to what religion that's not a religion would look like. And how it can make use of and be integrated with an ecology of psychotechnologies for addressing the perennial problems and a cognitive scientific worldview that can legitimate and situate that ecology of practices.

And then I made some suggestions as to the relationship between Credo and Religio in our determination of our mythos and the issue of criterion setting. I made, again, another argument for open-ended, in that sense, Gnostic mythos. Talked about a mythos that always puts therefore the credo in service of the religio. And that is always directed towards top-down, the propositional being ultimately grounded in the participatory, and also affording the emergence up out of the participatory through the perspectival and procedural into the propositional. I've suggested some ways in which we might set up a way of engineering credo, something analogous to a Wiki and create a structure that is distributed; a co-op structure facilitated by things like the internet.

And so, again, [I] remind you, I was not trying to offer anything definitive or set myself up in any kind of way. That is not what I want to do. I want to try and help facilitate the people who are already doing this so that they have ways of talking to each other, coordinating with each other, and facilitating each other's development and growth.

I then turned towards one of the culminating things we need to do, picking up on one of the deepest relationships [-] that meaning has, which is the relationship between meaning and wisdom. We need wisdom, of course, to, as I've argued, because it's the meta-virtue for the virtues. And we need that in order to give the individual pole for the relationship with the collective creation and cultivation of the meta-psychotechnology for creating the ecology of psychotechnology. We also, of course, need wisdom before, during, and after the quest for enlightenment, the quest for a systematic and reliable response to the perennial problems.

Insight: Systematic Seeing Through Illusion and Into Reality

I then proposed to take a look at the cognitive science of wisdom. And we did that by taking note of an important article that comes out after the first decade and a half of the resurgence of scientific interest in wisdom. And that's the article of McKee and Barber, and they're doing something consonant with what we've been trying to do in this series. They're trying to, in a sense, salvage what we can from the philosophical theories, the legacy

and the Axial Age of wisdom and the psychological theories that were emerging at that time. And then they set them into dialogue with each other, a process of reflective equilibrium trying to get a convergence between them. And they argue that all of these theories, the philosophical and the psychological theories converge on a feature, a central feature of wisdom. And then following work that I did with Leo Ferraro in 2013, we can sort of expand beyond the explicit thing to what is also set alongside their phrase and also directly implied by their phrase. And so a central feature of Wisdom is [-] the systematic seeing through illusion and into Reality, (Fig. 1a) (writes systematic seeing through illusion and into reality) at least comparatively so. And this, (places a bracket underneath Seeing through illusion) of course, is Insight, (writes Insight under the bracket) but it is a fundamental insight. (draws an arrow from Systematic to Insight) It is a systematic insight. It is an insight, not just into a particular problem, but into a family of problems.

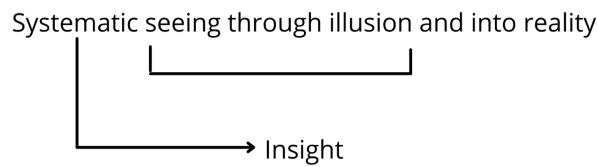


Fig. 1a

And McKee and Barber make use of a point that I made use of when I was talking about systematic insight in higher states of consciousness. They make use of the work of Piaget. If you remember Piaget found systematic errors in the way children are seeing the world, remember, things like, they fail at conservation tasks, counting numbers, or pouring liquids, right? So you have these systematic errors, which reflect a systematic way in which the children have over-constrained their cognition, their—they have to constrain their cognition it's adaptive, but they have to go through that process of assimilation and accommodation, constantly optimizing and complexifying their system of constraints.

But what we see with the children is eventually they get a systematic insight and we've all done it. We go through qualitative change, qualitative development. There's an actual change in our competence. Because it's not an insight into this problem or this instance where I'm failing to conserve, or this instance, or this instance where I'm egocentric, or this instance, but it's

a[n] insight into failures of conservation as a kind of error. Failures of egocentrism as a kind of error and having a[n] insight that is not just at the level of framing, but at the level of transframing, because it not only is reframing the problem, it is transforming my competence so it is a transframing insight. It is a systematic insight. (Fig. 1b) (writes Transframing below Insight)

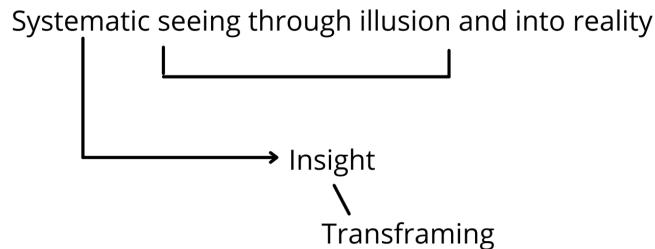


Fig. 1b

Because what it gives you is sensibility transcendence. That's literally what's happening to the children. Their sensibility is going through a form of transcendence. That's exactly what development is. And they use that as a way of explaining what they mean. Of course, without realizing it, they're making use of one of the paradigmatic metaphors for talking about wisdom. Which is, as the child is to the adult, right? (Fig. 2) (writes Child : Adult) the adult is to the sage (writes Adult : Sage below Child : Adult). Just like the adult has had systematic transframing, gone through development so that in a way, compared to the child, they much more systematically see through illusion and into what's real; the sage , right, similarly in comparison to an adult, right, sees systematically through in a transframing fashion, illusion and into reality. So this a core constitutive feature of what it is to be wise.

child : adult
adult : sage

Fig. 2

And you can see something, and this is not something that McKee and Barber said, okay, but you can see how this (indicates Transframing) is automatically, I would argue, [-] connected to the project of enlightenment in some very important fashion.

Wisdom vs. Knowledge

What are a couple of other important things that McKee and Barber talk about? They talk about that wisdom — and this is the beginning of the important distinction between wisdom and knowledge that we've been sort of also making use of throughout the course — that wisdom is not about what you know, wisdom has to do with how you know it.

And there's two senses of How that I want to explicate that they leave rather implicit, right? There's how you know it is. How you have come to know it. What's the processing involved as opposed to the product? So wisdom has a lot more to do with the process (Fig. 3) (writes Wisdom - Process) than with the product. (writes Product) Knowledge is often the product: "I know; this is what I know; and I know this and this and this." But Wisdom is: "How am I knowing? [-]" So definitely that. And that's going to be pivotal because [-] it's going to immediately link Wisdom to Rationality. Because one of the key features of rationality — I've mentioned this before...we're going to come back to this with the work of Stanovich — is a rational person is not only fixated on the products of their cognition, they pay attention to and find value [in] the processing of their cognition. That's what it is to be rational. Right?

Wisdom — Process

Product

Fig. 3

So that's one aspect of what they mean by the How. And then there's another aspect of How you know. And that has to do... and this goes to a point made by [-] John Kekes. (Fig. 4) (writes Kekes) Excellent philosopher who does work on wisdom [Moral Wisdom and Good Lives]. But Kekes makes a distinction between Descriptive knowledge (writes Descriptive knowledge) and Interpretive knowledge. (writes Interpretive knowledge). I often prefer to use the word *knowing* rather than knowledge, but that's his way of talking about. So again, this is (indicates Descriptive knowledge) grasping the facts, whereas Interpretive knowledge, this points towards an aspect of wisdom that we're going to have to come back to. This has to do with Understanding. (writes = Understanding beside Interpretive knowledge) This is to grasp the significance of what you know. (writes Grasp the significance below

understanding) And of course, relevance realization is being invoked. They're grasping the significance, connecting to the relevance realization. So understanding is grasping the significance. So part of what we're talking about with wisdom, and we're talking about the how, rather than the what, you know. We're talking about the process rather than the product; and we're talking not about the description of the facts, right? But we're talking about you grasping—understanding by grasping the significance of the facts that you have.

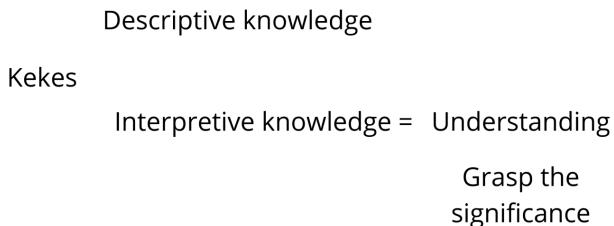


Fig. 4

So wisdom has to do with these things. It has deep connections to understanding (indicates Understanding), again, which has to do with the relevance realization. It has to do with the process (indicates Process) rather than the product (indicates Product), right. And that is all tied into this (indicates Systematic seeing through illusion and into reality) systematic transframing realization of what's real.

Perspectival and Participatory Aspects of Wisdom

They then point to one other important feature of wisdom. They point out: there's a perspectival participatory aspect to wisdom. They talk about what's called a pragmatic self-contradiction. A pragmatic self-contradiction is not a contradiction in what you state (indicates Descriptive knowledge), it's a contradiction in how, in the perspective from which you make the statement, and the [-] degree of identity you have in making the statement.

Let me give you a non-controversial example. “Okay. So I am asleep (writes I am asleep).” There is nothing logically wrong with that. If I'm pointing to the fact of John being asleep, there's no conceptual contradiction in John being asleep.

This is a pragmatic self-contradiction, because uttering it means I'm uttering it from the perspective of somebody who is awake. Because I have to be

awake in order to say it. And of course, there's a sense in which I'm not just pointing out a fact, I'm actually pointing to myself with it. And that's, of course, the degree to which I'm participating in the fact that's being disclosed. Now, that's very different, by the way, from lucidity in dreaming, where people can realize in a dream that, "Oh, I am dreaming." right? Because you can realize you're dreaming, and remain in the dream. There is nothing pragmatically self-contradictory about that.

Now they point out and think—you can just hear Socrates in this. They point out that this: "I am wise" (Fig. 5) (draws an arrow from I am asleep and writes I am wise) carries with it a sense, a very strong intuition, of a pragmatic self-contradiction. To state that you are wise, seems to be an indication that you are in a perspective, and you have an identity that is precisely not that of being wise. And, of course, this is part of the Socratic, "I know what I don't know" idea.



Fig. 5

This is part of, again, how I've argued and this is why awe—Awe as this two-faced thing between horror and wonder. (Fig. 6) (writes Wonder, Awe, and Horror and draws two arrows pointing to the left and right) right? And that, what it does is it brings out — and again, I'm using this in the original meaning of the word, not what we mean by it now — humiliation, the inculcation of humility.

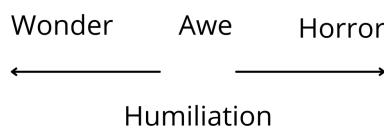


Fig. 6

And so what that tells us right away is that wisdom has this perspectival and participatory aspects to it, such that it's not a matter of making, of even having true beliefs (gestures at I am wise). There's a matter of: What perspectives can you take? What perspectives? What identities are you

assuming and assigning? So the participatory and the perspectival are also very central to wisdom. And that, of course, makes sense, again, with wisdom having to do with much more with the How than the What.

And, of course, this (indicates Systematic seeing through illusion in Fig. 1b) is also perspectival and participatory, because I'm seeing through a misframing and I'm going through transframing. I'm actually going through developmental change. My world is opening it up, and I, in a coordinated resonant manner, I'm opening up to it; and opening up through it, which is, of course, what wonder and awe are all about.

Rehabilitating What It Means To Be Rational

Okay (erases the board). So that gives us some very important things to take note of. And I've already indicated a connection to Stanovich with the idea of paying attention to process rather than product. And we can strengthen that connection by noting that at the core of wisdom is the capacity for overcoming self-deception. Now Stanovich himself has published About, at least, overcoming foolishness and therefore, at least by implication, what it is to become wise. But he normally talks about this ability to systematically overcome self-deception with another term. And this is the term Rationality (writes Rationality). And throughout I've been proposing to you that part of what we need to do to rehabilitate wisdom is we also need in a coordinated fashion to rehabilitate what it means to be Rational. Rational does not, cannot be reduced to, cannot be equated to a facility with syllogistic reasoning. Okay. Rationality cannot be reduced to logic.

So let's broaden the notion right away and make it connect to what we're talking about, which is what we mean by rationality is a capacity—capacity to overcome self-deception in a reliable manner. So what I'm going to mean by rationality is reliably and systematically (Fig. 7a) (writes Reliably and systematically)—I'll [explain] what I mean by those in a sec. Overcoming self-deception (writes Overcoming self-deception). And this is also in a lot of the work on rationality, especially by people like Stanovich, and also affording flourishing (writes Affording flourishing/ optimization), which is afforded by some process of optimization of your cognitive processing.

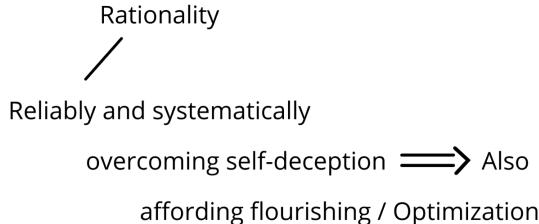


Fig. 7a

Okay. What I mean by reliably, it can't operate according to a standard of perfection, completion, certainty. Reliably does mean, though, that it has a high probability of functioning successfully. Systematically means it's not operational just in this one domain (Fig. 8a) (draws a square). So let's compare rationality with expertise. I can become an expert in, let's say, tennis. (writes Tennis) [-] I can become an expert in this. Okay. We have to be careful because we equivocate on this term (writes Expertise). There is one in which we can—it's something that we can study and one in which this is just a synonym for being good at something (writes Being good at something below Expertise). Okay. I'm not using it in that sense. Okay. I'm using it in the sense in which it makes sense to say somebody is an expert in tennis, they have acquired a high proficiency in the set of skills, such that they have an authority about tennis playing. Okay, that's what we mean—you can become a legal expert, et cetera. Okay. So let the person—[-] or in the law (writes Law connected to the square), for example, to become a legal expert.

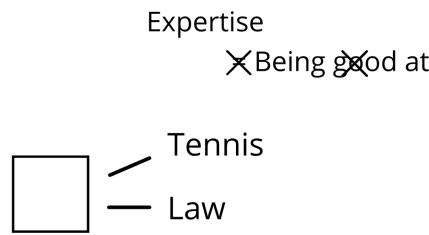


Fig. 8a

So what happens in expertise is precisely this. You find a domain, (indicates the square in Fig. 8a) a bounded domain that has a reliable set of very complex, very difficult, but nevertheless, reliable set of well-defined, or at least well definable for you eventually, set of patterns and problems. You know it's expertise precisely because it doesn't transfer. My expertise in tennis won't transfer even to things that are close. In fact, (draws another

square beside the first square) it will interfere with when I try to play squash. (Fig. 8b) (writes Squash below the square) My expertise in golf will interfere when I try to play hockey. Not only does it not transfer, it will often interfere in [-] even to things that are relevantly similar to your area of expertise.

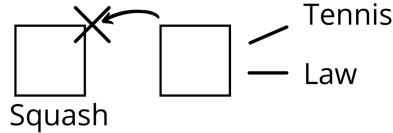


Fig. 8b

Now, this is a way again, (indicates the squares in Fig. 8b) in which we have to pay more attention in ways in which we could bullshit ourselves because we often confuse, right... because we don't pay careful attention to how we're using similarity, we often confuse people's expertise. What do I mean by that? So here's somebody who's an expert, for example, in a particular domain, maybe in physics; they have expertise there. And of course, physics is about knowledge and about getting at what's real. And so that seems to be similar to philosophy, right? And so presumably somebody in physics can therefore just transfer their expertise to philosophy and just make pronouncements about philosophy and metaphysics, perhaps pronouncing that philosophy is dead or useless or some such thing, which of course itself is a philosophical statement and pragmatically self-contradictory. And if we don't pay attention to this fact about expertise, we may fail to see that the similarity between physics and philosophy may actually be good reason for believing that these people are the worst people to listen to for philosophical advice, because their expertise in physics may be, in fact, interfering with expertise in philosophy, for example, at least academic philosophy. Just the way that expertise in tennis actually interferes with you trying to play squash. Okay.

So expertise is not systematic. It is limited in its domain. Rationality (draws 5 squares) is supposed to apply within, it's supposed to be apt within each domain (Fig. 9) (draws lines into each square) and apply across many domains. Somebody is rational if they can note self-deception when they're doing their daily life, where they're doing their professional work, where they're engaged in friendship, where they're engaged in [-] romantic relationships, okay? So. (erases Fig. 9)

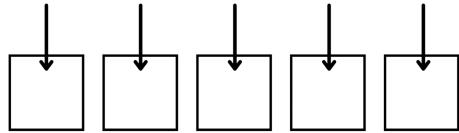


Fig. 9

And this is an important thing to remember. Rationality is in this sense, a domain general notion, (Fig. 7b) (writes Domain general beside Rationality) as opposed to a context specific. Expertise tends to be a domain specific. Now, of course, this is a continuum. The more systematic somebody is, the more rational we can claim them to be. Somebody might be very rational in a couple of domains and irrational in others. So on balance, they're not that rational of a person, right? And, of course, I'm not claiming that everybody is rational in the domain general way. I'm claiming that that (indicates Domain general) is the achievement that we are aspiring to.

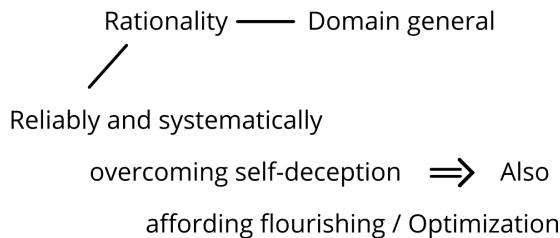


Fig. 7b

So rationality is to reliably and systematically overcome self-deception, also affording flourishing optimization. So you optimize (draws a downward arrow from Optimization) a set of procedures for achieving the goals you want (writes Goal below Optimization), but—And Stanovich doesn't talk enough about this, other people talk about this when they talk, like Agnes Callard, when she talks about aspirational rationality, part of it is also as you start to optimize your cognition, it will also tend to shift and change (Fig. 7c) (draws another arrow from Optimization and writes Goal) the goals you are pursuing. So the goals also tend to come under revision as we pursue this reliable and systematic overcoming of self-deception, and the attempt to optimize our functioning so that we can afford flourishing. (erases the board)

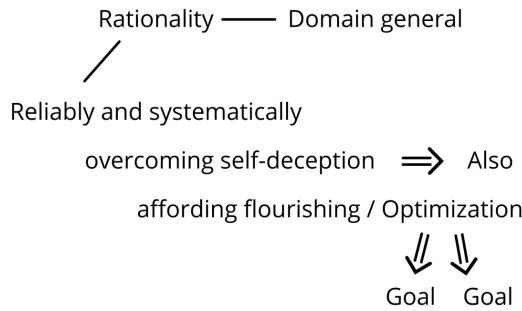


Fig. 7c

Okay. So given that that's what—talking about. We can then take a look at Stanovich's work and other people's work. And the way to do this is to situate it within the cognitive science of rationality. And that is to take a look at the Rationality debate (writes Rationality debate).

Experiments on Rationality

Okay. So the Rationality debate was driven by a whole bunch of experimental results (draws arrow pointing to Rationality debate and writes Experimental results at the tail end) that seemed to show that human beings are irrational. And how that works is — I'm not going to go into this in great length and I recommend you read Stanovich's work. I'm just going to show you a couple of examples of the kind of experiments you do, and then show you the features of them. So you give people certain problems to solve. And then you will note certain things about how they solve them.

So here's one problem. So here's a pond of water (Fig. 10) (draws a parallelogram) and I'm covering it, right. There's lily pads growing on, it starts with one lily pad (draws a circle inside the parallelogram), and every day, the lily pads double. (draws three more circles) So on day one, there's one; day two there's two, and so forth. Every day, the lily pads are doubling. And then I tell you on day 20, (writes 20) the surface of the pond is completely covered. On what day was the pond half covered? And people say, "Oh, on the 10th day (writes 10) halfway through it's half covered." No. Right? On day 19 (writes 19), the pond is half covered because on day 19, I'm one I'm halfway, right? You have to ask yourself on day 19, I was halfway towards being full because doubling of half is what gets me full. So it's on day 19 that the pond was half-covered by the lily pads.

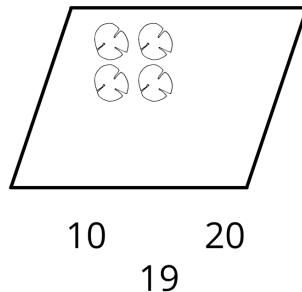


Fig. 10

Now what's interesting here is notice how [-] there's machinery like your insight machinery. There's machinery that's making you leap to a conclusion. It sounds—it feels like an insight, but it's actually causing you to misleap. And we talked about this. You're jumping to a conclusion that's actually incorrect. Now, please note that — how that adaptive machinery that often causes you to have an insight is actually thwarting you in an important way.

So people reliably fail on this kind of thing, right? (erases the board) This kind of task. Or you can give people this kind of task: [-] You give a preliminary test and you find propositions that they strongly agree with, or strongly disagree.

So let's say that some person strongly believes B. (writes strongly believes B) Well I'm not taking [a] stand here on this particular issue—they strongly believe that abortion is wrong, or they strongly believe that capital punishment is wrong. Now, what you do is you give them two situations. (Fig. 11a) (draws a downward arrow) You give them a good, in the sense of a logically valid argument (writes Good argument beside the arrow) that leads to “not B”, (writes $\sim B$) that (points to $\sim B$) means not. Let's put not in here. (erases $\sim B$ and writes Not B) And you give them a bad, (draws a downward arrow parallel to the first arrow) very poorly constructed argument (writes Bad argument) that leads to B (writes B at the bottom of the arrow). And you ask them, "Take a look at this and tell me which one of these is a good argument (draws arrows pointing the first 2 arrows from above)."

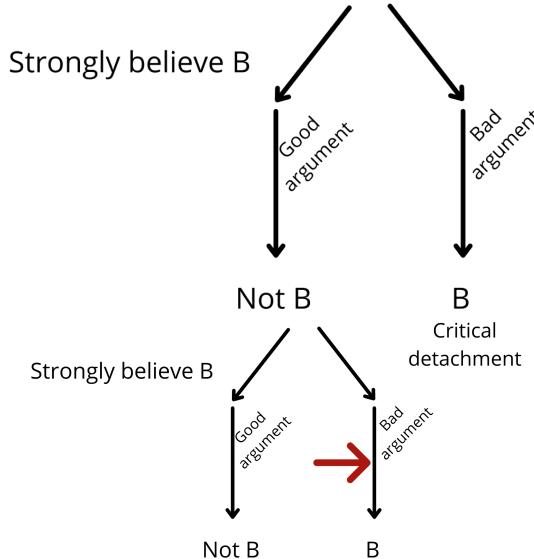


Fig. 11a Fig. 11b

And notice what I said earlier, how this points to what Stanovich argues. That part of rationality is your ability to remove your fixation (continuously taps on Not B) on the product of your cognition. That's like being locked in the nine-dot problem, right? And be able to direct your attention and care about the processing (taps Good argument) for its own sake. This is Critical Detachment. (writes Critical detachment). And what you find reliably for many people is people will say, "Oh, well, this is the good argument. This is the good argument (Fig. 11b) (red arrow appears pointing to Bad argument)." They'll fail at critical detachment (erases the board).

Now here's the thing. I'll give you a couple more of these, but notice when I showed you the right answer and the pond example, you went, "Oh, yes! Of course, of course." So you acknowledge the principle you should be using, but you don't actually reliably apply it. So you know what the right reasoning principle is, but you don't reliably apply. You know, you know that I should be able to independently evaluate an argument (draws a downward arrow and writes Good argument beside it) independent of what it leads to (draws a circle below the downward arrow), because if I can't do that, then there is no rationality possible. Because if you can't independently evaluate the argument, then you can't use the argument to evaluate the conclusion! And therefore I could never persuade you by argument. So you know that you should evaluate the argument independently from the conclusion, but we reliably fail to do that.

Do you see what the pattern is? We know what the principle is. We acquiesce in it when it is stated to us, but in experiment after experiment, we reliably fail to do it. Let me get you one more example. There are so many of these. Look up the conjunction fallacy. Look up confirmation bias. Look up the Wason selection task. Some of you can read some of my work elsewhere. I'll give you one more example of this, just because it's again so interesting about this.

So here's a principle we all acquiesce in, I believe. Because whenever you ask people, they say "Yes, yes, of course. That's the rule we should be using." Here's the rule. So I've got some evidence, (Fig. 12) (writes E) and the evidence is the basis for my belief (draws an arrow pointing away from E and writes B). And then if the Evidence is undermined, (draws an arrow pointing to E), I should change my belief (draws an arrow pointing to B). Of course, right? (erases the board)



Fig. 12

Now, of course, we can have disputes about what counts as evidence and blah, blah, blah, but that principle, right? If the evidence for my belief changes, I should change my belief. Now, the problem, of course, with testing that experimentally is, your beliefs are based upon all kinds of background evidence and information you've got. So testing it in an experimental situation is sometimes difficult, but this is what they did in an experiment, right? So what you do is you try and create a belief just in the experimental situation. So you're trying to create a new belief in the person, right in that experiment. And so the experiment is actually the place in which you're providing the evidence.

So what did they do is they brought a bunch of people in and they told them about this important skill that they wanted to see if they possessed, which is the ability to detect authentic suicide notes. Many of us have no experience with this. And so that's why it's plausible that this is going to be a situation in which a new belief is going to emerge. So the idea is, I'm going to give you a bunch of notes. And you have to be able to tell me which ones are

authentic and which ones are fraudulent. And this, of course, is a very valuable skill, because it can help with first interveners, it can help prevent a real suicide. It can help us determine people who are just faking it or et cetera., et cetera.

And so what you do is you give people a bunch of notes and they make their judgments. "I think this is real." "No, I think this is fraudulent." And then you, of course, give them feedback or, "Yes, that's, that's right." Or "That's incorrect." And then what happens is, you later reveal to people, the following thing has happened. People were randomly assigned to group A, (Fig. 13a) (draws a square and writes A inside) randomly assigned to group B (draws a square below A and writes B inside). If they were in group A, they were told they were very good at this task. (draws an arrow from A and writes Good) If they were in group B, they were told they were very bad at this task. (draws an arrow from B and writes Bad) Of course, there's going to be a group C, (draws a square below C and writes C inside) which is the control group, and it's just going to be neutral and you're going to use them as a control. I'm not going to go into that because that's just good experimental design, right? And so these people (Group A) come to believe, again, on the basis of the evidence in the experiment that they're good. These people (Group B) come to believe they're bad.

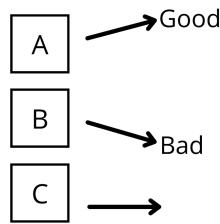


Fig. 13a

And now this is what you now do. Once you get them to reliably evaluate like they self-evaluate. Say, "Yeah. I'm good. Look, I keep doing well on it." "No, no, I'm bad at this. I keep doing bad on [this]." Then you say, "Aha!" Then you debrief them, right (writes Debrief)? And you show them that they were only getting the feedback completely randomly. You show them two things. All of the notes are fakes. All of the notes are fakes. None of them are real. And you were given the feedback only on the arbitrary, on the arbitrary factor, the completely random factor that you were just assigned to

group A, or group B. What that means, is the belief (writes Belief above Debrief) that you are good at this or bad at this, should be completely undermined. Because the evidence for it: that [-] some of these are real suicide notes, and that I'm getting the feedback based on my performance, has been completely undermined. (Fig. 13b) (Draws an arrow from Belief to Debrief)

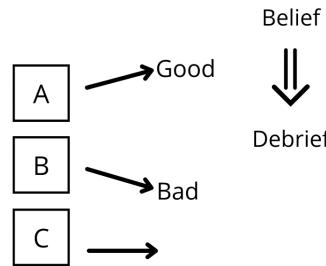


Fig. 13b

And now you give people a bunch of distractor tasks, so they're doing other things (Fig. 13c) (draws parallel lines), right? And then you come back and ask them, "Okay. But how do you think you would do on this in real life?" These people (Group B) reliably report, "I'll be bad at it." (writes bad) "Oh, no." These people (points to Group A) report "I'll be good at this." (writes Good) Or you ask them, "How would you do on a task very analogous to this? How would you be able to distinguish between fraudulent and legitimate marriage proposals?" Right? Something like that. And these people (indicates Group A) say, "Oh, I'll be really good at it." (writes Good) These people (Group B) say, "I'll be really bad at it." (writes Bad) This is known as belief perseverance. Belief perseverance, that people maintain the belief, even though the only evidence for it has been completely directly undermined in front of them.

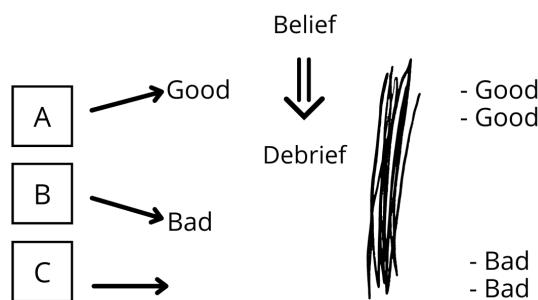


Fig. 13c

So once again, what do we see here? People acquiesce on a principle. They say, "Yes, this is the principle,"—Notice my language... "I should use. I acknowledge and accept that I should use the principle that if the evidence is undermined, I should revise the belief." And yet they reliably do not do that. So again, and again, you have all these experiments and there is a lot of them. I've just given you three examples and there are like, there's like 15 kinds of experiments you can run and tens, sometimes hundreds of versions of these experiments. So people acknowledge the principle, and then they reliably fail to engage in it. So they suffer — notice my language here — from systematic illusion, systematic self-deception.

Rationality Debate

All right. So a bunch of psychologists, cognitive scientists, and philosophers were coming to the conclusion that, well, that must— human beings are just irrational, right? They're just irrational. And so this idea that we've carried throughout all of our history from Aristotle on, that human beings are the rational animals, that's ultimately flawed. We're not. Human beings are not rational.

Now that's very problematic, right? Because think about what that means. If you were convinced that that was deeply correct, that human beings are not rational, then you'd have a very tough time justifying democracy. Because if human beings are reliably irrational, democracy is a very bad idea. You should have the few people who are reliably rational and let them rule, for example. I'm not saying this, I'm not advocating this. I'm trying to show you the consequences. You know, our legal system is also based on the idea that people are fundamentally reasonable, reliably rational. But if that's not the case, can we hold people responsible for their actions? I mean, the way they're connecting evidence, to belief, to action, is seriously [-] problematic.

Morality depends—and this is something that Kant famously argued for—morality depends on rationality. People can only be held moral if they can also be deemed rational, right? If you keep doing the right thing because of luck, right? Or because of coercion, we don't think you're moral. [-] But if you do the right thing because you have reasoned it out and come to the conclusion that that is the right thing to do, then of course we do deem you moral.

So as you can imagine, a debate arose, and this is a very good thing for science. So you notice what's going on here with rationality. Rationality isn't just a fact out in the world, like whether or not the earth is round. Rationality ultimately goes — because it is so deeply tied to perspectival and participatory knowing — it goes deeply to who and what I am. And that has implications for what kind of political citizenship I can have. What kind of moral status I can have. What kind of legal status I can have. Even your judgments, for example, of whether I'm mature or immature are going to be vectored through how well you assess how rational I am. Rationality is a deeply existential thing.

So a debate ensued around this: whether or not we should interpret the experiments are what they are, and they're robust and reliable; they are not suffering the replication crisis, these experiments. So these experiments are robust and reliable, but there's a debate about, and there always should be a debate in science about, how you interpret your experiments. Should we interpret these experiments to mean that human beings are fundamentally irrational?

Now, a debate ensued. And that debate is very important. And I want to go through this debate. Why are we doing this? Well, first of all, I'm trying to show you the deep connections between wisdom and rationality. And I'm trying to show you the existential and political and moral import of rationality. And I'm also trying to get you to consider expanding and revising the notion of rationality in a way that will help us to come back and deepen our understanding of wisdom. Why are we trying to understand wisdom? Because wisdom is deeply associated with meaning and wisdom is deeply needed for addressing the project [-] of enlightenment and addressing the perennial problems and also for the project of addressing the historical forces that have driven the meaning crisis.

Okay. So the rationality debate. The first major response is by Cohen (writes Cohen). And Cohen makes a very important argument. It's an argument that we [-] need to go carefully through and see again, this is what I mean, there has been so much deep work put into the notion of rationality. We should not take the self-proclaimed promoters of rationality on YouTube to be clear examples of what rationality is. We have to do this more carefully,

cautiously, reflectively; paying much more attention to the scientific evidence, the empirical evidence and the debate.

So Cohen argued that there is a problem with concluding that human beings are fundamentally irrational. And his argument comes down to a couple of very key points. So let me use this word cause... okay (writes Standard below Cohen). Cohen says, okay, to be rational is to acknowledge and to follow a set of Standards. And we noted that, that we can only attribute irrationality to someone, something if it acknowledges the standards and then fails to meet them. To say that this book is irrational makes no sense because it does not acknowledge the authority of those standards. (Text overlay appears saying, The book as a physical object, not the statements in it) So the fact that it fails to meet those standards is no reason for calling it irrational. The book is a-rational.

Okay. So Cohen stops right there. And he says, well, let's slow down. Let's ask ourselves, where do we get these [Standards]? (Fig. 14a) (writes Where do these come from?) The way he asked this is how do we come up with our normative theory? (writes Normative) Normative, not meaning statistically normal here, but normative meaning that the theory about the standards to which we should hold ourselves accountable when we're reasoning. So where does our normative theory come from, right?

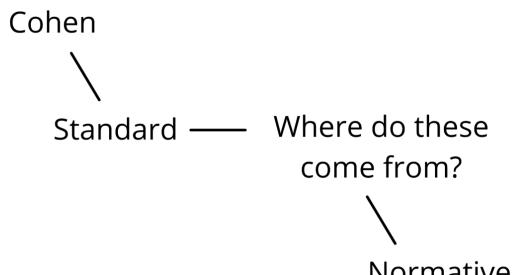


Fig. 14a

Reason As The Source Of The Norms

And then he makes use of an argument that goes back to Plato and it goes all the way through to Kant. And it's like, well, there's a deep sense in which reason has to be autonomous. Let's say I believed that my standards were given to me by some divine being, in the sense that it is commanded of me. There is some Moses of rationality. And then he comes back, or she comes

back with the commandments for how we're supposed to reason. So if we follow these, just because we are commanded to do so, that is ultimately not a rational act. That is just to give into authority, to give into fear. And we would be doing the same thing regardless of what those standards (Commandments) were, right?

If we follow the standards because we acknowledged that they're good and right, that means we already possessed the standards. This is an old argument that goes back to Plato. It's in the *Euthyphro* dialogue, right?

Where normativity has to be really deeply autonomous. If something is only good because the gods say it, then the gods aren't good in saying it. Look, if God says to you: Do X, and X isn't independently good to do, then God saying Do X does not make God good. Because it would only make God good to say Do X, if doing X was independently good. And if we only do something because we're commanded to do it, not because we independently accept that it is the good or the right thing to do, then we are also acting arbitrarily and not acting in a good manner.

So we have to possess the standards (internally). This is an argument that's crucial in Kant. Reason is ultimately autonomous. Not in the sense that people misunderstand it, that it's like a God or that it has absolute source. It's that reason has to be the source of the very norms that constitute and govern reason because that's how reason operates. So we have to be the standard.

Ought Implies Can

There's another way of seeing this. Ought implies Can. I'll give you two separate arguments for this idea. Ought implies Can. (Fig. 15) (writes Ought with an arrow pointing to Can) If I lay (underlines Ought) a standard upon you, "You ought to do this," then you have to be able to do it. It makes no sense to apply a standard to you that you do not have the competence to fulfill. "You ought to always say what is only certain and perfectly true. And if you don't, you are failing; you're immoral in some fashion." But that's of course impossible. You can't lay on anybody the obligation to speak all and only what is true. Because everybody has false beliefs. Most of our beliefs are false. And nobody can act comprehensively according to standards of certainty. If I lay that standard on you, it's a mistake because you don't have the competence to fulfill those standards.

Ought —→ Can

Fig. 15

Okay. So (erases Fig. 15), and there's just so much argument that converges on this point. (draws a downward arrow from) Okay. We are the source of the standards. (Fig. 14b) (writes Source of the standards below Standard) That's of course, why you so radically acquiesce to them. But then of course you should immediately say, "Right. But what the experiments show is: yes, people acknowledge the standard, but they fail to satisfy them." Well, then Cohen does something very interesting. He says: well, we have to be careful. People make two kinds of mistakes, right? And what we have to do is we have to make a distinction between competence and performance.

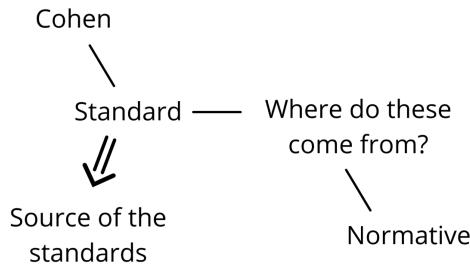


Fig. 14b

So let me give you an example. (writes Competence and Performance) This goes back to Chomsky, and we talked about it when we talked about systematic error. Let's do it again, just to bring it back into the argument. Okay. Competence is what you're capable of doing; performances is what you've actually done. You have a competence that greatly exceeds what you've actually done. You have a competence to speak so many sentences that you will never speak, right? So it is false that I have held my breath underwater for 17 days while listening to Beethoven's fifth symphony with a company of super-intelligent starfish.

That sentence happens to be true by the way. The fact that I uttered it is bizarre. I probably would never have uttered it in my life. Right. So, but [-] I have the competence to generate it, and you have the competence to understand it. So competence is what you're capable of doing; performance is what you actually do.

Now, the thing is, in between your competence and your performance, right? (Fig. 16) (draws an arrow from Competence to Performance) There are all the implementation processes. (writes Implementation processes below the arrow) You remember this? So I have the competence to speak English, but if I'm extremely tired, the implementation processes: the English in me doesn't—it comes up garbled. I start slurring my speech or right, perhaps if I was very drunk or something. Now you don't think that when I'm very drunk or very tired, that I've lost the competence. You just think, rightly by the way, that there's something interfering with the implementation processes, right?

But if I get in a car accident and my brain is damaged and I am slurring my speech all the time, then you go, "Oh no, John's lost English." It's a different thing, right?

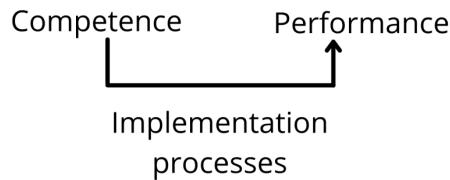


Fig. 16

Process of Idealization

Now, Cohen does something really clever here. And he says, How do we come up with this? (encircles Source of the standards) Well, we have to be the source of it, and it has to be something that we can hold ourselves to. Ought implies can. (Fig. 14c) (writes Ought implies can beside Source of the standards) Okay? So where do we come up with these standards? Well, what we do — this is how we come up with all of our normative theories. What we do is we look at our performance and we try to subtract (draws a diagonal arrow from Performance) from our performance, all of the errors that are due to implementation— implementation errors (writes Implementation errors beside Performance). Or as if they're often called, Performance errors, errors in how I'm implementing my competence. And so what I do is by this process of systematic idealization (draws an arrow from Performance to Competence and writes Idealization), I try to come up with an account of what my competence looks like completely free of performance errors. So what would I have to have in my head so that I could

reliably speak and understand English all the time in a perfect manner? Now, of course, all the time I'm speaking, because of implementation processes, there are performance errors. I sometimes stammer, I sometimes stutter there's gaps. I speak elliptically. Notice there I just went, "I—I." Those are performance errors and you read through those, right?

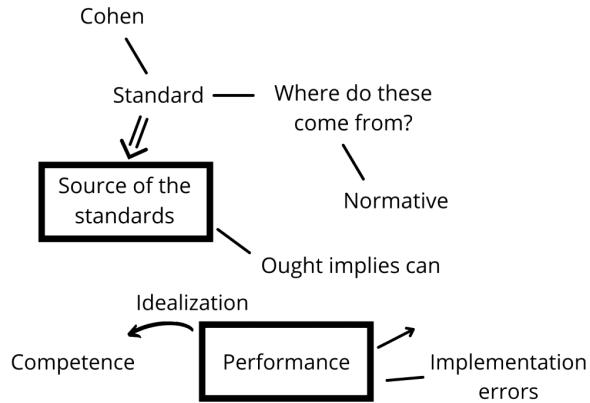


Fig. 14c

So what we do is we take our performance, and we put it through a process of idealization. We try and subtract all the performance errors that come from the implementation. And then we get a purified account (encloses Competence in a box) of our Competence, an idealized account. But in the sense that it's purified of distortion by performance errors. And then that is the standard to which we hold ourselves. That's how we come up with a normative theory. That shows how we can be the source of it and how we're ultimately capable of it, but how we can nevertheless, a lot of the time fail to meet it (taps Performance). So what he argues — brilliantly, but we're going to see there's going to be problems with it — He argues that all of the errors in these experiments have to be performance errors (encircles Performance). That all of the mistakes that people are making are like the slips of tongue that pervade my speech; they're performance errors. Because why? People have to be the source of the standards and they have to be able of meeting those standards. So we might just have at the level of our competence, all of the rational standards. We must be, at the level of our competence, rational beings. And the only reason we're making those mistakes is performance errors. Which means that human beings are not fundamentally irrational after all; they are rational.

Now, what I want to show you next time is what's right about that argument, and what's deeply wrong about that argument. How Stanovich and the work of Stanovich and the rest reply to this argument (indicates Fig. 14c) in a really brilliant way, and what it's going to show us again about the nature of human rationality. Human rationality is much more comprehensive than facility with syllogistic logic, right? It is the reliable and systematic overcoming of self-deception and that has to do with us not just sort of theoretically. It has to do with us existentially; and therefore, this notion of rationality deeply overlaps with, and I am going to argue, is a component of, what it is to be a Wise person; to be able to systematically see through self-deception, and into reality in such a way that, like rationality with wisdom, we can actually afford meaning in life.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 40 Notes:

Patrick McKee

Clifton E. Barber

Article Mentioned: [On Defining Wisdom](#)

Leo Ferraro

Publication: [Relevance, Meaning and the Cognitive Science of Wisdom](#)

Keith E. Stanovich

Keith E. Stanovich is Emeritus Professor of Applied Psychology and Human Development, University of Toronto and former Canada Research Chair of Applied Cognitive Science.

[Publications by Keith Stanovich](#)

John Kekes

John Kekes (/kɛks/; born 22 November 1936) is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, SUNY.

Book Mentioned: Moral Wisdom and Good Lives – [Buy Here](#)

Agnes Callard

Agnes Callard (born January 6, 1976) is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago.

Book Mentioned: Aspiration: The Agency of Becoming – [Buy Here](#)

Conjunction fallacy

The conjunction fallacy is a formal fallacy that occurs when it is assumed that specific conditions are more probable than a single general one.

Confirmation bias

Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's prior beliefs or values.

Wason selection task

The Wason selection task (or four-card problem) is a logic puzzle devised by Peter Cathcart Wason in 1966.

Rationality debate

The Rationality Debate—also called the Great Rationality Debate—is the question of whether humans are rational or not.

Cohen

Laurence Jonathan Cohen, FBA, usually cited as L. Jonathan Cohen, was a British philosopher.

Ought implies can

"Ought implies can" is an ethical formula ascribed to Immanuel Kant that claims an agent, if morally obliged to perform a certain action, must logically be able to perform it:

For if the moral law commands that we ought to be better human beings now, it inescapably follows that we must be capable of being better human beings.

The action to which the "ought" applies must indeed be possible under natural conditions.

Euthyphro dialogue

Euthyphro, by Plato, is a Socratic dialogue whose events occur in the weeks before the trial of Socrates, between Socrates and Euthyphro. The dialogue covers subjects such as the meaning of piety and justice. As is common with Plato's earliest dialogues, it ends in aporia.

Chomsky

Avram Noam Chomsky is an American linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, historian, social critic, and political activist.

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Ep. 41 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - What is Rationality?

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis.

So we are pursuing the cognitive science of wisdom because wisdom has always been associated with meaning from the axial revolution onward, so that's a deep reason. Wisdom, of course, is also important for the cultivation of enlightenment, the response to the perennial problems. It's also playing a central role in being able to interpret our scientific worldview in a way that allows us to respond to the historical forces. And so wisdom is very important.

We took a look at—we continued to look at McKee and Barber and we saw their convergence argument that at the core of wisdom is the systematic seeing through of illusion and into what's real. And this is very much like as the child is to the adult, the adult is to the sage. And then two other important aspects of it: that wisdom is much more with how you know than what you know, which means how you come to know it, and also how you interpret the knowledge. And that wisdom is, therefore, in a related fashion, deeply perspectival and participatory. And that's why wisdom can be associated with important forms of pragmatic self-contradiction. We then noted the connection with overcoming self-deception in a systematic fashion, and the emphasis on wisdom on the process rather than the products of knowing.

And that both of those took us into the work of Stanovich. And because he famously argues that one of the hallmarks of rationality is valuing the process rather than—sorry, not rather than—rathering the process in addition to valuing the products of our cognition. And that took us also into the notion, the discussion of rationality and Stanovich is a good bridge because for him, the notions of rationality and ameliorating foolishness overlap very strongly. And we got into this notion of, at which I've been sort of comprehensively arguing throughout this course, that rationality has to do with the reliable and systematic overcoming of self-deception. And the potential affording of flourishing by some process of optimization of achieving our goals, with the caveat that as we try to optimize, we often change the goals that we are pursuing. One reason being that we come to more and more appreciate the value of the process as opposed to just the end result of the process.

So in order to pursue that and to deepen our notion of rationality and thereby deepen our notion of wisdom—and, of course, wisdom has been associated with rationality from the beginning: Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, right?—we took a look at the rationality debate. We saw—I gave you three examples of many possible examples of experimental results that seem to show reliably this kind of thing. Very reliably, no replication crisis on this material.

So, very reliably, two things: That people acquiesce, they acknowledge and accept the authority of certain standards, principles of how they should reason. And yet they reliably failed to meet those standards. And so one way to—one possible interpretation of that, not the only interpretation—one possible interpretation is that most people are irrational in nature. As I pointed out, because rationality is existential and not just, sort of, abstract, theoretical, concluding that people are irrational, has important implications for their moral status, their political status, their legal status, even their developmental status. Okay? So this is what I keep meaning when I'm saying rationality is deeply existential, it is not just theoretical.

Okay. We took a look at the beginning of what's called the rationality debate, and good science always has good debate in it. The rationality debate and the argument was made by Cohen that human beings can't be comprehensively irrational, because we have to ask this very pertinent question: Where do the standards come from? And the argument is: the standards have to come from us.

And how do we come up with that normative theory? We come up with that normative theory that acknowledges, the way we come up with our normative theory is consonant with that we're the source of our standards. This is the idea that at the level of my competence, my competence contains all the standards. And that what I do in order to get my normative theory is, I idealize away all my performance errors. And this takes time. It takes a lot of reflection, until I get at the underlying competence. And then what I'm doing when I'm proposing a normative theory is, I'm basically taking—I'm giving people this now explicated, excavated account of the competence that they possess, and then demanding from them that they do their best to reduce the performance errors and meet that competence.

So we—at the level of our competence, we are fundamentally rational, and all of the mistakes that people are making in these experiments, according to Cohen, are just performance errors. They're just performance errors. Okay. And just like you do not think I've lost English because of all of my performance errors, you basically dismiss them and read through them and attribute to me the underlying competence, Cohen is arguing, we should read

through and dismiss these experimental results, because the argument shows that people must have the underlying competence.

Competence Performance Distinctions

Okay. So how does Stanovich reply to this? Well, in many places, but I think the best is Stanovich and West 2000 (writes Stanovich and West 2000) in Behavioral and Brain Sciences. Because the argument—this is a really, for me, a gold standard of how you do really good cognitive science; the way they integrate a philosophical, psychological argumentation together, for example, is really, really impressive. So Stanovich and West say: well, if Cohen is right, then all of the errors that people are making are performance errors (Fig. 1a) (writes Performance errors). And Cohen is invoking the competence performance distinction, (writes Competence vs. Performance beside Performance Error) which, of course, goes back through to Chomsky and ultimately to Piaget.

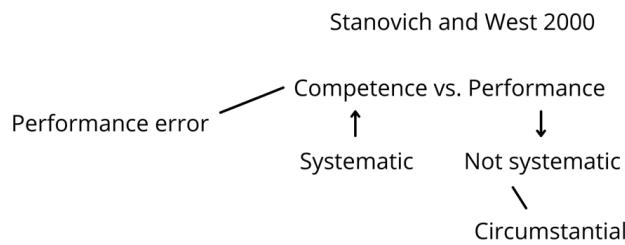


Fig. 1a

Now let's remember Piaget because we've talked about this. Well, how do you distinguish the child's speech deficits from the drunkard's. The drunkard is giving performance error, but we think the child, actually, her competence, for example, is not sufficiently developed. Why do we think that? Why do we think when the children are making all these conservation errors, that that reflects something about their competence at that point? Well that's because [-] errors that reflect a defect or a deficit in competence (draws an arrow pointing up to Competence) are systematic errors (writes Systematic below Competence). That's precisely how Piaget did his work. Right? That's precisely how you would determine that, if I got brain damage and I'm leaving out, right, my sentences are broken, that it is not performance error, because my errors would be systematic across different contexts, different times of day, different tasks, I'd be making these mistakes.

Performance errors are not systematic, right? (writes Not systematic below Performance) So if my speech is broken because I'm rushing, it's not going to be broken when I'm not rushing. If my speech is broken, when I'm tired, it's not going to be broken when I'm not tired. So this is circumstantially driven. (writes Circumstantial below Not systematic) As the circumstances change, the patterns of error will change and go all over the place. So these errors are not systematic in nature (underlines Circumstantial).

Okay, well, that means we have a reliable way of telling whether or not the errors that the people are making in the experiments are performance errors (encloses Performance error in a box) or not. How do you see if errors are systematic? Well, this is what you do. Errors are systematic (writes Error) if when I make this error (Fig. 2) (draws an arrow pointing to Error), it's highly predictive that I'll make this error (draws an arrow away from Error and writes Error). It's highly predictive that I make this error (draws another arrow pointing away from Error and writes Error at the end of the third arrow). It's highly predictive that I'll make this error (draws arrows from Error to Error). So if a child is [failing to show] conservation in this task, that's predictive that they'll fail to show conservation in this task, in this task and this task, right? So the degree to which—we've talked about this before—the degree to which there's a positive manifold. Remember when we talked about general intelligence. The degree to which your performance in one task is predictive of how you'll do on other tasks. If you have a manifold in your performance, if the errors are systematic across many different tasks that you're performing, then that's evidence that the errors are systematic (indicates Systematic) rather than not systematic (indicates Not systematic).

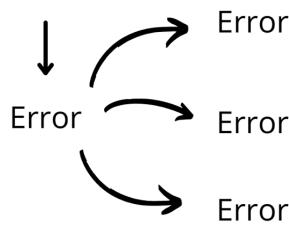


Fig. 2

Okay, so that's easy enough. So then what we can do is we can—and we've got all this data—we can look at people doing these different experiments. And in many experiments they're doing multiple versions, the same

participant is doing one task or another. So what we can do is the following: We can see, for example, if I make a failure in critical detachment, does that mean that I'll also tend to show belief perseverance? Does that also mean that I'll attempt to leap to the wrong conclusion when I was doing the task on the lily pads covering the pond? And the answer—and this is what there is overwhelming evidence for—is Yes. The errors you make are systematic. They're systematic.

And see. So now Stanovich and West say: Cohen's argument predicts that the errors are performance errors (indicates Performance error). That's what he claims. That means that the errors should be not systematic (Fig. 1b) (draws an arrow from Performance error to Not systematic). But what we find is overwhelming, convincing evidence (encircles Systematic) that the errors that people are making in all these tasks are systematically related together. So these are errors at the level of competence.

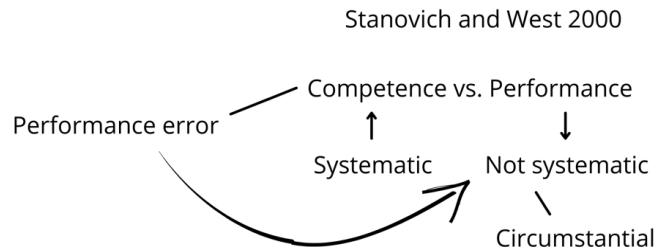


Fig. 1b

And now you go, "What?" And this is what I mean about good debate—makes something problematic, right? Because there's something right about Cohen's argument and Stanovich acknowledges it, right? There's something right, in that we have to be the source of our standards. And yet Cohen's conclusion that all the errors are performance errors is wrong. It's undeniably wrong. How do we put these together?

Well, you put these together, and you can see Stanovich and West doing this to varying degrees, You put this together by stepping back and looking at an assumption that's in Cohen's argument. It's an assumption about the competence. (writes Competence) Cohen is assuming that that competence for rationality (Fig. 3) (writes Single beside Competence) is a single competence. He's assuming that that competence is static. (writes Static beside Competence) right? He's also assuming that the competence is

completely individualistic. (writes Individualistic below Static) I'll come back to this one (indicates Individualistic) much later; I'm going to address these two (draws arrows pointing to Single and Static) because Stanovich really doesn't talk about this. (indicates Individualistic) So remember that, but we'll come back to it later. (erases Individualistic)

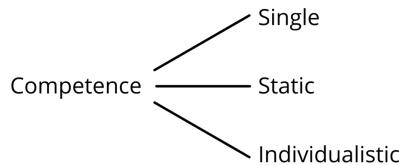


Fig. 3

Think about the platonic idea. What if I have two competences (Fig. 4) (draws two squares) that both are working towards getting me to reliably achieve my goals, correct my own behavior. But these competencies could actually conflict with each other. (draws an arrow from the first square to the second square and another arrow from the second square to the first square) That would mean, I would be the source of all the standards. Here are all the standards here (draws horizontal lines inside the first square). Here are all the standards here (draws vertical lines inside the second square). I am the source for all the standards. But at the level of my competence, I can be generating error, because these two competencies (indicates the two squares) can actually be in conflict with each other.

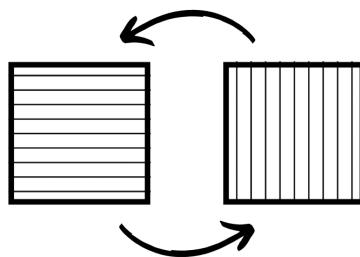


Fig. 4

[-] The way you start to resolve this debate, and this has become a central idea in psychology and cognitive psychology and cognitive science, is that we don't have a single competency. We have to have multiple competencies. This is why, for example, assuming uncritically, uncritically assuming that you could reduce rationality, and identify it with the single competence of

syllogistic reasoning, is just fundamentally wrong. It's not paying attention to the science.

Here's another issue. Cohen is assuming that your competence is full blown. It's finished, it's static, it's done. But, and I sort of slipped this in, notice the examples I used of small children. Their competence, for example, in English or whatever language they're speaking, I just happen to be speaking English that's why I'm using it. The little girl—the two and a half year old, her competence is not fully developed. She will come to have the standards as that competency fully develops. But as that competency is immature, she can be a source of error from her competence. So we have to give up the assumption that our competence again is static. Why would it be? And your cognition is inherently dynamic and developmental. Again, assuming, Oh, no, this is just what it is, right? And assuming that there is a single thing we're pointing to when we point to rationality, is a mistake. This way, Stanovich and West can say—and it's brilliant, right? It's brilliant—they can say that Cohen's argument is fundamentally right, but his conclusion, that specific conclusion is wrong, because the conclusion that the errors are only performance errors is only a conclusion based on the hidden premise, right, that the competence is single and static. You have multiple competencies, and they're in ongoing development.

Okay. So we've learned something very interesting. (erases the board) So what's happening is, and Stanovich is an advocate of this, right? You have dual processing models. (Fig. 5) (writes Dual processing) This is the idea that we have different ways of processing information. Think of how platonic this is, how much Plato was going, 'I told you this a long time ago', right? We have different styles, ways of processing information, that are good for different kinds of problem solving. And neither one of these competencies can be exclusive or sufficient for us, but they have ultimately a complimentary relationship, a relationship, I would argue, of opponent processing. Stanovich has a different view. We'll come back to that a little bit later. Okay.

Stanovich and West 2000

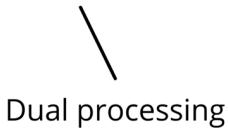


Fig. 5

Finitary Predicament

The second person in the debate, and you've heard me mention him and you've heard me talk about him (writes Cherniak) with serious respect. And he is given serious respect by Stanovich and West. Cherniak has a much different approach to the rationality debate. He agrees with Stanovich and West that the difficulty is not at the level of our performance, it's at the level of our competence; but he has a different move to make. He has a move that you see, you saw me invoke last time. This is "Ought implies can." So this is the question whether or not, right, whether or not we're applying the right normative theory to people in these experiments, when we're judging them to be irrational.

So Cherniak invokes something that you saw me invoke multiple times (draws an arrow pointing away from Cherniak) when we talked about relevance realization. We're in a finitary predicament. (Fig. 6a) (writes Finitary predicament below Cherniak) This is actually his term. Alright. We cannot, because it is combinatorially explosive, derive all the implications, we cannot consider all of our assumptions. All of this stuff that we've talked about before. We can not go back and recreate all of the ways in which we've represented something. This is combinatorially explosive. What do we do? Do we just arbitrarily choose whatever implication we want? No.

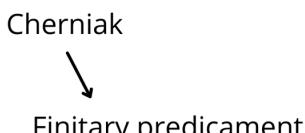


Fig. 6a

So here's the point. We can't be algorithmic. (Fig. 6b) (writes Algorithmic below Finitary predicament) We can't use standards that work in terms of certainty and completeness, (writes Certain Completeness below Algorithmic) because, for example, if I tried to be comprehensively

deductively logical, then I would [-] fall very rapidly into combinatorial explosion for any problem that I'm trying to solve. And I would then have committed cognitive suicide. It cannot be a standard, a normative standard of rationality, if trying to follow it would commit me to cognitive suicide, which would undermine any attempt to satisfy any of my goals.

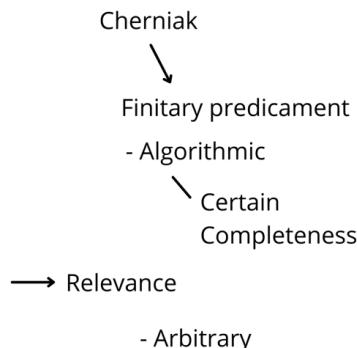


Fig. 6b

You see what Cherniak is saying, right? You can't do this (underlines Algorithmic), but, of course, you don't just arbitrarily (writes Arbitrary below Algorithmic) choose whatever representation you want, choose whatever inference you want, choose to check whatever contradiction you want. So you can't check them all, and you can't just arbitrarily—well, what's the answer?

Well, you saw the answer before. [-] You choose its relevance. You pick the relevant implications, you check the relevant contradictions, you check which aspects of your representation you consider relevant, et cetera. You do relevance realization. And Stanovich is like, yeah, that's right. Like, we're not going to argue with that. And that's part of what I've been arguing throughout. There's this consensus on how central this ability is, at least it's an emerging consensus. Herbert Simon, from Newell and Simon, talks about bounded rationality; that we can't be purely computational, algorithmic, et cetera, for all of the reasons we've already explored.

What Cherniak says is: but look what people are using in the experiments. They're using formal logic. (writes Logic) They're using formal probability theory (Fig. 6c). (writes Probability below Logic) They're using all these formal, purely algorithmic. (draws arrow from Logic Probability to

Algorithmic) By the way, you might say, ‘Oh, but probability certainly doesn't work in certainty.’ Yes, it does! It gives you certainty about probabilities. That's what makes it a formal theory. That's why it has axioms and theorems, et cetera. Okay? Don't confuse properties of the theory, with properties of what the theory is about. So what Cherniak says is, the scientists in the experiment are using all these formal theories (encloses Logic Probability in a box and encircles Algorithmic - Certain Completeness) that can only be applied in very limited contexts. If I try to apply them comprehensively in my life—and that's where rationality matters, because rationality is an existential issue—if I try to apply it (indicates Finitary predicament) comprehensively in my life from within the finitary predicament, I am doomed to fail. And then you're laying an Ought on me that I cannot possibly meet, which means you, scientists, have the wrong normative theory. Because if you're laying a normative theory on me that I cannot possibly meet, that's evidence that it's the wrong normative theory.

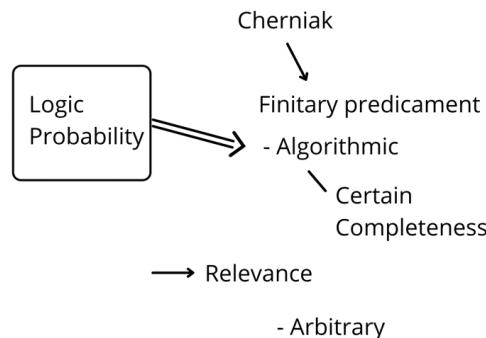


Fig. 6c

That's Cherniak's argument. It's a powerful argument. It's a good argument. It's an argument I take very seriously. So does Stanovich and West. They go, yes, all of this is right. However, Cherniak [-] thinks he's talking about one thing, and he's actually talking about another. And this is such a clever response, and it's going to tell us something really, really important.

First of all, this tells you that (indicates Logic Probability) again, here's another argument why you can't equate rationality with merely being logical, merely using probability theory, right? Does that mean I can be arbitrary (indicates Arbitrary) and ignore logic? No. It's the much more difficult—and

notice how this starts to overlap with wisdom—it's a much more difficult issue of knowing when, where, and to what degree I should use logic and probability in a formal manner, et cetera.

Computational Limitations

Okay. How does Stanovich and West reply? Again, I think it's brilliant. They say: all of this is right, but it's not about rationality. (writes Rationality below Stanovich & West) All of this. All of this stuff. They tend to talk about it in term, they use the phrase, computational limitations. (Fig. 7a) (writes Computational limitations below Stanovich & West) They always describe it sort of negatively. Instead of positively, instead of relevance realization, although the two are interdefined, they always talk about it in terms of computational limitations. But they say all this stuff that Cherniak is talking about in terms of computational limitations is actually not about rationality. (draws an arrow from Computational limitations to Rationality) It's actually about intelligence. (draws an arrow from Computational limitation and writes Intelligence) This is going to be a brilliant move. What it's going to also show us is there is a—and I said this a while ago—there's a deep difference between being intelligent and being rational. In fact, Stanovich is going to argue that what makes you foolish is, you're highly intelligent and highly irrational. And that is going to make sense of what we've already argued. That the very processes that make me adaptively intelligent are the very processes that also subject me to self-deception.

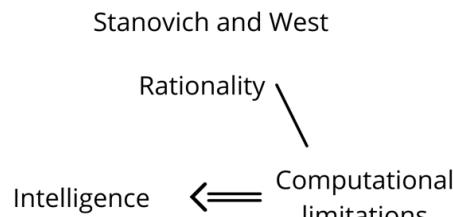
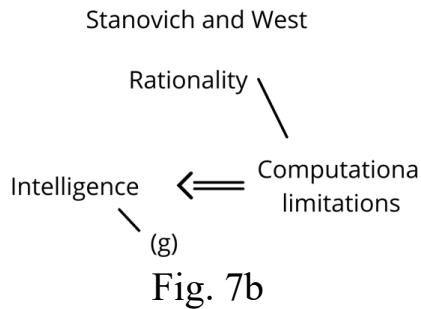


Fig. 7a

How does he do this? Well, he basically argues, and you saw an analogous argument, how did they do this? And how does Stanovich do it elsewhere? They basically argue that when we test for people's ability to zero in on relevant information, how can we test to see how well people deal with computational limitations? (encircles computational limitations) So what Stanovich basically argues is—and again, myself and Leo Ferraro argued

this in a convergent fashion, other people, right? Basically what we're testing when we're testing people's intelligence, is we're testing their capacity to deal with computational limitations. And this lines up again—also, you've heard me mention this, that measures of intelligence correlate with measures of working memory and blah, blah, blah. I've given you all that argument. Stanovich is giving you an additional argument here. He's saying, so we understand intelligence as the capacity to deal with computational limitations; (indicates Computational limitations) that's a negative way of putting it. I would say it's the capacity to do relevance realization, (indicates Relevance) but let's keep going. And then we have a way of, therefore, measuring people's capacity to deal with computational limitations.

So Cherniak is saying people fail in the experiment because of computational limitations, they're in the finitary predicament. And we have a way of measuring how well people can deal with computational limitations: that's intelligence. (encircles Intelligence) We have a way of measuring (g) (Fig. 7b) (writes (g) below Intelligence)—a reliable, robust way of measuring (g).



So now, notice what we can do, again, so brilliant (indicates Stanovich & West). (writes (g)) We have reliable ways of measuring g. Remember what Stanovich and West was showed with answers to Cohen. That all of the reasoning tasks (draws a square with an x inside) also form upon a strong manifold. They don't label anything, but I'm going to call it (gr). [-] (Fig. 8a) (writes gr under the square) There's this general factor of reasoning, because the reasoning tasks (indicates gr) form a strong positive manifold. Okay. So what we can do is we can measure the g of r. (writes (gr) beside (g) and erases the square labeled with gr) And now we can do something very, very, very basic. If what's happening in the experiment is a measure of rationality, and rationality is equivalent to dealing with combinatorial

explosion, computational limitations, then these two (Fig. 8b) (writes = between (g) and (gr)) should approach parity. Intelligence and rationality should be identical.



(gr)

Fig. 8a

(g) = (gr)

Fig. 8b

So notice what's going on here. If Cherniak is right, then rationality and intelligence would be identical, and there would be a strong relationship between how intelligent you are and how well you do on these experiments. And this is, again, good science: reliable, robust, well-replicated [over] decades. The relationship here (indicates Fig. 8b) is at best, 0.3 (writes .3 below (g) = (gr)). So the correlation goes from zero to one (writes 0-1) where zero is no correlation, and one is very strong correlation. 0.3 (encircles .3). Intelligence. What this clearly shows is that intelligence is necessary, but nowhere near sufficient for being rational.

So here's two things that are insufficient for making you rational: just being very intelligent, (indicates Intelligence) and just being able to use logic (indicates Logic Probability). The science is actually clear on this. So notice how a lot of the ways our culture has tried to understand rationality are now coming into question. [-] e.g. that Rationality is equivalent (Fig.9) (writes Rationality =)—think of Descartes... now you see why Descartes is wrong —to Logicality (writes Logicality). Well, that turns out to be false (draws a slash through =). Oh, well Rationality is the same thing as being really smart, really Intelligent (writes Intelligence = beside Rationality), right? Nope. That turns out to be false (draws a slash through =). Oh, what is that then? (writes a question mark below Rationality) What is that then? So now we're starting to do good science, right? We're starting to get away from common sense. We're starting to have some humility. [-] It's now a real problem.

Intelligence \neq Rationality \neq Logicality

Fig. 9

Well, what is it? What is it? And it gives us a way of talking about what we've been talking about—the very processes that make you intelligent (indicates Finitary predicament) can actually cause you to be irrational. There is no contradiction in saying: you're highly intelligent and highly irrational. Not at all.

So now we have to ask ourselves, well, what's the missing piece? So let's remember that. We've got an important question that we need to ask and answer. What's the missing piece for rationality? What's missing? Something else is going on. And that missing piece is going to tell us quite a bit I think about the overlap between wisdom and rationality.

Now there's a third argument, (erases the board) and it's an important argument. Because it's also going to connect to the issue of understanding, which is, again, a crucial feature of wisdom. Now, Stanovich and West talk about this argument, but they don't cite an individual who actually came up with the argument explicitly. I think it's just because I don't think there's any fraud; I think they just didn't read it. Because the person [-] I'm going to talk about is Smedslund. And the article is from the Scandinavian Journal of Psychology in 1970. (writes Smedslund) So it's impossible to read everyone, everywhere at all times. Again, we're in the finitary predicament. But Smedslund pointed out something that Stanovich and West do take seriously, and because Smedslund makes an explicit and clear argument for it, we should pay attention to what he says.

Fallacy And Misunderstanding

He says, well, there's a difficulty with this. So this is the third response. We've had Cohen, we've had Cherniak, and now a response that I will attribute to Smedslund. Stanovich and West don't, but they should, but again, no crime on their part. Smedslund says, well, there's a difficulty with interpreting the experiments. Again, that's the issue. Always the issue of interpretation. And you can't do an experiment to decide the interpretation, because then you have [-] to interpret that experiment. You can't experiment

your way out of interpretation. Interpretation is always going to be needed in science. And that means theoretical debate is always going to be needed.

Okay. So back to the theoretical debate. Smedslund says, now, interpreting these experiments relies on a distinction between a fallacy and a misunderstanding (Fig. 10) (writes Fallacy and Misunderstanding). Because there's two ways in which I can give the wrong answer. One is: I interpret the problem correctly (writes Interpret the problem correctly below Fallacy). I understand it (writes Understand). But then I reason incorrectly, (writes Reason incorrectly) and that's why I get (draws an arrow from Reason incorrectly) the wrong answer (writes Wrong answer below the arrow). So the fault in a Fallacy, fallacious reasoning, is, this is where the error comes in (draws an arrow pointing to Reason incorrectly). The poor reasoning. I reason incorrectly.

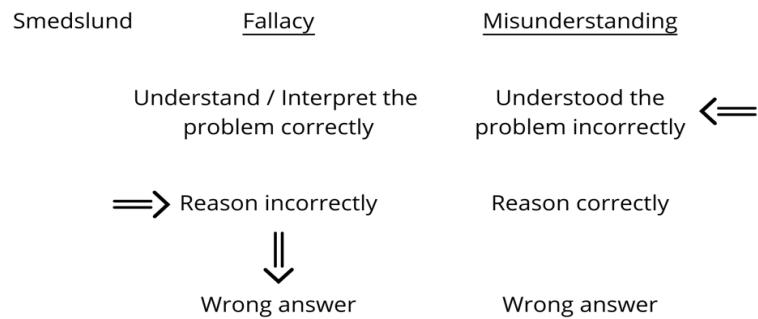


Fig. 10

But there's another way in which I can give the wrong answer (writes Wrong answer beside Wrong answer). You get to the same conclusion with the wrong answer. Well, what is it? I actually reason correctly (writes Reason correctly above Wrong answer) in a normative fashion, but I've understood the problem incorrectly (writes Understood the problem incorrectly below Misunderstanding). And that's a Misunderstanding. Somebody misunderstands us, the error comes in (draws an arrow pointing to Understanding the problem incorrectly) because they've interpreted the problem. They've understood the problem incorrectly. But once you give them that incorrect interpretation, there's nothing wrong with their reasoning. [-]

Okay, great. So there's two [-] equally good explanations for why we produce the wrong answers. One is: we reason incorrectly, and that's a fallacy, because we've got the correct interpretation. The other one is we are reasoning correctly. There's nothing wrong with our reasoning. But we've understood the problem incorrectly, and that's a misunderstanding. [-]

So this distinction is really crucial (draws a double-headed arrow between Fallacy and Misunderstanding) because this distinction is really key—crucial. Keeping these apart is really crucial. Because if we want to conclude that people are irrational, we (draws an arrow pointing to Fallacy) [-] have to attribute to them fallacious cognition, not some kind of distortion in the communication, that they've misunderstood us. One of the ways in which people typically often avoid self-criticism, avoiding the possibility that they might have reasoned incorrectly, is to always claim that they have merely been misunderstood. [-] Look for that in somebody. Look for somebody who never says, "Ah, my argument is wrong. I did it wrong." Look for somebody who always says, "No, no, I've been misunderstood." Because they're basically trading on this (fallacy-misunderstanding) in an equivocal fashion. They're bullshitting you, in a way. [-] Sometimes they should say: I've been misunderstood. Totally. [-] But sometimes they should say: "I reasoned wrong."

[-] Then Smedslund said: But this is difficult, because these things (indicates Fallacy and Misunderstanding) aren't independent, the way we need them to be. What do I mean? The attribution of fallacy, or the attribution of misunderstanding, are not independent [in] the way we need them to be, in order to cleanly interpret the experimental results as showing that people are largely engaging in fallacious reasoning. Well, why?

So Smedslund does something and of course, I think it's preliminary, but we'll have to come back to it—which is you have a preliminary account of understanding (writes Understanding). And he basically says, well, what is it to understand something? And he says, well, to understand X (Fig. 11a) (writes X):

- We ask people to give us something that's identical to X (writes Identical). Well, let's use arrows here (draws an arrow from X to Identical). To X.

- We ask [-] [people] to give us something that contradicts X (writes X, draws an arrow pointing from X, writes Contradicts X).
- We ask [-] [people] to give things that X implies (writes X, draws an arrow from X, writes Implies).

And these are all, of course, related, because identity is a kind of implication. Contradiction is a failure of implication.

And then we also ask them to give us things that are relevant to X.

There it is again. Uh huh. I would also add, by the way, because when you look at further research on understanding, people talk about not only what is relevant to X (writes What is relevant to X) but also what is X relevant to. (writes X is relevant to), And I don't think Smedslund would object to that. Here's relevance again, of course.

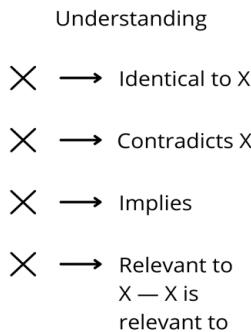


Fig. 11a

Okay. So what's the problem? Ah, now put this one aside and Smedslund just sort of puts it aside in his argument. And, of course, that's something I'm not going to, sort of, let sit by. He puts aside this (draws a bracket to the right of Relevant to X-X is relevant to; labeled B in Fig. 11b). He says, well, ignoring that (indicates the A in Fig. 11b), look at these three (draws a bracket from Identical to X, Contradicts X, Implies; labeled A in Fig. 11b). The way we determine if somebody has understood us is we determine if they have drawn the identities (indicates Identical to X) we would draw, drawn the contradictions (indicates Contradicts X) we have drawn, drawn the implications we've drawn (indicates Implies). So somebody understands us if they reason the way that we do.

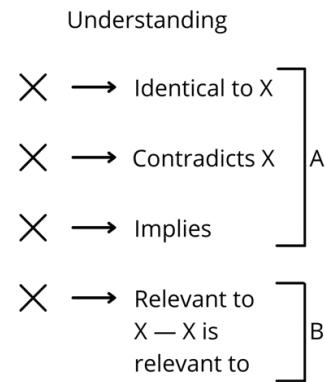


Fig. 11b

So what Smedslund says is: This is what the scientists are assuming. The scientists are assuming that the participants in the experiment have understood the problem [-] (indicates Interpret the problem correctly in Fig. 10). I've understood the problem correctly, and then reason incorrectly (indicates Reason incorrectly). But notice how this is a pragmatic contradiction. Because if they've understood the problem correctly, then they reason the way the scientist does, (indicates Fig. 11b) in this very difficult task of interpreting a problem. But then they reason in a way the scientist doesn't, when they're actually trying to solve the problem. That's problematic. In fact, couldn't I say this: couldn't I say, the fact that the participants in the experiment are consistently producing the wrong answer, is good evidence that they are misunderstanding the problem? People are reliably misunderstanding these problems.

"Well, that can't be, because the scientists made them. Scientists can't be making mistakes. Scientists can't misunderstand..." What are you attributing to scientists? God-like authority? No, stick with the argument here. Right? You [-] can conclude that they're making the fallacy, but it's sort of like, you have to say: For some reason, at this really difficult problem of interpreting what I'm saying, they're reasoning very correctly. And then when they go to solve the problem, they're reasoning poorly. Or you can say: They're reasoning correctly, but they've misunderstood the problem. But that also means that they're reasoning poorly. Or maybe I've misrepresented or miscommunicated the problem. See now it's much more problematic.

Normativity On Construal

Okay. So [-] two important things to note. First of all, we got to come back to this, (draws an arrow from Wrong answer to Relevant to X - X is relevant to) because [-] there's an opening here. Stanovich and West, because they haven't read Smedslund, and because they don't have this so clearly explicated (indicates Fig. 11b), they can't sort of pick up on that. So I'm not criticizing them for not seeing this. But they do come up with a very important point. And this [-] is convergent with their argument against Cohen.

They argue for this. They argue, in order to break this impasse, we need a normativity on construal (writes Normativity on construal). We need a normativity on how people interpret, make sense of, size up the situation of the problem. That's what construal means. Basically, we need a normativity on how they formulate the problem. And this has to be an independent normativity (draws an arrow from Normativity on Construal and writes Independent of inferential norms); independent of what? Independent of inferential norms. Right. If I try to use [-] good inference as my standard for doing this (indicates Fig. 12a), I'll fall into this circle. I have to be [-] able to evaluate construal independently of evaluating how people make inferences. That's the only way I'm going to break out of this.

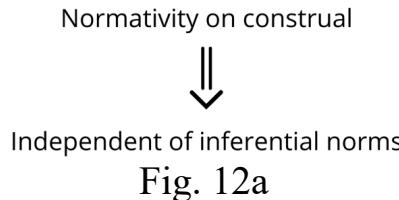


Fig. 12a

But that's okay, because that means... Stanovich doesn't take this as deeply as he should, but that means that there's a non-inferential aspect to rationality that is central. There's an aspect of rationality that has to do with understanding, with construal, that is non-inferential in nature. And that, of course, points back to this, (encircles Relevant to X - X is relevant to in Fig. 11b) because relevance is pre-inferential. The way you formulate your problems—remember that?—has to do with relevance realization. And that is something that is pre-inferential in nature.

So we can actually put this together very cleanly, I would argue. [-] What Stanovich and West say is, okay, we need this normativity on construal (indicates Normativity on construal). It has to be independent of our inferential normativity. And then they go, "Oh, we don't know what this is. (Fig. 12b) (draws an arrow from Normativity on construal and writes ???) What could it be? What that normativity of construal will look like?" [-]

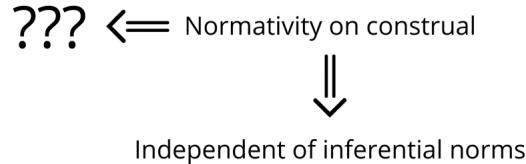


Fig. 12b

But here's a proposal [-] clearly presented to us from a lot of the arguments we've already considered. Right? We do have a normativity on construal. We have standards of what a good problem formulation is (Fig. 13) (writes Good problem formulation) versus a bad problem formulation (writes Bad formulation below Good problem formulation). Where do we study that normativity in psychology? Well, we study it in Insight problem solving (writes Insight beside Good problem formulation). We know what a bad problem formulation is. A bad problem formulation is one that puts you into a combinatorially explosive search space. A bad problem formulation is one that does not turn your ill-defined problem into a well-defined problem. A bad problem formulation is one in which you are not paying careful attention to how salience is misleading you.

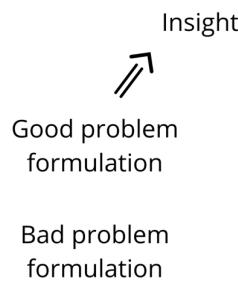


Fig. 13

So that's telling us something really interesting. That there is, in addition to inference being crucial to being rational, insight is crucial to being rational too. Because if what we mean by insight is somebody who is good at

formulating problems, avoiding combinatorial explosion, avoiding ill-definedness, avoiding salience misdirection, then being insightful is going to be central to being rational. It's not going to be something that comes up out of the irrational aspects of the psyche. It comes in from the non-inferential, but why should we be identifying—nobody is here—identifying rationality with just a pure logical normativity on inference.

So what I propose to you is that we need to understand the role of both insight and inference in rationality, and that's much more problematic. But we need that. Because we need to integrate rationality and understanding together in an integrated account. And notice how now more and more, that rationality and wisdom are starting to overlap for us in a serious way.

Because if I now get rationality and understanding, inference and insight, enmeshed together then, of course, I'm starting to talk more and more—and having to happen in a systematic and reliable way—I'm starting to talk more and more about the ways when we talk about how people are wise. If we give up thinking of rationality as being like Mr. Spock or Mr. Data, and we give up the idea that being rational is just being really smart, then we start to get into the problematic notion of rationality, and we need the idea of multiple competencies. We need the distinction between being logical and being rational, being intelligent and being rational. And we have to understand that there's an important component of rationality that is non-influential in nature. It has to do with a normativity on construal, the generation of insight. Not a normativity of argumentation and the generation of inference. And that's important. That's really important (erases the board).

Active Open-Mindedness

So the issue of construal is acknowledged, but not, in any way, resolved by Stanovich. So it's not going to play, although it should, given his own arguments, it's not going to play a significant role in his theory of rationality. What is that theory? What does it look like? What is the missing piece, according to Stanovich? So we said, that intelligence (Fig. 14a) (writes (g) and writes Intelligence above (g)) is not predictive, or an only weakly predictive of rationality (writes (gr) beside (g) and writes Rationality above (gr)). These are not equivalent. (writes ≠ between Intelligence and Rationality) And along the way we got yet another argument for intelligence

being relevance realization. Okay. That's all good. What is the missing piece then? The relationship here is only 0.3 (writes .3 above ≠). What accounts for most of the variance then, as a scientist would say?

$$\begin{array}{c} .3 \\ \text{Intelligence} \neq \text{Rationality} \\ (\text{g}) \qquad \qquad (\text{gr}) \end{array}$$

Fig. 14a

So Stanovich argues very clearly for what he calls a cognitive style. Well, this, this term is [-] a bit equivocal. It's used in slightly different ways in psychology for different things. And he also invokes the notion of a bad mindware, inappropriate psychotechnology. So that's also in there. So there's “[-] cognitive styles in psychotechnology” that can both be part of the missing variance.

So one part here is the psychotech you're using (Fig. 14b) (writes Psychotech below (g) and (gr)) You can have poor, what he calls mindware, which is like software. He's picking up on the psychotech idea here.

$$\begin{array}{c} .3 \\ \text{Intelligence} \neq \text{Rationality} \\ (\text{g}) \qquad \qquad (\text{gr}) \\ \swarrow \text{Psychotech} \\ \text{Cognitive style} \text{ — Active open mindedness} \end{array}$$

Fig. 14b

And then the other, and this is what often gets given more priority because it counts for a lot, is an appropriate cognitive style (writes Cognitive style below Psychotech). The difference between these (indicates Psychotech and Cognitive style) are not as clear, I think, as Stanovich seems to think they are. So we'll have to come back to that when we come back to the relationship between psychotechnology and wisdom.

So what's the Cognitive style? So a cognitive style is [-] something you can learn, at least as Stanovich is using it. And it's to learn a set of sensitivities

and skills.... notice the procedurality and the perspectival in here, but it's implicit, it's in the background. But what is the Cognitive style that's most predictive of doing well on the reasoning test? He gets this from Jonathan Baron. This is the notion of Active Open-Mindedness (writes Active Open-mindedness beside Cognitive Style). And when you see this, you're going to see a lot of Stoicism here; and this overlaps a lot with the cognitive behavioral therapy that is derived from Stoicism. And again, that's convergent, that's not by design or deliberate. And that tells you something, something crucial is being seen here.

What is Active Open-Mindedness? So active open-mindedness is to train yourself, to look for these patterns of self-deception, to look for biases. So here's a bias you've heard me mention, you've heard me mention some of these (Fig. 15).

- Confirmation bias — I tend to only look for information that confirms my beliefs.
- Essentialism bias — I tend to treat any category as a pointing to an essence shared by all the members.
- Availability bias — I judge something's probability by how easily I can remember it or imagine it happening. I am misusing the availability heuristic.

Fig. 15

Notice that a bias is just a heuristic misused.

Maybe we should give up an essentialism of sacredness, or at least in the terms of its content. I've already suggested that to you. The availability heuristic (indicates Availability bias) is the availability biases; We've talked about all of these; there's many of these.

So what do I do? First of all, I have to do the science. I learn about all of these (encircles Confirmation bias, Essentialism bias, Availability bias). So this comes from Baron (writes Baron). I want to point out something that Stanovich doesn't say as clearly as Baron does. So what I do is I learn about these (indicates Fig. 15) and I sensitize myself. I sensitize myself, and this is like a virtue, because I have to care about the process, not just the results. I sensitize myself to looking for these biases in my day-to-day cognition.

And then I actively counteract them (underlines Active open-mindedness). I actively say, no, no, no, I'm doing confirmation bias. I need to look for potential information that will disconfirm it. And here's where you can now begin to also give up the individualistic assumption of competence. Part of the way in which I can be rationally competent is, I can ask you to help me overcome my confirmation bias, because it's very hard for me to look for information that disconfirms my beliefs. It's much easier for you. And then if I practice with you a notch, I can start to internalize you and I can start to get better at looking for my own instances where I fall prey to the confirmation bias. So I now actively counteract those. That's sort of where Stanovich leaves it. Baron points out, but you don't overdo this. Because if you overdo this, you will start to choke on the tsunami of combinatorial explosion that will overwhelm you. So again, you have to do this, and you have to do this to the right degree. And that becomes much more nebulous. And again, we're starting to shade over into wisdom, right?

So what you should then ask is what predicts—if being intelligent doesn't predict—if intelligence predicted rationality then being intelligent would predict how well you've cultivated active open-mindedness. But of course it doesn't. So what is it about people that predicts how well they will cultivate active open-mindedness and this is the degree to which people have a need for cognition (Fig. 16) (writes Need for cognition below Active open-mindedness). This is people who problematize things. They create problems. They look for problems. They go out and on their own trying to learn.

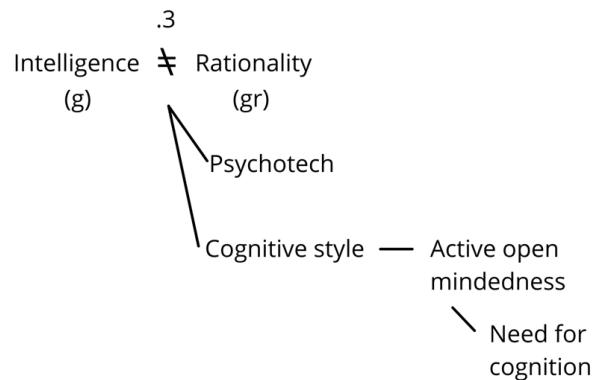


Fig. 14c

I would add to that. There's two aspects to need for cognition. There is a curiosity in which I need to have more information so that I can manipulate

things more effectively. And that's important. People that are, in that sense, more curious and want to solve problems, not just gather facts, but solve problems, because that's what needs for cognition points to. That's important. But also think about how important "wonder" is. How much it opens you up to putting into question your entire worldview, your deeper sense of identity? Deep need for cognition. And that's relevant to do, because rationality is ultimately an existential issue, not just a theoretical inferential logical issue.

So what we're going to need to do is to come back and look more [-] at Stanovich's account of rationality. Some criticisms of it. And then on the basis of that, because we're already overlapping with it so much, take a look at some of the key theories of the nature of wisdom and try to draw that together into a viable account of wisdom, which we can then integrate with the account of enlightenment.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 41 Notes:

Stanovich

Keith E. Stanovich is Emeritus Professor of Applied Psychology and Human Development, University of Toronto and former Canada Research Chair of Applied Cognitive Science.

Article Mentioned: [Individual Differences in Reasoning: Implications for the Rationality Debate](#)

Cohen

Laurence Jonathan Cohen, FBA, usually cited as L. Jonathan Cohen, was a British philosopher.

Cherniak

Christopher Cherniak is an American neuroscientist, a member of the University of Maryland Philosophy Department. Cherniak's research trajectory started in theory of knowledge and led into computational neuroanatomy and genomics.

Herbert Simon

Herbert Alexander Simon was an American economist, political scientist and cognitive psychologist, whose primary research interest was decision-making within organizations and is best known for the theories of "bounded rationality" and "satisficing".

Bounded Rationality

Bounded rationality is the idea that rationality is limited when individuals make decisions.

Book Mentioned: Models of Bounded Rationality: Empirically Grounded Economic Reason Volume 3 – [Buy Here](#)

Smedslund

Jonathan Baron

Jonathan Miller Baron is a Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania in the science of decision-making.

Confirmation bias

Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's prior beliefs, prejudices or values.

Availability bias

The availability heuristic, also known as availability bias, is a mental shortcut that relies on immediate examples that come to a given person's mind when evaluating a specific topic, concept, method or decision.

Book Mentioned: Biased – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: The 25 Cognitive Biases: Understanding Human Psychology, Decision Making & How to Not Fall Victim to Them – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Cognitive Biases : Your Guide To Rationality: A pocket reference book – [Buy Here](#)

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Ep. 42 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Intelligence, Rationality, and Wisdom

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis. So last time, we were taking an in-depth look at the work of Stanovich and rationality, because we are building towards an account of wisdom. Because that is deeply intertwined with the cultivation of enlightenment and, of course, with the cultivation of meaning.

We noted that rationality is an existential issue. It's not just a matter of how we're processing information. It's something that is constitutive of our identity in important ways, and our mode of being in the world. And we'll come back to that again.

One of the core things we saw as we took a look at the rationality debate in which Stanovich's work is situated, is that debate showed us a couple of important things. It showed us, if I can put this as a formula, that rationality does not equal logicality, and it does not equal intelligence (Fig. 1) (Writes Intelligence \neq rationality \neq logicality). That debate also showed us that we need multiple competencies when we're talking about rationality. We need an inferential competency, but we need an independent competency of construal. And then I proposed to you how we could understand what that competency is, and what the normative theory is acting upon it. Namely insight, good problem formulation.

Intelligence \neq Rationality \neq Logicality

Fig. 1

We then moved into what Stanovich saw as the missing piece. If intelligence doesn't give us rationality, what's the missing piece? There's two missing pieces. They overlap in some important ways. One is the notion, he calls it

mindware, what I've called psychotechnology (Fig. 2a) (writes Psychotechnology) and the other is a cognitive style (writes Cognitive below Psychotechnology). And the cognitive style that he talked about was Active Open-Mindedness (writes AOM beside Cognitive), which he gets from Jonathan Baron. And this is the idea that what you should do is cultivate a sensitivity and an ongoing awareness of the presence and effect of cognitive biases in your cognitive behavior and your cognitive life, and to actively counteract them.

Psychotechnology
Cognitive — AOM
style

Fig. 2a

I pointed out that, unlike Stanovich, who doesn't emphasize this as much, Jonathan Baron, who's the originator of this idea (AOM) as a constitutive of feature of rationality points out that you can't do that too much. 'Cause if you try to override too many of your cognitive biases, you, of course, will be also overriding them in their functioning as heuristics, that help you avoid combinatorial explosion. So getting an optimal form of active open-mindedness rather than a maximum form of it is crucial to rationality.

Defining Psychotechnology

I want to just briefly stop here and be a little bit more precise about how I want to use this term (draws an arrow pointing to Psychotechnology). I've been using it throughout, and I basically defined it by example, and then through exemplification. But I want to be a little bit clear about it because it's going to be relevant as we go forward and talk about wisdom.

So here's the definition I want to offer to try and clarify what I mean and how I'm using the term psychotechnology. As I said, I don't claim to be the originator of this idea, but I am claiming that this is the particular slant I'm taking on this idea of psychotechnology. A psychotechnology is a socially generated and standardized way of formatting, manipulating, and enhancing information processing that's readily internalizable into human cognition, and that can be applied in a domain general manner. That's crucial. It must extend and empower cognition in some reliable and extensive manner, and

be highly generalizable among people. Prototypical instances are literacy, numeracy, and graphing.

So I want to just make it very clear. It's not just that anything we use mentally will count as a psychotechnology. So the cognitive style of active open-mindedness will probably make use of psychotechnologies in order to help track bias. But obviously, Stanovich means something much more comprehensive. He means a set of skills, psychotechnologies, sensibilities, and sensitivities that will help you in a domain general manner, note and actively respond to the presence of cognitive bias. We can then ask, [-] if intelligence is insufficient for this (indicates Fig. 1), what is it about people that is predictive of them acquiring this? (draws an arrow pointing to AOM) Now, this is learnable (indicates Psychotechnology).

Need For Cognition And Problem Finding

And we talked about the need for cognition, as being an important predictor (Fig. 2b) (writes Need for cognition at the end of the arrow below AOM). So this is the degree to which you are motivated to go out and look for problems. You're trying to find, formulate, and solve problems. And so in that sense, you are generating your own instances of learning and problem solving in a quite directed and comprehensive manner. I suggested to you that there's two ways in which we can think about this: Curiosity and [-] [Wonder] (Text overlay appears saying "John means "Curiosity and Wonder" instead of "Curiosity and Wisdom").

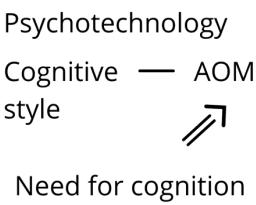


Fig. 2b

I want to stop here and note something about this need for cognition (draws an arrow from Need for cognition) that I'm now going to be making use of in today's lecture. Which is the connection between the need for cognition, and what Arlin calls (writes Arlin), "problem finding" (Fig. 2c) (writes Problem finding below Arlin). Because that's a very central feature, I would think. I would say an essential feature of what it is to have a high need for cognition.

Arlin argues that problem finders are very good at finding problems, as the name indicates there. They are able to realize problems and connect things together in ways that other people have not previously done. Some people have argued that this is central to creativity. But important for our purposes is that Arlin—and this is kind of prescient of this whole argument. She made this argument in 1990 (writes 1990 above Arlin). She argues that this is central to wisdom (draws an arrow pointing from Problem finding and writes Wisdom). That one of the crucial features of being a wise person is the capacity to find problems that other people have not yet found.

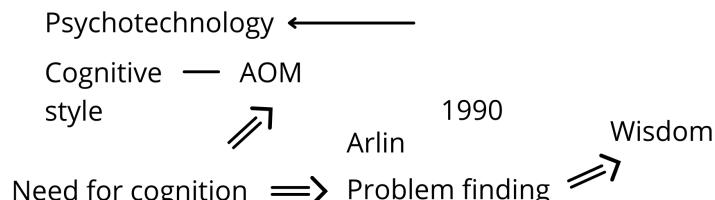


Fig. 2c

I want to take a moment here and offer a suggestion of how we can think about what makes somebody a good problem finder. This is not in Arlin, this is my attempt to extend, to develop Arlin and make it a little bit more concrete and practicable. So I want to propose to you this idea. (erases the board).

Becoming A Good Problem Finder

We don't find problems typically in a vacuum. We don't do anything in a vacuum. There's always already a background of existing issues we're dealing with, other people are dealing with in our culture. I would suggest to you that a good problem finder can do this. Here's some existing problems in the space in which human beings are operating (Fig. 3a) (draws 4 circles). And what a good problem finder does is, I think, not just simply add to that (Fig. 3b) (draws a 5th circle). I mean, that would be kind of a basic skill in problem finding (erases the 5th arrow). But I think people that we regard as being exemplary in this, and doing it very well, and therefore demonstrating an aspect of creativity; it helps to explain why problem finding sort of overlaps between wisdom and creativity. They can do the following thing.

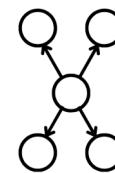
They can find a problem (Fig. 3c) (draws a 5th circle) that, if solved, would make a significant impact on these existing problems (draws arrows from the

5th circle). So what I'm suggesting to you is that good problem finding is the ability to generate a problem nexus (writes Problem nexus). So then if you say, here's some problems in various domains (indicates the circles) and then they are all centered on this core problem (indicates the circle in the middle). And if we can address that core problem, then we can go back and make a significant impact (indicates the arrows) on this.



Fig. 3a

Fig. 3b



Problem
nexus

Fig. 3c

I think many of the people—I don't take credit for this. I think the person who should be given credit for this, and I'll talk about that later today, is Dreyfus. The idea that many of the central problems of cognition are centered on this ability to realize relevance. I think that's a very powerful kind of problem finding; it's the generation of a real problem nexus. And I've tried to show you how it can be very generative of theoretical and empirical research. So I think that's part of what it is to be a good problem finder. It is to generate the problem nexus. I also want to point out something that I'm going to come back to, which is, this is going to overlap with an important aspect in some current theories of the nature of understanding that have to do with the effectiveness of how we are relating to knowledge. Now, that sounds very vague and I will come back to that more carefully, but I need you to understand right now that this problem finding, the ability to generate a problem nexus, will also make a significant impact and interact with some of the best accounts, I think, that are emerging about the nature of understanding. And that's going to be important, because we want understanding to be part of our theory, our account, of wisdom (erases the board).

I want to come back to the affective side of this. So I've suggested to you that one part of [-] need for cognition (Fig. 4) (writes Need for cognition) is good problem finding (writes Good problem finding below Need for cognition). And then good problem finding is the ability to generate a

problem nexus (draws a downward arrow below Good problem finding and writes Problem nexus). The need for cognition... look at this word here (underlines Need)... also points to obviously an affective, motivational component. And this takes us into the few things I talked about before: Wonder (writes Wonder below Need) and Curiosity (writes Curiosity beside Wonder). And I propose to you that, although these terms (indicates Wonder and Curiosity) are slippery, one way in which we can pick up sort of polar opposites, is that Curiosity is much more in the Having mode. It's much more about manipulating and controlling things. And Wonder is much more in the Being mode. It's much more about encountering mystery, and calling into question one's worldview, one's identity, etc. So that's why wonder can shade into awe, or potentially even into horror.

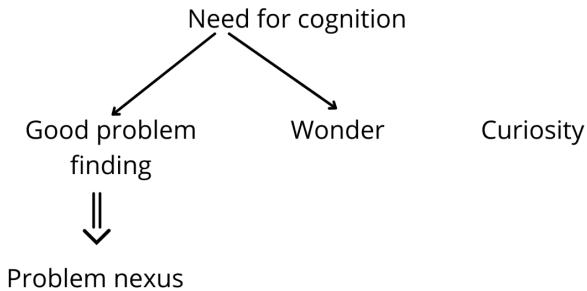


Fig. 4

Two Different Interpretations To Wonder

Now I want to pick up on something here. Because this, again, has some very deep connections to wisdom. So I actually have this on a, like a plaque in my apartment. It's a famous quote from Socrates, which is, *"Wisdom begins in wonder."* Wisdom begins in wonder. And like everything about Socrates, it is simultaneously provocative and enigmatic as to what did Socrates actually mean by that? And there's two different interpretations. You can see this in the different ways in which wonder (writes Wonder) is treated by Plato (writes Plato below Wonder) and, of course, by Aristotle (writes Aristotle below Wonder). You can see this sort of distinction to some of the current work on wonder.

But for Plato, the point of philosophy is to develop and extend that sense of wonder. So that what you're actually trying to do, for Plato, is you're trying to deepen wonder into awe (Fig. 5a) (writes Wonder and Awe below Plato).

Because he feels that this awe will have the greatest capacity for transforming us, for getting us deeply involved in the anagogic ascent. That makes sense.

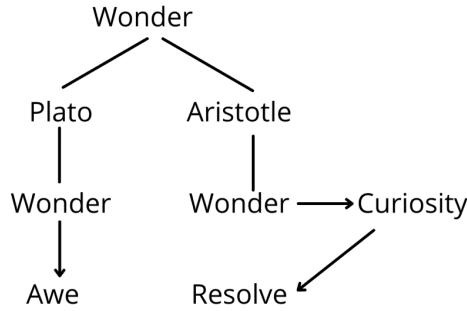


Fig. 5a

Aristotle also thinks that philosophy begins in wonder, but, I think you could make a good case that—and many people have—that Aristotle sees this more in line with curiosity (writes curiosity below Aristotle), trying to figure things out. And then what you're ultimately doing (erases Curiosity), I would say for Aristotle, is this. You're trying to basically shape wonder into curiosity (writes Wonder and an arrow and writes Curiosity) in philosophy, and then resolve the curiosity (draws an arrow from Curiosity and writes Resolve) in some answer to some question.

So for Plato, wonder sets you on a quest of anagoge. But for Aristotle, wonder gets you to formulate questions that you then answer. And that's a fundamental difference between them. And it's interesting because you see Plato is here sort of pushing for meta-accommodation (Fig. 5b) (Writes Meta-accommodation beside Awe) as we've seen before. Well, we talked about this, when we talked about the numinous. And Aristotle is, of course, putting for Meta-assimilation (writes Meta-assimilation beside Resolve). Of course, when I answer questions, that may force me to do conceptual accommodation, but overall, this is trying to stabilize and assimilate and sort of home things for you. Now the kind of stuff we saw in Geertz.

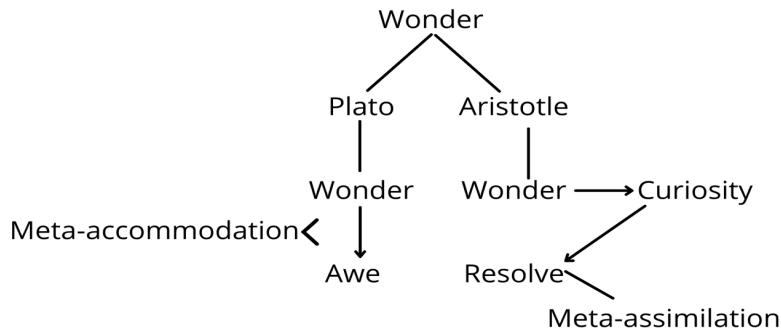


Fig. 5b

So philosophy is working within that whole structure. And why am I pointing this out? Because of course, again, we're invoking this higher order relevance realization that's at work within this need for cognition within wonder and curiosity (indicates Wonder and Curiosity in Fig. 4).

So we saw that Stanovich was able to respond to many of the defenders of human rationality in the rationality debate (erases the board). He was able to respond to Cohen by crucially noting that we have to challenge Cohen's assumptions. We do not have a single competence. I also added in that we shouldn't think of it as static or completely individual.

He was able to respond to Cherniak by pointing out that Cherniak was quite right about the centrality of dealing with computational limitations, but that what Cherniak is really giving is not a theory—because Cherniak's theory is a theory of relevance realization—it's not a theory of rationality, but a theory of intelligence. Something that's Stanovich also agrees with. And then to Smedslund, Stanovich acknowledges that we need an independent normativity on construal, and we've already seen that we can answer that. Well, at least I'm proposing that we can answer that by a different area in psychology, which is the work on good problem formulation and insight; of problem formulation that avoids the combinatorial explosion, ill-definedness, and the way in which we can be misdirected by salience to misjudge what is relevant.

Dual Processing Theory

I now want to return to Stanovich's theory properly. What's his positive account of what rationality is? So the way Stanovich does this [-] overlaps

with a lot of other work, and this is a point that he himself made. There's a lot of convergence in psychology on the idea of a "dual processing theory," that we have multiple competencies. Now, what this dual processing is, is itself very controversial. Initially, people talked about two systems, and then they talked about two styles. And because of critiques, it was hard to maintain those terms. And I'm not even convinced that they are [-] distinct things. They might lie on a continuum. But the basic idea is, to avoid all that controversy, they're simply called S2 and S1 (Fig. 6a) (writes S2 and S1). And like I say, I'm not claiming that they're discrete systems or even discrete styles, it's quite possible that they are polar positions on a continuum of processing. I'm going to put all of those aside because it's not relevant for what we're talking about here.

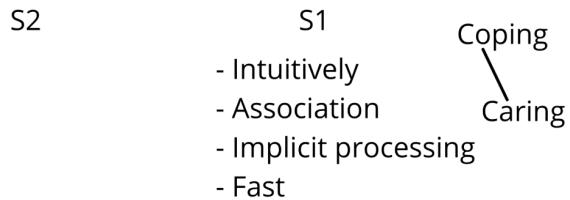


Fig. 6a

So the main idea here is that these are different ways in which you process information. And this process (S1) works largely intuitively (writes intuitively below S1). It works very much in a highly associational fashion (writes association below S1). It makes use of a lot of implicit processing (writes implicit processing below S1) and it's very fast.(writes fast below S1) It's very fast. So this is the kind of processing that you're using all the time in what we've, you know, when we talked about this, when Varella talked about your ability to cope (writes Coping beside S1). This is your coping. So when I'm moving around the environment, I'm relying a lot on my intuitive knowledge, my capacity for implicit learning, the way I can quickly associate things together. I would add to this, as I argued before, that this is also (writes Caring below Coping) sort of how we're primarily caring for things, being involved with them, finding them salient, et cetera. But nevertheless, this (indicates S1) is the part of your cognition that is operating a lot of the time in the background.

In fact, I want to, I'm going to step aside from Stanovich for a moment and propose to you that instead of thinking that these are discrete systems, we

can think of different states where you're in, where one style or other is more foregrounded, and the other is more backgrounded. So I'll come back to that.

What's S2? Well, S2 operates more deliberately (Fig. 6b) (writes Deliberately below S2) in both senses of the word, like deliberation, where I'm engaging in reflection and deliberate in the sense that I am aware of it and intentionally directed in it. So it's deliberately. So it tends to not work associationally, it tends to work inferentially, argumentatively (writes Inferentially / Argumentation below S2). Argumentation in the philosophical sense, not in the sense of having an emotional conflict with somebody. The processing, of course, all processing has—and this is an important point—some aspects of it that are implicit. So this is more of a contrast of emphasis. But this processing is much more explicit, (writes Explicit below S2) and it tends to be very slow (writes Slow below S2).

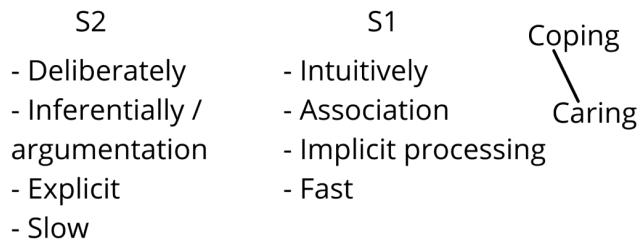


Fig. 6b

So Kahneman has a book out right now, Thinking fast and thinking slow that is a very good sort of discussion of this dual processing model. Because, as I said, there's a lot of theoretical argumentation and evidence that is converging on this. So this is a very highly plausible thing. And you see it showing up in many, many different domains within psychology.

So one way of thinking about this, and this is a way in which Stanovich and Evans have tried to get a clearer, more precise way of distinguishing the two, is the degree to which they're making use of working memory. So the idea is S2 really relies on working memory (Fig. 6c) (writes WM and draws an arrow pointing to S2), whereas S1 (draws an arrow from WM to S1) relies much less on it (writes + beside the arrow from WM to S2 and writes - beside the arrow from WM to S1). And so it's much more automatic (writes automatic beside the arrow from WM to S1) in that sense in its operation.

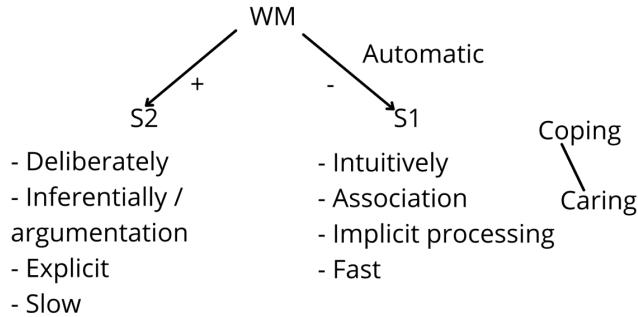


Fig. 6c

So let's, let's take an example where you use the two systems. So you're grocery shopping and you come up to the cashier and they're ringing you in. And you've got a normal sort of basket full of normal groceries. And the cashier says to you, well, "It'll be \$1,000 please." And you go, "What?" Now, where did that "what?" come from? Where did that "what" come from? Well, you have associations between sort of these objects, their prices, sort of the amount you've picked up implicit patterns. Notice how intuitively associationally, implicit and quickly you do, "What? That's wrong. It can't be \$1,000. That makes no sense." So you call the cashier in the question by using your S1 processing. Now what the cashier has to do, [-] s/he can't just respond this way (indicates S1) to you. The cashier can't go, "Nah, it's a thousand. I can sense it." What do they have to do? They have to deliberately [-] take out each thing. They have to get out the bill, they have to [-] concentrate, they have to pay attention step-by-step, make the argument to you explicitly and slowly (indicates Explicit). "No, no look [-] ...this matches this..." They're using S2 processing.

Now, these, of course, are in a tradeoff relationship, because [-] part of the problem with this (indicates S2) is how much demand it puts on your working memory (indicates WM), how slow it is. So you cannot rely on it. Yet another argument why you can't Descartes your way through your whole of your existence. You can't rely on it (indicates S2) for most of your behavior, because you will just head into the ocean of combinatorial explosion. You will get so slowed down and so overwhelmed that you won't be able to live your life. You'll commit cognitive suicide. But, of course, we have this (indicates S2) for a reason. We have this because it is supposed to override, to a degree, this (indicates S1). So notice that these two systems are in, basically, an opponent relationship. They are both working towards the

same goal of making you adaptive, but they tend to work in opposite fashions. And Stanovich sees S2 as largely having — and there's deep truth to this — having a corrective function for S1 (Fig. 6d) (draws an arrow from S2 to S1).

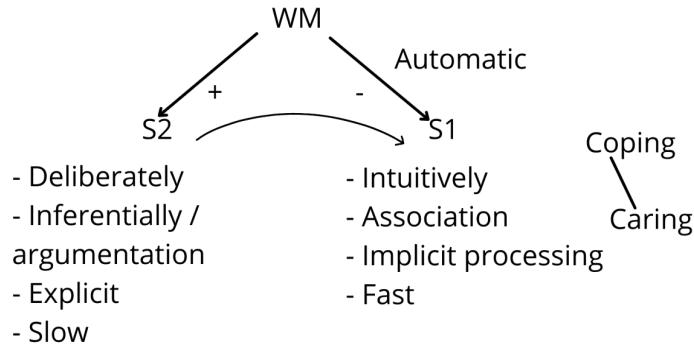


Fig. 6d

Active Open-Mindedness

So now I can first give you his theory of foolishness, which he understands as dysrationalia (writes Dysrationalia), like dyslexia. And then, by implication, his theory of rationality, which, because it's a comprehensive kind of rationality, it deals with a comprehensive kind of foolishness, it's now bordering on an account of what wisdom is. So here's the idea: what is active open-mindedness doing? Well, what's happening is, this (indicates S1) is the place where all the heuristics and biases are. This is where they're operating. And what happens here is they make you leap to conclusions (Fig. 6e) (writes Leap to conclusions).

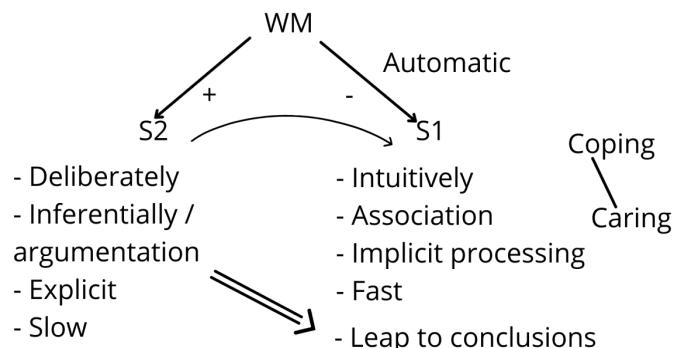


Fig. 6e

Remember when I did the problem with you where you've got the pond, and on day one, there's so many lily pads, and it doubles every day. And on day

20, it's totally filled. On what day was the pond half-covered? And your S1 shouts at you, "10 days! 10 days in, because it's half and half. And that's how it works." And that's wrong! Because on day 19, half the pond was covered. And what you have to do is, S2 has to basically override (draws an arrow from S2 to Leap to conclusions) how you're leaping to conclusions. How you leap to the conclusion that the people at the airport are in danger because of the representative heuristic or the availability heuristic. So S1 is constantly giving... but I need this—that's what makes me fast. If I'm not leaping, I'm not fast. I'm not coping. Leaping and coping are deeply interdependent. But the thing is, sometimes — and again it's unclear what the degree is, that's one of the ways in which I think Baron is a little bit more clear than Stanovich — but sometimes we need to override this leaping to conclusion.

So he sees that what active open-mindedness (Fig. 6f) (writes AOM) is basically doing is, teaching you to protect this (indicates S2) processing from being overridden by the way S1 makes you leap to conclusions. You are foolish, you have dysrationalia, if you are highly intelligent and yet you do not—you have not trained S2 (indicates S2 and AOM) to be properly protected from the interference (indicates Leap to conclusions) from S1. Do you see what's going on here? This is how he's ultimately responding to Cohen. You have these two competencies; (indicates S1 and S2) you need both of them. They are constitutive of your cognitive agency. So they're both (indicates S1 and S2) constitutive competences, but this one (indicates S1) can interfere with this one (indicates S2), and that can cause you to behave irrationally. What active open-mindedness does is to protect this kind of processing from that interference.

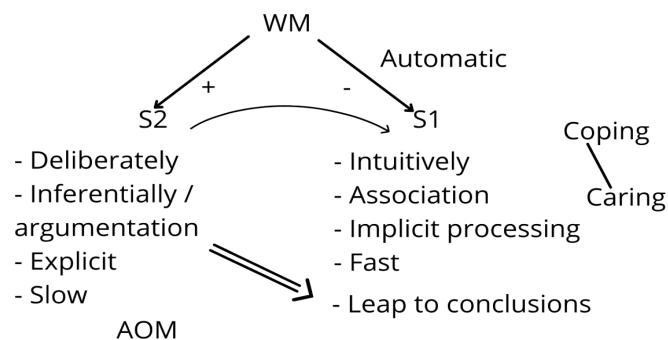


Fig. 6f

So that's Stanovich's central model. Now, I think that's definitely a good account of active open-mindedness (encircles AOM). My central criticism of this, is I think it's an insufficient account of rationality (erases the arrow between S2 and Leap to conclusions). It's insufficient. I grant a lot of work has been done here. Rationality is not being equated to intelligence is not being equated to logicality. It's centered on overcoming self-deception. There's an account of self-deception. It's so platonic, eh? It's so platonic. Here's the monster (indicates S1) and it's interfering with the man. So platonic. And so we get that interference effect, that's what's causing us to be foolish. That makes us self-deceptive. If we cultivate active open-mindedness, then we can reduce the interference. And that makes us more comprehensively rational. I think that's all, well, it's all elegant. It's beautiful. And the fact that this kind of work keeps getting replicated and massively, it's so highly plausible and profound. [-] I think that's all worthy of being noted.

Cognitive Leaping

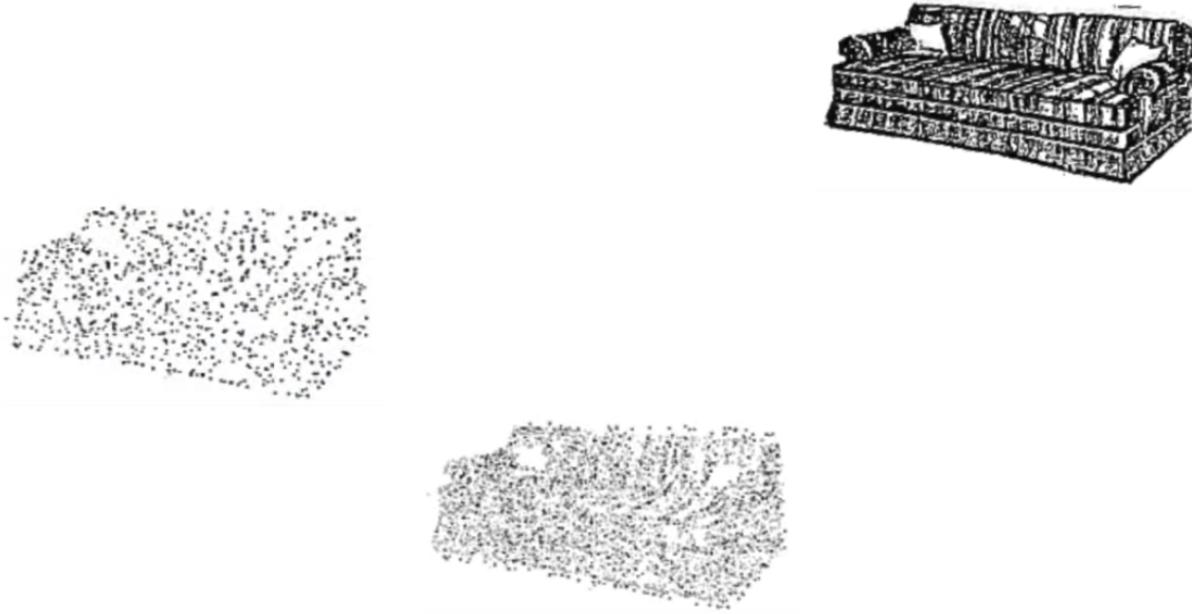
However, let's look to this (underlines Leap to conclusions). Because is leaping always a bad thing? Well, I already implied that you need to leap to cope. But let's take a look at the work of Baker-Sennett and Ceci from 1996. They investigated a thing they called inductive leaping (Fig. 7a) (writes Inductive leaping). I think calling it inductive leaping is a mistake because I understand induction (encircles inductive) as an inferential procedure, and what they're explicitly doing is not inferential in nature. So I'm going to suggest that we don't use that term (crosses out inductive). I'm instead going to use the more neutral term of Cognitive leaping (writes Cognitive leaping below Inductive leaping).

~~Inductive~~ leaping
Cognitive leaping

Fig. 7a

What's cognitive leaping? Well, cognitive leaping—how did they test it? They tested it in the following ways. I give you various patterns that are unfolding across time. And at various times, I stop and ask you if you can tell me what it's going to be.

One version of it is there's [-] a bunch of dots, and what's it going to be? And more dots get filled in.



Eventually you're able to leap and say, "Oh, it's going to turn out to be a sofa. Notice how you're going from Features to Gestalt. You're doing that leap. And you're going from looking at the dots to looking through them. You're doing an opacity transparency shift, all that stuff we talked about. Mindfulness is involved.

Now, why does that matter? Well, what they found was something very important. This (indicates Cognitive leaping) allowed them to operationalize an aspect of the inevitability of insight. Because often you don't know what's going on in an insight; there's this leap. How they operationalized it was this. You're a good leaper, you're a good leaper if you can use fewer cues (Fig. 8) (draws three lines) and accurately say (draws an arc that intersects with a circle) what the final pattern is going to be. So if you use fewer cues and you're making lots of mistakes, you're not very good. If you're largely accurate, but you have to get a whole bunch of cues, then you're not a very good leaper. But if you use few cues and get to the full Gestalt reliably, then you're a very good cognitive leaper. Okay, you're doing this. You have this skill, this facility with pattern detection, pattern completion.



Fig. 8

Why is that so important? Well, because that (draws an arrow from Cognitive leaping), and that's what the experiments show. This is directly predictive of insight (Fig. 7b) (writes Predictive of insight below Cognitive leaping). The better you are at leaping, the better you are at insight.

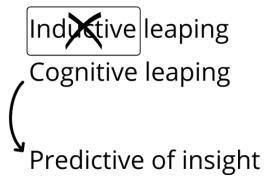


Fig. 7b

So do you see the tension here? If I try to shut off too much leaping to conclusions (indicates Leap to conclusions), I'm also shutting off the machinery (indicates Cognitive leaping) that makes me more insightful.

[-] Look... we have to give up naive, simplistic notions of rationality. I'm not accusing Stanovich of this; not at all. But what I'm saying is [-] — being rational is a very complex process in which there are trade off relationships, and a very complicated kind of optimization needs to be trained.

So we want active open-mindedness... (erases the arrow between S2 and S1) Let's make this the error of interference. So sometimes I leap to conclusions (Fig. 9a) (draws an arrow from S1 to S2) and that causes a lot of mistakes in inference (indicates S2) [-]. And what I need is active open-mindedness to moderate that (draws an arrow from AOM to the arrow between S1 and S2) and ameliorate it in a significant degree. But I want to leap to insight (writes Leap to insight under S1). And I need that for good construal; and good construal is central to being a problem solver. Central to being rational.

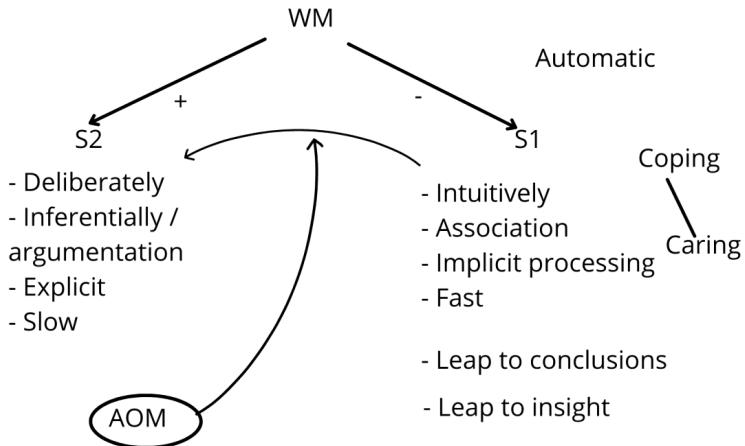


Fig. 9a

Two Different Contexts: Theorizing And Therapy

So what do I need? Well, it's interesting because if you turn to a domain outside of the academic domain, and [-] because rationality is existential, we have to pay attention to the context, even in which we're theorizing about rationality. And if we're in a largely academic context, we're going to think of rationality as primarily about theorizing. And so this (indicates S2 and S1) is a great danger to theorizing. And so I would argue, [-] if the project you're engaging in rationality is the project of theorizing, and I mean that broadly in the sense of generating scientific or historical theory, then active open-mindedness is crucial. But there are domains where it goes the other way. There's domains in which what you [-] need is (indicates Leap to insight) to be able to come up with a transformative insight. Where you need a radical reconstrual of the problem or the issue. Where that's crucial because you're somehow locked in. Where is the domain in where that's crucial? Well, we've talked about it.

So this is good for theorizing (Fig. 9b) (adds Good for theorizing above the arrow between S1 and S2). But Jacob's in his book, and you can see some related work by Teasdale, points out there's an opposite context. There's the context, not a theory, but there's the context of therapy (writes Therapy). I think it's broader than this (indicates Therapy), but I'm using this because it's a good contrast, there's an alliterative relation (indicates Theorizing and Therapy) to help for mnemonic purposes.

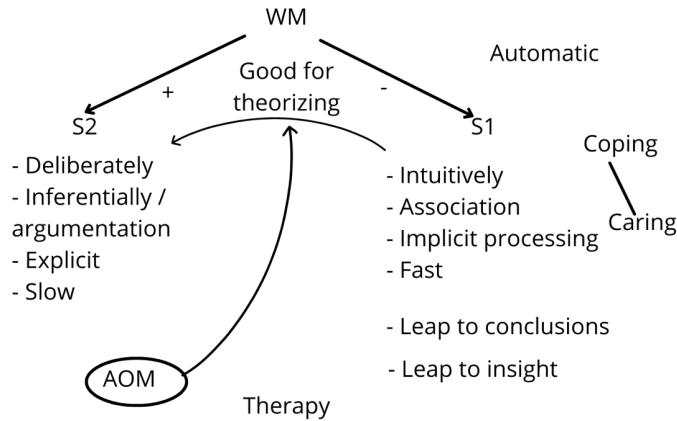


Fig. 9b

So in therapy very often what's needed is, and we've talked about this, remember? You're existentially trapped, and you need this fundamental kind of transformative insight, and you cannot infer your way through it. We've already tackled that argument in detail. You cannot infer your way through it. And the problem in therapy is people try to think their way through it. That's Jacob's main point. And [it's] related in a book called *The Ancestral Mind*. And the same point is being made I think by Teasdale, when he talks about metacognitive insight being central to therapy.

Often, what you need is to try and shut [S2] down, try to trigger [S1]. I mean, think of Freud and free association. You have to try and shut [S2] down, prevent it from interfering (Fig. 9c) (draws an arrow from S2 to S1 and crosses it out and erases the cross). Bring [S1] into the foreground. Keep [S2] in the background.

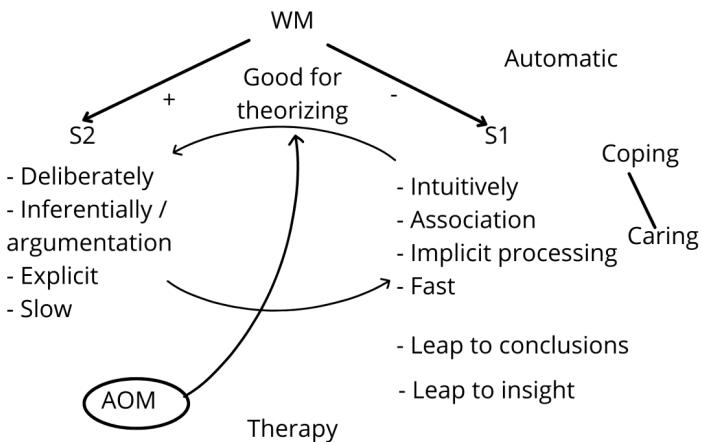


Fig. 9c

So when we're theorizing, we need [S2] in the foreground, and we need it protected. We need it to seriously background and constrain [S1]. Active open-mindedness in doing this. But in the therapeutic situation, [S1] needs to be much more foregrounded, [S2] needs to be backgrounded and where it needs to be constrained so it doesn't unduly interfere with [S1].

Mindfulness

Now, what we can ask ourselves is, well, what's a cognitive style that makes [S1] much more focal, tries to constrain [S2], and really improves insight (underlines Leap to insight)? Well, we know what that is. And Teasdale in fact, argues for it explicitly, as to what triggers meta-cognitive insight. That's Mindfulness. (Fig. 9d) (writes Mindfulness below S1). So you think about how much in a mindfulness practice — I've tried to argue that we need an ecology of psychotechnologies to cultivate the cognitive style of mindfulness — Think of one [-], think of meditation. Think of how much in meditation you are trying to really constrain [S2], shut this down, reduce all that inner speech, all that inferential processing, that deliberate direction. And you're trying to open [S1] up in a very powerful way.

So notice that I now have (encircles Mindfulness) a cognitive style that is (indicates AOM and Mindfulness), in a very important sense, opponent — not adversarial, but opponent to active open-mindedness.

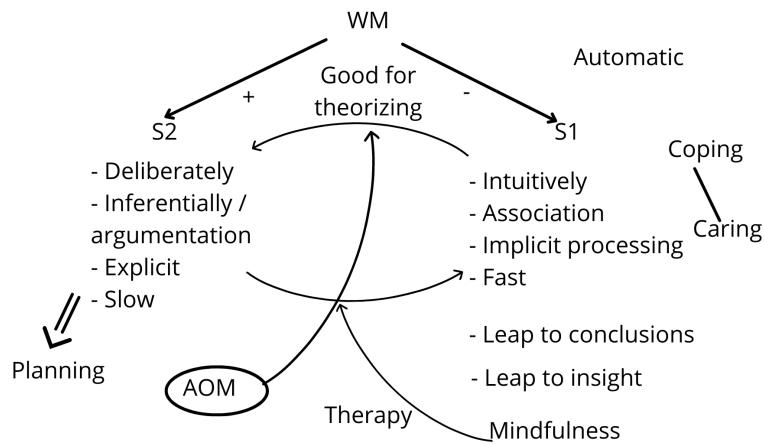


Fig. 9d

Notice that they are both sharing the training of attention and what you're paying attention to and how you're paying attention. So, [S2] is great for planning (writes Planning below S2). And [S1] is great for coping. And [S2] especially when the planning is epistemic, when we're trying to theorize, when we're planning for truth. [S1] is very good for coping, especially when we're doing a kind of coping that's therapeutic in a broad sense; in which we are needing to transform and undergo important qualitative development.

So I think what's missing from Stanovich is a broader account of our competences, and how they are played off against each other, how there's a tradeoff relationship with them. And part of what, I would argue, and I'm going to come back to this more directly later, what goes into wisdom is a cultivation of both active open-mindedness for inference (indicates Good for theories) and mindfulness for insight (indicates S1), and then what [-] coordinates them together (indicates S1 and S2)? How are they coordinated together? How do I optimize the opponent—not adversarial—how do I optimize the opponent processing between them? I want to come back to that and explore that in detail with you. Because I can't push this any farther, because as we push this farther, we're getting farther and farther away from Stanovich's theory and moving in towards a theory that I myself am going to propose to you, the work I've done with Leo Ferraro. And then, sort of, critically reflect on that. So I need you to remember this for when we come back to more explicitly talk about a theory of wisdom. And to be fair to Stanovich, he's ultimately not offering a theory of wisdom. And I think when he talks about rationality, he really means theoretical rationality, as opposed to what we might call practical or therapeutic rationality (indicates Therapy).

Okay. I want to stop here though, and [-] continue on with our investigation now of explicit theories of wisdom, but I want to sort of pull one thing out of our discussion from Stanovich before we leave Stanovich's good company. I want to use somebody else's work to extend that a bit and to just add more teeth to this claim that rationality is ultimately an existential issue.

Intelligence, Rationality, Wisdom

A way of understanding what Stanovich says is the following (Fig. 10a) (writes Intelligence). When I use intelligence to learn the psychotech and the cognitive style, I can use intelligence to actually improve (draws a circular

arrow from Intelligence to intelligence) how I'm using my intelligence. I can use my intelligence to improve how the competencies are optimizing, and I can therefore overall enhance my capacity for relevance realization. We can think of that as rationality (writes Rationality beside the circular arrow).

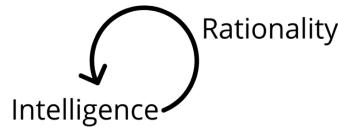


Fig.10a

But something else is emerging out of this, which, I'm only suggesting now, but we may perhaps be able to use our rationality to improve our rationality (Fig. 10b) (draws a circular arrow from Rationality to Rationality), to make it more optimal overall. And I would suggest to you, that's going to be crucial to wisdom (writes Wisdom beside the second circular arrow). That's going to be an essential feature, I would argue—not everybody agrees with me on this I'm trying to be really clear about this—but I would argue that that (indicates Fig. 10b) is a place in which we can find the locus for understanding the nature of wisdom, how it relates to rationality and how it relates to intelligence. What the nature of this (indicates the circular arrow pointing to Rationality) is we're going to have to come back to one more time (taps Rationality). Please remember when you see this word (Rationality) that I am not equating it to logicality or intelligence, I've given you long arguments, but I've tried to expand this notion. It's as much more about the reliable and systematic ability to overcome self-deception and to afford the enhancement of development and meaning in life. That's what I mean by that. Okay. So (taps Wisdom). Let's keep this in mind (indicates Fig. 10b).

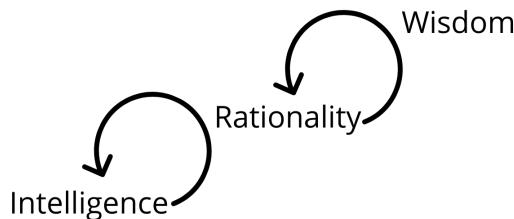


Fig. 10b

Let's take some time now to take a look at some more explicit theories of wisdom. I can't look at them all. This is a growth industry. I'm going to a

conference tomorrow that has a lot of the people that are working in this. And it's going to be a discussion to try and see if we can come to some consensus about this, precisely because it is such an important topic. A lot of good work has been done on it, but again, because there is such a multitude of viewpoints, getting a clear consensus on this is going to be a theoretical challenge.

The Existential Aspect Of Rationality

Okay. I want to, as I said, do one more thing before I do that before I move to the explicit theories. And I want to show you, I want to show you a bit about this (Fig. 11) (writes Intelligence with a circular arrow pointing to itself). And the point about this is to bring out something that Stanovich is not addressing, which is the existential aspect of rationality, the degree to which we identify with our higher cognitive processes.



Fig. 11

Okay (erases the board). So this is the work of [-] Carol Dweck, and [her] work on mindset (writes Mindset beside Dweck). She has a book entitled that, and this is, of course, is again, an ongoing thing it's been taking up in a lot of different research.

So I want to describe an experiment to you. And then I want to sort of challenge a little bit a potential ambiguity or confusion in Dweck that I think we can clarify by making use of this work from Stanovich. So Dweck did the following thing. She brought—she has a whole bunch of experiments, but let's talk about one. She brought in a bunch of school children and she randomly assigned them to three groups (Fig. 12a) (draws three squares vertically): group A, group B, and group C (writes A, B, or C inside each box respectively).

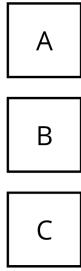


Fig. 12a

Mindset: Fixed And Malleable View

Now, Dweck talks about two different ways in which you can set your mind towards your traits. And the trait that's really crucial [-] is Intelligence. So she talks about two views you can have. Two ways in which you can set your mind (underlines Mindset). Now it's a mindset because it's not just a belief, it's the way in which you are identifying with. It's the way in which you feel you are embodying the traits we're talking about. So (Fig. 13a) (writes Fixed beside Mindset) you can have a fixed view of your intelligence, or a malleable view (writes Malleable beside Mindset). In the fixed view, you think intelligence is fixed, basically at birth or early on. And then once it's locked in, there's not much you can do with it. So, for example, my height is a fixed trait. There's not a lot I can do to modify it. It's a fixed trait. My weight is a much more malleable trait. I can change. It can—it's quite variable. It can change quite a bit. So you may think that intelligence is more like my height. You're sort of born with it, you're fixed, you got this number assigned, and that's it. Or intelligence is malleable. It can develop and change.



Fig. 13a

Now notice your behavior is going to be different if you think intelligence is fixed. If you think intelligence is fixed (writes Fixed intelligence), your attitude towards error (Fig. 14a) (writes Error under Fixed intelligence) is that error will reveal that you have a defect in a non-changeable trait. It'll reveal—it'll permanently disclose that you are not smart. So fixed intelligence tends to turn error into permanent revelation (draws an arrow

from Error and writes Permanent revelation). If I make mistakes, that will show that I have low intelligence. And once everybody knows that, including myself, there's nothing I can do about it. And then I'm doomed to being a stupid person.

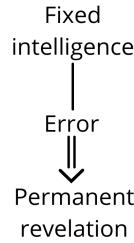


Fig. 14a

If you have the malleable view of intelligence (writes Malleable view beside Fixed intelligence, adds View to Fixed intelligence), error doesn't do that for you (Fig. 14b) (writes Error below Malleable view). [-] Error points towards the skills I'm using. I need better skills. Or the effort I'm putting in (writes Skills and Effort below Error). I need to put in more effort. Because if it's malleable, I can do things to change it. So the error [-] is basically pointing [out that] you need to make some changes. You need to cultivate more skills. You need to cultivate more effort.

Now, notice something right away, please. Notice how the fixed view (draws an arrow from Fixed view to Error) focuses you on the product? It focuses you—you just get fixated on the error. "Oh no!" The Malleable view focuses you—remember the key of rationality? It focuses you on the process (draws an arrow from Error to Skills effort). The process.

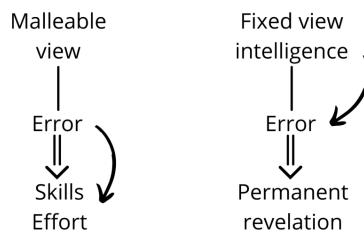


Fig. 14b

So she has a lot of experiments showing that the fixed view and the malleable view have a huge impact on your behavior [-]. But how can you trigger people into this [-]? If you were in an authority position, like being a

teacher at a school, one way you can trigger the mode — and this is really a mode, the mode that people are in — is how you praise them, the kind of feedback you give them (Fig. 13b) (writes Praise above Dweck). If I praise you using trait language, like "You're so smart, you're so bright." That's going to tend to trigger [Fixed] orientation. If I praise you for the process, "Wow! You're [-] using a really good skill. You're putting in a lot of effort [into] that." That's going to make the process salient to you. The more I make this (indicates Fixed view) salient, the more you're going to be in that mode. The more I make this (indicates Malleable view) salient, the more you're going to be in that mode. So I can praise the trait (writes Trait beside Praise). Or I can praise the process (writes Process beside Praise). I think about how important this is to parenting or schooling.

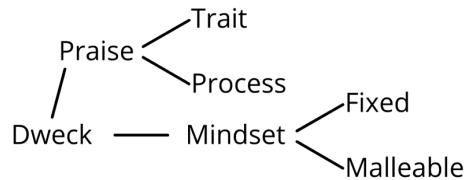


Fig. 13b

Okay. So let's go back to the experiment. We have these three groups (Fig. 12b), the C group is the control group. They're all given a set of problems that have been pre-tested for [-] grade 4. They could all solve these problems. They're challenging, but they're all solvable. And they all solved them. So all groups solved them (checks each box). But group A is praised for its trait (writes Trait beside group A). Group B is praised for the process (writes Process beside group B). And then group C has given the neutral, just acknowledgement that, "Oh, the praises we used succeeded so well in that problem." Okay? So neutral (writes Neutral beside group C).

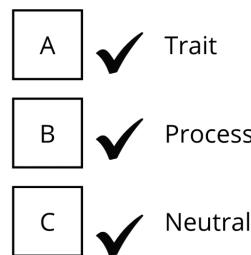


Fig. 12b

So the idea is this (indicates Trait) is going to trigger these people into the fixed view (indicates Fixed view), this (indicates Process) is going to trigger people into the malleable view (indicates Malleable view). So now what you do is, you give the kids a bunch of tests. You ask, which ones want to take on some more challenging problems. Notice what I'm doing here. I'm looking for need for cognition. Looking for need for cognition.

[-] This group (Group A) says "No. I don't want to try harder problems." (Fig. 12c) (draws a southeast pointing arrow and a line pointing northeast)." "Why?" Because if they try harder problems, there's a very good chance that they will generate error, and then error will generate the recognition that they're less intelligent, and then they're permanently stained with that, permanently marked.

The [Group B] process people say, "Yeah, I'd like to try harder problems." (draws a northeast pointing arrow beside Group B). They have a need for cognition.

Group C's [-], of course, neutral. (draws arrow to the right)

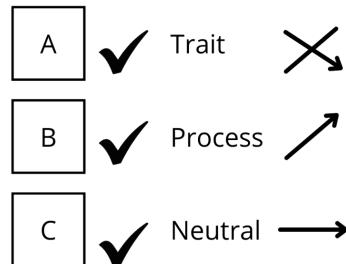


Fig. 12c

Then you give them some harder problems and ask, do they enjoy them? Group A: "I do not enjoy this." (Fig. 12d) (draws a southeast pointing arrow beside Group A) Group B: "Yeah, I enjoy this." Group C: Neutral (draws a horizontal arrow beside Group C). Now, here's the crucial thing.

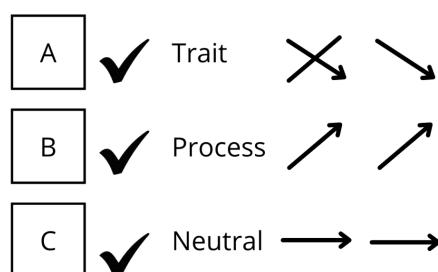


Fig. 12d

Now you give them a set of problems that were equal in difficulty to the first set of problems. You give them a set of problems that were equal in difficulty to the first set of problem. This has all been massively pre-tested, so it's safe. And what you find is this Group [C] does about the same, (Fig. 12e) (draws a horizontal arrow beside Group C), Group [B] does much [better], and Group A does much [worse] than it did before.

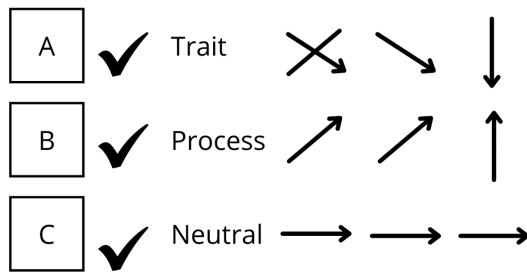


Fig. 12e

And now I want to extend this, and notice how this is starting to fold into a kind of self-deception. You ask these kids to write — I believe the experiment was done in America. You ask these people to write to a student in Germany that they will never meet, by the way, and report how they did on the experiment. So these two groups [Groups B and C] (Fig. 12f) (draws a + sign beside Group B and C) largely tell the truth. [-] 40% of [Group A] people (writes 40% beside Group A) lie about their performance.

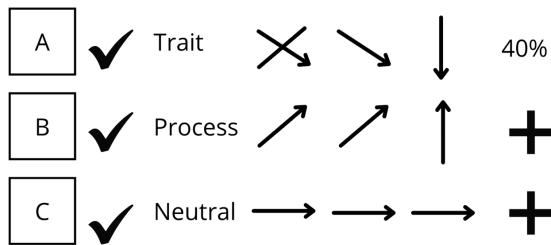


Fig. 12f

Okay. What am I trying to show you? I'm trying to show you the way you frame yourself, the way you identify with your processing, has a huge impact on your problem-solving ability, your proclivity for self-deception, and your need for cognition. Rationality is an existential thing. It is not just an informational processing thing.

Now. One thing that comes out of this is the question. But is intelligence fixed or malleable? And Dweck is not quite clear about that. The evidence is pretty clear that there's a few things you can do to modify your intelligence. There's some suggestion that long-term mindfulness practice, by enhancing attention and working memory, can improve your measures of general intelligence. But by and large, intelligence is fixed. It's not that malleable. And then you may say, "Oh, then this whole thing is based on lying to the kids." Right? Basically getting them to relate to intelligence and something malleable. Not really, not really at all because what we're actually talking about here, and that's what I've been continually alluding to here is that something that is terrifically, there's a way in which intelligence is terrifically malleable.

And this is exactly what mindsetting is. (Fig. 10a) (writes Intelligence and draws a circular arrow pointing to Intelligence) The way in which intelligence recursively relates to itself is a way in which we can think about it being [-] malleable. [-] A better way of talking about this, is that Intelligence is fixed (writes Rationality beside the circular arrow of Intelligence) and this is what Stanovich argues, but Rationality is highly malleable. And then here's Stanovich's main point about this. We care too much for intelligence and not enough for rationality. Because, yes, intelligence is highly predictive of all these things. And that's why measurements of [g] are such powerful predictors. But if I wanted to know something about you now, following Stanovich's argument, I want to know not how intelligent you are (indicates Intelligence), I want to know how Rational you are. (indicates Rationality) And that is highly malleable.

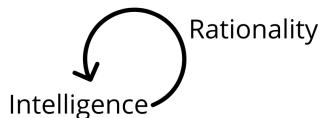


Fig. 10a

Okay. So what I'm trying to show you is that rationality is an existential issue. It's about how you're identifying with your own cognitive processing, and the way in which that identification process (indicates Intelligence) can impede how you're applying and using an intelligence, or it can enhance it. And then there's the possibility (indicates the circular arrow around

Intelligence) of cultivating the right kind of recursion and identity, the right kinds of cognitive styles.

So somehow we have to put processes of identification, processes of coordinating cognitive styles together, and we can get back a clear path for becoming much more rational. And as I'm suggesting to you, therefore much more wise. Because if we use rationality to better learn how to use rationality, and identify with our rationality, (Fig.10b) (draws a circular arrow around Rationality), then, of course, I'm suggesting to you that is wisdom (writes Wisdom). And as I promised, we should now [-] turn to some of the explicit, psychological theories of wisdom.

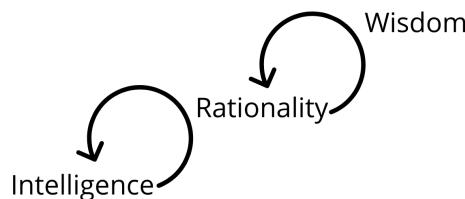


Fig. 10b

I can't, as I've already mentioned, I can't do all of them. I'm going to zero in on four theories that I think are quite representative of central ideas in the psychology of wisdom. And then I will then propose, I'll propose my theory, the work I've done with Leo Ferraro. And I'll put that into sort of dialogue with these existing theories, as well as critiquing the theory the work that I did with Leo, and then ultimately what we want to do is resituate that account of wisdom into its connection with the cultivation of meaning and the pursuit of enlightenment. We will take a look at that next time.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 42 Notes

[**Jonathan Baron**](#)

Jonathan Miller Baron is a Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania in the science of decision-making.

[**Dual processing theory**](#)

In psychology, a dual process theory provides an account of how thought can arise in two different ways, or as a result of two different processes.

Daniel Kahneman

Daniel Kahneman is an Israeli psychologist and economist notable for his work on the psychology of judgment and decision-making, as well as behavioral economics, for which he was awarded the 2002 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences.

Book Mentioned: Thinking Fast and Slow - [Buy Here](#)

Jacquelyn Baker-Sennett

Stephen J. Ceci

Stephen J. Ceci is an American psychologist at Cornell University. He studies the accuracy of children's courtroom testimony (as it applies to allegations of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect), and he is an expert in the development of intelligence and memory.

Publication mentioned: [Clue-Efficiency and Insight: Unveiling the Mystery of Inductive Leaps](#)

Gregg D. Jacobs, Ph.D

Book Mentioned: The Ancestral Mind: Reclaim the Power - [Buy Here](#)

John D. Teasdale

John D. Teasdale was a leading researcher at Oxford University, and then in the Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit in Cambridge.

Carol Dweck

Carol Susan Dweck is an American psychologist. She is the Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. Dweck is known for her work on mindset.

Book Mentioned: Mindset - [Buy Here](#)

Robert J Sternberg

Robert J. Sternberg (born December 8, 1949) is an American psychologist and psychometrician. He is Professor of Human Development at Cornell University.

Book Mentioned: Why Smart People Can Be So Stupid - [Buy Here](#)

Keith E. Stanovich

Keith E. Stanovich is Emeritus Professor of Applied Psychology and Human Development, University of Toronto and former Canada Research Chair of Applied Cognitive Science.

Book Mentioned: What Intelligence Tests Miss - [Buy Here](#)

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 43 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Wisdom and Virtue

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis.

Last time, we took a look at the work of Stanovich and culminating ideas coming out of the rationality debate. Tried to expand the notion for you the need for cognition, talked a little bit more about problem finding and the generation of a problem nexus, and then also the affective component of that, wonder and curiosity, and sort of balancing them off together. And then more specifically looked at Stanovich's theory of foolishness, which he calls dysrationalia.

And we looked at the idea of dual processing, S1 (intuitive/fast) and S2 (deliberate/slow). And the idea that what makes you foolish is S1's

functioning that makes you leap to conclusions, interferes with the inferential processing of S2. You leap to conclusions inappropriately, and that's what causes you to be biased in your processing, self-deceptive, foolish, et cetera. And then what active open-mindedness does, is it foregrounds S2 and protects it from undue interference from S1; and that's all very good in a theoretical context, but we took a look at the work of Jacobs and Teasdale and said, but in a [-] therapeutic context, the opposite is the case. What you need is you need that machinery of leaping to work well. And we took a look at the work of Baker-Sennett, and Ceci showing that that ability to leap, cognitive leaping, is actually very powerfully predictive of insight. And that's what you need in therapy. You need insight. Powerful kinds of insight to break you out of the ways in which you're confronting existential entrapment and inertia, ignorance; and you cannot infer your way through a transformative qualitative change.

So I proposed and Teasdale also has independently proposed this, that we need a cognitive style that foregrounds S1, puts us into a state for triggering insight and tends to background and constrain S2 processing, that inferential, argumentative processing. And that's mindfulness. We [-] have evidence that mindfulness facilitates insight, and mindfulness is also increasingly being incorporated into therapeutic settings, precisely for its capacity to generate cognitive flexibility and afford insight. So we're noticing that what we're needing is—because the relationship between S1 and S2 is opponent and not adversarial—we're going to need some higher order way of coordinating these two cognitive styles, active open-mindedness and mindfulness, so that we can optimize the enhancement in rationality of the relevance realization that is at the core of our intelligence.

And then I took the time before we passed to explicit [-] psychological theories of wisdom to note this idea that how you are relating to your intelligence and applying your intelligence to itself (Fig. 1) (writes Intelligence and draws an arrow from it pointing back to itself). The degree to which you problematize your own intelligence and try and improve it, we can see that as rationality (writes Rationality). And then [-] I proposed to you the possibility that when I do this (draws an arrow from Rationality pointing to Rationality), when I recursively and reflectively use my rationality to enhance and optimize my rationalities, by enhancing perhaps the relationship

between the component styles of mindfulness and active open-mindedness, then I am moving towards wisdom (writes Wisdom). We took a look at that.

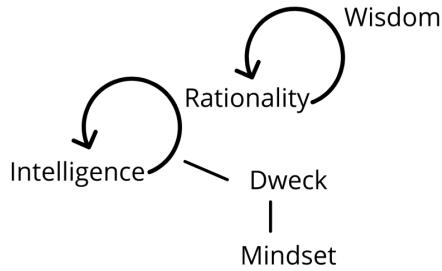


Fig. 1

And in connection with this (emphasizes the circular arrow for Intelligence), we took a look at the work of Dweck (writes Dweck beside Intelligence) and again, making the argument that the way you relate to your higher cognitive processes, your meaning making, problem solving capacity is not just intellectual or information processing, it's deeply existential. And we saw the work on mindsetting (writes Mindset below Dweck) and that the way you identify with your intelligence, the way you're framing, how you're identifying with your intelligence has a tremendous impact on your need for cognition, your problem solving, your behavior, your proclivity towards deception, self-deception, et cetera.

So we've learned a lot along the way that I think has given us a good framework with which we can critically and constructively engage with some of the representative theories of wisdom. Let's remember earlier on that we already took a look at a central review of some of those theories—the work of McKee and Barber. Showing us that they were not trying to give a comprehensive theory of wisdom, they were just trying to find a central feature. And the central feature was seeing through illusion and into reality. And then we took that up as: How does one get comprehensively, reliably, systematically better at dealing with self deception? And that's how we got into the rationality debate. That's how we're here. So we've done a lot to unpack that intuition. Well, it's more than an intuition. It's a conclusion of the [-] very careful argument made by McKee & Barber, that at the core of wisdom is, what I would argue, rationality, the systematic and reliable ability to overcome self-deception.

The Connection Between Wisdom And Virtue

Now let's take all of this [-] and let's put it into dialogue with some existing theories. The first theory I want to take a look at isn't a comprehensive theory of wisdom. But nevertheless, it's instructive, because it brings up some core components of a theory of wisdom and that's something that's exemplary. Something we need to consider. It discusses the relationship between wisdom and virtue, which is an idea that's taken up explicitly by one of the core theories of wisdom, which is the work of Baltes & Staudinger known as the Berlin paradigm. But before we do that, in order to examine the connection between wisdom and virtue, I want to take a look at the work of Schwartz and Sharpe (writes Schwartz and Sharp 2006). [-]

Later on, there was a book written—I think in 2010—called *Practical Wisdom*, which is much more extensive, but I'm relying on this article because I think that was a sort of clear and concise presentation of the argument. The article is called [Practical Wisdom: Aristotle Meets Positive Psychology](#). Aristotle you know about, he's been invoked and discussed repeatedly. Positive psychology, remember we talked about this when we were talking about 4E cognitive science. Remember what positive psychology is about... Positive psychology is the idea that we should study the mind, not only how it breaks down into its parts, we should also study it in terms of how it excels as an integrated system as a whole, because that excellence, that excelling beyond, can often reveal powers and principles that work within our mind, that normal cognition and pathological cognition do not reveal. So positive psychology studies states that are considered excellent.

Schwartz and Sharpe are interested in [-] some work done by Peterson, not Jordan [B.] Peterson, another Peterson. Peterson and Seligman, where they're discussing virtue as a form of human excellence. And so they list a bunch of virtues, and Schwartz and Sharpe sort of stand aside from that. And they note some difficulties with this idea of a list of virtues: that you should be honest, you should be courageous, things like that.

Notice what we have here. The presentation of the virtues carries with it the strong implication that they're logically independent from each other, or to use language you're familiar with, what we're given is a feature list of

virtues. We're given a feature list of virtues (Fig. 2) (draws several horizontal lines parallel to each other) without any indication of how they relate to each other. In fact, there seems to be the assumption that they're logically independent from each other. A very questionable assumption. Instead, what we should be looking for as a feature schema (draws a bracket beside the horizontal lines), we should be looking for a structural functional organization that helps to explicate and explain how virtues relate to each other.

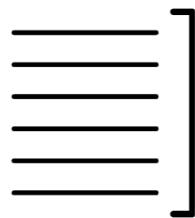


Fig. 2

So it's important to note that the feature list carries with it the implication that what you should simply do is maximize each virtue—and right away that tells you an inadequacy of the feature list. If I maximize honesty, if I'm always as honest as I can possibly be, I will at times be cruel. I will have given up on kindness. If I meet people and just say, "Oh, I need to tell you, you're looking uglier than you did yesterday." I need to tell you that because it's being honest, maximally honest. We don't think of that person as being excellent. We think of that person as being an asshole. And so that's important.

That's important right away to notice that we're not trying to maximize the virtues. We're trying to get some optimal relationship between them. And the ancient [-] Greeks had a [-] stronger version of this. They had the idea that the virtues were actually significantly interdependent with each other. And there's two ways in which they could be interdependent. They could form an interdependent system, or they could all be different versions of some core ability. I might come back to that if I have time, but I want to get into the core argument.

So the core argument is, we should talk about the relationship between the virtues. And as soon as we do that, we can see some important issues coming

to bear. So what they do is they talk about a couple of situations in which we can see virtues in conflict with each other.

So one example they give is, [-] you're a bridesmaid, and time is running out, and you're with the [-] intended bride, [-] and [she's] trying on wedding dresses and time is running out, and [she's] asking you, "Well, how do I look?"

So you're caught between being honest, being kind, and being helpful. You could just be totally kind. "You look wonderful. Oh, you're beautiful." That's maybe not the right thing to do. You could be honest. "You look ugly; it's hideous; such a mistake." Or you could try to be helpful. "We're running out of time..." But then what do you say? And how do you balance them? Do you just give up honesty? Do you just lie? No. Do you give up honesty? Kindness? Are you just brutal? No. Do you forget that you're trying to be helpful and you're under time constraints? No! What do you do?

Another example they give is [-], you're grading an assignment for a student. Now the student has made terrific progress (Fig. 3) (draws a northeast pointing arrow). They've really overcome some barriers. They've gone from a low C, and they've been improving, and they're getting into a high B. Now if I [-] try to grade this paper as completely 'objectively' as I possibly can, there's a good chance that that feedback will stop (draws an arrow pointing at the tip of the first arrow) that arc, will stop that growth, and the person will remain a B student. But if I just give them a little bit of encouragement, if I extend it (writes A)... is this lying? Because what am I doing with marking? Am I marking what they've done? Or am I also simultaneously indicating what they can do? So if I give them a little bit more, if I push them into the A range (writes - beside A) that might actually, like in a self-fulfilling prophecy, lift them into [being] an A student. And what's my moral obligation here? Is my moral obligation to give them brutally objective truth, or is my moral obligation to make them and afford them to be the best student they can possibly be? What do I do?

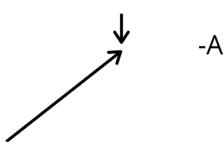


Fig. 3

What these dilemmas make clear is that the virtues are not independent from each other. And we're not trying to maximize between them. We're trying to optimize between them in an important way.

Wisdom As The Higher Order Ability Dealing With Relevance

Now this brings up some very important issues. [-] When we take a look at the dilemmas, we start to see some important issues of conflict. We start to see some important things about our relationship to the virtues. Let me read a quote from you. "Real life situations do not come labeled with the needed virtues or strengths attached." Notice how this is the categorization, the demonstrative reference, and all the stuff we talked about. And notice how they zero right in on it, because notice what they say next. "There is thus the problem of..." — here it is, and this word is emphasized in the original — "... there's the problem of *relevance*." Which one is the relevant virtue to bring to bear? [-] Is honesty the relevant virtue in these examples? Is mentorship the relevant virtue? Good guidance? Kindness? Being helpful? What are the relevant virtues? And, of course, what's also shown, is the virtues can conflict with each other. They often pull you into different kinds of behavior.

Now let's bring another thing back we often, and this is something that Schwartz and Sharpe are gonna make a lot out of. We often represent virtues with rules, and we've talked about this when we talked about rules. [-] This is a virtue rule: Be kind (writes Be kind). Do you remember the problem with that? That rule doesn't specify its conditions. It doesn't specify — this is the problem with specifications — it doesn't specify its conditions of application. Being kind to my son is not the same thing as being kind to my partner. It's not the same thing as being kind to my students. It's not the same thing as being kind to my friends. Not the same thing as being kind to a stranger. Not the same thing as being kind to a stranger on the street, and being kind to a stranger, somebody you've just met at a funeral. These are all different!

Remember that? That's why you can't capture relevance, your cognitive commitment in a rule because you'd have to just get an ever-expanding

penumbra of rules for how to apply and specify that rule. Rule application, specification, depends on relevance realization. In fact, unlike Schwartz and Sharpe, I think all the problems they list, the problem of relevance, it's clearly a problem of relevance realization, the problem of conflict is a problem of determining which is more important. And the problem, as I've just argued, of specification is also a problem of determining relevance.

So they specified these three interconnected problems as I've argued: Relevance, Conflict and Specificity. I would add a fourth that they don't talk about. And this has to do with the fact that sometimes the best response to a situation is to realize that I need to develop a virtue that I do not have. It's an aspirational response. Rather than selecting which of my virtues should I apply? Or how do I specify it? It might be, "Oh, geez, I'm lacking a virtue that I need. I need to cultivate a virtue that I do not have." So I would add in there, in addition to the problem of relevance, conflict and specificity, there's the problem of Development. The need to aspire to acquire virtues you do not have. And I've already shown you how much that developmental process is dependent on capacity for insight and qualitative transformative experience, et cetera.

So what are they proposing? They're proposing that we need a higher order. So here's the virtues (erases the bracket beside the horizontal lines). We need a higher order ability that deals with relevance (Fig. 4a) (places a bracket above the horizontal lines and right Relevance). They had put it as a list, but I've tried to show you how they're related. Conflict. [-] Specification. Development. (writes Conflict, Specification, Development under Relevance). Well, what would that be? Well, they argued that's Wisdom. (writes Wisdom).

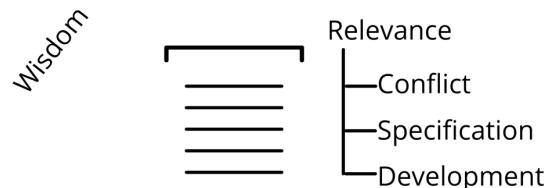


Fig. 4a

Wisdom is what you need. Notice the argument they're making here. Given the fact that they are not logically independent (indicates the horizontal lines), given that in very many situations, all of these issues (indicates

Relevance, Conflict, Specification, Development) are brought to bear, and I'm arguing and I think it's fair, that it centers on the ability to determine relevance. You need wisdom in order to be [-] virtuous. In fact, one of the interpretations of the [-] ancient Greek idea of the interdependence of the virtues is not that the virtues are all constraining on each other, but that each virtue is just a particular way in which you're wise in a situation. (Fig. 4b) (draws many arrows from wisdom pointing to each of the horizontal lines) So to be kind is how to be most wise in this situation; to be honest is how to be most wise in that situation. So that version of the interdependence of the virtues really, really tightly ties the virtues to wisdom. Either way, there is a deep connection between the cultivation and the pursuit of a virtuous way of life, and the cultivation of wisdom.

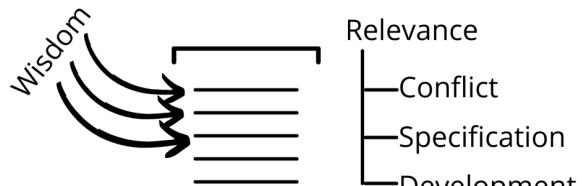


Fig. 4b

Sophia Vs. Phronesis

Now, this is where Schwartz and Sharpe, and this is why their book is entitled Practical Wisdom, and that's why the title of the article is Practical Wisdom. Because they call back to Aristotle's distinction (Fig. 5a) (writes Aristotle's distinction). This is the distinction between Sophia, which is in philosophia, and Phronesis (writes Sophia and Phronesis beside Aristotle's distinction). Both of these words can be translated as wisdom. This (Sophia) is often translated as theoretical wisdom, and then that becomes problematic because that's often assimilated to our idea of theoretical knowledge. And then we lose a lot of what Sophia is. And then Phronesis is often translated as practical wisdom.

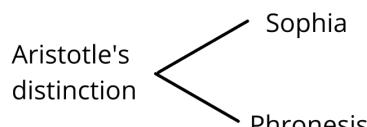


Fig. 5a

So what Schwartz and Sharpe want to argue is that Phronesis is what you need for virtue. (Fig. 5b) (writes Virtue below Phronesis) Phronesis is the ability to be very contextually sensitive, to exercise good judgment, to know what to do in this situation. So it overlaps very considerably with the relationship between procedural knowledge, knowing how to do various things, knowing how to be honest, knowing how to be kind, and perspectival knowing, a situational awareness of what is best fitted here, what is most appropriate for here.

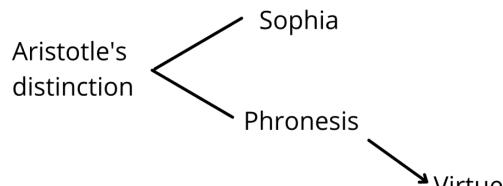


Fig. 5b

And so, you can see clearly why phronesis is relevant. And one of the things they argue, which is very interesting, is they really resist (indicates Phronesis), and I think appropriately, trying to understand Phronesis as having rules. (Fig. 5c) (writes Having rules below Phronesis) So here they're very sort of critical of a Kantian idea of being virtuous as sort of specifying as your behavior—whether or not this is Kant's view, it's not something I'm going to get into. This is certainly a view that many people have. That the point, the way in which you are virtuous, is to have a set of rules, moral commandments, and that you follow those rules as best you can. And then what that can lead to, and Schwartz has been critical of this elsewhere in some talks you can find on YouTube, for example, this can lead to the attempt to try (writes Legislation) and legislate everything, to try and specify everything, in term—of how we should behave in terms of rules.

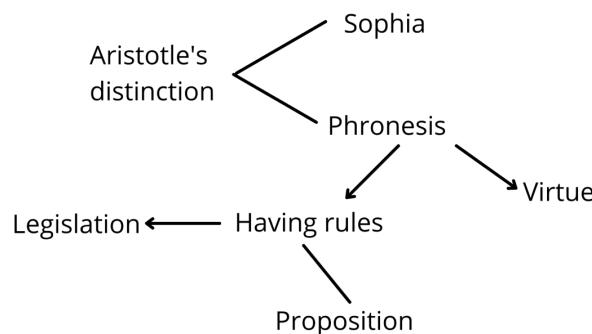


Fig. 5c

And they're critical of that because, first of all, it's impossible. Notice the example of: Be kind. If I try to make a law that we should be kind, then I have to make laws about all these different ways in which I specify being kind, I'd have to make laws that tell me when I should give a preference to kindness over honesty, across all possible... like it's just impossible. But you can get into an illusion that you can somehow replace people becoming wise, with people having laws.

Now, obviously I am not proposing anarchy, that we shouldn't have laws, et cetera. That's not Schwartz's point, he's not proposing that; that's absurd. What he's proposing is to step back and realize that that we should have this balance between proposing legislation, and requiring from people that they cultivate wisdom.

Okay. So he's making that argument and I think that's something that we should take into account. We should ask ourselves not just: Will this legislation reduce harm? That's a really important question, for sure. But we should also ask this important question. Will this legislation tend to make people less likely to pursue the cultivation of wisdom and virtue? Schwartz argues you have to think about that, too. I think that's an argument that should be taken seriously. And that's why, of course, he keeps making it, and he's getting a considerable audience around it.

The Need For Both Sophia and Phronesis

Okay. Let's go back to the main point. They tend to leave this (draws an arrow from Sophia) out because they tend to associate Sophia, I think, unfairly, with having rules. They assimilated, I think, too much to theoretical knowledge and the possession of propositions. (writes Proposition below Having rules) Of course, rules are propositions; you're proposing what people should do. Proposing very strongly. And they see Sophia as theoretical knowledge, largely propositional.

I think that's an unfair representation of Sophia, and other people have pointed this out. [-] This (indicates Phronesis) is about being very contextually sensitive, and that's very important because that allows me to

generate the process needed in this situation. I need to start behaving in this balance between being kind and honest. But I also need this (indicates Sophia). And instead of thinking of this as rules and the possession of propositions, sort of analogous to the Kantian model, let's think of this instead as the awareness of principles (Fig. 5d) (writes Principles beside Sophia). So phronesis is about getting you into a process (writes Process beside Phronesis), the contextual sensitivity, the perspectival situational awareness, activating the right procedures in the appropriate way so that I fit the situation.

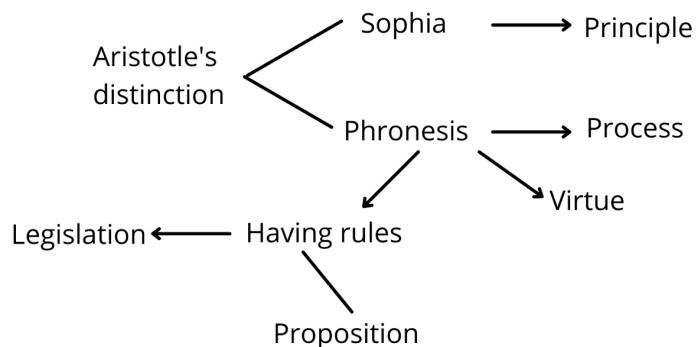


Fig. 5d

That's great. But I also need a cross-contextual sensitivity. I need to pick up on things that are generalizable across different contexts. And, of course, that is partially what we're trying to do with our laws (indicates Legislation). Hence the connection. But to reduce this (indicates Principles) to just the ability to generate propositional knowledge, I think is a mistake. That's not what sophia is. Sophia is something like a deep kind of ontological depth perception. It's to be able to see deep underlying principles. Because what I need to know really, and this was Aristotle's point, I need both of them. I need to know how to put principles into processes. (Fig. 5e) (draws arrow from Principles to Process) And I need to know how to regulate processes with principles (draws an arrow from Process to Principles). That's what it is to put a principle into practice, and to practice in a principled manner.

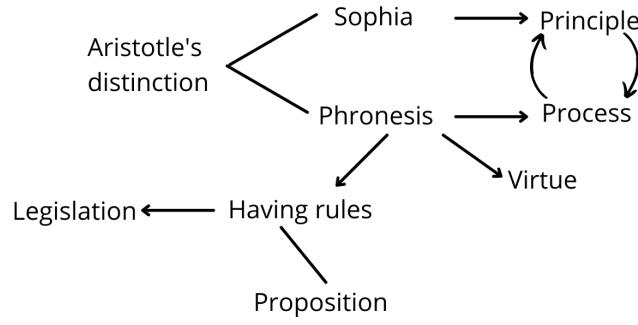


Fig. 5e

So, I would argue against Schwartz and Sharpe, that you need both sophia and phronesis. You need something that is trying to pick up on cross contextual invariants, and you need something that is designing, helping you to — and of course this is in line with the relevance realization model, I've argued — something that is the aspect of wisdom that is about contextual sensitivity. What's different here? What's special here? How do I fit myself to this specific situation, as opposed to, how do I generalize across these many situations? And what I want is an opponent relationship between them, so that I can discover powerful principles, and put them into effective practice. And so that I can regulate my practices with well-justified principles. So I think that that's a very crucial issue.

Phronesis In Terms Of Expertise

There's one other issue about Schwartz and Sharpe that I want to come back to. I think they're right in saying that phronesis is a kind of know-how, procedural knowledge. I think it's more. It's also perspectival and potentially participatory, but at least perspectival.

[-] They talk about this in terms of the language of expertise (Fig. 5f) (writes Expertise below Phronesis) of being an expert, which is different. And what they're trying to do with that contrast is, an expert doesn't necessarily possess the best theory. They don't [-] say that. The expert has the best know-how. Expertise is a kind of excellence in know-how. I think because they've focused on phronesis as separate from sophia, and they've thought of know-how without thinking also of the perspectival knowing, I think this is a mistake.

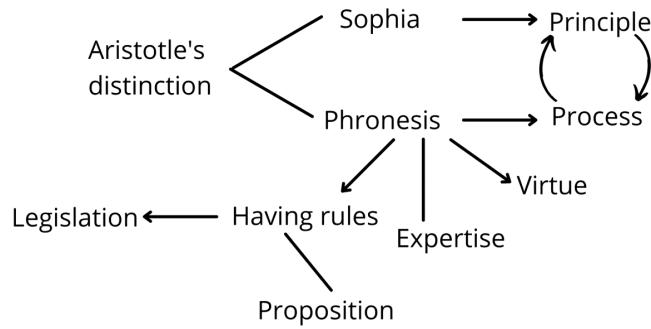


Fig. 5f

Here's why. I think that expertise... I'm trying to be careful here... There's a way which we can equivocate with this word. [-] We sometimes use this to mean just "good." (Fig. 5g) (writes Good beside Expertise). Like, Excellent! That's what expertise is, and that's a very loose way of talking. But if you're trying to use it within psychology in a more precise manner, expertise is a domain-specific thing (writes Domain specific). And we've talked about this before.

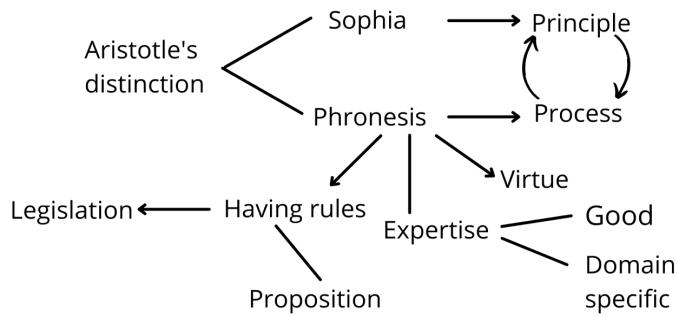


Fig. 5g

So I can become a tennis expert. My know-how can rise to a level of authority, and notice that my being an expert in tennis [-] doesn't give me any special authority over squash. In fact, my expertise in tennis can dramatically interfere with my playing squash. So typically what happens in expertise is, it tends to be very domain specific, which is precisely why you can get very focused training on it and become very good at, like, tennis.

Here's my problem with understanding Phronesis, and therefore also the relationship with virtue on the model of expertise. The domain specificity of expertise, if we're using the current term carefully, is not what I need here. It's not what I need. And you're saying, "Ah, but phronesis is context sensitive." Yes, it is. And perhaps that's the source of the confusion. Being

context sensitive isn't the same thing as having expertise. And you say, but that sounds similar.

Well, let's pull it apart. [-] Phronesis is not like expertise in tennis, which I can only apply here. And in fact, if I try to transfer it to something even similar, it will interfere. I would argue that what phronesis is, is my ability to be sensitive in this context, and sensitive in this context, (shifting slightly), and sensitive in this context (shifting slightly again). And that is very, very different from expertise.

So what we need is a domain-general ability. This is not a contradiction. Your ability to be contextually sensitive is itself a domain-general ability. I have to be able to be contextually sensitive in many different domains. And so I'm arguing that there's a bit of confusion here. And if you pull it apart, what we need is an ability to be contextually sensitive, but in a domain general way, across many domains. So I think things like, well, intelligence and rationality, or I would argue your ability to realize relevance, which always has a contextually sensitive component to it, are much better ways of understanding phronesis than expertise. Because those ways of talking are domain general. Each one of them has an aspect that is the domain general ability to be contextually sensitive here and here and here. And that's important, because you know what, you're not foolish generally in a domain specific way. Specific domains may make you more foolish, but we all wonderfully have the ability to be foolish in almost every domain of our life! Often many domains simultaneously in a disastrous chaos!

So I would argue that we shouldn't confuse that phronesis is about context sensitivity, with expertise, which is locked to a particular domain. We should think of something much more like intelligence, rationality, relevance realization, which can apply across multiple domains, make you a general problem solver, and deal with the domain generality of your capacity for foolishness.

[-] So let's try this together. The argument for the connection between wisdom and virtue, I think is a very powerful, solid argument. The argument that that should make us more hesitant to trying to capture [-] virtue just with rules, I think that's an argument I'm sympathetic with. I think that's going in the right direction. The argument that phronesis is all we need for virtue, I

question. I think, following Aristotle, that phronesis and sophia should be in a very powerful opponent relationship, trying to get principles into processes, and processes regulated by principles, et cetera. And the idea of trying to capture the procedurality of phronesis with the notion of expertise, I think, is a confusion, as I've argued. And we should put that aside.

Okay. I now want to pick up on one of the [-] seminal psychological theories of wisdom. In many ways, this theory turned the [-] psychological investigation of wisdom into an experimental, empirical process. And so this is the important work of Baltes & Staudinger (writes Baltes and Staudinger).

It's called the Berlin wisdom paradigm. They're both working in Berlin. Obviously, they're German. And so what I want to do is go to their [article] — it's always hard to tell you what to refer to, because their work shows up in multiple articles, multiple handbooks on wisdom. But the article, I think that many people regard as sort of the seminal one is an article entitled: [“Wisdom, A Metaheuristic \(Pragmatic\) to Orchestrate Mind and Virtue Towards Excellence”](#)].[-]

So notice right here, the title tells you that they've deeply accepted the point made by Schwartz and Sharpe that there's a deep connection between wisdom and virtue. “Orchestrating mind and virtue towards excellence.” There's already the deep connection to positive psychology. But also notice something: the invocation of the term “metaheuristic” and that notion of “pragmatic” tells us that relevance realization is playing a very significant role in this theory, at least I will argue that.

Defining The Notion Of Pragmatic

So let's first of all, deal with this notion that they put in brackets of pragmatic (Fig. 6a) (writes Pragmatic), because they're sort of picking up on a couple different related, but not identical meanings associated with that term. One is having to do with the pragmatic aspects of language pragmatics (writes Pragmatic). So there's syntax, semantics and pragmatics. And we talked about this when we talked about Grice and conversational implicature, that you always are conveying much more than you're saying, and how that depends on capacity for relevance realization. So there's that

sense of dealing with how much our communication and more broadly our cognition goes beyond what we can directly propositionally represent.

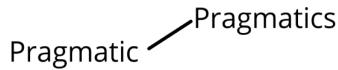


Fig. 6a

That's definitely there. There's another meaning of "pragmatics" and that has to do with "pragmatism" (Fig. 6b) (writes Pragmaticism), which I haven't talked about. I'm going to talk about it later when I talk briefly about James. And so the idea behind pragmatism is—sorry, like I said, there's so much there. But the idea about pragmatism, I would argue a way of understanding [-] James, who was one of my heroes. James was both a great psychologist and a great philosopher, [-] so he's kind of a proto-cognitive scientist. But he isn't interested just in cognition. He's interested very much in what it is to live a good life. He starts some of the earliest work on the study of mystical experiences and religion, psychological investigation. So he's just a really pivotal figure for me and for many people.

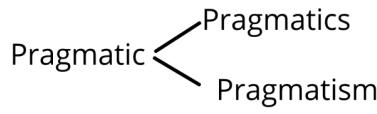


Fig. 6b

But one way, I would argue, what James was on about, is that you should evaluate your knowledge claims, ultimately, in terms of their efficaciousness, how much they can be viably used in your life in order to adapt you to the world. And so, one way of thinking about this is, your propositional claims ultimately have to be grounded in your procedural abilities. James doesn't use this language, but I could find passages in James that clearly point to it, I would argue. That your propositional knowing has to be grounded in your procedural abilities, which have to be grounded in your perspectival, which has to be grounded ultimately in your participatory. James was very interested in the phenomena of conversion, when people go through these massive identity changes and how that changes the world that they can live in.

Now, I think that's deeply right, but there are also some problems with pragmatism, and I'll come back to this, so I'll just mention it now. I think

there's a [-] potential confusion between truth and relevance. And that can be problematic. Now why does all of that matter? Well, because as I've just tried to show you, pragmatism tries to situate what James would call your intellectual claims, into this deeper lived, experienced, viable ability to fit your world, to develop your connectedness, to develop yourself.

Both of those (indicates Pragmatics and Pragmatism), I think, can plausibly be brought back together in the notion [of] what we're talking about. And then, this just goes so well with the invocation of the term "metaheuristic," a heuristic for managing your heuristics. We can draw this (indicates Pragmatic) together and this term together metaheuristic (Fig. 6c) (writes Metaheuristic beside Pragmatic). We can draw this all together, while having to do with realizing relevance. (draws an arrow from Metaheuristic and Pragmatic and writes Realizing relevance below) This is invoked, not in terms of the theoretical account I've given, but the idea that zeroing in on relevant information is crucial to wisdom, this is invoked throughout the article by Baltes and Staudinger. Let's be clear. I don't think they are explicitly making a case the way I am. What I'm saying is, they're invoking ideas and making use of them that ultimately deeply presuppose (indicates Realizing relevance) the ability for relevance realization.

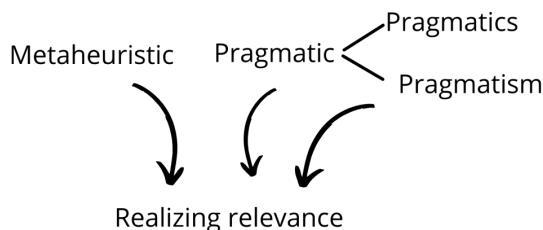


Fig. 6c

Berlin Wisdom Paradigm

Now, they have an account of the five criteria you need in order to be wise. And the point about this is to try and specify what these metaheuristics are that bring about an excellence in our life, an excellent orchestration of mind and virtue together, so that we become excellent human beings, excellent persons. They try to specify this in terms of five criteria. The point of the criteria are, these are the features that are needed to judge someone wise. And also, these are features that could be empirically investigated. Okay. So what are these criteria?

So rich factual knowledge about the fundamental pragmatics of life. This is in some sense, like sophia. This person has a deep grasp of the facts, the principles of the fundamental pragmatics of life. They also need rich procedural knowledge about the fundamental pragmatics of life. And this goes back to the McKee and Barber point. That wisdom is not so much what you know, but how you know, it's very much about knowing how to put these principles into practice into process.

Now they, of course, have now done propositional and procedural knowledge. I think they should have gone deeper. They obviously are going to need participatory knowledge, because they have to explain how we go through dramatic developmental change, because presumably qualitative change is what's needed for wisdom, hence the term excellence. And, of course, they are missing the perspectival knowing that connects the procedural knowing to specific contexts, situational awareness.

Okay, so that, I think, is important. I think they're pointing towards this perspectival knowing and how it ultimately plugs into participatory, when they invoke the next criteria, they call it lifespan contextualism. Lifespan contextualism. Like I say, this is a kind of perspectival knowing. This is the way in which you're taking the big picture, your ability to zoom out and then from that big picture, zoom in as needed. So it's this perspectival knowing, and that I think is very crucial. I think it has a lot to do with our capacities for self-regulation. We've talked about that.

Now, the next one I want to state it and then I want to challenge it. They call it relativism of values and priorities. I find that a hard criterion to be sort of tethered to. If they're using this term carefully, I don't think that many of the people that I would regard as quintessentially wise were moral relativists. I do not think Socrates or Plato were moral relativists. I think they're clearly the opposite. I think it's unlikely that the Buddha was a moral relativist, or Jesus of Nazareth was a moral relativist. I think we are falling prey to thinking that our liberal democratic values are constitutive of wisdom. I'm not arguing against these values. That is not what I am doing here. I'm arguing against tying the notion of wisdom to those values.

I think what might be on offer here, what they're actually talking about, is a capacity for tolerance. And perhaps the way we can understand that then is,

instead of a kind of relativism, we can understand it in terms that we can apply to Socrates of a fallibilism, which is a claim that you should never assert certainty. We can easily attribute that to Socrates, and it seems analogous to Jesus' regular condemnation of self-righteousness, seems to be appropriate here. So a kind of fallibilism. And then linked to something that you've heard me mentioned multiple times, humility, a recognition and appreciation of your status, your limits, et cetera. So if we bring in fallibilism and humility, rather than requiring wise people to demonstrate moral relativism, I think we can plausibly apply this criteria to many exemplars of wisdom from the past.

The fifth one, and I think this is very crucial, is recognition and management of uncertainty. Recognition and management of uncertainty. So this is to say, we're in a finitary predicament, most of the time. We can't do algorithmic processing. We cannot pursue certainty. We have to act as best we can, within unavoidable context of uncertainty. So you can see why I think this theory is sort of dripping in the machinery of relevance realization.

I think the term metaheuristic is very good. I think a metaheuristic is something that coordinates between heuristics. It might be something like an optimization within a dynamical system, like I've argued, the trade off between compression and particularization. Things like that.

They, at times though, tend to talk about this metaheuristic as a form of expertise. And I've already made the criticism that I think that's a mistake. I think that understanding wisdom as expertise is to mislead us. Again, it causes us to over-focus on the important procedural knowledge, to the exclusion of the perspectival and the participatory. It also confuses the context sensitivity with being domain specific, and we shouldn't do that. And I've made that argument, I'm not going to make it again.

Instead, I want to point out that what they tend to be arguing for, is a very comprehensive kind of cognitive flexibility and adaptability. That your cognition is flexible enough that it can adapt itself to different situations in a very efficacious manner. What's important is that they started to generate a semi-empirical work. How do you do this?

Well, you basically train independent judges to be able to evaluate these criteria in people's spoken behavior. Things like that. And then [-] you put people into various situations, often situations that might involve moral dilemmas, or other more practical challenges. And you get those people to relate on how they would deal with those difficult little situations. You try to find some situations that we would prototypically do this for. We would say: for somebody who handled themselves well in that situation, we would be quite happy with attributing wisdom to them. They'd say, "Somebody managed this situation really well, that would be good evidence for me for calling them wise."

Now what you do is, reverse engineer that. Take those situations that, if solved successfully, would generally lead to the attribution of wisdom, give them to a bunch of people, evaluate how in the answers that people are giving, not just sort of vaguely how well they answer it, but do they answer it in a way that exemplifies these five criteria? And then you can judge how well people are doing in solving these problems.

And so what you got was some of the first attempts to start to empirically measure wisdom by putting people... I mean, see what they're doing? This is analogous on how we test intelligence and rationality. We give people a bunch of tests across situations, and we try to see how they do, and then we start to generate from that a measure of how wise they are. I think this is, as I said, this is just quintessentially important.

So, one of the things I want to bring out, they talked about the cognitive styles that are important for being wise. And that is important, sort of a judicial style. Somebody who's good at making judgements. The reason why I'm not going into that detail, is that they're relying on notions from Sternberg and others about particular kinds of styles — I don't really have time to go into that in depth. So that would be a large chunk in itself. What it shows is how important the capacity for good judgment is for wisdom. And we knew that, but as I'm trying to argue, we're getting a sense of how, in terms of relevance realization, and the ability to zero in on relevant information, we're getting a sense of what that good judgment means.

The Solomon Effect

Now, one of the things I want to draw from Baltes and Staudinger, one of the experimental results—because this points to more recent and important work by Igor Grossman—is they gave people this experimental task in which they have to try and solve these problems. And they put them into three conditions.

In one condition, they could discuss the problem with a significant other before responding. In another condition, they could imagine a virtual or internal dialogue. Notice that. Imagine a virtual and internal dialogue. Remember the Stoics and internalizing Socrates? The third condition, they were just given more time to think about it.

And what they found is that the first and second group clearly outperformed group three. You're wiser if you talk to other people. [-] "Well duh!" Yeah, but if it's "duh," why do we carry around this bullshit mythology of complete individualism?

So that's one interesting finding. This goes back to the platonic dialogue; that in discussion with others, we get to a level of wisdom that we cannot get to on our own. [-] That's in itself interesting. What was interesting is, also there was no important difference between group one and group two. Talking to another person, and imagining, simulating in your mind, talking to another person, which is—that was just as good. If you can internalize other people, they can give you the metacognitive ability to overcome your biases.

Now, why [-] I think [this] is important is, I think this points to more recent work done by a colleague of mine, Igor Grossman, and I've mentioned his work already, the Solomon effect. Solomon, of course, the biblical figure of wisdom. What's going on with that talking with other people? Well, part of it, I think, is the Solomon effect.

If I describe a problem to you from the first person perspective, which I'm liable to do, especially in an individualistic culture like ours, I will tend to be very locked in. Because again, remember the whole thing about internalization? When I'm in a perspective, it's biasing me. And one of the things I can't see — my framing is often transparent to me. I can't see it. I'm seeing through it. And when I'm in the first person perspective, I'm sort of locked here in my perspective, because it is my problem. "Ah!" (holding his

hands in front of his eyes to show a narrowing view, like a horse with blinders)

If you get people to redescribe the same problem from the third person perspective — and notice the word I'm going to use — they often have an insight. They often notice something they hadn't noticed before. They pick up and make something salient or relevant that wasn't salient or relevant from within their first person perspective. So moving outside and looking back through somebody's eyes from a third person perspective on your cognition can enhance your capacity for these wisdom tasks. This is what I mean why Baltes and Staudinger, although they're not invoking it or theoretically discussing it, they are relying on perspectival knowing in their experimental work.

So we're starting to make our way through these theories of wisdom. We've taken a look at Schwartz and Sharpe. We've seen how the connection between wisdom and virtue is being established; Baltes and Staudinger are picking up on that. And they're starting to get us into some of the fundamental machinery of what it is to be a wise person.

I want to continue that next time, and also bring up some important criticisms of the work of Baltes and Staudinger. You've seen me already make one. I don't think that this ability (indicates Fig. 6c) should be understood as expertise. I'll make some other ones. And those criticisms will take us into the important seminal work on wisdom by Monika Ardelt. And then we'll also take a look at the work of Sternberg. And then I will return and propose, or at least explain to you an account, a proposal made by myself and Leo Ferraro in 2013, about how to try and draw this (indicates Fig. 6) together, in terms of this machinery (indicates Realizing relevance) that I've been advocating. And then I want to subject that theory, my own theory to, I think, some pretty significant criticisms, and then [-] I hope that will point us towards how we can then reintegrate the account of wisdom with the account of enlightenment. And ultimately re-situate us back with awakening from the meaning crisis.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 43 Notes

Paul Baltes

Paul B. Baltes was a German psychologist whose broad scientific agenda was devoted to establishing and promoting the life-span orientation of human development.

Ursula Staudinger

Ursula M. Staudinger is a German psychologist and researcher of aging.

Article Mentioned: [Wisdom: A Metaheuristic \(Pragmatic\) to Orchestrate Mind and Virtue Toward Excellence](#)

Barry Schwartz

Barry Schwartz is an American psychologist. Schwartz is the Dorwin Cartwright Professor of Social Theory and Social Action at Swarthmore College and since 2016 has been visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

Kenneth Sharpe

Article Mentioned: [Practical Wisdom: Aristotle meets Positive Psychology](#)

Book Mentioned: Practical Wisdom: The Right Way To Do The Right Thing
[- Buy Here](#)

Christopher Peterson

Christopher Peterson was the Arthur F. Thurnau professor of psychology and organizational studies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan and the former chair of the clinical psychology area.

Martin Seligman

Martin Elias Peter Seligman (/ˈselɪgmən/; born August 12, 1942) is an American psychologist, educator, and author of self-help books.

Phronesis

Phronesis is an ancient Greek word for a type of wisdom or intelligence relevant to practical action, implying both good judgement and excellence of character and habits.

Sophia

Sophia is a central idea in Hellenistic philosophy and religion, Platonism, Gnosticism and Christian theology.

Fallibilism

Broadly speaking, fallibilism is the philosophical claim that no belief can have justification which guarantees the truth of the belief, or that no beliefs are certain.

Igor Grossman

Solomon Effect (Solomon Paradox)

Grossmann and Kross have identified a phenomenon they called "the Solomon's paradox" - wiser reflections on other people's problems as compared to one's own

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 44 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Theories of Wisdom

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis.

So last time, we took a look at the theory of Schwartz and Sharpe. And that was an important theory for linking wisdom to virtue and positive

psychology. And we saw the deep connections between wisdom and the cultivation and practice of virtue. We made some criticisms of Schwartz and Sharpe. I argued that they should include sophia and not just phronesis. If you remember those, they were invoking Aristotle's two notions of wisdom and giving priority to phronesis. I think you need both, as Aristotle argued: sophia and phronesis in order to be virtuous. I also argued that their attempt to explain phronesis with expertise, I think, was confused, and we should put that aside.

And then we took from that some ideas about the developmental aspect that's, of course, central to Aristotle. Remember, he brought the developmental dimension to wisdom, and how much wisdom is [about] becoming the virtuous person. Other things I think are lacking in the theory —and we'll come back to this— that there wasn't much discussion about the connection between wisdom and meaning in life.

But we then passed to taking a look at a theory that took very seriously the connection between wisdom and virtue. And this is the seminal [-] work of Baltes and Staudinger. We took a look at the idea of the metaheuristics, pragmatics, for orchestrating mind and virtue and excellence. And they talked about the fundamental pragmatics of life. I pointed out to you that a way of making sense, conjointly, of the invocation of metaheuristics and both senses of pragmatics, is this idea that its core to wisdom is this capacity for relevance realization; obviously improved in some fundamental way, which I think means that there's integral connections between wisdom and intelligence, via the notion of rationality that we've already been developing together.

And then we took a look at the five criteria, where there was clear indications of propositional knowledge, procedural knowledge. The contextualism, I argued, can be seen as perspectival knowing. I argued against their notion of relativism, and argued instead for humility and fallibilism. [-] I'm sorry that was maybe too harsh to them. I think it's pretty clear that many of the seminal [-] wisdom figures from the past were not moral relativists or relativists in any significant way. So I strongly recommend replacing relativism with fallibilism and humility.

And then finally, the fifth criteria is that wisdom is applicable to domains in which there is uncertainty. And of course, as I've already argued, that a huge aspect of our life and our cognition, because ill-definedness, combinatorial explosion, et cetera, et cetera, which again means relevance realization is being strongly presupposed.

I want to give you some further quotes to indicate what's going on about that. So they talk about wisdom having to do with generativity, flexibility and efficiency in application. And of course the, the generativity, the flexibility, but also the efficiency, are bringing together many of the ideas that we've been talking about with relevance realization. They talk about it taking place—listen to this language—within the frame of bounded rationality. They're invoking the notion here from Simon. Bounded rationality. This is rationality that is taking place within a framing, it's taking place within the constraints of a combinatorial explosion, within the constraints of working with ill-definedness. It's a notion of rationality deeply enmeshed with relevance realization.

They talk about—these are all quotes, I'm giving you, by the way—highly complex sets of information about the meaning and conduct of life are—highly complex, okay?—are reduced quickly—listen to this!—to their essentials without being lost in the never ending process of information search—notice that combinatorial explosion directly being invoked here—that were to occur if wisdom was treated as a case of unbounded rationality. So I think it's pretty clear from all of those quotes that they are directly invoking the machinery of relevance realization.

I pointed out that they—with their criteria, they were able to begin the operationalization of wisdom, and in some of the first experimental work, they found that cognitive style in which one had excellent skills of judgment, seemed to be predictive of the ability to do well in the experiments. They also found that discussing with another person, or imagining discussing with another person, enhanced your capacity for wisdom, challenging an individualistic notion of rationality going back to Descartes, and assumed, if you remember, by Cohen in his arguments. But what's really interesting about that is, of course, this brings up the relevance of platonic dialogue, but also the Stoic idea of internalizing the sage, because the case where people

imagined talking to a significant other was just as efficacious as actually talking to a significant other. And both of those were more efficacious than just giving more time to think and reflect on your own.

I pointed out that one plausible explanation for why this works is that you're getting something like what Igor Grossman has shown with the Solomon effect; that the move to take the perspective of other people—move to a third person perspective — [-] really enhances one's ability to overcome the transparency and the bias induction of one's own perspective. And that it can be facilitated, of course, if you not only are taking the perspective of somebody who's present, but you can do that by simulating them internally. And eventually you could internalize that perspective, the way we've talked about with the Stoics internalizing Socrates. And one can learn to [-] converse with oneself, dialogue with oneself, do something like link with oneself and provoke aporia, provoke the challenge and the demand for transformative change.

I think all of this is really excellent work on their part. I noted that they also, like Schwartz and Sharpe, I think make the mistake of trying to understand wisdom in terms of expertise. And I'm not going to repeat that argument. And I think that it is a kind of fundamental mistake. I think understanding wisdom on the lines of something like rationality is a much more fruitful connection.

Further Criticism Of Baltes And Staudinger

Now, what are some further criticisms of Baltes and Staudinger? I think one of the most important criticisms I would make, other than the ones I've made about expertise and not being very clear on explicating the role of perspectival knowing—that's kind of an unfair criticism, cause it's anachronistic. But we should at least endeavor to bring that into our account of wisdom, given their own experiment and given the further work of Igor Grossman.

I would also say that one of my criticisms, and this is a criticism that I made with Leo Ferraro and the 2013 article we published on wisdom, I would argue that there's a mistake here at a more theoretical and conceptual level. It's a mistake of omission, not commission. What we're getting here is a

product theory of wisdom (writes Product theory of wisdom) in which what you're trying to do is to come up with sort of the account of what wisdom is, and that's a valuable thing, you should definitely do that. You should try and come up with not just a feature list, of course, that's a little bit of a problem with just the list of criteria, of course, but what you do is you want to come up with what am I going to do? I'm going to find wise people. I'm going to get widely shared definitions of wisdom, and try and come up with an account of what wisdom is, based on that. And that's a legitimate thing to do. It omits something that's very important though. It omits what we saw as so central to the ancient theories of wisdom that we were looking at. If you look at [-] Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and the Stoics, and if you look at the Buddha, the centrality of transformational change in wisdom is being lost in a product theory. What you also need (Fig. 1a) (draws a double headed arrow beside Product theory of wisdom)—and these two should talk to each other—you need a process theory. [-]

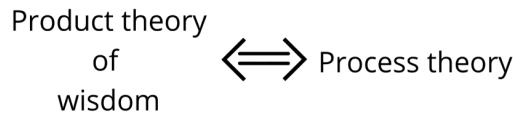


Fig. 1a

And this is what I think the ancient theories of wisdom are. [-] What you're getting is (taps Process theory) an account that works something like this in a process theory. You have an independent account of what is foolishness (Fig. 1b) (writes Foolishness), and what is flourishing (writes Flourishing below Foolishness). And then what a process theory tells me is how I can overcome foolishness (draws an arrow pointing from Process theory to Foolishness) and how I can afford flourishing. (draws arrow from Foolishness to Flourishing) And then from that, (draws an arrow from the arrow between Foolishness and Flourishing to Product theory of Wisdom) it tries to derive what wisdom is.

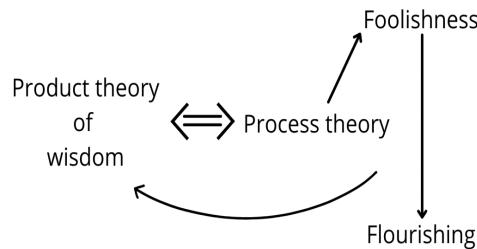


Fig. 1b

And I think this is a very important thing to do, to try and figure out what wisdom is, from an account of how one becomes wise. Because first of all, it taps into this longstanding and important philosophical heritage; so there's a tremendous legacy that we've explored in this course that we should be making use of.

And secondly, it does something that I think is much clearer than what a product theory does, which is, it picks up on the central insight that McKee and Barber talked about, which is seeing through illusion and into reality. The process theory gives you an account of what self-deception is, and how you can see through it and into reality, so that you can be better connected to yourself, to other people, to the world, and thereby flourish.

So I would advocate that in addition — not in competition, but complimentary to a product theory — we should be developing a process theory. Tells us what foolishness is, how foolishness develops, how we can overcome foolishness, how we can afford flourishing. And then on the basis of that, get into a dialogue with accounts of what wisdom is. So I think that's important. [-] The fact that Aristotle's being invoked really says we need to bring in the developmental and transformative aspects of wisdom (underlines Process theory) in a more serious manner. So that's one of my most central criticisms of Baltes and Staudinger. The other one, like I said, is they seem to make a mistake around expertise.

I would now like to share with you some central criticisms made by a really seminal thinker. Somebody I've had the chance to meet a couple times and interact with. And this is Monika Ardelt (writes Monika Ardelt 2004). I think she did something really important, which is the critique she published of Baltes and Staudinger in 2004, and her ongoing work. She's generated one of the wisdom scales that is used experimentally. She's generated a lot of experimental work. Monika's work is really important and central.

Modal Confusion

Now, I'm going to use some of my language that we've developed in this course to talk about Monika, and I hope it's not imposing on her, but I think it's plausible that it's not. Her main criticism of the Baltes and Staudinger

paradigm or approach, is they confuse—this is her criticism, and I agree with it — they're confusing having theoretical knowledge about wisdom with being a wise person.

So there's a sense in which there's a bit of a modal confusion going on in the Baltes and Staudinger theory. It's like, I have a lot of knowledge about wisdom, that doesn't make me wise. So I'm an excellent case in point of that, I would think. I've read a lot of the wisdom literature, about the philosophical and the psychological [aspects], I teach on it. I'm [currently] involved with [-] some experimental work, et cetera. So I think I have quite a bit of theoretical knowledge about wisdom. I would not in any way dare to equate that with the claim that I'm a wise person. While that knowledge, I think, could be argued to be necessary, I think what Ardelt is clearly pointing to is that it's nowhere near sufficient. It's nowhere near sufficient.

And so what, I think, she's pointing to is the fact that a wise person—and we can think of the Socratic example here about the truth and the transformative relevance needing to be kept together. The wise person must realize these theoretical truths within a process of self- transformation, must realize this within a process of self-transformation. So people that are wise have gone through a process of self-transformation. They have achieved a significant kind of self-transcendence that allows them to embody and enact these truths, rather than just having them in a propositional fashion.

So Ardelt is clearly pointing towards something missing (indicates Process theory): the importance of the process of development. She's also importantly pointing to the way in which wisdom is a project of becoming a particular kind of person, [-] living in a particular kind of world. And so she's directly pointing towards what I've articulated in this course as participatory knowing.

Distinction Between Descriptive Knowledge And Interpretive Knowledge

So she then brings out something very important about this distinction. She makes use of this distinction between having knowledge and being wise. And she makes use of a distinction from a really important philosopher, John Kekes (writes Kekes). I've mentioned him before, he's done some important

work on moral wisdom and its relationship to virtue. And Kekes makes a very important distinction between descriptive knowledge (Fig. 2a) (writes Descriptive knowledge beside Kekes) and interpretive knowledge (writes Interpretive knowledge below Descriptive knowledge), which Monica points to.

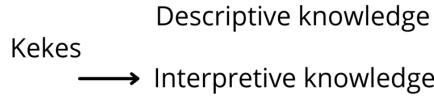


Fig. 2a

And what Ardel is pointing to is, of course, that wisdom has to do more with this (Interpretive knowledge). So descriptive knowledge is basically your knowledge that, [for example,] the cat is a mammal. Your knowledge that the cat is a predator, or something like that. Interpretive knowledge is your ability to grasp the significance of your descriptive knowledge. (Fig. 2b) (writes Grasping the significance)

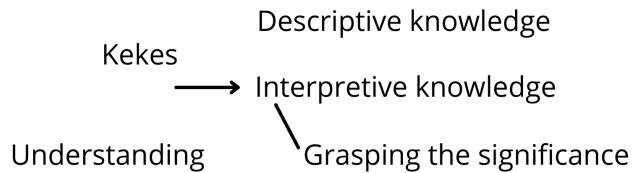


Fig. 2b

Now that's going to be important, because that actually turns out to be a central feature in most of the theories that are now being developed about what "understanding" is, and how it differs from knowledge. And I think what Ardel is pointing to here by invoking Keke's notion of interpretive knowledge is the centrality of Understanding (writes Understanding) to wisdom. And, of course, grasping the significance is putting us—I'm going to argue later, that this (encircles Grasping) [-] [has] to do with construal. And this (encircles Significance) is going to have to do with relevance. Relevance realization.

Now, I think that's very important work, and there's so much happening in these theories, and the thing is, it's happening in a very sort of concise fashion. So let's gather what we've got here. We've got the realization that we shouldn't be just talking about having knowledge about wisdom (indicates Monika Ardel 2004), we should be going through the process of self-

transcendence (indicates Fig. 1) by which we become wise. That involves, as I said, a process theory. We're going to need a process theory, not just a product theory. And that what the wise person has, above and beyond knowledge (indicates Descriptive knowledge) — I would call descriptive knowledge, knowledge — and Interpretive knowledge — whether that's knowledge, I don't know — but that's at least what many people are considering Understanding. And this has to do, as I'm going to argue, that grasping the significance of your knowledge is good construal that realizes what's relevant.

Personality Characteristics Of A Wise Person

So Ardel then talks about the personality characteristics that you should see in the wise person. So she thinks that if we want to talk about what it is to be a wise person, we shouldn't just be talking about the knowledge, obviously. We should be talking about the kind of characteristics that the wise person has, and that's important because we've already seen the deep connections between wisdom and virtue.

So she thinks that there are three ways in which we can judge the relative value, we can grasp the significance of our knowledge. [-] There's three dimensions of our personhood that are crucial for being a wise person (erases the board). [-] Up until now, we've been clearly giving these emphasis.

There are Cognitive factors (writes Cognitive). So what are the cognitive factors here? This, of course, is your ability to have a comprehension of the significance and meaning of information. And not just theoretically. The significance of the information for your development, for your going through a process of self-transcendence and becoming a wise person.

Then there are Reflective (Fig. 3a) (writes Reflective beside Cognitive). And I think the distinction here, this is picking up a bit on the way rationality has this reflective component into it, as opposed to intelligence, which is just your ability to grasp what's relevant. So I think that's something that can be integrated quite well with the discussion we had on rationality. So the reflective factors, a person who has been cultivating wisdom is multi-perspectival. [-] They're capable of engaging in multiple perspectives.

They're capable of self-examination, self-awareness, self-insight. So notice again that the reflection here has an existential import. You're taking these perspectives, but you can ultimately internalize this perspectival ability onto yourself in self-reflection, self-examination, self-insight. So I think that's very valuable (draws a line connecting Cognitive and Reflective).

Cognitive — Reflective



Fig. 3a

And then there's an Affective component (writes Affective below Cognitive and Reflective). And I'm doing this because Ardelt clearly thinks that these three are mutually influencing, mutually constraining, causally interacting with each other. So the affective dimension, she talks about in terms of compassion. I've made a case that—because of some of the models she invokes from Buddhism, I don't think this is inappropriate—I've made a case that the capacity for agape (Fig. 3b) (writes Agape below Affective) is the best way of understanding compassion.

Cognitive — Reflective



Fig. 3b

The main idea here is, and this is why I'm invoking agape, as opposed to either philia or eros, is because it helps to overcome egocentrism. And you can see how [-] [Agape and Reflective] are working together. How this (indicates Agape) is helping to overcome egocentrism (Fig. 3c) in kind of a powerful way. So [Reflective] is sort of overcoming egocentrism perspectively. And [Affective] is overcoming egocentrism attitudinally, in terms of your core motivations, your core set of priorities and preferences. Basically the way in which you're caring about the world, and that you're caring is directed towards the flourishing of other persons.

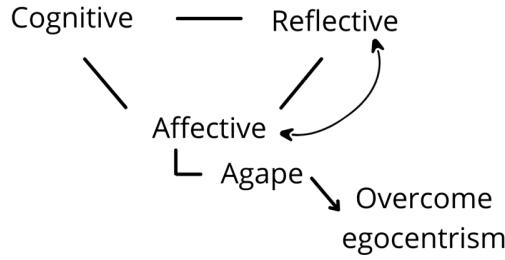
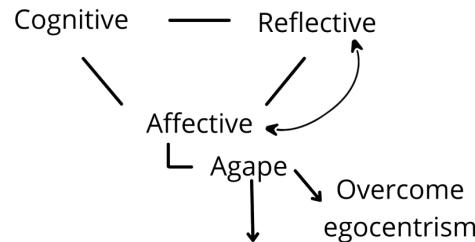


Fig. 3c

So I think that also is an important improvement in the theorizing. The fact that Ardelts clearly giving equal priority to Cognitive, I would call these perspectival (indicates Reflective) and the perspectival aspects of rationality and, of course, the important affective things. And if you remember, this does something also, at least implicitly, that we don't have in Baltes and Staudinger.

And so this is one other criticism I would make, on behalf of Monika Ardelts, of the Baltes and Staudinger theory, which is, agape starts to (draws an arrow down from Agape)—I've argued, so I'm not attributing this argument to Ardelts, but I'm supplementing it to her theory—because what agape gives is, it at least gives a way of trying to talk about meaning in life (Fig. 3d) (writes Meaning in life below Agape), the way Wolf talked about it. And I argued that agape helps us to get that kind of connectedness and caring that is so central to grounding meaning in life. We don't have to ground meaning in life, in being subjectively attracted to something that's completely objectively attractive. We just have to be transjectively coupled to those things we find inherently valuable because of their connection to meaning making coherence and caring.



Meaning in life

Fig. 3d

And so this (indicates Agape and Meaning in life) allows, well, what it affords, and I would argue enables Ardel's theory to do, is to connect her account of wisdom to meaning in life in a much more direct fashion. That connection to meaning in life is not clear in Baltes and Staudinger.

And if you remember, Wolf argues that you can't reduce meaning in life to morality. So the connection between wisdom and virtue while central, and being discussed well by Schwartz and Sharpe, and by Baltes and Staudinger, is not reducible to, it's not sufficient for the connection between wisdom and meaning in life. By bringing in this affective component, and the idea that we are becoming wise, not just thinking about wisdom, and so the process of identification, the modal existential aspects, Ardel is doing a lot more with, about connecting wisdom to meaning in life. And I think that's very, very important.

Okay. So this is sort of understanding (Fig. 3e) (writes Understanding below Cognitive) in a sense I'm going to help develop later. This ability to pick up on what to realize, the significance of your knowledge. And allow you, and again, in an existential fashion, not just abstract, theoretical, but in a way that allows you to, I would argue, ultimately see through illusion and into reality so that you can afford your development.

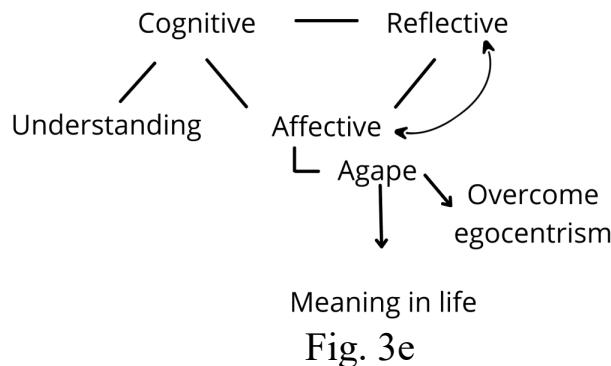


Fig. 3e

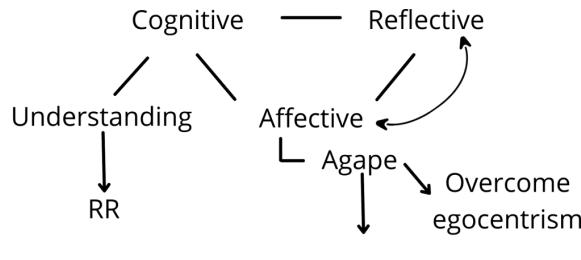
That is connected to your reflective capacity, your perspectival knowing, which ultimately could be linked to the stuff we saw with Grossman's work, and in the Berlin paradigm of Baltes and Staudinger. The ability to take the perspective of others, being multiple perspectival, and ultimately turn that back on oneself, in self-examination, internalize it in self-insight. And that those two (indicates Cognitive and Reflective) are also linked to something like a capacity for agape. And I would argue that you need these two

(indicates Agape and Reflective) for overcoming egocentrism, and it also—I haven't seen Monica develop this very explicitly in connection, especially with Wolf's work—but there's the real potential here of connecting wisdom to something other than virtue. It should be connected to virtue, but it should also be importantly connected to meaning in life.

What are some of my criticisms of Ardel's work? Well, it clearly invokes transformational processes. It doesn't really incorporate a theory of transformative experience, or an account of it. You know, like we have in LA Paul's work. It doesn't really give us a processing theory. It points towards [it]—and this is important—it points towards the need for a processing theory, but it doesn't give us an account of what that process looks very much like.

And it doesn't have an independent account of foolishness. It doesn't really tell us very much what foolishness is. And that's something needed if we're going to, I would argue, have a good process theory of wisdom. There is an untapped potential. This isn't so much a criticism as encouragement—that there's an untapped potential, given this theoretical machinery of connecting wisdom to meaning in life in a way that complements the connections between wisdom and virtue.

So I think these are all some very important features about this. I've already indicated grasping the significance, I think this is points towards RR (Fig. 3f) (writes RR below Understanding). We've already talked a lot about Agape and the relationships I tried to drive between it and relevance realization. And, of course, I've already indicated this (indicates Reflective) is bringing in the recursive aspects. It's bringing a perspectival knowing. And there's also, at least in the background sense, the participatory knowing, because one is coming to know oneself differently, one is coming to know the world differently, because one is going through this inherent transformational process.



Meaning in life

Fig. 3f

So we're seeing how the theory of wisdom is sort of building up. It's becoming more complex. It's bringing in different [-] kinds of knowing. There [are] quite important aspects of relevance realization in Schwartz and Sharpe; clearly in Baltes and Staudinger. Quite strongly implied in the central role, at least in the cognitive aspects—although I would argue also in the reflective and the affective aspects of Ardel's theory, [where] relevance realization is playing an important role. And we see how it's getting sort of developed and specified into and connected to other important cognitive processes.

Alright. I think the next important theory we should turn to is Sternberg. This is because you can see Sternberg's work (writes Sternberg) running throughout the history [-] of the psychology of wisdom. Robert Sternberg basically really gets this off the ground with his pivotal work, not only in his own theories, [-] [but the] work he's done in putting together various anthologies on wisdom or related anthologies on foolishness. Why Smart People Can Be So Stupid is one of the best anthologies on the psychology of foolishness I've seen.

He is also been tireless in trying to connect the psychology of wisdom to pedagogy. He gets, again, something that is important and central, and we see it crucially in the ancient theories of wisdom. It's not so clearly present in the current psychological theories, but the deep connection between wisdom and teaching. That's, of course, clearly the case in Socrates, it's clearly the case in Jesus of Nazareth. It's clearly the case [-] [with the Buddha and] Buddhism. That [-] there's a deep connection between wisdom and education. And so he's been very tireless, not only sort of theoretically pointing out that connection, but trying to work out, if you'll allow me, I mean this word in a complimentary sense, trying to “engineer” some

psychotechnologies, sets of practices for how to bring the cultivation of wisdom into the educational domain.

So for many reasons, Sternberg is a pivotal figure in the [-] community of people who are endeavoring to come up with a psychological, cognitive scientific, even neuroscientific theory of wisdom. There are some people who are pursuing this. Meeks and Jeste are one. Other people are pursuing the neuroscientific aspects, but I'm not going to go into that in great detail right now. I'm trying to concentrate on the psychological theories, precisely because they are the ones that are most directly accessible and relevant to trying to respond to the meaning crisis.

A Balance Theory Of Wisdom

So in 1998, Sternberg, he had an earlier theory where he was talking and he's come back to this many times. He has a book where he tried to talk about the relationships between intelligence, wisdom, and creativity. I'm trying to follow that up in my own way, trying to show you the relationships between the intelligence, rationality, wisdom, insight, et cetera. So definitely influenced by Sternberg in that way. But he then came up with a more [-] I want to be complimentary of the newer theory without being completely dismissive of the older. I would say the newer theory is sort of more coherent, more tightly integrated, more explicated theory. So in 1998, he came up with what he's called and maintained A Balance Theory Of Wisdom. That's actually the title of the 1998 article, A Balance Theory Of Wisdom. So the notion of balance (writes Balance beside Sternberg) is going to play a crucial role in this theory.

Now Sternberg starts by talking about Sophia and phronesis and episteme, which is at the core of epistemological—that's what I would call propositional knowledge. He calls it scientific understanding. He quickly drops that as not being particularly relevant to wisdom, not because knowledge is unimportant. Because everybody knows the centrality of knowledge to wisdom. That's why we're spending so much time on getting knowledge in this course, but everybody pretty much also understands that wisdom is something above and beyond scientific, theoretical propositional knowledge. So that's sort of easily understandable.

He also [-] invokes Sophia, and talks about it in connection with contemplation, phronesis and practical wisdom. He zeroes in, like Schwartz and Sharpe, on phronesis. I think that's, again, a little bit too much of a neglect of the important role of Sophia. He also draws on Polanyi's idea of tacit knowledge. Remember we talked about that when we talked about subsidiary awareness? And he talks about the tacit knowledge having to do with our procedural abilities. It's relevant to attaining goals. It's not explicitly taught, we experience it intuitively. So he's invoking all kinds of important aspects about implicit learning, intuition and procedural knowing.

I think that's good. I think he needs to also add to that, techne, what are some important psychotechnologies. Especially since I can, I think, in fairness, say that he is trying to engineer such psychotechnologies in his pedagogical endeavors. I also think he needs to try to do what Aristotle did, which is integrate how phronesis, which is largely happening in an implicit, intuitive, sort of S1 kind of fashion, is integrated with Sophia, which can have a more reflective, perhaps a more S2 aspect to it.

That being said, what's the core theory? Well, the idea is, [-] he starts talking about it as tacit understanding. So the tacit knowing, the tacit implicit learning, is also a way in which Sternberg tries to invoke the capacity for understanding.

Now that isn't very well explicated in the account. [-] I'm speculating that what I think he's trying to get at is that the machinery by which we sort of grasp the significance of our knowledge, and use it to directly and intuitively cope with the world, is a significant component of understanding. So I think that's why the shift is there. [-] The reason why I want to invoke that is because what the tacit understanding is doing, it's again so pregnant with aspects of relevance realization. Because he talks about the understanding, guiding our ability to adapt to—listen to that language—to adapt to situations, to shape them. And that doesn't necessarily mean physical. It can mean how we construe them, how we formulate our problems. And the selection of environments, the selection, the moving around, the exploring or exploiting. This is all very much doing with relevance realization. He talks about these abilities [that] are needed to deal with practical problems.

This is why he's emphasizing wisdom not as the same thing as theoretical knowledge. He's picking up on the same point that Monika Ardelt did. But he said, [-] these problems are unformulated [-] or in need of reformulation. And so he's invoking problem formulation here. [-] With the notion of reformulation, he's invoking the notion of insight. And so we can see, again, the relevance realization machinery being invoked.

[-] His theory, quote, "views wisdom as inherent in the interaction between an individual at a situational context." It's inherently transjective. It's about fitting. In fact, he then goes on to say, "wisdom depends on the fit of a wise solution to its context." So notice the fittedness. All of the language that we've developed is being directly invoked, it's being put at the center of the theory.

And I'm going to argue that what he is invoking when he's invoking balance, is he's invoking Optimization (Fig. 4) (writes Balance - Optimization). And I, of course, argued that relevance realization is an optimization theory.

Balance — Optimization

Fig. 4

So what's beautiful about the theory is he gives a schematic diagram of it, and I'll draw this for you. So here's our tacit understanding (draws a box and writes Tacit understanding inside) that's that implicit processing, et cetera. Remember, we talked about that so much in connection with flow.

And what's happening is it is dealing with trying to balance your interests (Fig. 5a) (draws a triangle above Tacit understanding). Balance your interest. What you're interested in, what you find salient, important. And he talks about three kinds. There's the intrapersonal, the interpersonal and the extrapersonal. So this of course is interest between people (writes Interpersonal at the right corner of the triangle). This is interest within a person (writes Intrapersonal at the left corner of the triangle). So you can think of Plato here trying to get your various centers and what they're interested in, coordinated together. And extrapersonal (writes Extrapersonal at the top corner of the triangle), having to do... I think this is ultimately how you're connected to yourself (indicates Intrapersonal), how you're connected to other people (indicates Interpersonal) and how you're connected to the

world (indicates Extrapersonal). I think he's invoking, at least implicitly, the three dimensions of connectedness that go into meaning in life. And so, I think, at least implicitly, we could make a clear argument here that he's trying to connect wisdom to meaning in life (draws a bracket on the left and writes Meaning in life).

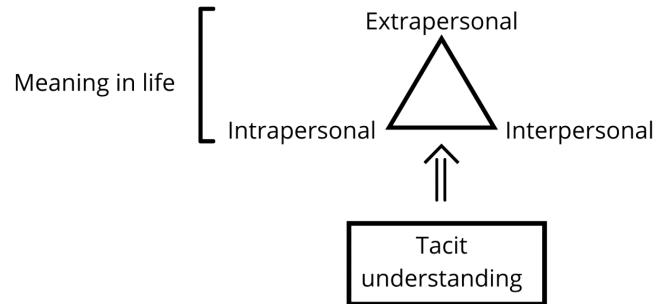


Fig. 5a

And that this capacity (indicates Tacit understanding) for sort of zeroing in on relevant information is playing an important role in that. And the reason why I say that is because (Fig. 5b) (draws an arrow pointing up from Extrapersonal). It's not clear to me why the arrows only go one way. It seems to me that I—well, this is a criticism I would make. I think the arrows should go both ways because there's also going to be feedback. But anyways, they feed forward to the three things (draws a triangle above the second arrow) that are clearly I would argue are, which is the adapting (writes Adapting at the top of the second triangle), the shaping (writes Shaping at the right corner of the second triangle), and the selecting (writes Selecting at the left corner of the second triangle).

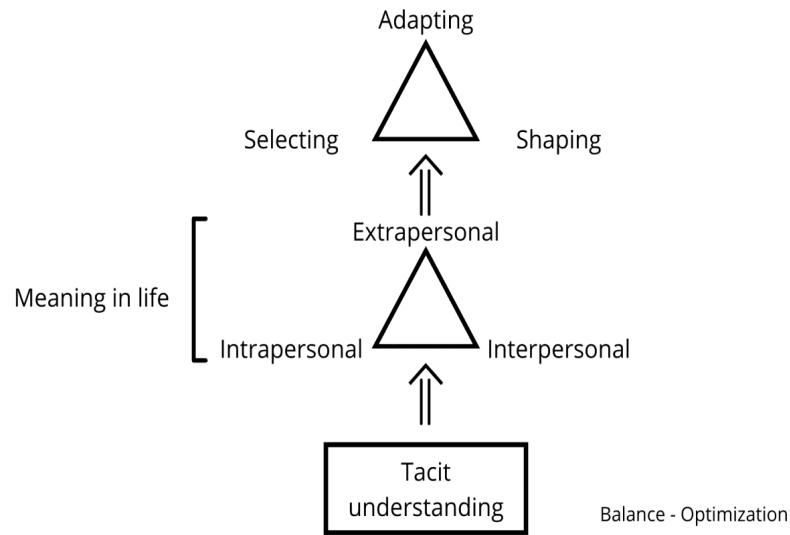


Fig. 5b

I'll come back to that (indicates Balance - Optimization and erases it on the board) notion. The triangles are meant to indicate balance. And I've tried to indicate to you that, I think, I'll put that down here and we'll come back to it. That balance has to do with optimization (writes Balance - Optimization).

[-] This is a balance of your response to the environmental context. So this is balancing your interests (indicates the lower triangle and writes Interests) and this is balancing your response (writes Response beside the second triangle). Like I said, that's (indicates the upper triangle) pretty clear of our relevance realization stuff.

This then is directed towards, he argues, the common good (Fig. 5c) (draws an arrow above the upper triangle). Here again is where I have to step aside (writes Common good) from the value he's articulating, and the theory he is generating. I agree, especially within a liberal democratic framework, a framework deeply influenced by Christianity, that the common good is an overarching value for us. I'm not sure that that is going to be universally shared by all people who I think can reasonably be deemed wise individuals.

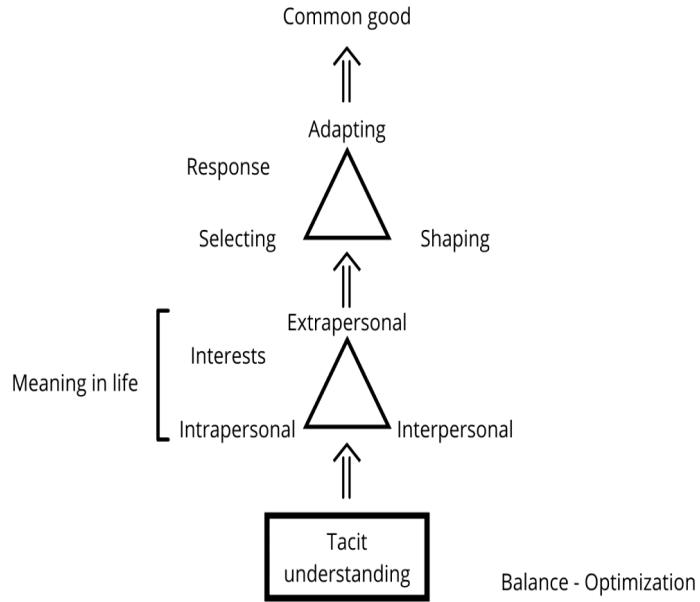


Fig. 5c

So if you're in a culture, that's—what this means, maybe you have to bend this (indicates Common good) so much, then it's then trivial. Maybe it doesn't mean "common" in the sense of "shared by everyone." It might be, you're in some sort of hierarchical, feudal society, and the common good isn't that everybody equally benefits from it. It might be more that everybody is working well together, some sort of justification like that.

I'm not trying to justify a hierarchical society or anything like that. I want you clearly to understand. I think this (indicates Common good) is an important value. I'm just concerned here that Sternberg is being anachronistic here, and he's using one of our central values and attributing it to every person who has been wise. I think you could make a case that that's clearly the case in Jesus or the Buddha. I'm not sure that it's the case for Marcus Aurelius and all of the Stoics. It's clearly not the case for Epictetus. So I'm hesitant about putting that up there.

I'm going to advise that there's something I think more broadly comprehensive. I think the things that we should put up here (erases Common good) are things that there's already a consensus on. [-] That we're really concerned with is virtue (Fig. 5d) (writes Virtue above the upper triangle). And because of this (draws an arrow from Meaning in life to Virtue), I think, and meaning in life (writes + Meaning in life).

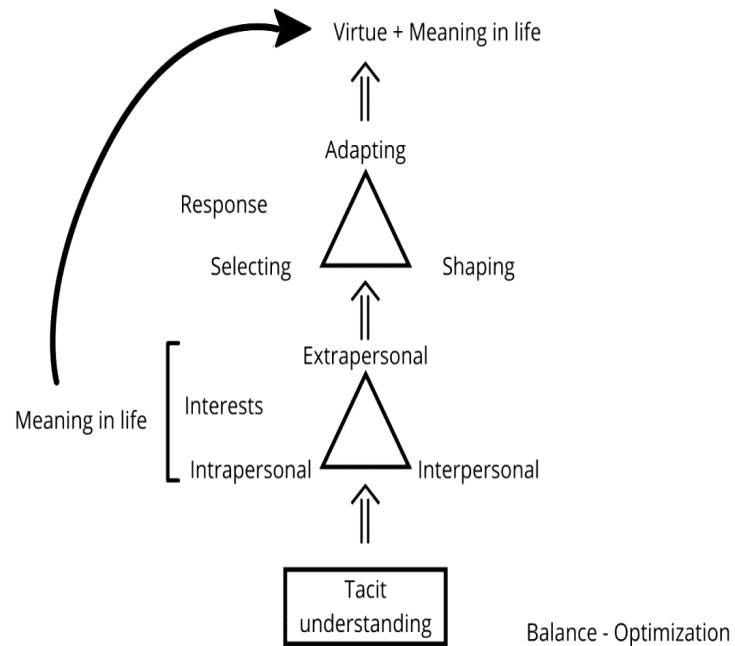


Fig. 5d

Okay. I have changed (indicates Virtue + Meaning in life) that is not in his model. I have changed it because of, again, I'm worried that his particular term is, anachronistic and idiosyncratic to our particular historical cultural context. It's important to also note that, running alongside of this (draws a rectangle to the right) is values (Fig. 5e) (writes Values inside the rectangle) and then arrows that are kind of indeterminately pointing (draws two arrows from Values pointing to the left).

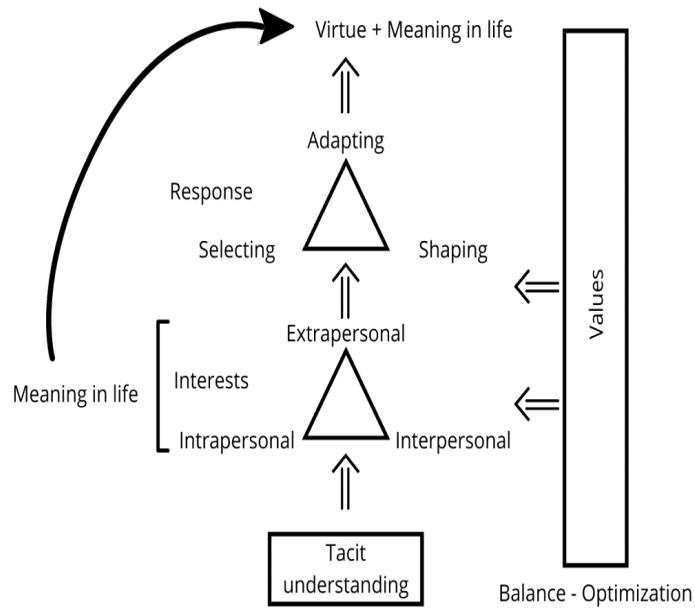


Fig. 5e

So trying to interpret what that means is something like, the wise person is being constrained by values. What those values are, are not clear. Again, is it that we're talking about things like meaning in life and the virtues? (Fig. 5f) (draws an arrow from Meaning in life to Values and another arrow from Virtues to Values) Perhaps.

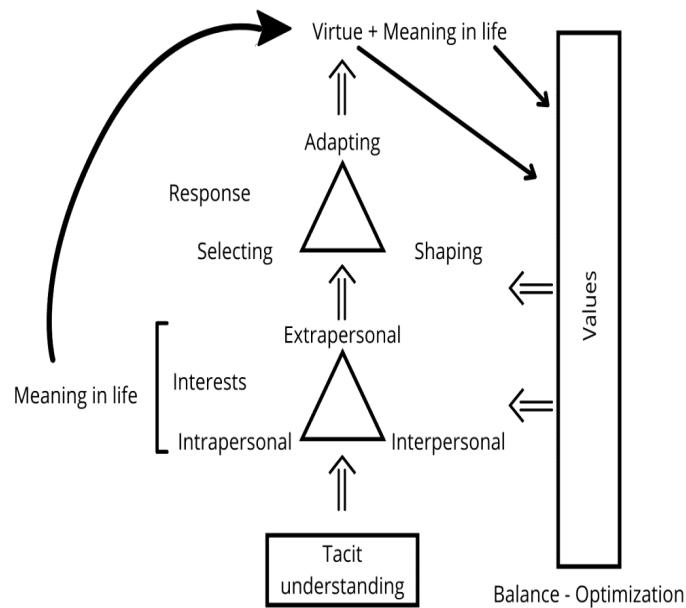


Fig. 5f

So another criticism I have is that this part of the theory (indicates the part where Values are located), this part of the diagram, the way it's operating is unclear. It might be something as basic as the wise person is working normatively. They're trying to get the best. And then this (indicates the Values) is not that interesting a claim, because wisdom is itself a normative notion. And therefore the fact that the wise person is being governed by normativity is almost definitional. If it means something specific, like the wise person has a specific set of values, that needs to be explicated and defended. So I don't know quite what to do with that. So I have to sort of leave it somewhat inert.

What I would argue, and I think what these triangles indicate, and what the language indicates, is that the balance is used to adapt, shape, and select environments. And what is this balance? He argues that something like Piaget's equilibration between assimilation and accommodation. He argues that it's a balance between coping with novelty and proceduralization.

You see what he's doing, what the balance here is? It's balance that is directly invoking a lot of the machinery we've talked about relevance realization, and he's clearly not invoking sort of a spatial balancing. He's invoking optimization.

So I think this theory is also a theory that is deeply integratable with a lot of the material we've been discussing. Relevance realization is playing a key role in terms of the balancing, and this (indicates the upper triangle) process here also down here (indicates Tacit understanding) at the level of grasping the significance, at least intuitively, of our knowledge, and the patterns we picked up from the environment. There's deep connections to, or at least there's a real potential in Sternberg's theory for making deep connections to meaning in life (taps the lower triangle). Because as I said, I think this has played clearly how you connect to yourself (indicates Intrapersonal), how do you connect to others (indicates Interpersonal), how do you connect to the world (indicates Extrapersonal). There's important possible connections, possibly (indicates Values)—I'm unsure — between this (indicates Values) and virtue and meaning in life. So this is all very good. And like I said, overall, this is clearly a dynamic optimization, and it's invoking something very much like relevance realization.

[-] What are some of the criticisms of Sternberg? This is still in the end, a product theory. It's not a process theory. [-] This (indicates Tacit understanding) avoids equating wisdom with expertise, and that's a powerful advantage of this theory. But [-] this domain, the values unexplicated, it could either be somewhat trivial, because it's almost tautological that the wise person is acting according to normative standards, or it could be a much more controversial claim, that specific values are involved. I don't know. I've already told you (indicates Virtue + Meaning in life) I don't think that the "common good" is the goal of all wise people; that see seems anachronistic to me in an important way.

The theory could clearly be improved by getting clear about the nature of tacit implicit learning. Getting clearer about optimization, getting clearer about relevance realization, getting clearer about how relevance realization connects to meaning in life. So all of those things would be developed if one started to develop a process theory, and not just a product theory.

So Sternberg needs an independent theory of foolishness. Now he has a theory of foolishness, but it's not independent. His theory of foolishness is basically: foolishness is an imbalance in these things. So what foolishness is, is basically a lack of wisdom. And again, while that's definitionally the case, what you need is an independently constructed theory of [-] foolishness. You need a theory of foolishness that takes in hand the centrality of seeing through illusion and into reality, that has an independent account of how we're self-deceptive, how we're self-destructive, how that operates, how that unfolds — because we see that in many of the ancient wisdom theories — and how we can ameliorate that. So I think that is missing in a central way from Sternberg's work.

Okay. So I think in the end, what I want to do is try and draw all of these together. I've tried to indicate important points of improvement. One theory with respect to the other; relative strengths and weaknesses. I've also tried to indicate powerful points of convergence and connection to the ideas of relevance realization that we've been developing in this course, because that's part of the big possibility diagram. To show how the machinery of relevance realization can help to explain what it is to be wise, and help to

explain, as I'm going to argue, what it is to become wise, to give a processing theory.

So we want to take that up in the next account. And I'm somewhat hesitant about that. Because [-] I'm very cautious about proposals about consciousness, and other things like that. But we've got proposals about higher states of consciousness, and insight, and that. And I've tried to make arguments for that. And I'm going to make an argument that I have made with Leo Ferraro about wisdom. But [-] it borders on hubristic to talk about this in that way, but I'm going to try and draw on this, and at least show you a plausible way in which we can draw all of this material together with the theory of relevance realization and come up with an account of wisdom.

And then, I think, also subject that theory, at least the version that was published in 2013 to some important criticisms. And then hopefully then be in a place where we can fold it back into the connections between the [-] cultivation of wisdom, the cultivation of meaning in life, the cultivation, the pursuit, [-] of enlightenment. How these are all connected and how that can be situated into the larger project of awakening from the meaning crisis.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 44 Notes

Herbert Simon

Herbert Alexander Simon was an American economist, political scientist and cognitive psychologist, whose primary research interest was decision-making within organizations and is best known for the theories of "bounded rationality" and "satisficing".

Bounded Rationality

Bounded rationality is the idea that rationality is limited when individuals make decisions. In other words, humans' "...preferences are determined by changes in outcomes relative to a certain reference level..." as stated by Esther-Mirjam Sent (2018).

Igor Grossman

Leo Ferraro

Publication: [Relevance, Meaning and the Cognitive Science of Wisdom](#)

Monika Ardelt

Susan Wolf

Susan Rose Wolf is an American moral philosopher and philosopher of action who is currently the Edna J. Koury Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

L. A. Paul

Laurie Ann Paul is a professor of philosophy and cognitive science at Yale University. She previously taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Arizona. She is best known for her research on the counterfactual analysis of causation and the concept of “transformative experience.”

Robert J Sternberg

Robert J. Sternberg (born December 8, 1949) is an American psychologist and psychometrician. He is Professor of Human Development at Cornell University.

Book Mentioned:

Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development - [Buy Here](#)

A Handbook Of Wisdom: Psychological Perspectives - [Buy Here](#)

The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom - [Buy Here](#)

Why Smart People Can Be So Stupid - [Buy Here](#)

Applying Wisdom To Contemporary World Problems - [Buy Here](#)

Teaching For Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, and Success - [Buy Here](#)

Wisdom, Intelligence, And Creativity Synthesized - [Buy Here](#)

Article Mentioned: [A Balance Theory Of Wisdom](#)

Thadeus Meeks

Dilip V. Jeste

Dilip V. Jeste, M.D. is an American geriatric neuropsychiatrist, who specializes in successful aging as well as schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders in older adults.

Sophia

Sophia is a central idea in Hellenistic philosophy and religion, Platonism, Gnosticism and Christian theology.

Phronesis

Phronesis is an ancient Greek word for a type of wisdom or intelligence relevant to practical action, implying both good judgement and excellence of character and habits.

Episteme

Episteme is a philosophical term that refers to a principled system of understanding; scientific knowledge.

Michael Polanyi

Michael Polanyi was a Hungarian-British polymath, who made important theoretical contributions to physical chemistry, economics, and philosophy.

Tacit knowledge

Tacit knowledge or implicit knowledge—as opposed to formal, codified or explicit knowledge—is knowledge that is difficult to express or extract, and thus more difficult to transfer to others by means of writing it down or verbalizing it. This can include personal wisdom, experience, insight, and intuition.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

Ep. 45 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - The Nature of Wisdom

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis.

So we are continuing, and it deserves this much attention, our long discussion about the nature of wisdom, because since the axial revolution it is just crucially connected to the project of meaning in life.

Last time we finished up [with] a look at Baltes and Staudinger. I made some criticisms and that led into important criticisms made by Monika Ardelt. And then we looked at Ardelt's theory and the way it brought in an important distinction about not just having a good theory of wisdom, but the process of becoming a wise person. And then the emphasis on what are the features of a wise person, as opposed to what are some of the central claims made by a theory of wisdom.

And then we talked about how Monika insightfully brings together the cognitive, the reflective, and the affective. And I pointed out how, within at least the cognitive directly, because of the invocation of Kekes and understanding, we've got relevance realization, grasping the significance. I would also point out that I think that's at least implicit in the reflective machinery, and there's [-] deep potential connection there with both perspectival knowing and the cultivation of rationality, at least perspectival rationality. And the affective ties to agape, which I've already argued has very important connections to relevance realization. And that affords Ardelt's theory a powerful way of connecting wisdom to meaning in life as something different from connecting wisdom to virtue. And that's a very important thing to do.

We still noted some criticisms, that largely it's still a product theory. It doesn't have an independent account of foolishness, and a processing theory

of how one becomes wise. And in that sense, it's not picking up, as well as it could, the philosophical heritage given to us by people like Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and Marcus Aurelius, et cetera.

We then took a look at the theory of Sternberg, just [an] extremely pivotal figure in the psychology, the cognitive science of wisdom. And we took a look at his theory, and I pointed out his ideas about adapting, shaping and selecting are clearly ideas about relevance realization. He invokes implicit processing, tacit knowledge, in order to bring understanding in. That sort of intuitive grasping of the significance of information, I think is what he's implying.

We talked about how he involves a balancing of interests. And there's the intrapersonal, how you're connected to yourself. The interpersonal, how you're connected to other people. The extrapersonal, how you're connected to the world. And so that's [-] implicitly important connections to meaning in life that we've been talking about throughout this course. He invokes balance throughout. And I tried to make a good case that you should see that as optimization and directly relevant, therefore, to accounts of optimization of processing that we discussed with connection to relevance realization.

There were some issues I had with Sternberg. The idea that all wise people, all of this machinery, is directed towards the common good. That strikes me as anachronistic. I think a less contentious claim would be that it's directed towards virtue and meaning in life, for oneself and others, in some unspecified way.

There was also the invocation of values as affecting or constraining the whole process. Again, it was unclear to me what this is. There's an ambiguity here. It could be the relatively trivial claim that the wise person is being regulated by normativity, by considerations of what's true and good and beautiful. And that would be definitional, because wisdom is a normative term and therefore relatively trivial. Or it could be that specific values are being invoked here. But if that's the case, they should be specifically stated and then justified for why those ones are chosen, and explicitly explain how those specific values make an impact on specific aspects of the machinery.

So that's all sort of missing and needs to be addressed. It's ultimately a product theory, not a process theory. Sternberg does have a theory of foolishness, but it's not independently generated. And it doesn't really pick up on the centrality of seeing through illusion and into reality.

So if you'll allow me to make use of all of that machinery, not only the machinery that we've talked about in the psychology of wisdom, but the machinery that many of these theorists are either explicitly or implicitly invoking, all of the philosophical work we already covered in the first half of the course connected to wisdom. I want to try and humbly draw upon that and talk about a proposal made by myself and Leo Ferraro. If you remember, Leo and I had done work together on flow, which I've talked about. Work on mindfulness that I've talked about (writes Vervaeke & Ferraro 2013). This was work from 2013.

Vervaeke and Ferraro Model

So the place to start is to go back to what we saw and what I've argued for. So I hope I don't have to recapitulate that whole argument, that we have these two competencies. We have sort of an inferential competence (draws a square and writes Inferential inside) that has to do with our propositional knowing. And we have an insight competence (draws a square and writes Insight) [-] and that has to do with construal. And [-] that's more sort of procedural perspectival. I'll come back to that point, because that's one of my criticisms of Vervaeke and Ferraro.

And then the idea here is that this is enhanced (Fig. 1a) (draws a larger square around Inferential and writes AOM) and protected from undue influence from sort of more S1 processing, by active open-mindedness (AOM). And then I argued, following Jacobs and Teasdale, and also arguments derived from the need for an independent competence on construal, et cetera, that while this (indicates AOM and Inferential) is really clearly the case for theoretical context, a more therapeutic or at least an existentially developmental context, we want this (draws a larger square around Insight) to be foregrounded and we want it protected from that (Inferential). And so we want it developed by mindfulness (writes Mindfulness in the larger square). And you understand that by mindfulness, I

mean a style that coordinates psychotechnologies together, of meditation, contemplation, perhaps flow interaction with the environment.

Vervaeke & Ferraro 2013

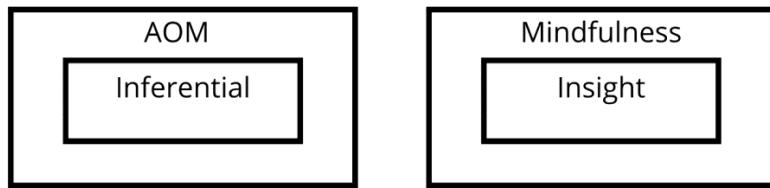


Fig. 1a

That brought up the immediate question of how are these coordinated together? (draws a connecting line between the left and right box) Now, one answer might be that they are just opponent processing and they are self-organizing, and that's potentially viable. [-] We argued that, whereas this (indicates Inferential / AOM) is giving priority to propositional knowledge, this has to do with procedural knowledge (indicates Insight and Mindfulness), skills of attention, basically with cultivating certain skills of attention. And then the idea was that active open-mindedness and propositional knowing basically, we argued then, give you knowledge of facts (Fig. 1b) (writes Fact under AOM and Inferential). This gives you knowledge of events or processes (writes Events / Processes under Insight and Mindfulness). So this (indicates AOM and Inferential) basically tells you about how we're understanding what a 'fact' is, as cross-contextual patterns. Events or processes are things that are unfolding, like idiosyncratically, in time and space. [-] That's sort of right. Perhaps a better way of putting this, that would align it with the stuff we talked about with Schwartz and Sharpe is: this is your grasping of principles (writes Principles beside Fact) and this is your grasping of processes.

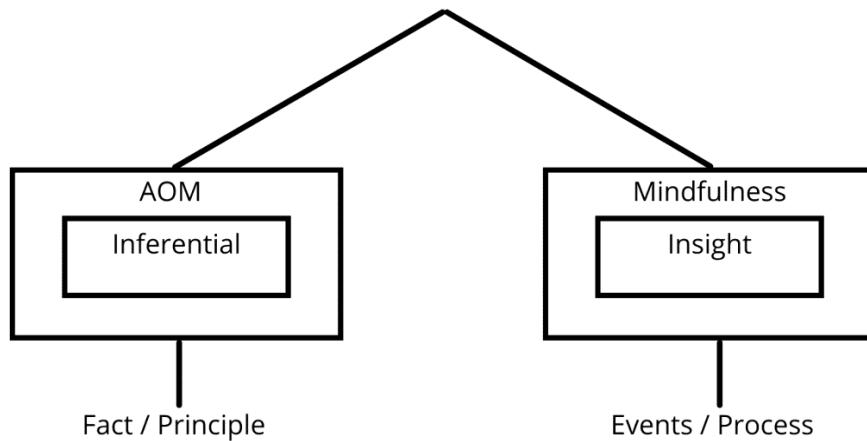


Fig. 1b

And this (indicates AOM and Inferential) would therefore largely be sort of like what's being talked about in Sophia. And this (indicates Insight and Mindfulness) is largely what perhaps what was being talked about in phronesis. We suggested that—I'm still open to that suggestion. I'm not quite sure that it maps as cleanly as that now—but in addition to this clearly propositional and, at least, centrally procedural, we invoked perspectival (Fig. 1c) (draws a square and writes Perspectival inside). So this is propositional (writes Propositional beside AOM and Inferential). This is largely procedural (writes Procedural to beside Mindfulness and Insight). And then this is perspectival (indicates Perspectival at the top). And then so this (Inferential) has to do with inference, this (Insight) has to do with insight, and we've already got a good sense. We've seen this. We didn't—we were not aware cause it hadn't been generated. We were not aware of Grossman's work at the time, but we knew the Berlin work. And this is, of course, what's being managed here is internalization (writes Internalization below Perspectival). How do you learn to adopt and take other people's perspectives, and internalize them within your own processing so they become metacognitively effective?

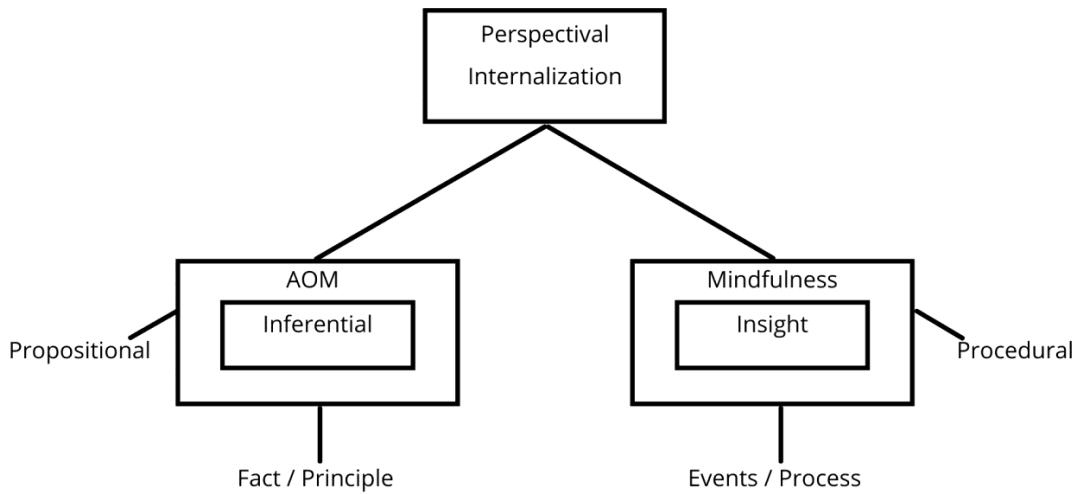


Fig. 1c

And then we said, well, what perspectival knowing did—and here's where I want to—one of my, I think first criticisms. We said, well, what perspectival knowing does is it integrates knowledge of facts with knowledge of events. It sort of helps you to [-] put principles (indicates Fact / Principles) into processes, (indicates Events / Processes) and have processes (indicates Events / Processes) governed by principles (Fact / Principle). And that's what perspectives are doing. [-] We're talking about the epitome of this (Insight) is a skill, and the epitome of this (Inferential) is a theory. And what a perspective does is put theories and skills together.

I think that's kind of right, still in a sense, but I think the relationship is [-] more like this. That propositional knowledge (Fig. 2) (writes Propositional knowledge) is grounded in but affected by (draws a double-headed arrow below Propositional knowledge) procedural knowledge (writes Procedural knowledge under Propositional knowledge), your skills, knowing how to interact. And then (draws a double-headed arrow under Procedural knowledge) that this (indicates Procedural knowledge), your ability to cultivate skills and then apply them to the propositional knowledge is grounded in your perspectival knowing (writes Perspectival knowing under Procedural knowledge). Because that's going to give you your situational awareness that you need to cultivate the skills, so that you can apply (indicates Propositional knowledge) your knowledge of principles. And then I would argue that that's [-] ultimately grounded in your participatory

knowing, (writes Participatory knowing under Perspectival knowing) the Agent:Arena attunement that affords your being in the world, and your ability to go through modal transformation, existential change.

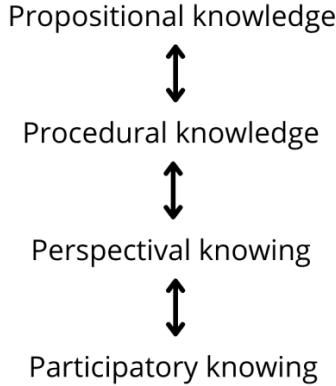


Fig. 2

So that also brings up—I might as well mention it now—another criticism of this theory (indicates Fig. 1c), which is, although it's talking about propositional and procedural knowledge and perspectival knowing, there's no clear discussion here of participatory knowing (indicates Fig. 2). And that's a significant lacuna in the theory for the following reason. Without an account of participatory knowing, for all of its claims, the Vervaeke and Ferraro theory, of being a process theory rather than a product theory, without talking about the participatory knowing, it really can't incorporate into its account of becoming wise, how one goes through transformational experience, how one goes through modal change. I mean modal in the existential sense, not the logical sense. So without connecting participatory knowing to this overarching schema (indicates Fig. 1c), the connections between wisdom, transformative experience, altered states of consciousness—all of these things that we've discussed—are actually crucially missing from this theory. And therefore its claim to being an adequate processing theory can be rather significantly challenged. So that needs important development.

We did talk about a cognitive style that you could cultivate.

One more thing. I think what we were doing is also, we were smuggling in that the perspectival knowing (indicates Perspectival and Internalization) with the process of identity creation, that's central to participatory knowing

(indicates Participatory knowing in Fig. 2). So I think that was also a part of the problem.

Sophrosyne As An Optimization Of Your Perspectival Knowing

Now, what we did argue is that this (draws a larger square around Perspectival and Internalization) is set within a cognitive style that will give you a higher order way of regulating active open-mindedness and mindfulness. And here we took directly from the philosophical tradition, and we talked about internalizing the sage (Fig. 1d) (writes Internalizing the sage beside Perspectival and Internalization). Internalizing Socrates, internalizing the Buddha, internalizing Jesus, internalizing the sage.

Vervaeke & Ferraro 2013

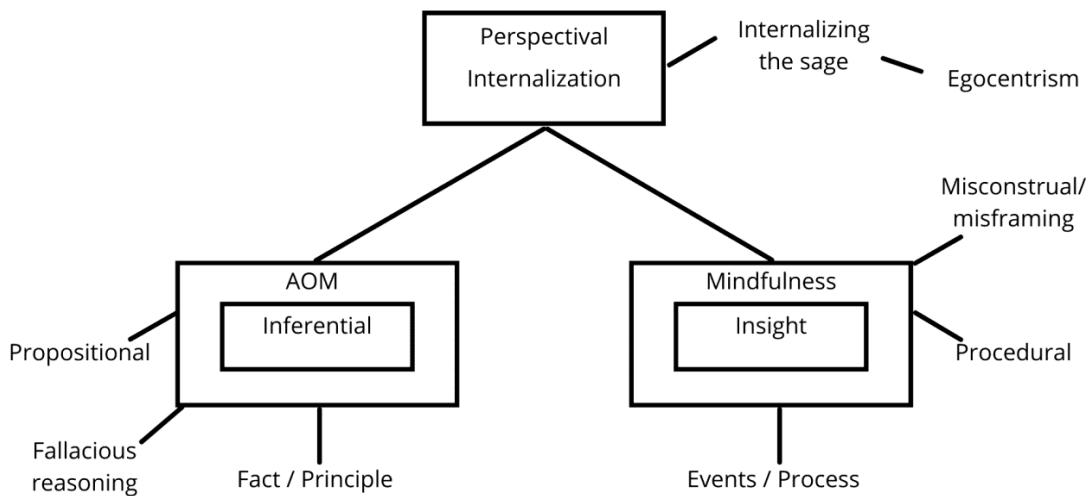


Fig. 1d

And we talked about what impact that has. So we, you know what this is. Internalized. We talked about this repeatedly what the process of internalization is. What it's like to internalize Socrates, et cetera, et cetera. And we've already seen how central that is to wisdom. So while this is overcoming fallacious reasoning (writes Fallacious reasoning beside AOM and Inferential). This is overcoming misframing, misconstrual. (writes Misconstrual / Misframing beside Mindfulness and Insight) What this (indicates Perspectival and Internalization) is doing, is it's helping you to overcome egocentrism in a powerful way (writes Egocentrism beside Internalizing the sage).

These are all ways in which we can fall into illusion, self-deception. But we also talked about what does internalizing the sage do? When you get that metacognitive enhancement, you get that perspectival ability, what's it doing?

So here we talked about a virtue that you haven't heard me talk about very much (Fig. 1e) (draws an arrow from Perspectival and Internalization and writes Sophrosyne). And it's unfortunate because, in some ways, this is... So the ancient Greeks had four cardinal virtues. Wisdom, which is really kind of a meta-virtue. Justice, which we talked a lot about. Courage. And then the fourth is this word, Sophrosyne.

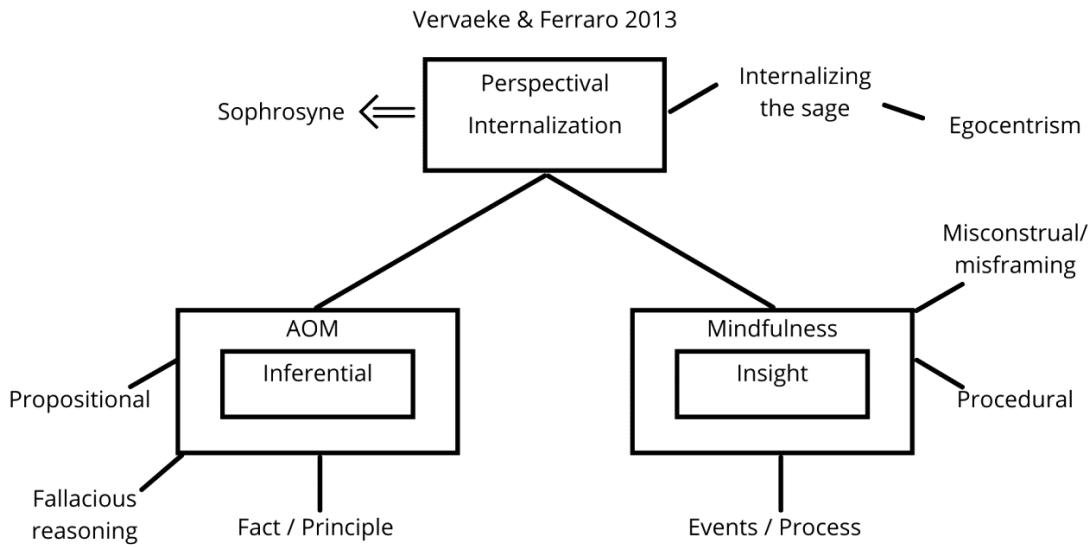


Fig. 1e

Now sophrosyne is often translated as temperance—doesn't capture it well. Moderation, doesn't capture it well. So I want to put that aside and try and come back at this. But you see, if you went to the Delphic Oracle, there were things inscribed on the wall there. And one was Know Thyself, and that's clearly connected. Socrates made it his own. And we've come to know what that means. How the knowledge of oneself is, of course, not romantic autobiography, but a deep understanding of the principles by which you're operating.

But the other one (inscribed on the wall at Delphi) was Everything In Moderation, which was like this (indicates Sophrosyne). But that's not. Again, moderation is good, but it's not quite right. And we know this

(indicates Sophrosyne) is connected to something like Aristotle's notion of the Golden Mean. Remember what that is? You're trying to create a virtual engine that generates enough options, so you don't suffer vices of deficit, but also [-] there's enough governance, there's enough selective constraints, so that it also thwarts vices of excess. So there's a kind of optimization going on there.

[-] You get a little bit in the word 'moderation,' but moderation sounds more like averaging and settling. We argued that there's a better way of trying to understand this, by understanding it as something that it was often contrasted with, which is enkratia (Fig. 1f) (writes Enkratia beside Sophrosyne). So this word (indicates Enkratia). This is demos kratia (writes Demos and Kratia above Enkratia). Power or rule by the people; and kratia is sort of exercising power on yourself. So this is kind of like self-restraint, self-control (writes Self-restraint under Enkratia).

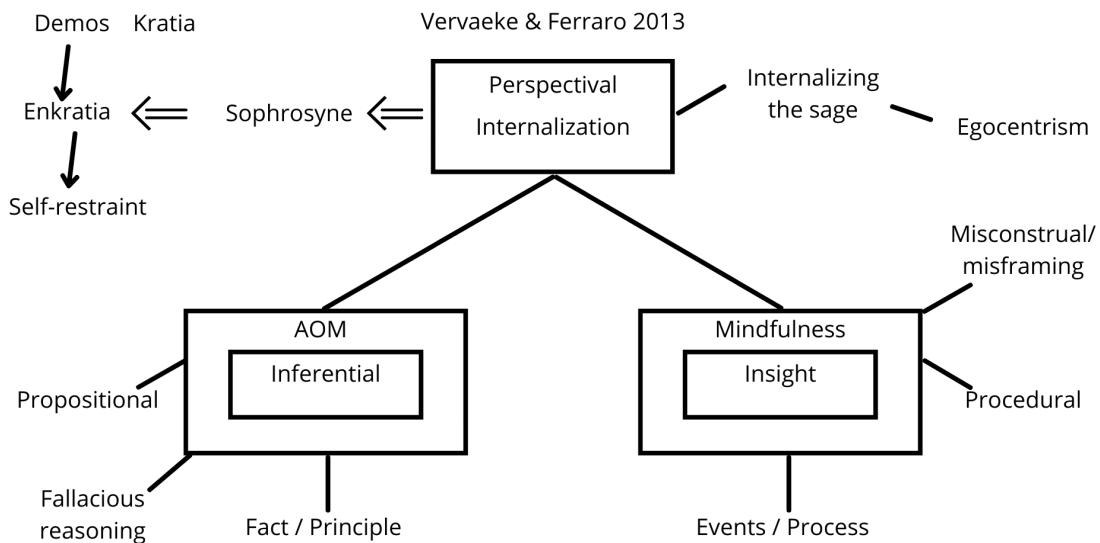


Fig. 1f

And so a way of getting at this is to think about the fact that you could be practicing a virtue—a virtue (indicates Enkratia) enkratically or in a sophrosynic manner. Let me give you an example.

So here's two people. There's Tom and there's Susan. Tom is honest, or at least he's trying to become honest. Now Tom goes into situations and Tom sees clearly the potential to lie. And he sees clearly the benefit that would accrue to him if he lies, and it comes with a tremendous sort of temptation.

There's a tremendous impulse. And so he exercises self-control. And he doesn't lie. And Tom is to be commended for that. That is an important kind of honesty.

But consider Susan. Susan comes into a situation. She clearly sees the opportunity to lie. She clearly sees the advantages that would accrue to her if she lies. But that's it. It's like when we talked about Frankfurt and whether or not something—it's unthinkable to her, not in the sense that she can't think the thought, 'I can lie.' Or think or imagine to herself lying. It's not a viable option to her. She can't get into the existential mode where that draws on her in any way. So although she can think it in one sense, in a Frankfurtian sense, it is unthinkable to her. It just—she's not tempted to lie, in that sense.

Many of us, myself included, would side with the Greeks in saying, Susan is more honest than Tom. Because honesty is now second nature to Susan, in a way it isn't to Tom. So that's sophrosyne, at least one aspect of it.

Do you remember when we were doing Paul and agape? And Paul says, 'now I will show you the most excellent way.' And then he's talking, of course, about agape as the most excellent way. And then he says, remember, in order to try and get you to understand the transformation, when I was a child, I thought like a child, I spoke like a child, and acted like a child. But when I became a man, I put childish things behind me. And remember we talked about that? When you're a child, you're deeply tempted by toys, your salience landscape automatically organizes in a certain way. But when you're an adult, when I'm a man, I come in and I see Spencer's toys. I know that they're there. I know that I could play with them, but they have no pull on me. They do not call me. They do not tempt me. And as the child is to the adult, the adult is to the sage. The sage has a salience landscape in which they are not tempted to self-deception in the ways that we so readily are.

That's sophrosyne. It is to have a salience landscape (draws an arrow pointing towards Sophrosyne) that has gone through a kind of fundamental reversal. [-] Like the way our salience landscape is less oriented towards the self-deceptiveness of a child, the sage's salience landscape is less oriented towards *our* prevalent and pervasive forms of self-deception. They see through illusion and into reality.

So this (Sophrosyne) is, of course, deeply perspectival. And I want to add a little bit more to it (draws an arrow from Sophrosyne) because it's not just—[-] you see this in Taoism, it comes through. The idea that once you've trained enough, [-] the sage can just let things unfold naturally.

You see this even in Augustine. You know, 'love God, and then do what you want.' Of course you have to love God. That means if you really, truly love God, if agape is flowing through you, as Paul recommends, then you have sophrosyne [-] —and this is what I want to say: You will be tempted to the good. You will be tempted. Just like you could be tempted, your salience landscape naturally self-organizes towards self-deception. Your salience landscape, if you're wise, naturally self-organizes towards seeing through illusion, zeroing in on what's relevant and important, and how it is relevant to the project of becoming more virtuous, and having a more meaningful life. You're tempted, you're naturally tempted to the good. That's sophrosyne. And so we argued that what you're doing here is you're internalizing the sage, and what that's doing is helping to overcome egocentrism in this deep sense of helping you to realize sophrosyne.

We argued that there's deep connections, and I don't think these have been explored enough, between wisdom and sophrosyne. And of course sophrosyne is a kind of optimization of your perspectival knowing. It's that I've optimized my perspectival knowing so it's always in service—and this (indicates Participatory knowing) is what was, to some degree, missing from this theory—it's in the service of my Agent:Arena relationship and how that is being developed. Being developed. That reciprocal realization. So that I can go through the important transformations that are needed to become a wise person.

We argued that what the sophrosyne is directed towards were three M's. Obviously Morality (Fig. 1g) (writes Morality below Sophrosyne), more broadly construed as not just knowing the rules, but the capacity for being virtuous. Realizing Meaning in life (writes Meaning in life below Morality). Now, a deficit there is, we only had self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan, on this kind of stuff. And much more work, much more significant work has been done with meaning in life. Work that I'm doing with Thalia Vrantsidis, Juensung Kim, Philip Rajewicz, and we're presenting at APA this

year. And so, this theory needs to be revised, and I've tried to show you that, in the course, to more directly connect this machinery to meaning in life. So this needs significant improvement (draws an arrow to Meaning in life). We did argue that meaning in life is irreducible, a la Wolf, to morality. And then something we talked about, is Mastery (writes Mastery below Meaning in life).

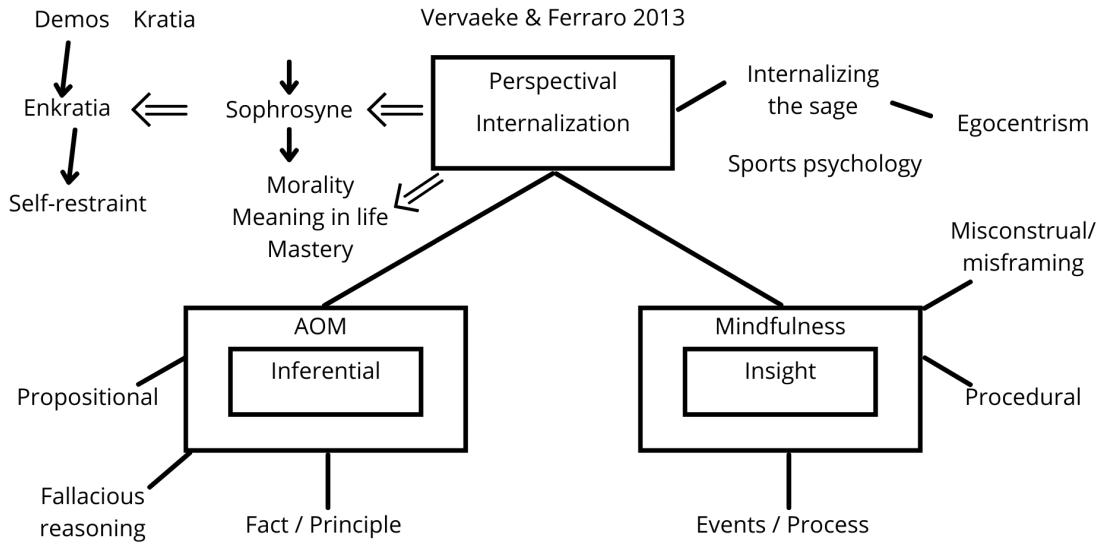


Fig. 1g

We use the three M's because they're helpful. I'm not comfortable with that term (Mastery) anymore, because of all of its political connotations. We were thinking of it more like in the academic sense, like when you get your M.A. And [-] in the oldest sense, like when you did your 'masterpiece.' What we meant here was a terrific capacity for caring and coping with reality. You had sets of skills, you had sets of psychotechnologies, you had sets of roles that you could take.

[-] Propositional knowing (indicates Inferential and AOM) gives you rules. And procedural knowing gives you various routines. Perspectival knowing gives you various roles. And being able to use rules, routines and roles with Mastery in coping and caring was central. Again, always guided under the governance, under the regulation of sophrosyne (draws an arrow from Sophrosyne to the three M's). So this is a processing account. It tells you how to become wise. You cultivate active open-mindedness. You cultivate mindfulness. You cultivate internalizing the sage.

We use sports psychology (writes Sports psychology below Internalizing the sage) here as a way of trying to get what that looks like. (indicates Internalizing the sage) We also use, of course, developmental psychology. Vygotsky, sports psychology, talks about very much how people go through a process of internalizing the coach, and that's strongly analogous to internalizing the sage. And so we talked about: you cultivate active open-mindedness. You cultivate mindfulness. You cultivate internalizing the sage. And you're guided overall by trying to become sophrosynic in that.

And so this is a processing theory, as I've mentioned; I think there's a deficit in it. [-] What's absent from it is transformational experience, transformational development. These are all very telling things. The role or relationship between this and altered states of consciousness was not properly developed. The participatory knowing, which of course connects to the transformational experience, is missing. So wisdom is not connected to gnosis here in any important way.

So those are some important criticisms I would have. The relationship between the kinds of knowing wasn't well-developed. We argued that while perspectival knowing synthesizes these (indicates AOM and Inferential and Mindfulness and Insight) together, I think that's too simplistic. A much more complex relationship, you see me argue for in this course, I think is being developed, and needs to be developed. [-] A core aspect of this theory that I think is still central, is that all of this [-] is about enhancing relevance realization (indicates Fig 1g).

Our main argument is that wisdom is some kind of comprehensive optimization of cognition. And then I would extend that now. Consciousness, character, et cetera, and that in order to optimize cognition in a comprehensive fashion, and in a developmental fashion, that means that what you're doing is enhancing relevance realization. And we always, we already saw that at work throughout this. And we saw that relevance realization is central in the explicit psychological theories that we've already examined.

Now in connection with that, there's another serious lacuna in this theory, which is that, although it does something, I think that's very important, it connects wisdom to insight. Let's start here (indicates Insight). I mean, it

would be odd to say, for example, that Sam is very wise, but he's not very insightful. That seems wrong. We could say things like: Sam is very wise and he's maybe not very educated. He might not be sort of super intelligent. That's fine. But to say that Sam is wise and not insightful, well, that seems to trespass on that McKee and Barber point about seeing through illusion. Wisdom definitely has to do with gaining knowledge in the best way, theoretical knowledge. Obviously gaining procedural knowledge.

So the wise person knows how to believe well, and that seems also deeply, deeply right. The wise person is overcoming egocentrism, internalizing the sage. The traditions point to this very clearly. And they point towards sophrosyne, the most excellent way. And of course, one way in which we could understand this (Sophrosyne) is exactly the Pauline recommendation (Fig. 1h) (writes Agape). That the best form of sophrosyne is agape. But what's missing?

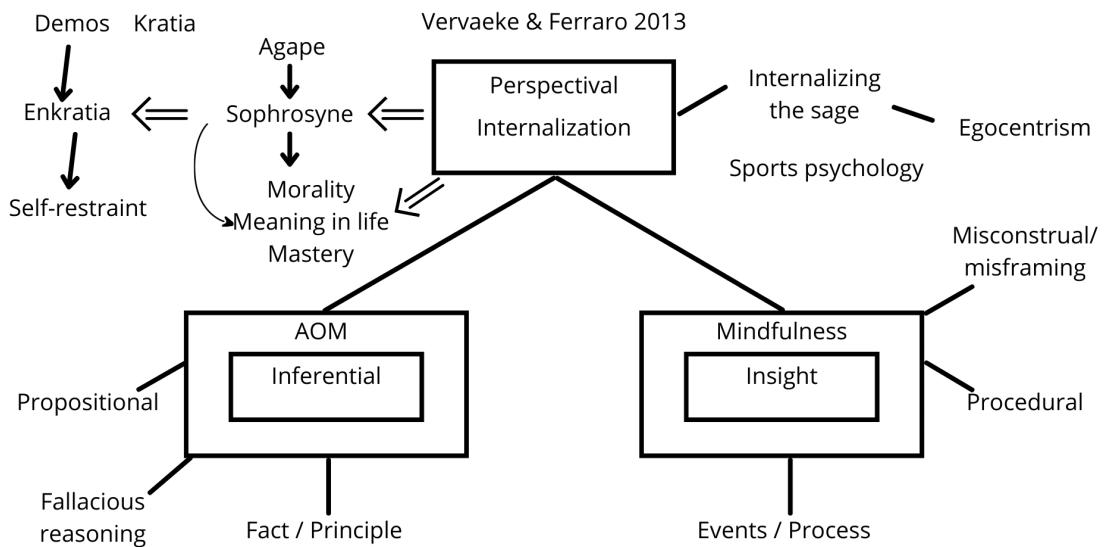


Fig. 1h

So I've already pointed to many things, but something that's central here is a theory of understanding. To say that Bill is very wise; he's so insightful; he's so capable of self-transcendence and overcoming egocentrism; he believes things really well, like he's not easily duped... but he doesn't understand; he doesn't have deep profound understanding of things. It's like, "no, no, that's not right." One of the ways people zero in on relevant information is by being more insightful, yes. One of the ways they zero in on relevant

information is avoiding bias and fallacy in their inferential changes of their beliefs. One way in which they zero in on relevant information and overcome egocentrism is all of the perspectival, internalization, the cultivation of sophrosyne.

But what's missing—and we saw this in Ardel's work very clearly, we saw it implied in Sternberg. And so we should have taken this into account.

Wisdom should also have within it a [-] connection to a clear theory of understanding. And so I think that's also missing. What is it to enhance understanding? What is it to develop a profound understanding?

So I want to try and at least discuss that. I'm not in the place where I have a complete theory of understanding. I've been doing a lot of work on it. Work that I'm actually doing with Leo Ferraro. And because that theory is still very much a work in progress, I'm also not clear quite how it would fit into this (indicates Perspectival Internalization). What would be the cognitive style for tapping into the participatory knowing, and how does that relate to enhanced understanding? I'm not sure. I don't know. I don't know. So the criticisms have shown me many ways in which there's important lacuna, there's things that are underdeveloped, and things of which I'm ignorant.

However, and I'm going to try and address the 'understanding' issue in a moment. I would like to say, nevertheless, we can see how all of the theories converge, including this one, on relevance realization, intelligence, rationality, these different kinds of knowing, and integrating them together, optimization. They're all zeroing in on this, so that we see—remember?

Back to this old diagram, everything converging (Fig. 3) (draws converging lines) on the RR (writes RR) and then coming out (draws diverging lines) into all these aspects of human spirituality. And here's one (writes Wisdom) I've made, I think, a plausible case for that really helps plays a crucial role in helping us to give a naturalistic account of what wisdom is. That I think I've made a plausible case for.

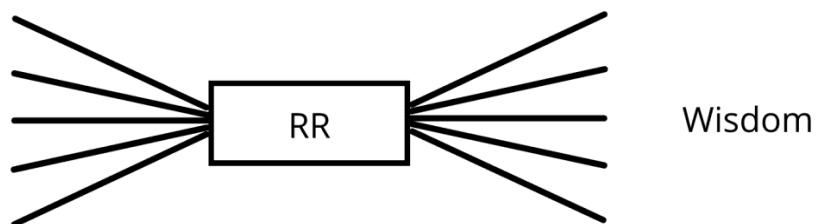


Fig. 3

Now, what about understanding? Well, we already saw it invoked with this grasping of significance. And it's interesting in a completely independent and convergent manner. When you look through a lot of the current philosophy of understanding, this is what people are now distinguishing: understanding from knowledge, distinguishing understanding from just possessing an explanation, because an explanation is a set of propositions. So there is the idea that understanding is something beyond possessing an explanation. It's something above and beyond simply knowing. We already saw with Kekes, this idea of grasping the significance. And I pointed out to you that that could be understood in terms of construal and relevance realization. What I am saying is if you take a look at the 'philosophy of understanding' literature, this idea that understanding goes beyond knowledge and explanation, in the grasping of the significance of the knowledge, is something to which you can [-] draw a quite powerful convergence argument. Many people are converging on this idea.

There's some variation on what they think this 'grasping the significance' is. I think, to go back to Smedslund that it has to do, like we saw, with grasping the relevance of what you know. Remember that was one of the key features of his account of understanding. So in addition to all the implication and logical relations, there were relations of relevance, non-propositional. And then I argued that construal plays a central role, and that construal can be understood in terms of [-] the relevance realization machinery that's found within problem formulation.

Good Construal

So I would argue that what we're talking about is a really good construal (Fig. 4a) (draws a square and writes construal inside). And we have a way of talking about that already. We have the notion of an optimal grip (draws a downward arrow from Good construal and writes Optimal grip). [-] A really good construal has a structural functional organization. I've sized up the situation well, featural Gestalt, the right degree of transparency and opacity. I'm getting an optimization on my grip on things. So this is good contact. That's the good construal. And then what it does, is it affords me to grasp what's relevant in this situation. How I sized up the situation and got an

optimal grip on it, affords—remember in Madison—good problem formulation.

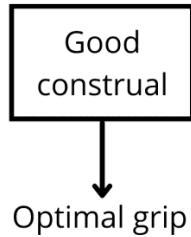


Fig. 4a

Now, we also saw something else. If you remember the connection to good problem finding (Fig. 4b) (draws arrows pointing from Good construal). And that's why I talked about the problem nexus. And I promise to come back. I talked about Arlin. But I also mentioned that point, the very recent work [-] of de Regt (writes De Regt). And I've never met this person, so I hope I get their name right. I just want to copy this very carefully (writes Cigsberg). Cigsberg? I'm not sure if that's right or not. This is work from 2017 (writes 2017). And then there's also de Regt's own book on understanding (Explaining Understanding – Grimm, Baumberger, Ammon). And there's a lot of good work going on about this. It's very exciting stuff. They point towards what they call the 'standard of effectiveness' for understanding. I understand something—what's the contrast here?

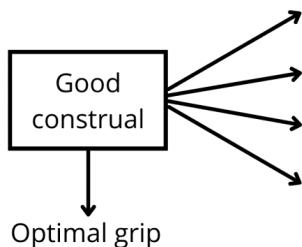


Fig. 4b

Standard Of Effectiveness For Understanding

You don't want to say that somebody has understood something, and what that means is, they've grasped the truth. Now they have to be *trying* to grasp the truth, that's important—and that'll come out in a moment. But you can't say, well, if they didn't grasp the truth, they don't understand it. Because then you're faced to say the following thing: that most people have never understood anything, because most people's beliefs in the past are false. And

most of my beliefs right now are false. So I'm actually not understanding. You don't want to tie understanding too tightly to truth in that fashion.

So instead of tying it to truth, you might want to tie it more to something like rationality, where you're [-] using the best methods for trying to get at the truth. That's more plausible. And this would also help to explain why, in the prototypical instances within science, we use things that aren't true, in order to generate understanding. You go and you open a science textbook and they'll show the atom with this little circle and things going around it (Fig. 5) (draws a circle and larger rings around it). And that's all, that's pretty much completely false.

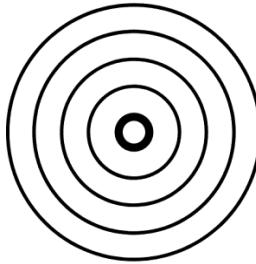


Fig. 5

It doesn't matter that it's false. It is effective for helping you to grasp the significance of the scientific model of the atom, to draw, as Cherniak would say, the right implications, look for the right connections. It helps you zero in on the relevant information in the right way. And that's why it's used. [-] You're making a mistake if you think most of the diagrams and the idealizations that are at work in science are attempts to represent the truth accurately. They are not, they are attempts to effectively get you to zero in on the relevant implications. Make the relevant connections, as Smedslund would say. This is what is meant by effectiveness.

Effectiveness is exactly doing. And then they talk about how, what it is to say that somebody understands something, is that they're good at being able to apply their knowledge, find new domains, open up new areas of research. So of course, it's this multi-apt ability to apply [-] their good problem formulation here. To transfer it, and transform it, and specify in many different ways. And what's implied in here, of course, is an important capacity for problem finding (Fig. 4c) (writes Problem finding). Somebody who has good understanding can [-] motivate and facilitate a need for

cognition. Because they can use that to go out and find and formulate problems, perhaps zero in on important problem nexus.

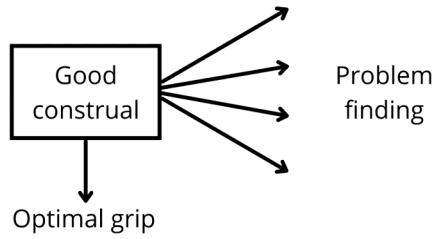


Fig. 4c

[-] This optimal grip is giving me something that De Regt [-] also talks about, and what many people talk about. The idea that understanding is contextually sensitive. It's contextually relative. To know that I understand something, is relative to the situation at hand, and relative to the person at hand.

You and I can both know the same things, but if you're in situation A and situation B, you might understand those things because you can apply them in A. I couldn't be said to understand them as well, because I can't apply them in situation B. Also, we could be in the same situation, but I have a different set of skills. And so I can apply my knowledge better than you can. I understand better than you can.

So there's very much that this is context relative, and I would then add, of course, context sensitive (Fig. 4d) (writes Context relative and Context sensitive below Optimal grip). And that, of course, is the context sensitivity, whereas this (points to Problem finding) is the ability to do things in a much more context general way. And of course, I'm invoking the machinery of relevance realization. I'm invoking it in a good construal and then the ability to transfer it insightfully (indicates Problem finding).

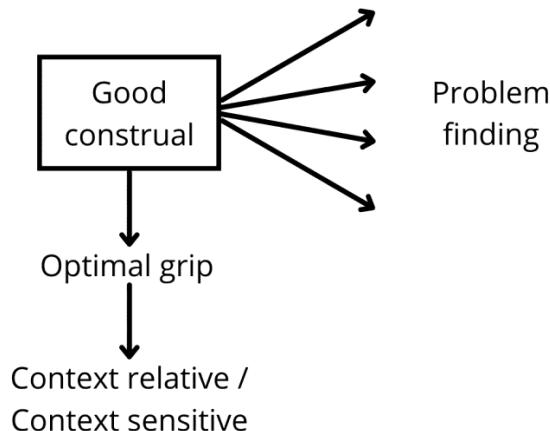


Fig. 4d

I would also argue that one more thing is needed. Because we've already got the idea that if I am making these kinds of forward cognitive commitments, they need to be backed by a lot of convergence (Fig. 4e) (draws lines converging on Good construal) so that my construct is also trustworthy. I've done a lot, of course, to overcome self-deception. So if basic understanding is to grasp the significance, grasp through relevance realization, the relevant implication, the relevant connections—this is what I'm trying to suggest to you. That basic understanding becomes profound understanding when basic understanding is used to generate Plausibility (writes Generate plausibility above Good construal).

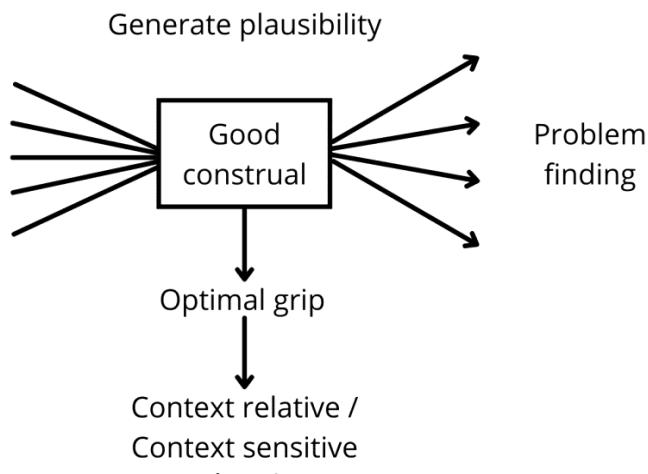


Fig. 4e

I don't think that's enough, because if you'll allow me a sort of schematic way of putting it, this is very horizontal; (draws a horizontal arrow) it tells you how to bring different domains together into your good construal and then apply them to many domains. And you're doing the compression. And

then you're doing the variation. You're doing the relevance realizing. The compression, variation, good problem formulation, optimal gripping. This is contextually sensitive (indicates Context sensitive). This (points to Problem finding) is effectively applied across in a cross-contextual manner, et cetera, et cetera.

But I think understanding also has, if you'll allow me, a vertical domain (Fig. 6) (draws a vertical line down the horizontal arrow), because I think part also of what profound understanding does, is it aligns and optimizes the relationship—so if this is plausibility generation (writes Plausibility generation in the X-axis), what's being aligned and optimized here? I think are the propositional knowing (writes Propositional in the upper right quadrant), the procedural, perspectival and the participatory (writes Procedural, Perspectival, Participatory in the lower right quadrant).

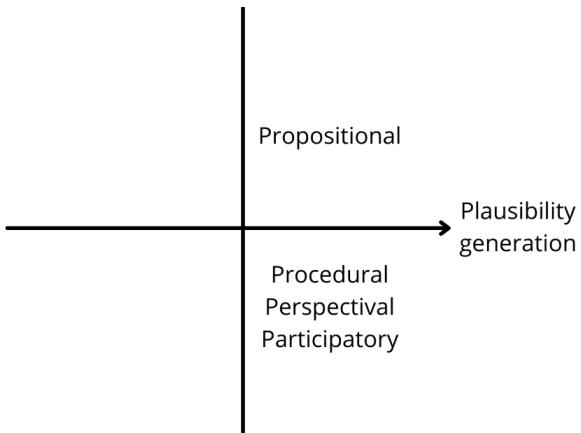


Fig. 6

[...] Somebody who really knew physics wouldn't just be grasping the propositions of physics, they would be able to—they'd have the skills—they'd know how to do physics, and they'd have the situational awareness—they would know which skills to apply, and which skills to develop, in order to do physics well. There might even be a participatory aspect, where they might have come to identify with the physicalist worldview, and taken up their agency with respect to that. Although that might be problematic, given arguments from the meaning crisis. [...] So the more deeply these are aligned and interconnected and mutually facilitating each other (Fig. 6), the more capable they are, I would say, of understanding the material.

So I think what needs to be developed is a way of theoretically integrating the horizontal, that [-] profound understanding is to take basic understanding, grasping the relevance connections; and make those relevance connections—convergence, elegance, optimal gripping—so that profound understanding is to generate plausibility. That's the horizontal. But profound understanding is also to align, so you're getting grounding downward, and you're getting emergence upward. The relationship between propositional knowing, procedural knowing, perspectival knowing, and participatory knowing. And then all of that needs to be, of course, integrated into an account of wisdom.

As I said, what also needs to be aligned is transformational experience. And that means an account of gnosis needs to also be integrated into the account of wisdom.

Transformative Knowing / Experience

So that notion of [-] knowing through transformation and becoming, so that knowing and becoming; knowing oneself and knowing the world, and becoming a different agent in a different arena, [are] bound together. We've talked about this, that transformative knowing (writes Transformative knowing/experience), that transformative experience. There's, of course, many instances in which it's rather sudden, or somewhat sudden, (Fig. 7a) (writes Sudden below Transformative knowing/experience) and so it has very much important features of insight. And we've taken a look at that. And that, of course, is again, to recommend it one more time, the seminal and powerful work of LA Paul (writes Insight and LA Paul below Sudden).

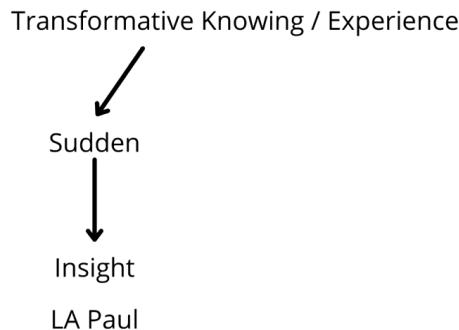


Fig. 7a

Now, Agnes Callard in her book, *Aspiration* (2016), [-] has recently argued that there are also instances where people go through this transformative knowing, that are much more incremental in nature (Fig. 7b) (writes Incremental nature under Transformative knowing/experience). She doesn't deny this (indicates Sudden), but she argues that there are very many instances about this (indicates Incremental nature). So all of the stuff we talked about here (indicates Sudden) hasn't been dispensed with. This (indicates Incremental nature) is being added as a complement and a supplement.

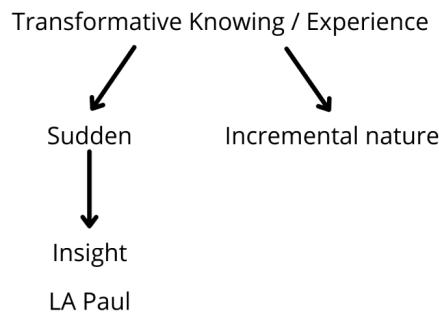


Fig. 7b

Aspiring To Proleptic Rationality

So what's an example of this more incremental process? She gives many examples. Let's use one. You join a music appreciation class. And so we're using the word appreciation here not in the sense of gratitude, but how it's used when people talk about music appreciation, art appreciation. So you're joining a music appreciation class. What would make you a good student in the music appreciation class? If you're there because you want to impress your girlfriend or your boyfriend, or you're there because every time you go, you pass the chocolate store and you buy some chocolate. Or you're there because you're just trying to get a credit, the person teaching the music appreciation class is not going to regard you as a good student, because why? Because the goal of music appreciation is to come to value music for its own sake. It's to come to finding music intrinsically valuable, and therefore something that is directly relevant to your meaning in life. Something that you directly care about.

[-] Now think of the paradox here, and this is so beautiful the way Callard brings it up. If I was a good student, I would appreciate music for its own

sake. But if I appreciated music for its own sake, I do not need to take the music appreciation class. Do you see the paradox here? And then Callard points out that this was the same thing when you decided you're going to undertake a liberal education. The liberal education is gonna give you values and preferences that you don't currently have.

So the idea is the music appreciation. So what do you do there? How do you break through that dilemma? Now, let's be very clear. Callard is in agreement with LA Paul, that you can't get through this in an inferential fashion, for all of the arguments we've already seen. She does make something clear that I don't think that's clear in Paul's work. She talks about the fact that this process of trying to acquire an appreciation for something as intrinsically valuable, she calls this process Aspiration (Fig. 7c) (writes Aspiration). Where you might call this process more inspiration (indicates Sudden), the sudden insight. Inspiration versus aspiration. So you're aspiring.

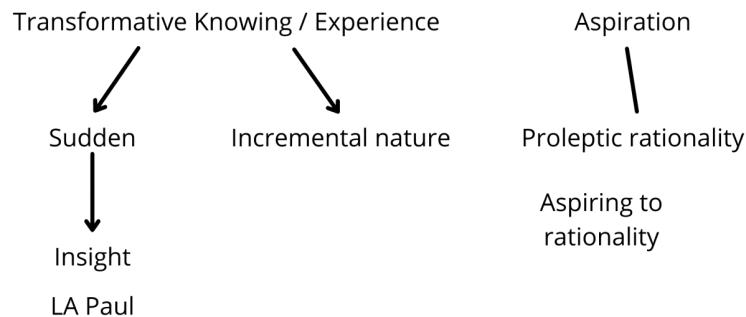


Fig. 7c

And she points out something that I think is really clear; that this has to be something that can be seen as a rational process. Now, of course, there's ways in which we can screw this up. But what she wants to argue is that there's a form of rationality appropriate to aspiration. She calls it proleptic rationality. When you were doing proleptic things in the ancient world, you were trying to encourage people to cultivate particular virtues or values. Proleptic rationality (writes Proleptic rationality under Aspiration).

Why? Because if we were to say that the person who is engaged in aspiration, who is trying to become somebody other than they are, to go through the transformative experience, to have a perspectival knowing, a participatory knowing that they do not currently have—because they cannot do that inferentially, they cannot use decision theory to do that—if we were

to say that therefore they're irrational, notice the paradox we fall into. Because we would have to conclude that if I am aspiring to rationality (writes Aspiring to rationality), because you have to, that would be an irrational thing to do. If I'm aspiring to virtue, that would be an irrational thing to do. If I decide to take up a liberal education to become a better person, a different better person, then that would be an irrational thing to do. [-] To call that irrational would be a performative contradiction. My aspiring to rationality has to be itself a kind of rationality. That's proleptic rationality. Or to use something older, my loving of wisdom, my aspiring to becoming wise, cannot itself be an irrational process. It has to be rational, not inferential rational, for sure.

So first of all, she does that excellent work of saying [that] we've got to broaden our notion of rationality to include aspiration. I would argue we have to broaden our notion of rationality to include inspiration as well. And that's the way in which I'm being radically sort of reconstructive of romanticism. So now the issue becomes, what's going on here? Well, I'm going through a process of identity change (Fig. 7d) (writes Identity change below Incremental nature), transformative experience, participatory knowing.

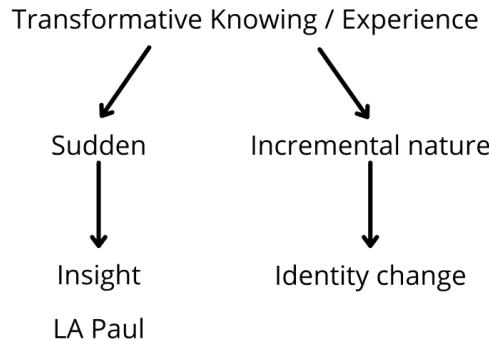


Fig. 7d

And here's where Callard's work is a little bit lacking. Because while she makes a very good case for aspiration, and a very good case for the nature of aspiration, that it's proleptically rational, she doesn't give us very much towards a psychology of aspiration. And that's, of course, perhaps because she's a philosopher. She does offer a couple of cues.

Let's go back to the music appreciation. [-] Think about how this connects to sophrosyne, trying to tempt yourself into the good, but you got to do it in

this tricky way; and think about also how it's related to gnosis and trying to get out of existential entrapment. So what I got to do is I've got to [-] have a value that will get me currently engaged. Here's my frame now. It'll get me currently engaged with music (Fig. 8) (draws 2 intersecting squares), but I will be able to give up that value (draws a northeast arrow from the center of the lower square) when I actually value music for its own sake.

So you see what's going on here? You need to, she calls it a placeholder, but it's actually in our sense, it's a symbol. It's something that connects the future you, and [-] your way of life, to the current you. And it does it by having this double-faced—not duplicitous, because you're aware of this... that's what makes it a rational process. This double-faced thing.

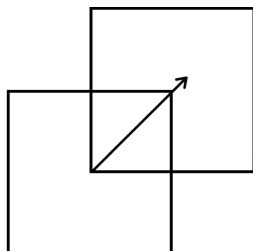


Fig. 8

So I may go to the music class because I currently have the value of making myself do things that I find difficult. Now that's not the same value as appreciating music. But I do that with the understanding that that is temporary. That is to try and get me into a liminal place where I can start to play with what it's like to value music for its own sake. To enter that world. You can see the connections to gnosis here. You can see the connections to symbolic enactment here. Aspiration is deeply bound up, I would argue, with gnosis.

And then something that Callard doesn't talk at all about, but we've already talked about; I think aspiration is deeply connected to wonder (Fig. 7e) (writes Wonder). Wonder gets you to question, almost like Socratic aporia, your world view, your sense of self. It opens up and it motivates you. It opens you up and motivates you to go through aspirational change. I think if you have a wonderful kind of gnosis that's got the appropriate placeholder in place, that's the beginnings of a psychological account of how we can go through aspiration.

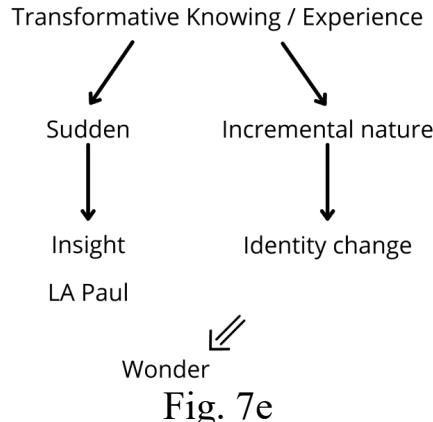


Fig. 7e

So, I think we can bring what was needed for a theory of wisdom, because, of course, *Philosophia*. We aspire to wisdom; and we always aspire to wisdom because to claim—and this is a deep point—that we've achieved wisdom, is kind of a mistake. So we need an account of understanding, an account of gnosis. And these are all related. And an account of aspiration. We need them to be further explicated, integrated, and then integrated with the accounts of wisdom that I've been arguing for already.

I want to try and draw this all together now. So I'll point to what's going on. Because I'm going to need more time. I'm going to need time from the next episode to try and draw this all together. What I want to do in the drawing together is, I want to try and draw this all together into an account of what wisdom is. I'll say what this is now, so I don't just leave you completely hanging, but I want to come back and develop it. And then I want to try and connect this notion of wisdom back to enlightenment, and back to responding, awakening from the meaning crisis.

An Account Of Wisdom

Here's the account of wisdom I'm going to leave you with. And then I'm going to come back and try and at least develop and defend a bit.

Wisdom is an ecology of psychotechnologies. An ecology of styles that dynamically—and that means reciprocally, in a reciprocal fashion, constrain and optimize each other, such that there is an overall optimization, enhancement of relevance realization. Relevance realization within inference, within insight and intuition, the connection to implicit processing, internalization, understanding, gnosis, transformation and aspiration.

Wisdom is an ecology of psychotechnologies and cognitive styles that dynamically enhance relevance realization in inference, insight and intuition, internalization, understanding, and gnosis, transformation, and aspiration.

In that sense, what's happening is something that's already overlapping with the machinery of enlightenment. We're seeing that wisdom is a dynamical system. A dynamical system that is counteractive to the machinery of self-deception. And that helps to afford the self-organized transformation into the life of flourishing. A life that is deeply meaningful.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 45 Notes

Leo Ferraro

Book Mentioned: The Scientific Study of Personal Wisdom: From Contemplative Traditions To Neuroscience – [Buy Here](#)

Sophrosyne

Sophrosyne is an ancient Greek concept of an ideal of excellence of character and soundness of mind, which when combined in one well-balanced individual leads to other qualities, such as temperance, moderation, prudence, purity, decorum, and self-control.

Enkratia

Enkratia comes from the adjective which means possession, power over something or someone else.

Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro theory of human motivation and personality that concerns people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs.

Henk de Regt

Book Mentioned: Scientific Understanding: Philosophical Perspectives – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Understanding Scientific Understanding – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Explaining Understanding: New Perspective From Epistemology And Philosophy Of Science – [Buy Here](#)

L. A. Paul

Laurie Ann Paul is a professor of philosophy and cognitive science at Yale University. She previously taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Arizona. She is best known for her research on the counterfactual analysis of causation and the concept of “transformative experience.”

Agnes Callard

Agnes Callard is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago. Her primary areas of specialization are ancient philosophy and ethics.

Book Mentioned: Aspiration: The Agency of Becoming – [Buy Here](#)

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 46 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Conclusion and the Prophets of the Meaning Crisis

Welcome back to Awakening for the Meaning Crisis.

So last time, I attempted to draw together all of the other theories, and I don't mean just the psychological theories, although they're most salient right now, but also the philosophical theories, into an account of wisdom. I presented a model to you, a theory of a wisdom developed by myself and Leo Ferraro from 2013, in which we are enhancing inferential processing through active open-mindedness, enhancing insightful processing through mindfulness. We're enhancing the capacity for internalization by internalizing the sage and cultivating sophrosyne. Our salience landscape naturally organizes away from self-deception and tempts us towards the truth. Or at least what's true, good, and perhaps beautiful; that's perhaps a better way of putting it. And that that coordinates the propositional knowing associated with inference, the procedural knowing associated with insight, the perspectival knowing associated with internalization, together. And [-] that is directed towards realizing sophrosyne. And that that can help cultivate a more moral existence, the connection to virtue. Mastery in the sense of coping and caring, and meaning in life. But of course, one of the criticisms I made was that the notion of meaning in life there was too simplistic, and it needs to be integrated with a much more developed account that's already in the literature, and I'm contributing to that by work I'm doing with others on meaning in life.

I pointed out that the Vervaeke and Ferraro model is missing participatory knowing. It's missing the relationship between, or at least I think it misrepresents, misaligns, the relationship between the kinds of knowing. Understanding is missing. Transformative experience is missing. Aspiration is missing. Gnosis is missing. So all of these things need to be deeply integrated together.

[-] I tried to suggest the beginnings of an account of how we turn basic understanding, which is to grasp the relevance of our knowledge, into profound understanding by integrating the account of understanding with the account of plausibility. So that profound understanding is the generation of plausibility by having convergence onto a contextually sensitive optimal grip that is formatively transferable in a highly effective manner in problem finding and many different problem finding formulating and solving in many different domains.

I also brought out the idea that in addition to inspiration, this is a term I'm giving for more sudden, insight-laden transformative experience. You can have what Callard calls 'aspiration.' It's more incremental. It's still can't be solved in an inferential decision theoretic fashion. She agrees with Paul on that. She does argue though, and I agree with this argument, that aspiration must be considered a form of rationality, which he calls proleptic rationality, because you're going to get into a performative contradiction. If my aspiration for rationality and my love of wisdom are not themselves rational processes, I'm kind of in trouble in my model of rationality.

Then, given all of that philosophy, what's missing, as I argued, is an extensive psychology of aspiration. I know one of my colleagues, Jeunsung Kim, is working on exactly that problem and he's doing it in connection with a psychology of wisdom. I did suggest to you that we could see one of Callard's ideas of how we do this by we create something that's double-faced, I argued, ultimately symbolic, having aspects of gnosis in it, that allows us to make the jump, the leap, even if it's an incremental one, from who we are now and what we value now, to the place where I've acquired some new thing that I value for its own sake. We use the example of music appreciation, et cetera.

But unlike Callard, I see that as inherently relying on our symbolic capacity, our capacity for enacted symbolic behavior. What I call gnosis serious play. And because I mean in serious play, it's always like when I'm playing with something, I'm treating it as, for example, a sword, but it's actually a piece of plastic. That kind of serious play, that symbolic ability, especially the inactive one that gives me anagoge and analogia. That's really important, I would also argue, for aspiration. At least for the placeholders that do important work within aspiration.

I also argued that aspiration also probably has an affective component to it. And I suggested that wonder—and we saw how central wonder is to the cultivation of wisdom—that wonder is the affective state that's most conducive to aspirational progress because of the way it opens up our identity and our world, triggers the transjective relationship, and that participatory knowing puts it into a developmental trajectory. So all of that needs to be integrated together into an account of wisdom.

And then I suggested to you, drawing it all together, is that wisdom is an ecology of psychotechnologies/cognitive styles. [-] And that means reciprocal optimization that dynamically enhances the relevance realization that's central to inference, to insight and intuition, to internalizing, especially internalizing the sage, to understanding and gnosis, and related gnosis to the relevance realization at work within transformative experience and aspiration.

[-] That enhancement, that way in which I'm talking about wisdom, that dynamic system, that ecology, is already overlapping, as it should; overlapping with the account we gave of enlightenment where a crucial element of enlightenment was to create a counteractive dynamical system that counteracts parasitic processing. [-] I'm arguing that wisdom is a kind of dynamical system that is counteractive for overcoming self-deception, and therefore would be counteractive for overcoming parasitic processing and foolishness. This is a processing account.

You can see, I think, given what I've just said, how it would ameliorate foolishness, we've already talked about how it might enhance flourishing—and we did that in connection with Sternberg—how it's going to help you be better connected to yourself, to other people, and to the world. But I would argue that, especially where it's overlapping with enlightenment, that what wisdom is doing in order to enhance meaning in life, is it's enhancing religio.

So we've got wisdom here. (Fig 1a) (draws an oval and writes Wisdom inside) And I'm sort of saying there's a significant overlap with enlightenment (draws an oval overlapping the first oval and writes Enlightenment). And one of the things that wisdom is doing that's also really important, is it's enhancing religio (writes Religio below Wisdom). That's a way in which you can powerfully—and we saw already the connection, remember Ardel?—the connection to agape, it's enhancing religio. And I would say that the enhancement of religio is already—and remember the role of wonder, potentially even awe here? It's taking us into sacredness (writes Sacredness below Religio), the notion of sacredness that I already have argued and articulated for.

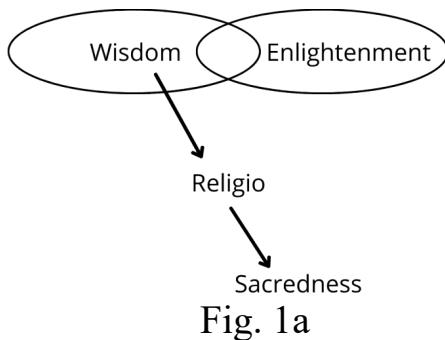


Fig. 1a

And so given this connection... so this is how it's enhancing meaning in life (Fig. 1b) (draws an arrow from Religio and writes Meaning in life beside Religio). And of course, this is also an enhancement (draws a double-headed arrow from Meaning in life to Sacredness). These are all connected is what I'm saying. It's enhancing sacredness.

I think it's plausible therefore to argue—not to conclude decisively, but to argue—that I've shown, I've explicated and explained the deep connections between wisdom, enlightenment, the enhancement of religio, and thereby the relationship to sacredness.

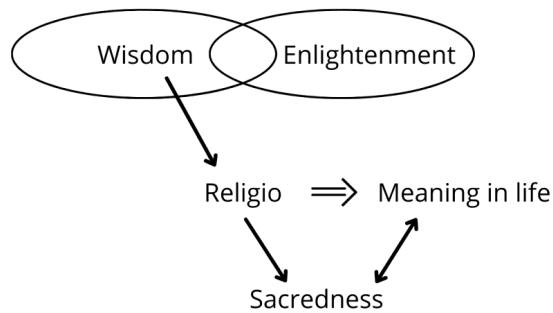


Fig. 1b

Wise Cultivation Of Enlightenment

I want to draw that all together in this notion of the wise cultivation of enlightenment (writes W.C.E.). The wise cultivation of enlightenment. What that carries with it, of course, the enhancement of religio, the encountering with the sacred, the enhancement of meaning in life, et cetera. The wise cultivation of enlightenment.

I think if the wise cultivation of enlightenment is situated within two things... If it's situated within a worldview that affords worldview attunement (Fig. 2a) (draws an arrow from W.C.E. and writes Worldview), if

it's situated within a worldview—and I've tried to do that by throughout consistently, I believe, at least, making this account consistent with a scientific worldview, by running it all off the machinery of relevance realization, that can ultimately be given a naturalistic explanation. And we've already argued how 4E cognitive science, third-generation cognitive science, can give us this worldview. And notice how much the discussion of wisdom was invoking a lot of the theoretical machinery that we got from third-generation 4E cognitive science; it was all through it.

W. C. E.



Fig. 2a

Okay. So that (indicates W.C.E) is situated into, basically, an enabling and encouraging worldview. And it is also situated within some of the things I suggested, where we have a co-op network of communities of practice (Fig. 2b) (writes Co-op network of communities of practice). I already talked about what that is. And that that is in a reflective equilibrium, a dynamic, ongoing one, with a wisdom Wiki (draws an arrow from Co-op network and another pointing to Co-op network, writes Wisdom wiki). And this has both a top-down, like there's researchers (writes Researchers below Wisdom wiki), the researchers in wisdom that I've talked about here, and then drawn from here, of course, is we want to talk about the practitioners (draws an arrow from the Co-op network of communities of practice and writes Practitioners). People are practicing.

W. C. E.

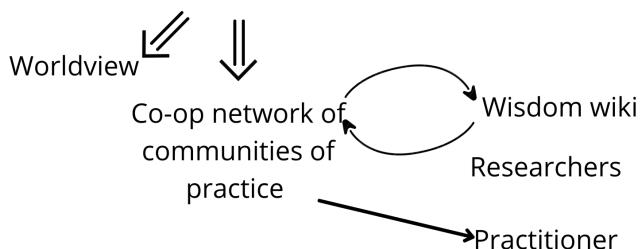


Fig. 2b

And of course, this is a bottom-up, top-down relationship (Fig. 2c) (draws a double-headed arrow between Researchers and Practitioners). So (erases the arrow between Co-op network to Practitioners) we have the practitioners, we

have the researchers, top-down, bottom-up relationship, and they are in that fashion contributing to the wisdom wiki (draws an arrow pointing to Wisdom wiki). The wisdom wiki is taking on a credo function. But it's always in service of religio, and therefore it's being created in a large part by these communities of practice.

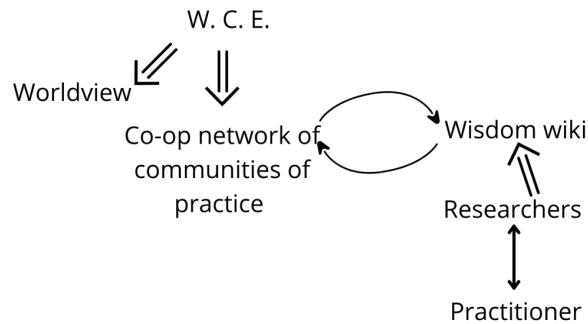


Fig. 2c

Now I think if you put this all together... here it is! (Fig. 2c) This is how I think we can awaken from the meaning crisis. I think that we can draw all of the machinery together for overcoming the perennial problems dealing with historical issues. How to connect wisdom and enlightenment together in a comprehensive fashion and to connect that with enhancing and meaning in life and overcoming self-deception, et cetera, all of that machinery, and then situating it within this kind of socio-cultural framework. I think that's how we can, individually and collectively, awaken from the meaning crisis. And why I want to one more time—and that's what's part of this (indicates Worldview)—emphasize that all of this has been explained and can be engineered from within a secular scientific worldview. It's not a view that is in any way, I think, hostile to religion. I am genuinely and sincerely respectful throughout. But it is a way that is not dependent on religion, nor is it dependent on a political ideology.

A lot of this, this part of it (indicates Co-op network) is already nascent. It's already coming into existence. We have some existing examples of this that are being developed. We can apply it. I've tried to give you an account of this (indicates W.C.E.), and I've tried to give you an account (indicates Worldview) of how the cognitive science re-situates us within a scientific worldview.

Roadmap Of Central Prophets Of The Meaning Crisis

What I now want to do is to put this into, I hope, a constructive dialogue with other responders to the meaning crisis, I would even call them prophets, in the Old Testament sense, of people that were telling forth the meaning crisis, trying to awaken us to it and trying to galvanize us in response to it.

So what I want to do is take everything that I've done, it's summarized by this schema (indicates Fig. 2c). I hope it's not oversimplified by the schema. It's summarized. And I want to put this into dialogue. I hope like I said, constructive dialogue with some of the central prophets of the meaning crisis, especially in the 20th and 21st century.

Now, inevitably I cannot do everybody. Your favorite philosopher might not make it here. Both for lack of time and lack of expertise, I'm not going to talk, for example, very much about Wittgenstein. Although I think he's important. I've taken a lot of undergraduate courses, graduate courses, read a lot of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein has deeply influenced me, the notion of cultural cognitive grammar is Wittgensteinian through and through in important ways. But trying to connect Wittgenstein to the meaning crisis is not something that I feel I have the requisite expertise.

Whitehead is a philosopher I am currently, again, trying to understand. He is somebody who is wrestling very deeply with the meaning crisis, and trying to come up with a way of resituating us within a scientific worldview. [-] I'm reading quite a bit. I'm not confident yet about that. Whitehead, of course, has been terrifically relevant to process theology in some of the new theological innovations in the 20th century. And part of that could be, I've seen, I could argue, I think many people could argue, that theological innovation is designed to respond to the meaning crisis.

There's other people, those are just two clear examples. Instead, I've chosen the people I've chosen for two reasons. I've chosen them because I think I have some relevant knowledge, relevant expertise to bring to bear. And secondly, because they form a network. I don't need to present them sort of a piecemeal fashion. They have relations of contrast, connection, causal influence with each other. So there's a network of people I want to talk about

that are, in a sense, harbingers of the meaning crisis. But again, in that prophetic sense, they're trying to awaken us and arouse us to respond.

So what I want to do is, first of all, put up what that network is going to look like to give you an overarching roadmap of where we're going. And then what I'm going to be doing throughout is presenting that material. And then as I said, trying to put it into constructive dialogue with the argument I have made.

My attempt is not to sort of say that [-] my account is better, or they're all just saying what I was saying. But what I want to show is that the account I've made, [-] I can argue, that it is deeply responsive and responsible to the work of these prophets of the meaning crisis.

So the figure that—and he's a controversial figure. And I think it's fair to say my philosophical attitude towards him is one of ambivalence—but a pivotal figure in this is Heidegger (Fig. 3a) (writes Heidegger). So I want to take a look at Heidegger. Right now, I'm not going into discussing these people; I want to draw out some important connections. We'll have to go behind Heidegger a little bit, and talk about Husserl (writes Husserl) and phenomenology. That's important. Heidegger is, I would argue, also deeply influenced by the gnosis (writes Gnosis) underground running through Germany, especially in the 20th century, and especially between the Wars. And that comes through, at least explicitly, you can see this in John Caputo's book on The Mystical Element In Heidegger's Thought. This comes through the Rhineland mystic of Meister Eckhart (draws a line from Gnosis and writes Eckhart), has a huge impact on Heidegger (draws an arrow connecting Eckhard to Heidegger). So those are definitely important aspects, important influences.

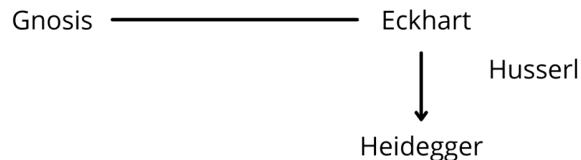


Fig. 3a

Another, of course, titanically important 'cause he just influences everybody is Kant (Fig. 3b) (writes Kant and draws an arrow pointing to Heidegger)

and behind Kant, of course, is Descartes (writes Descartes above Kant).

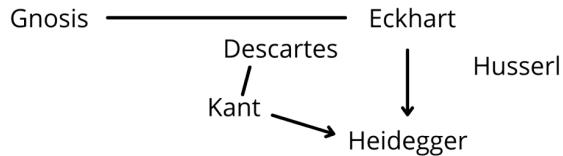


Fig. 3b

So many of these people I'm not going to talk about at length because I've already talked, but I'm trying to map this out, because I'm trying to show you what I'm going to invoke and then what I'm going to discuss in order to try and draw this all together.

So another really important figure, and you've heard me mention him several times.. And he directly gets into that connection with theology, but he is one of the great writers about the meaning crisis. It's of course Paul Tillich; and his masterpiece, *The Courage To Be* is all about a prophetic announcement of the meaning crisis and an attempt to seriously revise theology to take that into account. And there's also, and it's, I think both this way (indicates Gnosis and moves his hand down the diagram), and it's not clear if it's also independently, but there are Gnostic element, deeply Gnostic elements. So I'll put that in sort of a dotted line (Fig. 3c) (draws a dotted line from Gnosis to Tillich) in Tillich, Tillich famously argues that we need to get to the God beyond the God of theism, which is about a Gnostic a statement as you could possibly make.

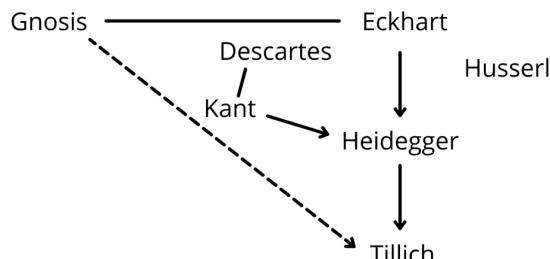


Fig. 3c

So Heidegger also has a lot of influence on somebody you've heard me mention, especially with ideas of transjectivity, but he has a lot to say about symbolism and the meaning crisis, and this is Corbin (Fig. 3d). And so I'm going to have to talk a lot about Corbin, because I haven't discussed him at length, but his work is, again, very pivotal in trying to respond to the

meaning crisis. The work that Cheetham has done in his trilogy of books, or maybe there's four books. But I've read three—well, I've read two. And I'm currently reading the third. Books about Corbin that really helped to make a good case for how important it is. Many people don't know about, for example, the deep connections between somebody else that we're going to talk about. Corbin and Jung (writes Jung below Corbin). And of course, Jung is directly influenced by the Gnostics (draws an arrow from Gnosis to Jung) and directly influenced by Kant (draws an arrow from Kant to Jung).

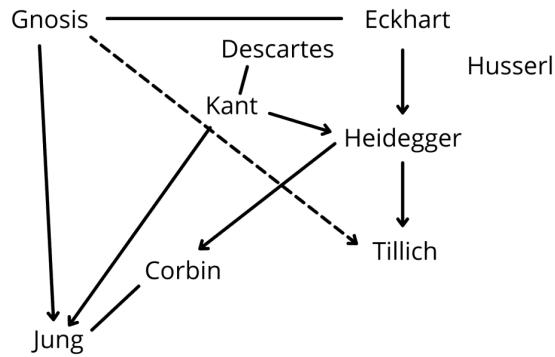


Fig. 3d

This allows me to bring out another important connection. Which is the work of Dourley (Fig. 3e) (draws a bracket between Jung and Tillich and writes Dourley) because what he does, which is really impressive, is he shows the deep similarities between Tillich and Jung. No doubt because of their sharing—well, I'm arguing—the sharing of the Gnosis background. I would also argue that both Tillich and Jung are in an important sense, nontheists. And we'll talk about what nontheism is as we get into that. But one of the core shared ideas, and this is actually the title of one of Dourley's book, is the “psyche as sacrament”. Both Tillich and Jung view the psyche in a sacramental fashion. And that is part of the way in which they attempt to respond to the meaning crisis. Both of them have profound things to say about symbols and the relationship to the spiritual life, broadly construed. So we're going to talk about Jung.

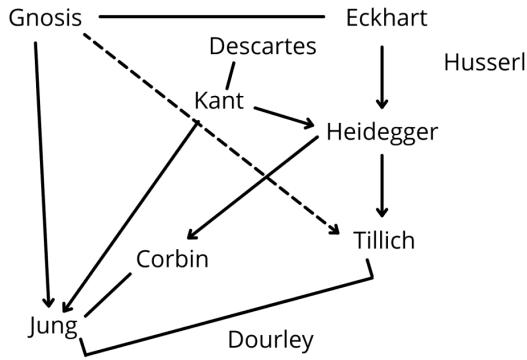


Fig. 3e

Now somebody that's also here directly influenced by Gnosis (Fig. 3f) (draws an arrow pointing away from Gnosis), influenced by Kant through the romantics (writes Romantics below Kant), which we've talked about, at least the early German romantics. People like, Schlegel, for example. And therefore, through Coleridge. And the person I'm drawing in here, this is going to be Barfield (draws a line from Romantics and writes Barfield). And you've heard me mention him a couple times. And Barfield's notions of participation have a lot to say. So you can see how there's sort of a network here.

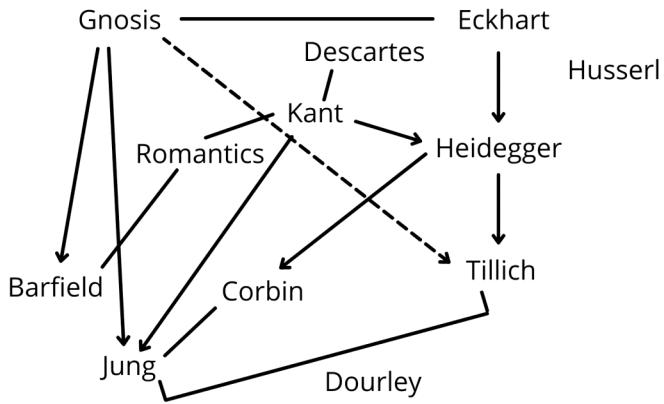


Fig. 3f

And then there's another one that, of course, we need to talk about. And this is the connection between Heidegger and what's been—I don't like this term, but, and people abuse it—[referred to] as postmodernism. As if everybody

who's a postmodernist were saying the same thing. We should more carefully look at individual thinkers and their individual arguments.

One potential connection here is, we'll take a look at it, Derrida (Fig. 3g) (draws a line from Heidegger and writes Derrida). Now, whether or not we should call these two other people "postmodern" is not clear. They are deeply responding to postmodernism and that's Graham Harman (writes draws an arrow from Heidegger and writes Harman) and the terrific work of Timothy Morton are also doing. And this is what's known as "speculative realism" (writes Speculative realism below Harman). It's also known—Harman's particular version of it is known as triple O (writes OOO below Speculative realism). This stands for Object-Oriented Ontology. This is the attempt to deeply bring back a profound kind of realism and contact with reality. Another person that's influenced by [Heidegger] (draws a line from Heidegger) is Han (writes Han). Current philosopher and cultural critic.

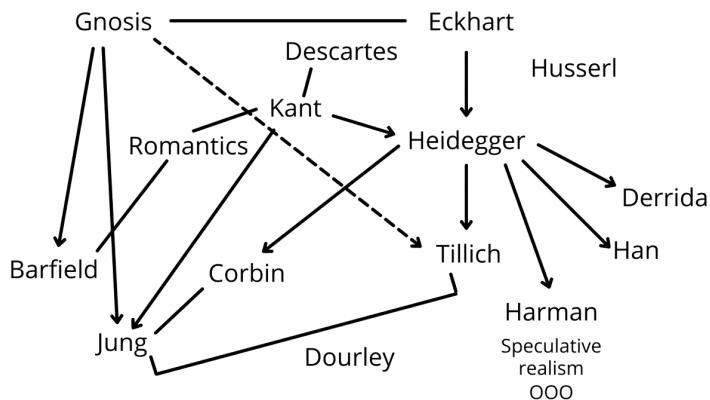


Fig. 3g

We'll talk a little bit about... I can't give all of these people equal work. I'm going to talk about Barfield, Jung, Corbin, and Tillich, and Heidegger quite extensively. Harman, not as much. Han, not as much. Derrida, not as much, but I'll at least touch upon them. Because I want to do this as a way of trying to connect the meaning crisis to what's been called postmodernity, very broadly construed. And offer an alternative response to postmodernism to both sort of wholesale adoption of it. Or the wholesale demonization of it. I think these are both overreactions that we should have a much more nuanced and careful response to.

Now Heidegger has a huge influence in an area many people don't know about (Fig. 3h) (draws an arrow away from Heidegger). And part of this influence is also James (writes James). And part of this influence is also Buddhism (writes Buddhism beside James). And you've heard me mention this, and this is the Kyoto school (writes Kyoto below James and Buddhism), and they are deeply about responding to the meaning crisis, and especially the work of Nishida (writes Nishida below Kyoto) who really is the pivotal figure in founding this.

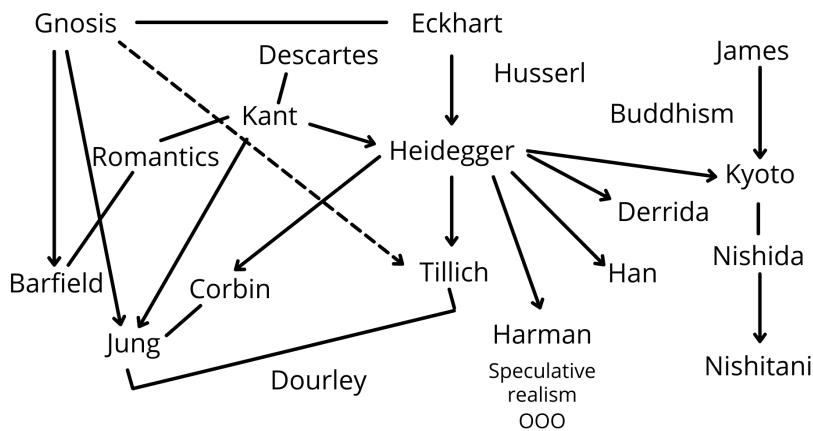


Fig. 3h

And then the person who I think wrote one of the masterpieces on responding to the meaning crisis. And this is Nishitani (writes Nishitani below Nishida). His book, Religion and Nothingness. I've read that book twice. I would put that book in the top five books of responding to the meaning crisis. It is not an easy book, but that's why I've not yet put it into like the Twitter book recommendations. I've recommended the Kyoto school and some of Robert Carter's excellent work, introducing you to these people. Directly reading Nishitani is very difficult. You need to know Heidegger well, James well, Buddhism well. And then the Kyoto school people, I won't talk about, like Maso Abe. They put this into dialogue with people like Tillich and Whitehead.

So this is what I want to try and address. Again, I will be giving some of these people much more priority. I only have four lectures left after this, so four hours. So I'll be giving some people much more priority than others. Obviously, Heidegger is taking a central role here. But we'll be spending

quite a bit of time with Barfield, Jung, Corbin, and Tillich, and with Nishitani. Okay. So those are the ones that I'm going to give priority to. These other people, I'll try to do my best to represent them, but I will have to prioritize. I want to keep my commitment to you that I finish this in the 50 episodes. I also do not want to drag my video crew to some kind of a video version of a death march until they are exhausted beyond all recognition.

So where to start here? Well, I'm going to start at the center. So this is very complicated, and this is not meant to be an explanatory schema. This is meant to be a roadmap to show you where I'm going. How are things connected? You can take this down. And like I said, then you can use this to retrace the connections as I try to explicate and explain them.

Husserl: Phenomenology

Alright. So before we get to Heidegger, we have to talk about, I don't have to talk about Eckhart and the Rhineland mystics, because I've already done that. Or gnosis cause I've already done that quite extensively. Or Kant because I've done that. But one person that I haven't discussed, and his titanic influence on Heidegger is Husserl. Edmund Husserl.

And Husserl (writes Husserl), of course, is famous for founding a whole philosophical movement called phenomenology (writes Phenomenology beside Husserl). Existentialism comes out of phenomenology via Heidegger, by the way, that's how you get existentialism. Heidegger does something to phenomenology and it leads to existentialism. But it also leads to deconstructionism postmodernism, blah, blah, blah, blah. I've already pointed out.

Now again, you need an entire course to get clear about what phenomenology is. I really recommend the Introduction to Phenomenology by Sokolowski (Fig. 4a) (writes Sokolowski beside Phenomenology). Sokolowski and the book Experimental Phenomenology by Don Ihde (writes Ihde below Sokolowski). This (Sokolowski) gives you an idea of what phenomenology is. [-] And this (Ihde) gives you a sort of way of practicing some phenomenological techniques to get a more inside feel of what phenomenology is like.

Husserl

Phenomenology — Sokolowski
Ihde

Fig. 4a

Now phenomenology—and Husserl even writes a book where he invokes the word crisis—crisis in European sciences. Phenomenology was Husserl's attempt to try, I would argue, [-] and get us back to a contact epistemology. And that's why you can see people who are deeply influenced by the phenomenological tradition, like Dreyfus and Taylor, talking about the loss of a contact epistemology, because they're aware of the idea of a contact epistemology, I would argue, from their phenomenological heritage. Husserl famously argued about getting back to things, getting back to the things. That we had gotten so abstracted and removed, we had lost contact with the world. We were out of touch in a profound way, and that's why phenomenology has had such a big influence on those aspects of cognitive science that are trying to show how deeply embedded, embodied and connected we are to the world. So the attempt to get back at contact epistemology was really central.

And one way of understanding that contact (Fig. 4b) (writes Contact under Husserl), and to put it into dialogue with the language we've been using in this course, is that you get this contact by—see, phenomenology shouldn't be confused with merely introspecting. That's the everyday or common sense stance. The phenomenological attitude is not the same thing as your commonsensical everyday introspection. Instead, phenomenology is a much more disciplined practice in which you're trying to pay reflective and, following Ihde, a kind of an experimental attention, this probative attention, *to* the way in which we are in contact with the world.

Husserl
|
Contact

Phenomenology — Sokolowski
Ihde

Fig. 4b

So let's say that what I'm doing in phenomenology is, I'm playing (draws an arrow from Phenomenology to Contact) this reflective, experimental, exploratory, probative attention... (writes Reflective/ Experimental/ Exploratory/ Probative attention) (Fig. 4c). Attention to contact. And then how can we understand contact? Well, what Husserl emphasized, he

emphasized Intentionality (writes Intentionality below Contact). That's one pole of this relation. Okay. Now I've got to explain this. Normally when we use this word, it's correct, but it's a species of the broader sense of intentionality—when you say you do something intentionally, it means you're doing it on purpose. Intentionality here in phenomenology and philosophy, in general, is much more broader. It means any mental directedness, any mental directedness. So when my perceptions are *of* the bottle; or my actions are *towards* the book. Or I'm thinking *about* Paris. Those are all intentionality and that I have a mental directedness.

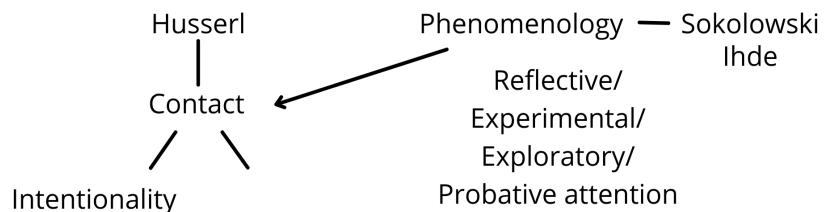


Fig. 4c

So there's the intentionality. And it's in this reciprocal relationship with the way in which a world is disclosed (Fig. 4d) (draws a double-headed arrow beside Intentionality and writes World disclosure), where world doesn't mean a planet. It means something that we've been talking about throughout. It means a meaningfully structured environment. A meaningfully structured environment, what I've tried to often capture by this notion of an arena. This (indicates Intentionality) is kind of a core kind of agency. This is at least mental agency, this mental directedness. So, and this is important. This is—Husserl used the word noesis (writes Noesis below Intentionality and draws a double-headed arrow beside it) here for this, and the noema is here and there's of course, all kinds of debates about what does this refer to. Just something in my consciousness or something in the world.

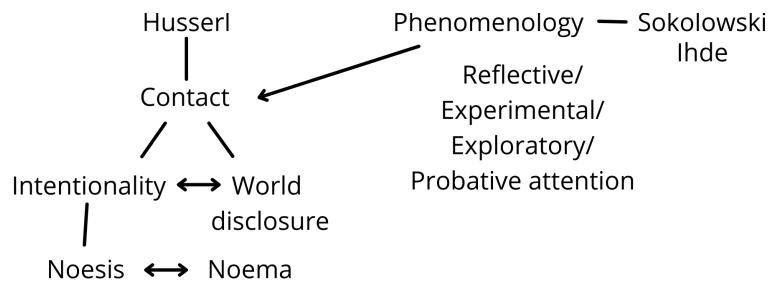


Fig. 4d

We're going to come back to some of this. We're going to come back to it when in order to get to Harman. And we are going to look at Sparrow's critique of phenomenology. Cause he's going to argue that the very goal of phenomenology, which was to get back into contact with reality, and therefore to be a kind of realism, is thwarted by this setup. So he's going to argue that phenomenology ultimately fails as a form of realism, and that it's ultimately a kind of idealism, and therefore it doesn't give us what it purported to do. We'll come back to that. That's just a forewarning.

What I would argue using this [-] — the language and some of the conceptual vocabulary and theoretical grammar we've developed together— using that, I would describe phenomenology as this reflective, experimental, exploratory, probative attention on the transjective relationship. And the fact that he's invoking this term, remember noesis. This is perspectival knowing. So putting it together, it's this reflective—meaning all of these (indicates Reflective/ Experimental/ Exploratory/ Probative attention). It's this reflective attention paid to your perspectival knowing of the transjective relationship. And in that sense, it's deeply consonant with, and that's no coincidence this has had a huge influence on me and my thinking, and many of the people in third-generation cog sci, 4E cognitive science, have been deeply influenced by this because they're trying to understand meaning in this transjective way, making sense.

Heidegger: Criticism Of Husserl

Now, as I said, we're going to come back to criticize that, but right now—in order to make the bridge to Harman and to speculative realism. What I want to do now is [delve into:] (indicates Fig. 4d) What did Heidegger do with this?

[-] Let's do the two criticisms then draw them together.

One of Heidegger's main criticism is that Husserl's work, and this is going to be developed by Sparrow and the speculative realists, is that Husserl's work had not really given us contact. Now one way I would put it, is because it had not really developed an account of participatory knowing. It had not really developed an account of how the agent and the arena were

fundamentally related together, so that this perspectival relationship could unfold.

Now, I don't think that's the case for all of phenomenology. I would make the case that Meleau-Ponty's—and we talked about this. Merleau-Ponty's ideas about embodiment and embeddedness are trying to get at the connection between the perspectival knowing of Husserlian phenomenology and the participatory knowing.

Nevertheless, what Heidegger was innovating, and this is how he was bringing in an existential aspect, he was trying to point out that the modal relationship between the agent and the arena, using our terms, was not properly accounted for within the Husserlian framework. So participatory knowing was deeply missing. And that's sort of our fundamental way in which we're connected, in contact with being.

And then in connection with that. That that participatory knowing had not been set within an ontology that this (indicates Intentionality, World Disclosure, Noesis, Noema) needed to be set within participatory knowing (Fig. 4e) (draws an arrow from Noesis and Noema and writes Participatory knowing). Existential modes. Existentialism comes out of Heidegger. And that in turn needed to be set into a proper ontology (writes Ontology beside Participatory knowing) and a proper account of the structure of being. To use our language. How does the transjective relationship sit within an overall account of the structure of being itself?

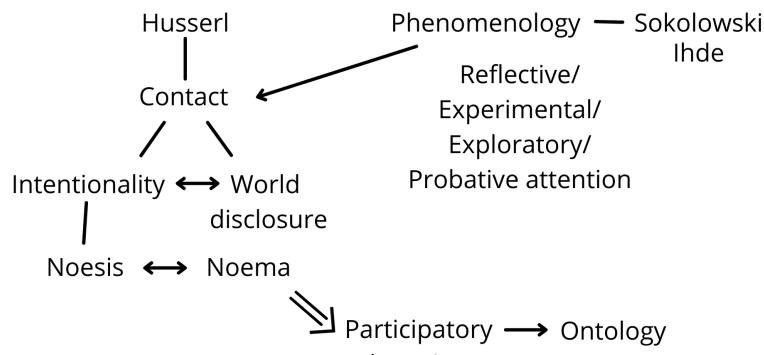


Fig. 4e

If we don't have that, then we have not really got contact back. Because we're still out of touch with our being, and through our being, of being itself.

We're out of touch with our being, and through our being, of being itself. This is Heidegger's main criticism.

A related criticism that is pervasive—although for a long time implicit, and I don't like the way Heidegger, of course, eventually turned on Husserl for despicable reasons. But one of the criticisms Heidegger was making is, Husserl was still trapped within the Cartesian cultural cognitive grammar. Husserl is deeply Cartesian. He entitles one of his books, *Cartesian Meditations*. So in that sense, Heidegger feels that Husserl is still bound within the Cartesian grammar. And he sees that that Cartesian cultural cognitive grammar, for ways we've articulated, radically cuts us off from the world. And this is, of course, a way of saying that we're still sort of trapped within our subjectivity. And in that sense, we'll see what Sparrow means by Husserlian phenomenology is maybe still understandable as a kind of idealism, which doesn't get us back to realism as much as the phenomenologist claim and wanted it to do so.

So, how do we get to this deeper contact? In an organized fashion, how do we do those two things? How do we open up participatory knowing, situated within an ontology, and break free from the Cartesian, ultimately, he would say platonic—I think that's incorrect, maybe Aristotelian—but how do we escape the strictures, the restrictions of the Cartesian cultural cognitive grammar that keep us out of contact with reality?

So, what we need to do is phenomenologically, not just theoretically, but phenomenologically, within participatory knowing, by transforming it in a reflective, experimental, exploratory, probatory way, our attention. By directing our attention in this fashion. I'm opening up our perspectival knowing. So we're going to phenomenologically realize, but we're going to direct that phenomenological realization towards something important. We're going to direct it towards our being. Who and what we are. That's how we're going to connect to the participatory knowing.

What's that going to do? Well, we're going to have a phenomenological realization, which, of course, is then going to become an existential realization, that we are the beings whose being is in question. We are the beings whose being is in question. Now, if you heard the word being and you think, well, you're a homo sapiens and you've got DNA. That's not what's

being meant here. So be patient because it's what's grounding this (indicates Noesis and Noema) that is our being, I'm not talking about a biological phenomenon, at least in any direct sense. Although I think it's ultimately grounded biologically. We're talking about what grounds this Husserlian framework in a participatory knowing. What does it mean to say we are the being whose being is in question?

Well, you can even get a sense of this from the term “existentialism.” Remember we talked about this. That existentialism says human beings don't have an essence like other creatures, other things. So a gazelle is born. It is a gazelle. Its identity is set. It's going to develop into a gazelle. Right.

But for us, at least insofar, I would argue, as we are persons, who and what we are, whether or not it makes sense to call it our essence, because essence should be a widely shared property—but our “being” then—maybe that's a better word to use right now—who and what I am as the person, John Vervaeke, that has been in question. I existed before who and what I am has come into being. And in fact, it's still unclear to me who and what I am. And that's also the case, so you are in question. You exist before you have an essence — before you have who and what you are. That's what existentialism (writes Existentialism) ultimately points to. That your existence precedes your essence. That's one of the things existentialism takes out of Heidegger.

But the key idea is that—this thing's being (lifts his water bottle) is not in question to it, or even ultimately to us. I mean, we can sort of do philosophy on it, but there's from within phenomenology, from within a phenomenological [-] stance [-], *we are in question to ourselves*. Who am I? What am I? What is it to be a person? What kind of person am I?

You see why this is relevant? [-] It's bound up with this question: What is the meaning of my life in this? Not in the sense of destiny, but: How is my life meaningful? What makes it meaningful? What makes it meaningful to me? What is its meaning?

Dasein

[-] We've already talked about Heidegger's connection to this. Heidegger is trying to get you into something like an aporia. And he's trying to get you to

remember the Being mode, the mode in which you're not trying to manipulate even yourself, and solve problems. You're stepping back and confronting mystery because you're engaged, not with controlling things and satisfying your Having needs, you're engaged in a process of development, of becoming! And so you're confronting mystery, because you're going through transformative experience. You are the being whose being is in question, and he's trying to wake you up, not theoretically, phenomenologically. He's getting you to phenomenologically realize that you are the being whose being is in question. That's what we all are.

So instead of referring to us as persons or human beings or things like that, he crafts this new word. Heidegger is famous for neologisms. And part of what he's trying to do with the neologisms is break us out of the familiar terms, and thereby break us out of the Cartesian grammar. He comes up with this word *Dasein* (writes *Dasein*), which means “being there.” It has to do with: I exist. Being there, I'm sort of flowing into the world, thrown into existence. And my being is in question. *Dasein* — being there.

So what's interesting is, my participatory knowing, the way in which I try to connect to how I'm situated in being, has an aporetic element to it. Aporia. In which I realize that central to me, according to Heidegger, is that my being is in question.

Now if my being, that's my participatory knowing, my groundedness in being, is in question, that is how I can link participatory knowing to ontology itself. Do you see? Because—and this is why it's participatory knowing—my self-knowledge will also get me into my knowledge of ontology. Because by knowing myself as the being whose being in question, I can [-] frame an ontological question of putting “being” itself into question. I know myself as a being whose “being” is in question. And knowing myself that way is also to put “being” into question. Right? And so I've got this deep participation in the co-determining mysteries of who I am, and what being is.

So by phenomenologically exploring that being, the being of *dasein*, we can simultaneously come into contact with our modal existence; we can remember the being mode; we can be opened up to the wonder of our own being; that we are ultimately self-defining — at least in some important

aspect, we're ultimately self-defining, self-making things. But, of course, we don't do that egotistically or egocentrically, because we're bound to the world, for reasons I've already given you multiple times. So by phenomenologically exploring the being of dasein, we can simultaneously come into contact with our own modal existence and the mystery of being itself.

So this is starting to take us into the core of how Heidegger is trying to deepen what he thinks was missing. Ultimately the contact with ourselves, not with our autobiographical ego, but with our being. The contact, our participatory knowing of ourself, the connectedness to being, and he's found this... I mean, that's why he's Heidegger. There's brilliant insight, that because we are the being whose being is in question, we can deepen the contact by phenomenologically exploring this (indicates Dasein). So that's really central to what Heidegger is trying to do.

Reading Heidegger is very hard, because it's filled with all this neologisms. It's filled with all of this constant—qualifying, this constant self-criticism, which, of course, is good. There's constant refinement, but also this constant acknowledgment statement that we're not quite getting it. We're not getting the answer. So it's like going on a walk through a really gnarled forest with somebody. This is a metaphor that Heidegger himself would use. And you get a sense of progress, but it's not clear if you're actually making progress. You come into clearings and you get openings and insight, but then there's also, but yet we haven't arrived. We haven't arrived, and so you go on again. So there's this long process.

So what I want to do instead with you is, instead of trying to do something audacious to try and summarize—I want to try and go in [-] do some exposition with you. I want to read some key quotes from Heidegger. and what I then want to do is try and unpack them, following this idea (indicates Fig. 4e) of how he's trying to deepen contact. Trying to put into dialogue with the very tremendous help of Dreyfus, with the theoretical machinery we have developed. And that will also afford me a critical response to Heidegger.

I'm not going to start those quotes now because we're almost out of time. What I want to do is just foreshadow what Heidegger is going to argue.

Heidegger is going to argue that the history of metaphysics, that whole philosophical history coming out of the axial revolution, is actually the history of nihilism. This is why he is a prophet of the meaning crisis, that whole historical development, that framework, that cultural cognitive grammar that we've inherited from the axial revolution, that whole metaphysical framework, has developed inexorably towards nihilism. It has driven us into the meaning crisis. And, of course, that's already deeply resonant with the historical analysis that we pursued in the first half of this course.

So if we can understand that cultural cognitive grammar of metaphysics, that's a pejorative term for Heidegger, we can link it to this project of the phenomenological investigation of dasein and break free from that grammar. And deeply re-establish, and this is not just theoretically, this is phenomenologically, existentially, our contact with being. And that deep participatory knowing and remembering of being, and the realization of being, and how it's not "a" being, not a particular being, and our status with respect to being; that's the response Heidegger is recommending to the meaning crisis. And next time, what I would like to do with you is explore what his thinking is by going through the quotes, unpack it more. What links it to the argument that the history of metaphysics is the history of nihilism. See what we can glean in a cooperative dialogue between this course and Heidegger about responding to the meaning crisis, and draw what important or at least relevant conclusions we can from that.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 46 Notes:

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein was an Austrian-British philosopher who worked primarily in logic, the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of language.

Alfred North Whitehead

Alfred North Whitehead OM FRS FBA was an English mathematician and philosopher. He is best known as the defining figure of the philosophical school known as process philosophy, which today has found application to a wide variety of disciplines, including ecology, theology, education, physics, biology, economics, and psychology, among other areas.

Process theology

Process theology is a type of theology developed from Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, most notably by Charles Hartshorne, John B. Cobb and Eugene H. Peters.

Heidegger

Martin Heidegger was a German philosopher who is widely regarded as one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century. He is best known for contributions to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism.

Edmund Husserl

Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl was a German philosopher of Jewish origin, who established the school of phenomenology.

Book Mentioned: The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Cartesian Meditations – [Buy Here](#)

John Caputo

John David Caputo is an American philosopher who is the Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion Emeritus at Syracuse University and the David R. Cook Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Villanova University. Caputo is a major figure associated with postmodern Christianity and continental philosophy of religion, as well as the founder of the theological movement known as weak theology.

Book Mentioned: The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought – [Buy Here](#)

Meister Eckhart

Eckhart von Hochheim OP, commonly known as Meister Eckhart or Eckehart, was a German theologian, philosopher and mystic, born near Gotha in the Landgraviate of Thuringia (now central Germany) in the Holy Roman Empire.

Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant was a German philosopher and one of the central Enlightenment thinkers.

Paul Tillich

Paul Johannes Tillich was a German-American Christian existentialist philosopher and Lutheran Protestant theologian who is widely regarded as one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century.

Book Mentioned: The Courage To Be – [Buy Here](#)

Henry Corbin

Henry Corbin was a philosopher, theologian, Iranologist and professor of Islamic Studies at the École pratique des hautes études in Paris, France.

Tom Cheetham

Book Mentioned: The World Turned Inside Out – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Imaginal Love – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: All The World An Icon – [Buy Here](#)

John Dourley

John P. Dourley was a Jungians analyst, a professor of religious studies, and a Catholic priest. He taught for many years at Carleton University in Ottawa, his doctorate being from Fordham University.

Book Mentioned: The Psyche as Sacrament – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Paul Tillich, Carl Jung and the Recovery of Religion – [Buy Here](#)

Nontheism

Nontheism or non-theism is a range of both religious and nonreligious attitudes characterized by the absence of espoused belief in a God or gods.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an English poet, literary critic, philosopher and theologian who, with his friend William Wordsworth, was a founder of the Romantic Movement in England and a member of the Lake Poets.

Romantics

Romanticism (also known as the Romantic era) was an artistic, literary, musical, and intellectual movement that originated in Europe towards the end of the 18th century, and in most areas was at its peak in the approximate period from 1800 to 1850. Romanticism was characterized by its emphasis on emotion and individualism as well as glorification of all the past and nature, preferring the medieval rather than the classical. It was partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, the aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment, and the scientific rationalization of nature—all components of modernity.

Owen Barfield

Arthur Owen Barfield was a British philosopher, author, poet, critic, and member of the Inklings.

Jacques Derrida

Jacques Derrida, born in Algeria, was a French philosopher best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction, which he analyzed in numerous texts, and developed in the context of phenomenology.

Graham Harman

Graham Harman (born May 9, 1968) is an American philosopher. He is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles.

Book Mentioned: Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory Of Everything
– [Buy Here](#)

Timothy Morton

Timothy Bloxam Morton is a professor and Rita Shea Guffey Chair in English at Rice University.

Speculative realism

Speculative realism is a movement in contemporary Continental-inspired philosophy (also known as post-Continental philosophy) that defines itself loosely in its stance of metaphysical realism against its interpretation of the dominant forms of post-Kantian philosophy (or what it terms "correlationism").

Byung-Chul Han

Byung-Chul Han is a South Korean-born Swiss-German philosopher and cultural theorist.

Book Mentioned: The Scent Of Time – [Buy Here](#)

Robert E. Carter

Book Mentioned: The Kyoto School: An Introduction – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: The Nothingness Beyond God: An Introduction To The Philosophy Of Nishida Kitaro – [Buy Here](#)

Kitaro Nishida

Kitarō Nishida was a prominent Japanese philosopher, founder of what has been called the Kyoto School of philosophy.

Keiji Nishitani

Keiji Nishitani was a Japanese university professor, scholar, and Kyoto School philosopher. He was a disciple of Kitarō Nishida.

Book Mentioned: Religion and Nothingness – [Buy Here](#)

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness.

Robert Sokolowski

Monsignor Robert Sokolowski is a philosopher and Roman Catholic priest who serves as the Elizabeth Breckenridge Caldwell Professor of Philosophy at The Catholic University of America.

Book Mentioned: Introduction to Phenomenology – [Buy Here](#)

Don Ihde

Don Ihde is an American philosopher of science and technology.

Book Mentioned: Experimental Phenomenology – [Buy Here](#)

Hubert Dreyfus

Hubert Lederer Dreyfus was an American philosopher and professor of philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley.

Charles Taylor

Charles Margrave Taylor CC GOQ FRSC FBA is a Canadian philosopher from Montreal, Quebec, and professor emeritus at McGill University best known for his contributions to political philosophy, the philosophy of social science, the history of philosophy, and intellectual history.

Book Mentioned: Retrieving Realism – [Buy Here](#)

Noesis

Nous, sometimes equated to intellect or intelligence, is a term from classical philosophy for the faculty of the human mind necessary for understanding what is true or real.

Noema

The word noema (plural: noemata) derives from the Greek word νόημα meaning "thought", or "what is thought about".

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Maurice Jean Jacques Merleau-Ponty was a French phenomenological philosopher, strongly influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.

Book Mentioned: Phenomenology of Perception – [Buy Here](#)

Speculative Realism

Speculative realism is a movement in contemporary Continental-inspired philosophy (also known as post-Continental philosophy) that defines itself loosely in its stance of metaphysical realism against its interpretation of the dominant forms of post-Kantian philosophy (or what it terms "correlationism").

Dasein

Dasein is a German word that means "being there" or "presence", and is often translated into English with the word "existence".

Aporia

In philosophy, an aporia is a conundrum or state of puzzlement.

Nihilism

Nihilism is a philosophy, or family of views within philosophy, expressing negation (i.e., denial of) towards general aspects of life that are widely accepted within humanity as objectively real, such as knowledge, existence, and the meaning of life.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

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[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 47 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Heidegger

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis.

Last time I finished the discussion of wisdom, and connected it to enlightenment, and argued for the wise cultivation of enlightenment as our deepest kind of existential response to the meaning crisis. A way in which we can awaken from the meaning crisis.

I then wanted to put that scientific model of spirituality, for lack of a better phrase, into discourse with some of the central prophets of the meaning crisis. I'm using the word prophet, of course, as it's used in the Old Testament sense. I'm talking about individuals who were crucial for articulating the advent and helping to propose or promise a response to the meaning crisis.

I put a diagram on the board. I'm not going to re-put that diagram on the board, in which Heidegger played a central role. There's many connections in there that I will not be able to fully address. [-] Because some of the people are there insofar as they help us articulate the response, not to be examined for their own sake.

A couple of major pointers I want to make out. First, an apology. I misspelled because of my dysgraphia and I didn't realize it. There was something bothering me the whole time about the diagram. I misspelled Heidegger. I won't make that mistake again.

I mentioned the work of Nishida and Nishitani in the Kyoto school. I will talk briefly about Nishitani here, but I won't be able to go into that in depth. I do intend to pursue this later in another series I am putting together. I'm putting together a couple of series to follow this one, and I would like to do a series that will include work on the Kyoto school. A series that I'm entitling The God Beyond God, in which we look at all of these great non-theistic thinkers within both Eastern and Western traditions, and things like the Kyoto school that try to bridge between them. So I will have to neglect to some degree the Kyoto school in this series, but I promise to follow it up more deeply in another series.

I also mentioned Derrida. And I will not be able to talk very much, probably maybe not even at all about Derrida and deconstructionism. I will also address this again when I return in the other series, The God Beyond God, especially when I'm going to talk about the relationship between Derrida and

what's called negative theology. So many of you will be perhaps disappointed that I don't talk too much about Derrida or the Kyoto school. I do promise to return to that in another series that I am currently working on.

So what did I do? I sort of tried to give a quick background to Heidegger. I talked about the importance of Husserl and phenomenology. And I pointed you to the work of Sokolowski as a great introduction and this slogan of back to the things. Husserl. And he does write a book with the word crisis in its title, *The Crisis In European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Basically, he is pointing to the loss of contact epistemology, and he's trying to get that contact back. And this is done through [-] not just introspection, but through a reflective experiential attention, paid to the structures and processes within our experience. And I pointed out how there's two components in this. There's the intentional mental directedness, noesis, and then there's the world disclosure. There's a deep correlation between them. And this is the noema. The noesis—and notice that that's the term I've used also to describe perspectival knowing. And that the correlation between the noesis and noema is very much like the Agent:Arena relationship.

Now, we took a look at Heidegger's main criticism of Husserl's work, which is that Husserl's work had not really given us back the missing contact. I would say that I'm in agreement with this. I think Heidegger's pointing to something very important in the critique of phenomenology that Sparrow has picked up in his wonderful book, *The End Of Phenomenology*. Anyways, Husserl's work had not given us a contact, but it has not really developed adequately participatory knowing.

Now, I do think that Merleau-Ponty went a long way towards addressing this. He's after Heidegger with his notion of embodiment. I tried to explain how much this notion of embodiment has been taken up into cognitive science. And how intimately it is connected with the return to contact epistemology. In fact, I would argue that there is no return to a contact epistemology without a deep existential and theoretical recognition of embodiment.

So Heidegger is critiquing both the lack of participatory knowing, and perhaps that's addressed by Marleau-Ponty, but there's a further thing that I

think Marleau-Ponty does not address that is also lacking for Heidegger. That participatory knowing is not set within ontology. It's not set within a deeper understanding of being, and how we come into contact with being. Being as realness, in the sense of the groundingness with that which grounds truth, seems to be something that Heidegger feels that was lacking in Husserl's work.

Another way of putting it is that Heidegger thought that Husserl was still trapped within the Cartesian cultural cognitive grammar. Husserl's still trapped within subjectivity. And this is the main thing that Sparrow criticizes throughout his entire book. There's also a YouTube video by him that you can watch on his critique of phenomenology. That phenomenology is driven by the goal of returning to the things, but because of its approach, it actually can never return to the things. It is still locked into a kind of subjectivity, or a hidden kind of idealism. That what is really needed to get to being, is this aspect of Heidegger that I'm going to talk about shortly, which is to pay attention to the independence of being from our experience of it, which is something that a lot of people do not tend to emphasize in Heidegger. That's largely because I think, while it's present in Heidegger, it's not made explicit and foregrounded enough from him. But I think the work of speculative realists like Harman and others—Morton, for example, brings this aspect out, and why they see their work as transcending phenomenology.

Questing Into Our Being

Now to return to Heidegger. How do we get to this deeper contact? Well, it's really interesting. He tries to do, he's still within, phenomenology. But he's trying to get it to drive towards ontology, get us back in touch with the world. And he's trying to get you to do this through a specific kind of questioning.

You have to think of this questioning as taking place, not in the Having mode, in which we're trying to get an answer, trying to control the situation. You have to think of it much more as within the Being mode. A being mode that is experienced as wonder. In fact, perhaps a better word is not questioning, but *questing*, you're trying to go on a quest with this questioning. You're not trying to have a propositional answer. You're trying to engage in a participatory transformation.

Now this brings us to the central thing for Heidegger in some ways. And this is Heidegger's notion of *dasein*. Being there. This is *our* being. And notice how this is an inheritance from the Christian tradition, that we're in the image of God. Somehow by Heidegger's taking this up, as somehow by paying attention, by wondering into, questing into our being, we will get a deeper understanding of being itself.

Why is that? Because for Heidegger, our being is the being whose being is in question. We are the type of being who actually question who and what we are, in a way that makes a difference to who and what we are. This is the core idea of existentialism. Existentialism is that we are fundamentally without an essence and that our essence, if you want to put it that way, is to have no essence. And therefore we are continually defining ourselves by how we question our being, and respond to that questioning questing. So the idea is, by phenomenologically exploring that being, our *dasein*, the way we are, the being whose being is in question, we can simultaneously come into contact with our modal existence. Come into the Being mode, and come into contact with the mystery of Being.

A History Of Nihilism

Now coming into contact with this is central to Heidegger, and Heidegger is deeply responding to the meaning crisis. One of Heidegger's most famous, or perhaps infamous theses, the one that runs as a constant thread throughout his work, is this idea that the history of metaphysics, which Heidegger tends to use in a pejorative term, the history of philosophical, existential, and perhaps also religious responses to *dasein*, to the kind of being we have, the history of that response is metaphysics. And for Heidegger, that history is the history of nihilism.

Heidegger sees that whole project as fundamentally misconstrued. To use our language, the whole project is a fundamental misframing of our relationship to being, and because of that, that has produced this deep loss of contact with our being, and therefore simultaneously with being itself. And that, for Heidegger, is the meaning crisis.

So this whole history that we saw, for example, in the first half of this series is the history of nihilism. And you can see, I hope, if you remember that

argument, that there's a lot of great truth in what Heidegger has to say, about how the unfolding of the history of that metaphysical project has led us into the meaning crisis.

Now, Heidegger does not use the word 'ontology' in a pejorative way, the way he uses the word 'metaphysics.' Most people don't have this distinction as clearly as Heidegger stipulates it to be. So when we're talking about Heidegger, metaphysics is a pejorative term. It is a misframing of the ontological project. The ontological project is the project of understanding our being, and thereby understanding our relation to being, and thereby understanding being itself.

Heidegger is voluminous, he's incredibly prolific. He's also famously difficult to read. His works have an aporetic structure to them. They often fail to come to any clear conclusion. Part of that I think is legitimate. Part of that is him wrestling with trying to break out of the cultural cognitive grammar. But I also think, and this is part of my criticism of Heidegger, part of it is self-promotional. By constantly being the person for announcing these deep mysteries, and how difficult it is to think about them, and how he's exemplifying that difficulty, [-] he was also building a mystique around himself. So you have to take that into account.

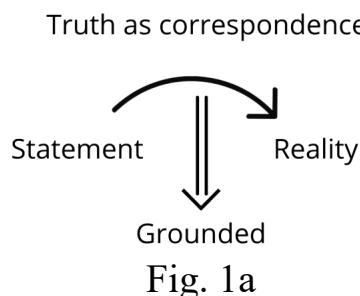
So all of that makes it difficult to sort of point to: here's where I'm going to point to the core of Heidegger. But I do think there's something, for me and for many other people, and I hope for you, there is a particular place where I think we can zero in on what Heidegger is doing. And this is his important essay *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* which is on the essence of truth. And I think this is important because it will tie into many of the themes we have discussed.

I want to read an extended quote from this, and then I'll comment on it. So this is the quote from Heidegger, obviously translated into English, which is a difficult task I've been told. You have to read a lot of Heidegger before you read Heidegger well, because you will misread Heidegger for a long time. And part of why he makes his writing so torturous is to sort of tear you out of the mistaken ways you will misunderstand him.

The Essence Of Truth

Okay. So here is the translation. "A statement is invested with its correctness," so this is a sense of true—when we say that statement is true, we mean it's correct. "A statement is invested with its correctness by the openness of comportment." So I'm going to try and unpack all of this for you. The openness of comportment. How you were comported towards things. "For only through the latter,"—the openness and comportment... and I'll try and explain to you what that means. "Can what is opened up really become the standard for the presentative correspondence." Okay, so let's stop here.

So here's the idea of truth as correspondence (Fig. 1a) (writes Truth as correspondence). A standard notion of truth. So the idea here is, this is how Truth works. Here's the statement, (writes Statement below Truth as correspondence) and what makes it correct is that it corresponds (draws an arrow from Statement) in some important way to reality (writes Reality). What's in the statement and what's in reality correspond. That's what makes it correct. That's what it is to be true. Now, of course, famously, philosophers have argued for a long time in many different ways about what this correspondence is. But what Heidegger is trying to say is, that debate about the correspondence has missed something. And here's part of the misframing. It's missed that this corresponding relationship is grounded (draws an arrow below the arrow connecting Statement and Reality and writes Grounded), is dependent on, and is sustained by, a deeper relationship.

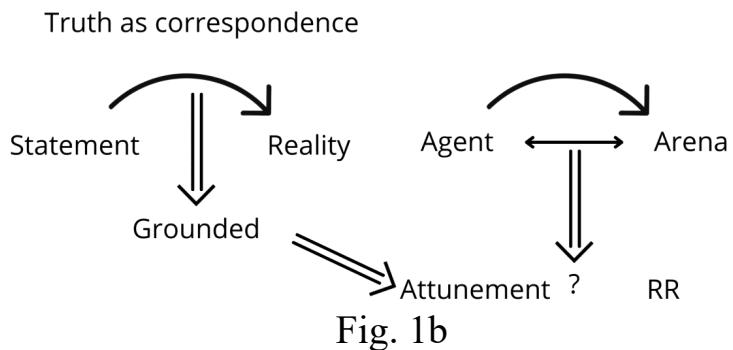


"Open comportment must let itself be assigned the standard." So this lower relationship, this open comportment, is an affordance of an ability to set up correspondence between statements and reality, such that we find them true.

Now start to think about what this means. That must mean that in making the statement, the person is directed and connected. It also means that the statement is picking up on some aspect of reality that is disclosed, and there's some kind of connection there. So he's trying to point towards that. “This means that it must take over a pre-given standard for all presentation. This belongs to the openness of comportment.”

So the normative standard, what we normally call truth, truth as correctness, as correspondence between statement and reality, is ultimately grounded, dependent on, how this deeper relationship, which we haven't quite articulated yet, affords and makes possible this (indicates Statement and Reality).

But you can see something here, to use some of our language. You can see how the agent and the arena (Fig. 1b) (writes Agent and Arena and draws a double-headed arrow between) have to be shaped to each other, such that what the agent does or says is meaningful in that arena (draws a double-headed arrow above Agent and Arena). So the agent:arena relationship makes possible and affords this correctness. But, of course, what Heidegger's pointing to is, yes, but what grounds (draws a downward arrow below Agent and Arena and writes ?) this Agent:Arena relationship? Now I've tried to argue that it's ultimately the process of relevance realization. We're going to come back to that. I've argued this is relevance realization (writes RR beside ?). Heidegger talks about this in terms of Attunement (writes Attunement beside ?) He uses attunement, which is very nice, cause it picks up on musicality.



So here's another quote by Heidegger, specifically mentioning this. "However, being attuned, attunement, can never be understood as

experience." Notice what he's saying here. "Attunement can never be understood as experience and feeling." He is rejecting any subjective interpretation of attunement. Why? Because—to continue, "it is thereby simply deprived of its essence." You have lost the essence of attunement if you understand it subjectively. It is not an experience. It is something that makes meaningful experience possible. And I argued that that, of course, was the case, for relevance realization. Let's continue with his quote, "being attuned," that is what he calls eksistent, standing out exposedness. So this standing out, he takes the word 'existence,' and he plays with words a lot. (Fig. 2) (writes Ek-sistence) this is 'standing out,' (writes Salience below eksistent) which of course is analogous to what the word 'salient' means. Standing out.

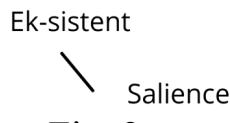


Fig. 2

"This eksistent exposedness," how things—exposedness to being—this is us — "as a whole can be experienced and felt." And he puts both those words in sort of scare quotes to question them. "Only because the man who experiences..."—again in question, because he's challenging this whole natural way of thinking and talking, that's why he's putting it all in these scare quotes. "...without being aware of the essence of attunement, is always engaged in being in tune in a way that discloses beings as a whole."

So attunement is not subjective. Any subjective feeling or experience of it is actually grounded in the attuning relationship, that precedes and grounds our cognitive appraisal or appropriation within the Agent:Arena relationship.

So because we have got locked up here (indicates Truth as correspondence), what I would call the propositional level, we have forgotten this (indicates Attunement and RR). We have forgotten the attunement relationship, which for Heidegger is the essence of truth. Because it's what makes correctness of statements possible for us. "Because of this forgetfulness," Here's another quote, "man clings to what is readily available and controllable, even where ultimate matters are concerned." Remember that word ultimate when we come back to Tillich, please.

So what happens is we get trapped into the having of propositions. We get trapped into the Having mode (indicates Truth as correspondence). "What is readily available and controllable." There's a deep, modal confusion at this deep existential level. The forgetting of the grounding attunement also traps us within propositional processing, and it traps us in the Having mode, the having of correct propositions.

This goes right back to Plato. I don't think Heidegger would like me doing this. His attitude towards Plato is very ambivalent. Plato consistently makes a distinction between *philia sophia*, (writes *Philia Sophia*), the love of wisdom. And *philia nikia* (writes *Philia Nikia*), the love of victory. The love of victory. The having of the correct answer that defeats the opponent. And one of Plato's ongoing points is, this is the deepest kind of bullshitting, (encircles *Philia Nikia*) because this looks like we're arguing. This looks like we're reasoning, (indicates Truth as correspondence) but what we're doing is manipulating propositions, and trying to assert correctedness, but we're forgetting all of this and we're forgetting the pursuit of wisdom (Fig. 3) (draws an arrow from *Philia Nikia* to *Philia Sophia*). The transformative existential project that Socrates advents for us.

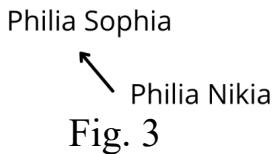


Fig. 3

This is why I continually criticize people who I suspect present themselves as if they're doing this (indicates *Philia Sophia*), but are often doing this (indicates *Philia Nikia*). This is why I am so critical of people who want to debunk, demolish and debate to the point of victory, their opponents. People who really are incapable of getting out of modal confusion. They cannot remember the Being mode. Because they can't listen. Look, this is how you know somebody is listening. They will say, 'I did not know that, I have just learned something from you,' or 'I was wrong, I was mistaken about this.' Those are the marks of *philia sophia* (love of wisdom).

Heidegger is trying to get us to remember *philia sophia*. And he definitely sees the history of metaphysics as becoming more and more bound up with *philia nikia*, the pursuit of victory. The ultimate theory that crushes all

opposition. So we have to wake up, according to Heidegger. And again, this is why his language is so torturous. Because we are in a state of deep forgetfulness, deep modal confusion. And if we read his text, we are deeply tempted to read them from that forgetfulness and that modal confusion, and thereby fundamentally misunderstand him. So his texts are deliberately Socratic, in they're constantly trying to undermine that cognitive cultural grammar that we habitually bring to things. So he wants us to remember, Sati, the forgotten mystery of dasein.

So he says this: "Whenever the concealment of being as whole is conceded only as a limit that occasionally announces itself, concealing as a fundamental occurrence has sunk into forgetfulness." If we only sort of acknowledge the way beings transcend our framing of them, sort of at the limit... Yes, yes, yes, reality is combinatorially explosive. Yes, yes, yes, yes. And then we turn that, and we wave our hands and then we go back to: Yes, but within this, within my framework, blah, blah, blah, blah. And what Heidegger says is, when you only acknowledge it as a limit, you have actually deeply forgotten it. That relationship to the combinatorial explosive nature of things has to be an ongoing feature of your thinking. Now, I try to argue for this within the relevance realization framework, which I'm going to show you is deeply appropriate to Heidegger, in terms of this idea of sacredness as an enacted, participatory resonance to the moreness, the inexhaustibleness of reality.

The Thing Beyond Itself

[–] I can't go into this a great deal. I hope to go into this again later in another series (erases the board). But I want to briefly talk about the work of Harman, and what's called Object-Oriented Ontology, or what's also known as speculative realism. And this is the position from which Sparrow and Harman and others have critiqued phenomenology as being inadequate. Again, I'm trying to summarize all of this, which is like some of the most exciting work that's recently being done in ontology. And I respect people who say that we need to talk about ontology more but if you want to talk about ontology, just don't do old talk about ontology. Pay attention to the insightful, inventive, new work being done on ontology within speculative realism.

So again, I wouldn't even claim this as a summary. I'm just picking up one important thread of the speculative realism as a way of trying to develop this important idea of Heidegger, because we're gonna need it when we talk about other people like Tillich and Jung and Barfield. So the core of this is *not* the Kantian picture of the thing in itself, veiled by subjectivity. So remember that Kantian picture. Our subjectivity completely veils the thing in itself, and makes it ultimately inaccessible to us.

So what Harman is picking up on, is that this transjective attunement, and we'll come back to see that they have a difficulty with limiting ontology to what they call correlation, just our experience of ontology. But nevertheless, let's start here. This transjective attunement makes both the subject and the object possible in phenomenological experience.

So. What does that mean? Well, there's a different way about thinking about how you encounter objects. Instead of the Kantian thing in itself that is veiled from us by our subjectivity, instead, think about two things happening simultaneously. This is picking up on what Heidegger's talking about. Think about the thing 'shining into subjectivity,' and that's what phenomenology originally means. Heidegger picks up on it. The Greek term, phenomenon, actually means 'to shine forth.' So simultaneously, the thing is shining into my subjectivity, but that is interpenetrated, inter-afforded with, it is simultaneously withdrawing from my framing. It is always beyond my framing, as well. And that that 'beyondness' is not something in my phenomenology, but it contributes to the sense of the realness of my phenomenological experience.

Think about how in virtual reality, [-] if you get a sense that the world is closed, that you can drain it dry with your activity, it loses its realness. But only, and here's now the openness that Heidegger is talking about—the comportment—but only if there's a realness, a way in which the world withdraws beyond you continually. So there's always a horizon of your experience. A horizon is something you always move towards, but you can never reach. So as long as that world constantly withdraws, as it also shines into your experience, then it is real to you.

Now, the moreness is not something in your experience. It's not an object of your experience, but it's a feature. The withdrawal is as much a contributor

to the realness of things, as they're shining into your subjectivity. This is, I think, a profound way in which Harman and others have explicated Heidegger's idea, and then gone beyond it.

Now, the way I want to put it, and the way I've argued it earlier, I think this lines up with what I've tried to argue. That our framing, which is transjective in nature about attunement, simultaneously discloses and conceals. So I want to replace the Kantian term, 'the thing in itself,' with another term: 'the thing beyond itself.' (writes The thing beyond itself). Everything is both shining into our subjectivity and withdrawing beyond our framing of it. And those are inter-affording. They're interpenetrating. They co-contribute to the realness of the object for us. And it's precisely the withdrawing, according to Harman and others, that was missed by phenomenology, because of the way it was still bound within a Cartesian subjective framework.

Whether or not that is completely fair to phenomenology is another question. And I'm not trying to get into that theoretical debate right here. My main focus here is trying to understand what's going on, but I think we can take from speculative realism, this term I've coined: 'the thing beyond itself.' It's clearly a central idea in Harman's idea of the object, the thing beyond itself.

Truth As Aletheia

So this takes us to now a new understanding of truth. How do we get an attunement that discloses things, as things beyond themselves? Things that are simultaneously shining into our subjectivity, but also withdrawing into their objectivity, where this no longer means 'an object of thought.' It means 'a depth beyond our framing, an independence beyond our experience,' and how those are transjectively interpenetrating for us, in the sense of realism. What does it mean to be connected to things in this way? This is Heidegger's famous notion of truth as aletheia.

Truth as aletheia. So 'lethe' means to cover or to forget. In Greek mythology in the underworld, you passed through the river of Lethe, and it made you forget all of your previous life as you went into the underworld. And this (indicates 'a-' in aletheia) is of course the negation of it. So it means it's sort of a deep remembering, Sati, and a deep disclosure.

So always remember these two poles. It's a deep remembering. You have to modally remember, not just like our normal sense of remembering. Like Sati, you have to remember the Being mode and this (indicates Aletheia) discloses this aspect of reality, that it is simultaneously shining and withdrawing.

So ‘truth as aletheia’ is this attuning to the mutual disclosure, fittedness within the mystery of being. You’re getting attuned *to* things. You’re deeply remembering things. And again, not just cognitive memory, existential memory. You’re remembering things. This is to be in contact with them, when you’re attuned to how they are simultaneously appearing, shining and withdrawing.

Now, I've been throughout using the language of relevance realization that I've argued for, to talk about Heidegger. And some of you may be a little bit sort of like, eh, I don't like that. You know, Heidegger's, you know, I like the Heidegger talking, it's all ontological and I don't want this scientific talk and you might have a deeper point there because the scientific talk for Heidegger is at a higher level than ontology.

Nevertheless, I want to continue making this argument, and I want to make it because there's an explicit and important history. And this is the connection that has had a profound impact on my work, and the argument that you have seen between Heidegger, Herbert Dreyfus (Fig. 4a) (writes Heidegger = Dreyfus), and third generation, third gen, 4E cog sci (writes 3rd gen and 4E cog sci) that I have articulated and exemplified to you.

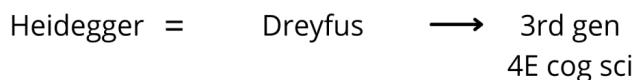


Fig. 4a

Dreyfus is an important interpreter of Heidegger, but he's also one of the founding figures of this version of cognitive science. In fact, Dreyfus tried to formulate, or is continuing to formulate important aspects of third generation 4E cognitive science as a way of trying to articulate the importance of Heidegger for understanding the nature of mind, the nature of cognition, the nature of consciousness, et cetera.

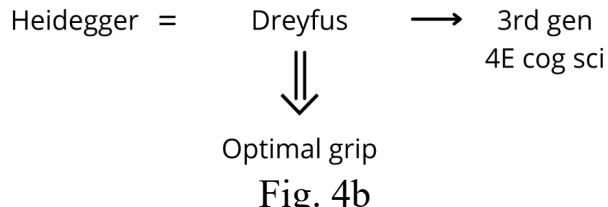
So there's a book he wrote on Heidegger's most central work, *Being And Time*, and Dreyfus' book is called *Being-in-the-World*. And I want to read you a quote from that. And the quote is exemplary. It's not a unique, isolated moment in Dreyfus' work. It's something that is exemplary of a theme running throughout Dreyfus.

Here's the quote from that book on Heidegger. "Facts and rules are, by themselves, meaningless. To capture what Heidegger calls *significance* or *involvement*; they must be assigned relevance." And those two terms are emphasized in the original. My emphasis of them is just reporting the emphasis that he gave them.

"They must be assigned relevance. But the predicates that must be added to define relevance, are just more meaningless facts." You can't capture it with a definition. "And paradoxically, the more facts [-] the computer is given," notice how he immediately links Heidegger to a computational psychology, and a deep critique of it. "The more facts the computer is given, the harder it is to compute what is relevant to the current situation." You get into combinatorial explosion if you stay at the propositional computational level, and you lose your ability to fit yourself to the current situation, to cope with the current situation.

This is why Dreyfus, because of Heidegger, was one of the founding, and remains one of the ongoing, critics of a purely computational Cartesian approach to cognitive science, to AI, to artificial intelligence. He literally wrote the book entitled, *What Computers Can't Do*, that founded this whole criticism of computational psychology. It's considered the discovery of the frame problem within cognitive science. He later updated it with a later book called, *What Computers Still Can't Do*. This has been an ongoing thing. He sees Heidegger as the deep forerunner of the criticism that we should understand the mind only in propositional computational terms.

This is why Dreyfus went on to pick up [on] work from Marleau-Ponty, which I've referenced, and helped to develop (draws a downward arrow from Dreyfus) this notion of 'optimal grip' that I've discussed at length (Fig. 4b) (writes Optimal grip below Dreyfus). Optimal grip. It is a process that is doing this relevance realization. And it is something that is deeper than propositional knowing.



Optimal grip

Fig. 4b

So I'm trying to show you that my attempts to connect Heidegger, who is a prophet of the meaning crisis, to the machinery of relevance realization and participatory knowing, and optimal gripping, is not misplaced. Dreyfus is not a single figure. There are other figures like this. See the work by Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism*, about how we can get back to really being in contact by making use of these ideas.

I'm going to keep doing that. I'm going to keep showing you, because what I'm trying to show you, is that the framework we have built allows us to enter into deep dialogue with the central prophets of the meaning crisis, in a way that I think insightfully discloses aspects of their own theorizing, and affords potentially synoptically integrating them together into a more comprehensive response to the meaning crisis. This is the final part of the argument I'm making.

A Dynamic Coupling

I want to continue on. Do a little bit more about Heidegger, and leading into the other thinkers we want to examine. So Avens in his wonderful book, *The New Gnosis*, in which he talks about Heidegger, Corbin, Jung, Hillman. It's a book in which he links Heidegger to Corbin into Jung. And he puts it this way when he's discussing Heidegger's thought. Here's a quote.

Again, it picks up on something we've already been talking about. Here's the quote, "A questioning that involves the questioner in the matter of thought so deeply, he becomes, in a sense, one with it. At this point, knowing is no longer divorced from being. We know the way we are, and we are the way we know. In the Platonic tradition, this is expressed in the axiom, 'like can only be known by like.'" He is pointing directly... and this is not something you get in Heidegger. That's why I turned to Avens. He's pointing to how Heidegger is actually bringing back this deeply Neo-Platonic idea of participatory knowing as a deep kind of conformity between you and the world. This is a participatory knowing that is a dynamic coupling.

Now Avens immediately points and connects this kind of participatory knowing, this dynamic coupling, like known by like, and reality is dynamic, so you have to be dynamic and dynamically coupled to it. He immediately points from Heidegger to Corbin, because Corbin is deeply influenced by Heidegger. Corbin was one of the first important translators of Heidegger into French. His translation of *Introduction to Metaphysics* was seminal for how Heidegger was spread into France, for example.

But Corbin explicitly calls this participatory knowing that is a dynamical coupling, a dynamical conformity, he explicitly calls this 'gnosis.' A term we've already examined right. "Gnosis," for Corbin, [-] "is a salvational redemptive knowledge, because it has the virtue of bringing about the inner transformation of man." Sorry for the sexist language on his part. "It is knowing that changes and transforms the knowing subject."

You see, it's that dynamical coupling in which you know by being coupled to something. And it's participatory knowing, because you know it insofar as you are changed, and your knowing of yourself, and your knowing of the object, are coupled together. But that is what you need to respond appropriately to *dasein*! Look, you are the being whose being is in question. And by questing into that, you quest into being. You are only going to get a response to that quest when you add something that's simultaneously, in an inter-penetrative, inter-affording fashion, both knowing yourself—not your autobiographical knowing; knowing the depths of your being—knowing yourself and knowing the world, coupled together, mutually affording each other. This is what Corbin is calling gnosis. And this is what he's saying he's getting from Heidegger.

Now let's take a look at what we've done so far. And I want to show you how these two things are not irrelevant. (Fig. 5a) (writes Heidegger and draws two lines below it) They're deeply relevant to each other. You've got Dreyfus over here (writes Dreyfus below Heidegger) and the whole aspect of relevance realization (writes RR below Dreyfus) and Dreyfus is clearly pointing out that this is non-propositional, coming from Heidegger; non-computational, in the sense where computation is the inferential manipulation of propositions to draw out implication relations (writes Non-propositional, non-computational under RR).

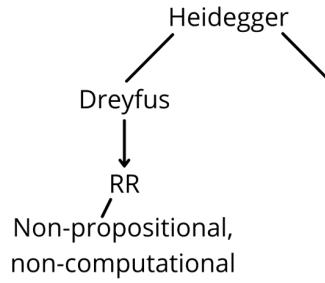


Fig. 5a

And then over here, you have Corbin (Fig. 5b) (writes Corbin below Heidegger). And he's calling all of this gnosis (writes Gnosis under Corbin), this participatory, mutually self- and world-transformative kind of knowing. But what Corbin is doing with the gnosis that isn't apparent in Dreyfus, is that he's pointing out how this (indicates Gnosis) is redemptive. How it saves us. Remember the Gnostics are trying to free us, to liberate us from existential entrapment.

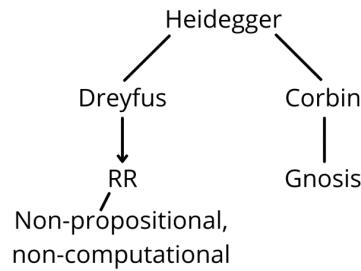


Fig. 5b

So Corbin is pointing out that how this, Corbin is making explicit that this machinery that we're talking about here is a way of responding to the modal confusion. It is a way of responding to the forgetfulness of being. It is a way of awakening from the meaning crisis. So let's try and do this again a little bit more carefully.

Forgetfulness Of Being

[...] What is this forgetfulness, this modal confusion? So on one hand, we have the Being mode (Fig. 6a) (writes Being mode). And remember Fromm ultimately gets this from Heidegger, as does Stephen Batchelor. Being mode, and Having mode (writes Having mode).

Being mode Having mode

Fig. 6a

Do you see what I'm trying to do? I'm trying to show you how seamlessly you can interweave this language from Heidegger with the language we've been developing in the second half of this series.

So the Being mode. So what's going on in the Being mode? The Being mode is the transformative participation in the mystery of being. That transformative participation in the mystery of being (Fig. 6b) (draws a downward arrow from Being mode), this leads, of course, to aletheia (writes Aletheia below Being mode), which I have discussed. And there's two components to this that we've discussed. There's the attunement (writes Attunement below Aletheia). But there's also the independence of Being (writes The independence of Being).

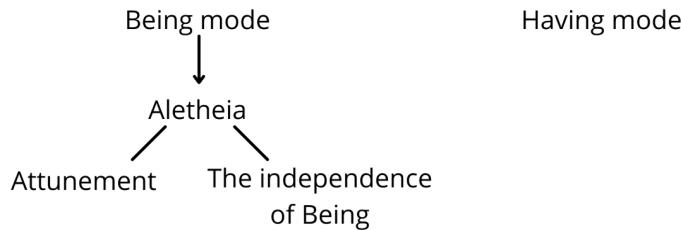


Fig. 6b

I think the attunement clearly points to relevance (Fig. 6c) (writes Relevance below Attunement). I've already argued that repeatedly. I hope I don't have to argue it anymore. But this independence of being. This is independent of the correlation between us and being. That being always transcends how it is being known and being experienced by us. This is the moreness. [-] The moreness is simultaneously with the presence of the shining.

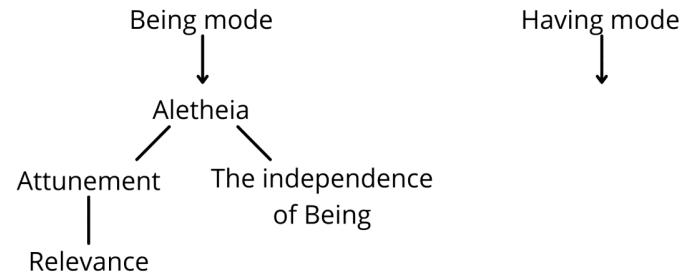


Fig. 6c

This (draws a downward arrow from The independence of Being), I think, is what Harman and others would argue, ultimately gives things—I don't want to say all of their realness, but an important pole of their realness that we

have neglected. You can see what I'm trying to point to there's. I mean, the word [-] which might not even seem natural to put here—of the independence of Being—is Truth, (writes Truth below The independence of Being) but that's not quite right (erases Truth). Because we've seen that truth belongs up here in the discussion of aletheia (writes Truth beside Aletheia) or even higher up in the correctness of our propositions based on Aletheia (erases Truth).

So this is relevance (indicates Relevance). And why am I stopping here? Because remember, we don't want to [-] disconnect relevance from truth or realness. I want to point to something deeper here. That the relevance must always be open to—and remember, not just as an acknowledgement of the limit. It has to be an ongoing constraint. The relevance has to have an ongoing constraint in its connectedness to a sense of the moreness (Fig. 6d) (writes Moreness below The independence of Being), the inexhaustibleness of the thing beyond itself (writes Inexhaustibleness of the thing beyond itself).

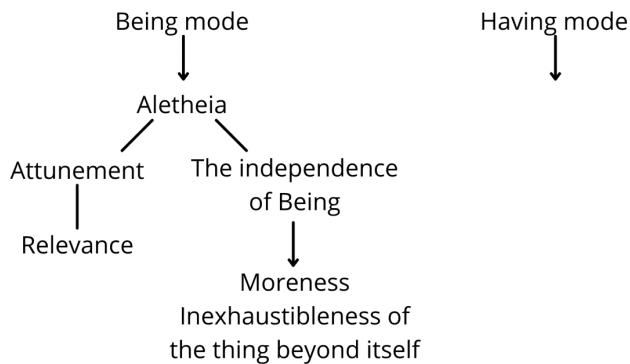


Fig. 6d

So what would be going on over here in the Having mode? And where we're getting the modal confusion? So now we think of an object. We think of its being in terms of how it can be manipulated by us, not just physically, but conceptually. Remember, this is the quintessential point of the Having mode. We have control. We can grasp it. We can manipulate it. We can use it. We're not confronting mysteries. We're solving problems. And so what happens when we get into the Having mode, into conceptual manipulation, and the

having of propositions, and we forget the Being mode and all of this over here (indicates the Being mode)? What can happen to us?

Onto-theology And Nihilism

This is one of Heidegger's main critiques. We start to misunderstand in a modal sense. You start to misunderstand Being as a particular being. Misunderstand Being as a being (Fig. 6e) (writes Being as a being). So I'm using Being as with a capital B to Being. Where I'm using a little be to mean a particular being like this marker, or this eraser, or this body.

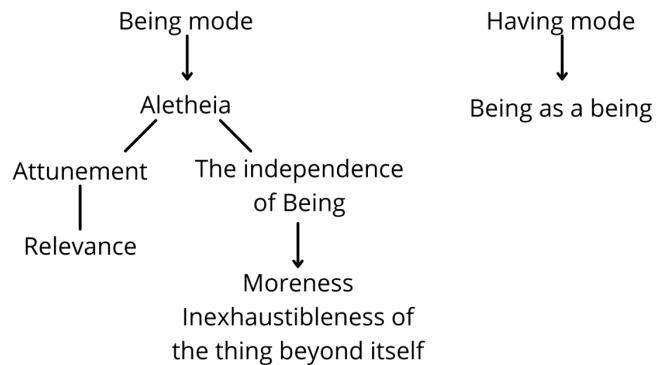


Fig. 6e

And then we misunderstand the attempt to try and get back to this (indicates The independence of Being) by positing it within—this is a modal confusion. We try to capture—something's wrong, just thinking, we're not quite getting being with a big B when we look at this being (picks up the eraser), or think of being as a particular bit, we've got to do something more. And so what we'll do is we'll put it to the limit. Remember what Heidegger says? That's insufficient. We'll understand Being, as the supreme being (Fig. 6f) (writes As the supreme being below Being as a being), the highest being. The highest subject, perhaps. The highest person, the highest force. The highest thing.

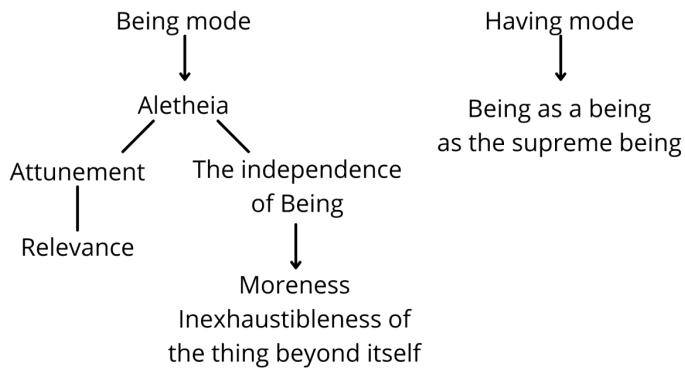


Fig. 6f

And for Heidegger, this is the ultimate modal confusion (indicates Having mode), for this is to try to turn Being in a problem that can be solved by the conceptual manipulation of a propositionally defined object. And, of course, what's being alluded to here (Fig. 6g) (draws an arrow from As the supreme being and writes God) is classical Theism's sort of traditional presentation of God. Now, whether or not this is going to be fair to how many people have written about God, we're going to come back to that when we talk about Tillich and Barfield.

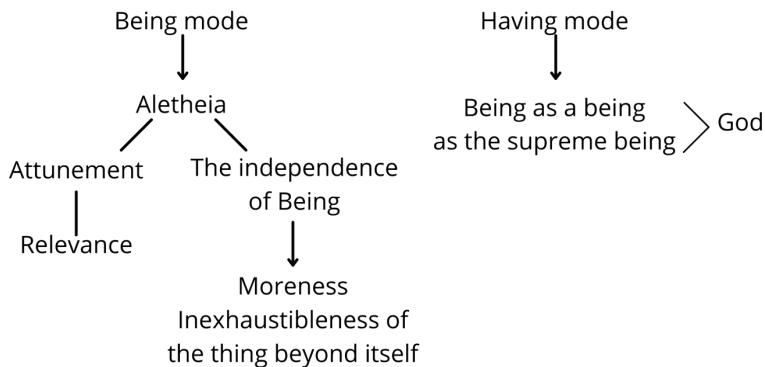


Fig 6g

Heidegger is certainly right, that there is a longstanding tradition within metaphysics, understood in a pejorative sense, in which God is understood in this limit sense. God is understood within the Having mode. God is understood as the supreme being that somehow grounds and makes all other beings. And this is a fundamental mistake for Heidegger. This is a fundamental misunderstanding. It's a fundamental problem.

So this is known as the problem of onto-theology (Fig. 6h) (writes Onto-theology below As the supreme being), where we try to understand Being theologically, in terms of a supreme being. And for Heidegger that, and this may strike many of you who come from religious framework as almost bordering on offensive. (I'm trying to present it in a way I think that's more accessible to you.) That's not the case. [-] I'm requesting of you that you are not simply offended, that you try and understand what Heidegger is trying to articulate here, because he's going to make this claim.

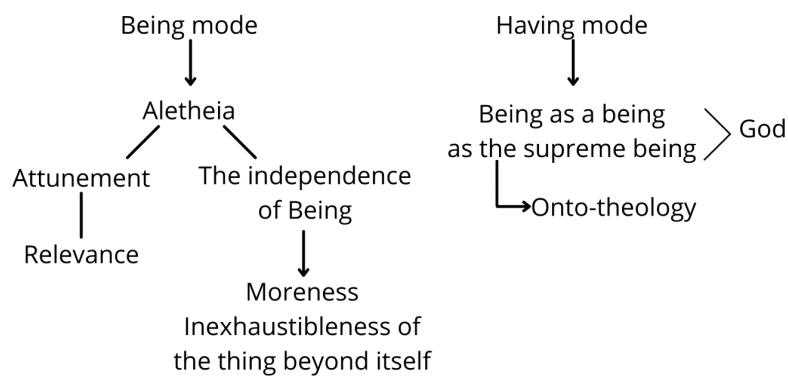


Fig. 6h

And here's the claim that you might find offensive. That there's a deep connection between the understanding of Being — in terms of the supreme being, God, onto-theology — and nihilism. This is Heidegger trying to articulate Nietzsche. And Nietzsche is another big influence on Heidegger. Understanding Being, or the ground of Being, as a supreme being, onto-theology, is the deep forgetfulness that just cast us existentially adrift in modal confusion, and fundamentally misframing our relationship to Being, and therefore being subject to a disconnectedness from realness, which is at the heart of the meaning crisis.

So Tillich is going to pick this up. He's going to be deeply influenced by Heidegger, but also I think I prefer Tillich to Heidegger, and there's also personal reasons for that. Tillich was the first non-Jewish academic to be basically persecuted by the Nazis, because he, from the very beginning, opposed them and resisted them. He had to leave Germany because of that.

Unlike Heidegger. And this is not something you should dismiss, like some people do, and I want to return to it, discuss it later. Heidegger joins the Nazi party and becomes an official member. An official within the Nazi party. And that is something to pay attention to. And it's fair to bring this up, because Heidegger presents his entire position as an existential one, not just a theoretical one. And if you try to dismiss his participation in the Nazis by just saying, 'Oh, but that has nothing to do with his theory,' you have sort of fundamentally missed how he is involved with the very presentation of his own theory.

Now Tillich is going to take up, nevertheless, Heidegger's critique of onto-theology, but he's going to do something very interesting with it. He's going to use this as a way of bringing back the very traditional religious notion of idolatry, and what is wrong with idolatry. So next time, what I would like to explore with you, as a way of developing further what Corbin is talking about with gnosis and gnosis as serious play, I want to try to finish up: What would it be like to have the gnosis? To remember Being through aletheia? What would it be like to be remembering Being through aletheia? What would that be like? How would we be? How would the world be to us? And this is a way of trying to say: What would it be like to experience the remembering, that is a way of awakening from the meaning crisis?

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 47 Notes

[Heidegger](#)

Martin Heidegger was a German philosopher who is widely regarded as one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century. He is best known for contributions to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism.

Book Mentioned: Basic Writings – [Buy Here](#)

[Kitaro Nishida](#)

Kitarō Nishida was a prominent Japanese philosopher, founder of what has been called the Kyoto School of philosophy.

Keiji Nishitani

Keiji Nishitani was a Japanese university professor, scholar, and Kyoto School philosopher. He was a disciple of Kitarō Nishida.

Kyoto School

The Kyoto School is the name given to the Japanese philosophical movement centered at Kyoto University that assimilated Western philosophy and religious ideas and used them to reformulate religious and moral insights unique to the East Asian cultural tradition.

Jacques Derrida

Jacques Derrida, born in Algeria, was a French philosopher best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction, which he analyzed in numerous texts, and developed in the context of phenomenology.

Negative Theology

Apophatic theology, also known as negative theology, is a form of theological thinking and religious practice which attempts to approach God, the Divine, by negation, to speak only in terms of what may not be said about the perfect goodness that is God.

Edmund Husserl

Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl was a German philosopher of Jewish origin, who established the school of phenomenology.

Book Mentioned: The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology – [Buy Here](#)

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness.

Robert Sokolowski

Monsignor Robert Sokolowski is a philosopher and Roman Catholic priest who serves as the Elizabeth Breckenridge Caldwell Professor of Philosophy

at The Catholic University of America.

Noesis

Nous, sometimes equated to intellect or intelligence, is a term from classical philosophy for the faculty of the human mind necessary for understanding what is true or real.

Noema

The word noema (plural: noemata) derives from the Greek word *vόημα* meaning "thought", or "what is thought about".

Tom Sparrow

Book Mentioned: The End of Phenomenology – [Buy Here](#)

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Maurice Jean Jacques Merleau-Ponty was a French phenomenological philosopher, strongly influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.

Book Mentioned: Phenomenology of Perception – [Buy Here](#)

Speculative Realism

Speculative realism is a movement in contemporary Continental-inspired philosophy (also known as post-Continental philosophy) that defines itself loosely in its stance of metaphysical realism against its interpretation of the dominant forms of post-Kantian philosophy (or what it terms "correlationism").

Graham Harman

Graham Harman (born May 9, 1968) is an American philosopher. He is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles.

Book Mentioned: Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory Of Everything – [Buy Here](#)

Timothy Morton

Timothy Bloxam Morton is a professor and Rita Shea Guffey Chair in English at Rice University.

Dasein

Dasein is a German word that means "being there" or "presence", and is often translated into English with the word "existence".

Existentialism

Existentialism is a form of philosophical inquiry that explores the problem of human existence and centers on the lived experience of the thinking, feeling, acting individual.

Nihilism

Nihilism is a philosophy, or family of views within philosophy, expressing negation (i.e., denial of) towards general aspects of life that are widely accepted within humanity as objectively real, such as knowledge, existence, and the meaning of life.

Plato

Plato was an Athenian philosopher during the Classical period in Ancient Greece, founder of the Platonist school of thought and the Academy, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world.

Sati

Sati is mindfulness or awareness, a spiritual or psychological faculty (indriya) that forms an essential part of Buddhist practice.

Object-oriented ontology

In metaphysics, object-oriented ontology (OOO) is a 21st-century Heidegger-influenced school of thought that rejects the privileging of human existence over the existence of nonhuman objects.

Paul Tillich

Paul Johannes Tillich was a German-American Christian existentialist philosopher and Lutheran Protestant theologian who is widely regarded as

one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century.

Carl Jung

Carl Gustav Jung, was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology.

Owen Barfield

Arthur Owen Barfield was a British philosopher, author, poet, critic, and member of the Inklings.

Aletheia

Aletheia is truth or disclosure in philosophy.

Hubert Dreyfus

Hubert Lederer Dreyfus was an American philosopher and professor of philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley.

Book Mentioned: Being-In-The-World – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: What Computers Can't Do – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: What Computers Still Can't Do – [Buy Here](#)

Charles Taylor

Charles Margrave Taylor CC GOQ FRSC FBA is a Canadian philosopher from Montreal, Quebec, and professor emeritus at McGill University best known for his contributions to political philosophy, the philosophy of social science, the history of philosophy, and intellectual history.

Book Mentioned: Retrieving Realism – [Buy Here](#)

Henry Corbin

Henry Corbin was a philosopher, theologian, Iranologist and professor of Islamic Studies at the École pratique des hautes études in Paris, France.

Robert Avens

Book Mentioned: The New Gnosis – [Buy Here](#)

Erich Fromm

Erich Seligmann Fromm (/frɔm/; German: [fʁɔm]; March 23, 1900 – March 18, 1980) was a German social psychologist, psychoanalyst, sociologist, humanistic philosopher, and democratic socialist.

Stephen Batchelor

Stephen Batchelor is a British author and teacher, writing books and articles on Buddhist topics and leading meditation retreats throughout the world. He is a noted proponent of agnostic or secular Buddhism.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 48 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Corbin and the Divine Double

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis.

So last time we were pursuing in-depth, trying to understand Heidegger's work as a prophet, in the Old Testament sense, of the meaning crisis. We took a look at this notion of the thing beyond itself, and realness as simultaneously the shining into our framing, and the withdrawing beyond our framing, in a deeply inter-affording, inter-penetrating manner.

We took a look at this deeper notion of truth. Not truth as correctness, but truth as aletheia. That which grounds the Agent:Arena relationship in attunement, and allows us the potential to remember being, by getting into an attunement with its simultaneous disclosure and withdrawal. But we can forget that; we can get into a profound kind of modal confusion. And this is

the history of metaphysics as the emergence of nihilism. We can forget the Being mode. We can get trapped into the Having mode, in which the metaphysics is a propositional project of trying to just use truth as correctness.

And we misunderstand Being as a particular being; we try to capture the unlimitedness aspect of being. But we only do it at the limit, which Heidegger's deeply critical of. And so we understand being in terms of a supreme being. A being at the limit and beyond the limit, this is onto-theology. We understand God as the supreme being. And this is deeply enmeshed, for Heidegger, with nihilism. Because this onto-theology, this theological way—at least a version of theology from classical traditional theism—this way of understanding being, gets us into the deep forgetfulness and modal confusion that is the hallmark of nihilism.

But, of course, we could perhaps remember the Being mode. And this is what Corbin, following Heidegger, talks about as gnosis. We can understand what this gnosis is. What does it look like? What would it be like to remember, from the Being mode through aletheia, Being? So I want to pick up on this idea of gnosis's serious play in a particular piece of work by Heidegger. Heidegger discusses, and Avens discusses this in his book, and Caputo also discusses this in his excellent book, *The Mystical Element In Heidegger's Thought*. So both Avens and Caputo talk about this. Heidegger's commentary on the poetry of Angelus Silesius.

Angelus Silesius was a poet who was basically trying to put into poetry [-] the work of Meister Eckhart, who was one of the great Neo-platonic mystics within the Rhineland mystics that I talked about so long ago. Now what's important of course for Meister Eckhart and this discussion of gnosis as the remembering through aletheia of the Being mode that alleviates the forgetfulness, alleviates nihilism, is that Eckhart, of course, is also experiencing this as a form of sacredness. As something that is appropriate to a religious context.

So we also noted in conjunction with that, that Tillich is going to be deeply influenced by Heidegger's critique of ontotheology, but he is also going to situate it within—although he's going to radically revise what this means—a traditional religious term, which is idolatry.

The Rose And Physis

Now let's think about Heidegger's commentary on this poem. So what's the poem? Here's the poem, what's in translation. So we, unfortunately, lose some of the poetry.

The Rose is without why.
It blooms because it blooms.
It cares not for itself.
Asks not if it is seen.

So it's interesting that when Heidegger is doing this, he's actually talking about this word 'physis' (writes Physis). The Greek word, which, of course, is the core of the word physics, which again, he's trying to get back to a re-experience of the "physical" as an important way of remembering the Being mode. This is again why I think many people misunderstand. And I've argued this elsewhere and I'm going to keep coming back to it. The response to the meaning crisis is somehow a rejection of physicalism and the physical. Heidegger's instead, trying to show you how it can more deeply be remembered.

Now he's picking up on the Greek for this term (indicates Physis). So again, he's doing some etymological work here. Physis means: blossoming forth from itself, springing forth from itself. Very much like the rose is being described. And think about what this means. This is what Heidegger says. "The blossoming of the rose is grounded in itself. Has its ground in itself. The blossoming is a pure emerging out of itself. Pure shining."

Now what's going on there? Of course, Heidegger will never talk just about the shining, even though he doesn't explicitly mention it here. It's implied and we should therefore remember it in the phrase, 'emerging out of itself,' that the shining is simultaneously withdrawing. We get a sense of the depth of the rose in its physis, because as it shines, it shines in a way that's showing that it's shining out of itself, shining out of its depth, shining out of that into which it withdraws, as it presents itself to our phenomenological experience.

So here Heidegger is picking up on one of Eckhart's maxims. This is what Eckhart said: Live without why. Or you could also translate it as Live

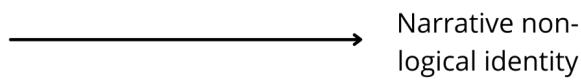
without a why. Now that sounds to some people like, what? That sounds like a meaningless existence. There's no why, there's no purpose. There's no grand unifying purpose.

Think about it a little bit more carefully, right? Is that quest for the grand culminating purpose? Is, is that maybe, perhaps, coming from the Having mode and not from the Being mode. Eckhart is not proposing meaninglessness. He's actually proposing a non-teleological way of being. A non-teleological way of being. It's to move beyond.

There's no narrative to the rose. The rose is not that it's sort of lacking. It's beyond, above and beyond the narrative. So a way of thinking about this—and I promised to come back to this earlier in the series and I've come back to it now (draws an east pointing arrow). And we talked about this in a couple places. We talked about it back with the Stoics. And we talked about it when I was talking about, perhaps we can't get back to a narrative in the sense of a teleological aspect to physis, to the physical universe. But maybe the universe as a whole is like the rose. Maybe it's blooming from itself, grounded in itself, blossoming, shining from itself while always, always withdrawing. And think about how well that actually comports with the physics of an ever-expanding universe coming out of the Big Bang, but grounded in the quantum. Like, is that so foreign a way of talking about the universe, that it's very much like the rose? And we get better at being connected to its physis, if we drop the axial age requirement that there be a teleological narrative to it all.

Narrative And Non-Logical Identity

This horizontal narrative. Look, it's important. The horiz—narrative gives us practice in something. It gives us important practice in something. We're going to come back to this because the thing about narrative is narrative gives you deep practice, cognitive existential practice in non-logical identity (Fig. 1a) (writes Narrative non-logical identity). We've talked about this and the relationship it has to the symbol.



Narrative non-logical identity

Fig. 1a

So let's talk about it, first of all, in the symbol. Remember, here's a framing, (Fig. 2) (draws a square) and then you transframe, (draws a larger square outside the small square) and then there's a non-logical identity between the world inside the frame and the world outside the frame, (draws a double headed arrow between the two squares) and a non-logical identity between you here and you there (draws a double-headed arrow between the two squares). Remember this? This non-logical identity between who you are inside this frame and who you are after a transframing. Remember that when we talked about aspiration... when we talked about aspiration, remember that?

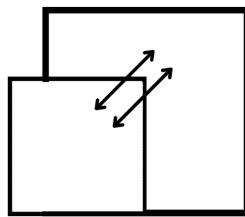


Fig. 2

Now the thing about narrative, is that narrative is a way of representing through time, (indicates the horizontal arrow) symbolically (Fig. 1b) (writes Through below Narrative non-logical identity). [-] Sometimes we're just talking about a kind of transformation through time. But one of the things that narrative does, is through time, it represents how you have a non-logical identity to yourself.

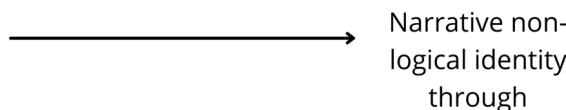


Fig. 1b

Look, I was born in Hamilton in 1961. I'm not in Hamilton now. I'm not nine pounds. I'm 190 pounds. That kid that was born in Hamilton, can't speak English. Couldn't walk, couldn't move around. Certainly couldn't teach this... that kid is in so many ways different, non-identical from me, but in another sense, it's me! And I'm him.

Narrative is a way of tracing out and training us in being able to work with non-logical identity, to work with this kind of fundamental transformation. But what we can do, what I think Eckhart is pointing to (erases the board

except the horizontal arrow), we can exapt that ability for non-logical identity (Fig. 3) (writes Exapt). We can exapt that symbolic identity. And instead of thinking of it as unfolding narratively across time—remember how the Stoics criticized this? Stop pursuing fame and glory and wealth and power. Instead of the horizontal narrative, we can do the vertical ontology (draws a downward arrow across the horizontal arrow). We can do the vertical ontology in which we are connecting the depths of ourselves to the depths of being in a non-teleological Being mode. This is, I think, is what. Heidegger is pointing to and what Eckhart is pointing to.

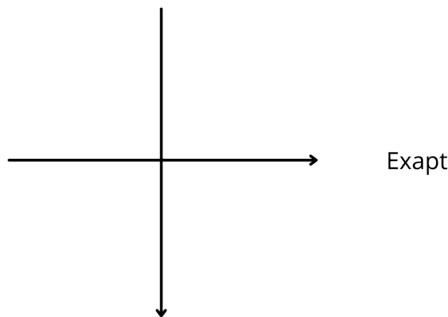


Fig. 3

Pure Shining And Pure Withdrawal

[...] Here's the pure shining (Fig. 4a) (writes Pure shining), the way the rose shines, phenomenon, experience. Right? I think that's shining. I think we can talk about it as relevance realization (writes RR below Pure shining), the salience landscaping into intelligibility. [-].

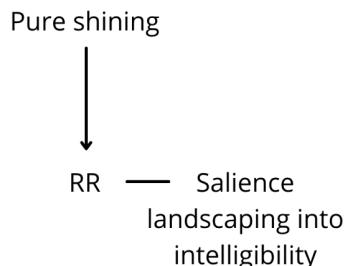


Fig. 4a

What about the pure withdrawal? (Fig. 4b) (writes Pure withdrawal beside Pure shining) This is the independent inexhaustibleness of a combinatorially explosive reality. Independent, because it is inexhaustible (writes Independent inexhaustible). We cannot drink it dry. The Tao Te Ching. Right? And the Tao is a way of understanding physis the way Heidegger's

talking about. Look at the book, Heidegger and Asian Thought, or Heidegger's [Hidden] Sources, where it talks about the connection to Taoism and he might've been directly influenced by it. Right. And the Tao Te Ching talks about how the Tao is a well that is never used up. It is the inexhaustible mother. So the independent inexhaustibleness of a combinatorially explosive reality (writes of COE reality below Independent inexhaustibleness). The thing, and the things, beyond themselves (writes Things beyond themselves below Independent inexhaustibleness of COE reality).

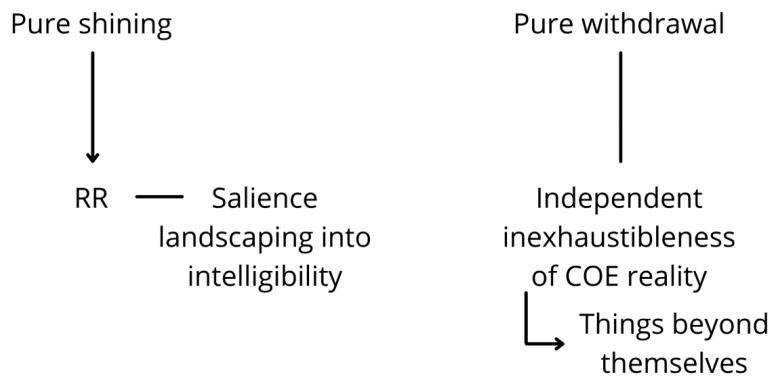


Fig. 4b

I think we can draw these two together (Fig. 4c) (draws a line between Salience landscaping and Independent inexhaustibleness), as I've already argued, into this. I want to say this very carefully. We can see this, we can experience this from within the being mode in the following way. A trajectory, a trajectory of transframing that is always closing upon the relevant, while always opening to the moreness. It's a trajectory of transframing that is always closing upon the relevant as it is simultaneously always opening to the moreness.

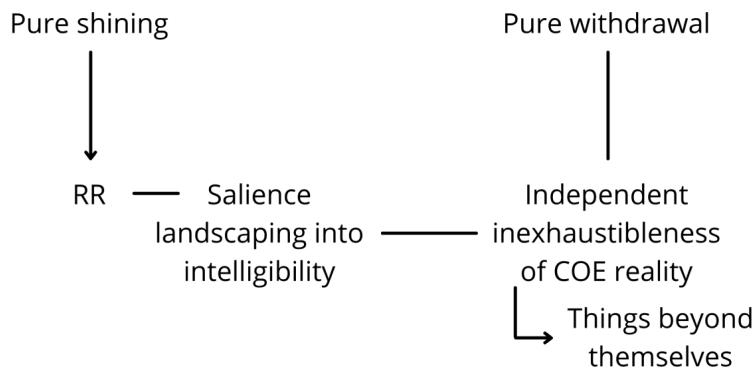


Fig. 4c

When we recognize that aletheia, remember it from within the Being mode, so that we can accentuate it and celebrate it; that's what I've argued 'sacredness' is. And that seems to line up very well with what Eckhart is saying. And one of the things I have about Heidegger is he's reticent to talk about this in terms of sacredness. Tillich isn't. Heidegger is. And that's part of why I think he goes astray in certain ways.

So we can think of realness as a tonos (writes Tonos). This creative tension. It's something that Barfield brings out tremendously and clearly in his work. We can think of realness as a tonos, as a creative polar tension between: [-] confirmation, coherence, and moreness. And remember you need both.

If the virtual reality just has the confirmation and the coherence, it falls flat. If it can't provoke a sense of opening and wonder; if there's no element of surprise; if it's all assimilation and no accommodation—remember accommodation is experienced as awe and wonder. If it's all of that, if it's just assimilation and not accommodation, if it's just the foreclosure and never also the opening; if it's just the homing and never the numinous, see these themes? Then it's not real. It's not experienced as real.



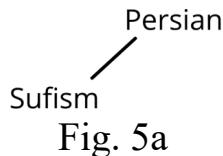
And that being able to attune—and this is where the Tao was so, like Taoism is such a powerful symbolism. You have the yin, which is the confirming. Drawing down. And the yang is the opening up. And both of those interpenetrate. Think of the classic Tao symbol: within the white is the black dot, within the black is the white dot. And they're sinuous because they're interpenetrating, interleaved together.

And all of that is the disclosure of the inexhaustibleness of the Tao. I'm trying to make a convergence argument here. Taoism is all about the serious play [-] with the serious play of being. And that's how Corbin describes it. When he's talking about gnosis he talks about the play of being. So does Avens when he's talking about Corbin. So I'd like to pass now explicitly leaving Heidegger behind now and moving into Corbin.

Persian Sufism And Corbin

I've already noted how deeply Corbin was influenced by Heidegger. But he's also deeply influenced by Platonism. And that leads him into probably his deepest influences. So all of these things are important to Corbin: Heidegger, the Neoplatonic tradition, but most especially Neoplatonism within Persian Sufism.

So Sufism (Fig. 5a) (writes Sufism) is the mystical branch of Islam, and Corbin is particularly focused on Persian sufism (writes Persian above Sufism). And I think that's something important that we should just pause to note. One of the gifts of Corbin's work is to help us remember—and thereby overcome our ethnocentrism—how central—and I use that term decidedly—how central Persian philosophy is to the history of philosophy in the world.



Persia plays a pivotal role. And I don't mean it as a neglected middle—well, it is by us, but it shouldn't be a neglected middle. Persia plays a central role between, for example, between the Arab world, the European world, and the world of India and China, the Asiatic world. And what's really important about Persian Sufism—the history of Persia is a fraught one.

We sort of think of now. And this is because of the history and since the seventies, we think of Iran is sort of rabidly Muslim and something like that. And that's played up by propaganda. It is not to deny that there is an Islamic fundamentalist totalitarian regime in control in Iran. What I'm trying to do is challenge that as a monolithic representation of all of Persia and all of Persian culture. Instead, you have to remember that Persia was made Muslim via an Arab invasion that was nothing less than a genocide. And I know Persians. They remember this deeply to this day. So the attitude towards the Arab overlords is something that has become deeply woven into Persian culture.

Why am I saying that? Because that means that the Persians were especially attracted to, at least for huge periods, Rumi and others, they are deeply attracted to Sufism. They're attracted to a mystical interpretation of Islam,

precisely because they are trying to find a form of liberation from an oppressive Arab empire. So that means that it's important that it is Persian Sufism, and this deeply has an impact on Corbin. He's really taken up by this and how that Persian Sufism has a much more—I'm trying not to be dismissive here—as a much more flexible relationship to Islam than you might think of, when you think of Iran today in the world.

And so, like, reading the poetry of ancient Persia—well, not even ancient Persia—the poetry from Persia since the Arab invasion and genocide, I think is an important thing to do. To re-remember these aspects. Now Corbin did all of that. He read this stuff deeply. Profoundly, repeatedly, extensively.

Now there's ways in which he suffers. There is ways in which as a Frenchman, he will fundamentally misunderstand some of this literature. And I'm not going to say that he is a perfect interpreter, but I will say he is an insightful and important interpreter. So he draws all this in. He's drawing in the Heidegger and the Neoplatonism and especially—and [-] the Persian Sufists know this—the deep influence of Neoplatonism (Fig. 5b) (writes Neoplatonism above Sufism) on Sufism.

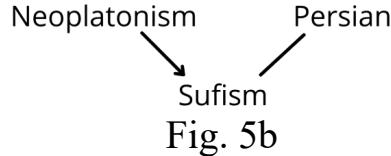


Fig. 5b

So there's Neoplatonism then there is a mystical form of Islam, deeply influenced by Neoplatonism and then Corbin is bringing that into understanding Heidegger. And then he's bringing all of that as a way of trying to explain this gnosis, and how this gnosis can ultimately be salvic and redemptive in the face of the meaning crisis. Remember, he talked about gnosis as transformative, salvic, participatory knowing. A deep at onement, attunement, at onement. See how all these things are resonating with each other?

Now, what does Corbin bring to this that we don't have in Heidegger? And here's where I think you can see the influence of Sufism and the rich world of Persian poetry upon him. And I think this is an important thing.

Corbin sees there, and argues for—reading Corbin is very different than reading—it's like Heidegger in the sense that it's difficult, but because he's trying again, to break out of the cognitive and cultural grammar, but it's very lyrical. It's very beautiful. But sometimes you pick up the beauty and that's again the influence of the Persian poetry on him. You pick up the beauty[-], and then you should pause and say, yeah, but did I really understand what he just said? So you have to read, you almost have to recite Corbin, and repeat Corbin.

Now he uses that kind of argumentation to make a claim that the recovery of gnosis is bound up with imagination, in an important way (writes Imagination). And you may think, "oh no, John is just going to jump off into some decadent form of romanticism." No. Corbin is doing something very interesting about this.

I recommend the Lachman book (Lost Knowledge of the Imagination) that I've recommended for Corbin. See also Aven's book, The New Gnosis, that I've just mentioned. See all of Cheetham's work, The World Turned Inside Out, Imaginal Love, the third one I think it was Henry Corbin and the Angelic [Function] of Beings. [-] I recommend reading Aven and reading Cheetham before you read Corbin.

So if you take a look, Corbin is doing something very important with this. He's not using this word (indicates Imagination) in the way we typically use it. And in order to bring that out, he actually makes a distinction. A distinction that's going to be important, especially when we turn to talk about Jung.

Distinction Between Imaginary And Imaginal

He makes a distinction between the Imaginary (Fig. 6) (writes Imaginary below Imagination) and what he calls the Imaginal (writes Imaginal). And it's the Imaginal that is bound up with gnosis. (Writes Gnosis above Imaginal)

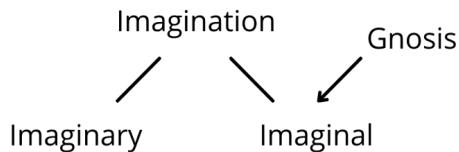


Fig. 6

So imaginary. The Imaginary is what we typically mean when we invoke the word imagination. We mean the purely subjective experience of generating inner mental imagery, which we know is not real and that it's sort of completely in our control and we can play with it as we wish. That is explicitly, clearly, definitively not what Corbin is talking about.

Corbin is talking about the Imaginal. And to try and convey the imaginal, I'm going to try and schematically represent it to you. Because if you don't get the imaginal, you don't get what Corbin is talking about. I also would say you ultimately do not get what Jung is talking about, when he's talking about active imagination, because you'll just misunderstand active imagination as a purely imaginary experience, as opposed to imaginal experience. And as I'll point out later, Corbin and Jung are deeply influential of each other. Corbin is much more open about that relationship. Corbin talks about and invokes Jung, often critically, but, at least clearly and explicitly, and with credit, way more often than I see Jung talking about Corbin, which I think is a criticism I have of Jung.

Okay. So let's try and represent this. So, first of all, think of two ways (Fig. 7a) (writes Abstract) in which you sort of try and represent, come into cognitive contact with reality. One is through abstract representations, abstract—the abstract intelligible world (writes intelligible world below Abstract). The world that you get through your intellect. So you grasp reality as a mathematical formula or something like that, or you grasp reality as a purely formal entity. And then in contrast, there is, of course, the concrete and, of course, concrete and abstract are always relative terms, they're not absolute terms. The concrete sensible world (writes Concrete sensible world below Abstract intelligible world) at the bottom here.

Abstract
intelligible world

Concrete sensible
world

Fig. 7a

So one thing the imaginal does, is it actually mediates between these two. (Fig. 7b) (writes Mediates between Abstract intelligible world and Concrete sensible world) It bridges between them. It allows them to come together in meaningfully structured experience. Because in my phenomenological experience, of course, there's both an intelligible order that I can abstract intellectually, but that intelligible order also affects the way I come into sensual contact concretely with it.

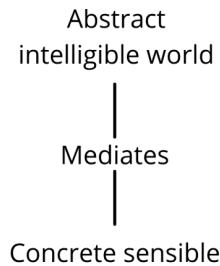


Fig. 7b

So the imaginal mediates between these (Fig. 7c) (erases Mediates and writes Imaginal). And one of Corbin's arguments is, and you see what he's doing here. He's arguing that the Cartesian cultural grammar that basically replicates the axial two worlds, but within us. So here's the world of mind, the abstract intelligible world, pure mind. And the concrete sensible is the world of pure matter. This is the Cartesian division. And what Corbin is arguing is. Yeah, but we've lost the imaginal that bridges between those two worlds between the mind and the material.

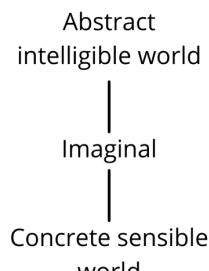
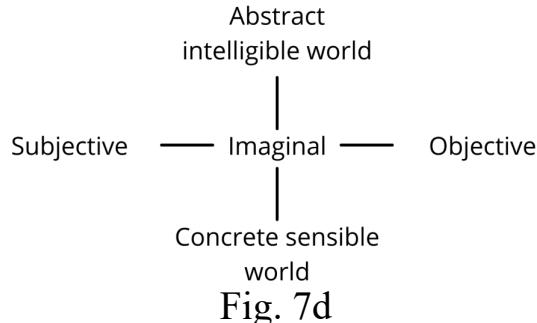


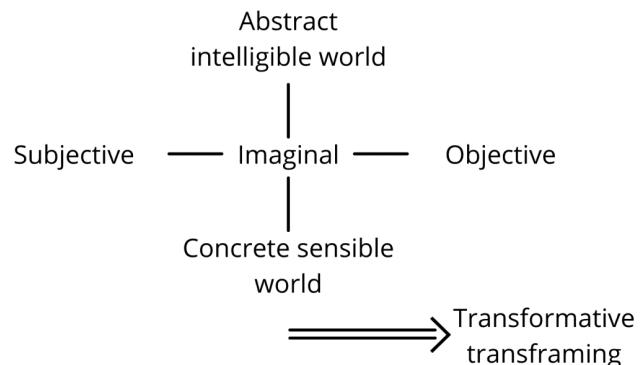
Fig. 7c

Now, of course, Descartes split things in another way. And the imaginal mediates between those (Fig. 7d) (draws horizontal lines on both sides of Imaginal) and these, of course, they're not the same. That's why I represent them with different axes, but they are not independent. That's why I'm putting them together within the schema. The imaginal also bridges between

the purely subjective (writes Subjective to the left of Imaginal) and the purely objective (Writes Objective to the right of Imaginal).



So to use the term I've been trying to develop with you and we saw it all through Heidegger. The imaginal is deeply transjective in nature. So it mediates and it's transjective. And then what you have to do is you have to see this whole thing sort of in motion (Fig. 7e) (draws an arrow pointing to the right below), which I can't draw for you. Because the imaginal isn't a static relation. It's also a constant transformative transframing (writes Transformative transframing). There's a movement to the imaginal. It is vibrant and vital in that way. There's a movement to it.



So this is what Corbin means by the imaginal. It's a use of images, but not using them subjectively, using them transjectively. We'll try to come back to that. In a way that mediates, bridges, integrates the abstract intelligible world and the concrete sensible world together. But again, not just statically, but in this ongoing [-] transformative transframing.

So because of the centrality of the imaginal to Corbin, Corbin—and he explicitly understood himself as doing this and stated this — He was deeply opposed to fundamentalism. And here you can, of course, see the connection

to the Persian history I was relating to you. He's deeply opposed to fundamentalism and literalism. Why?

Because fundamentalism and literalism, first of all, they reify this, (Fig. 7e) they make it static. And they put things into *either* the abstract intelligible world *or* the concrete sensible world, *or* just in to subjectivity *or* just in to objectivity. They freeze this, and then they fracture it. And thereby, they completely lose the nexus of the imaginal. And for Corbin, if you lose the imaginal, you lose the capacity for gnosis. (Fig. 7f) (writes Gnosis above Imaginal). And then if you lose the capacity for gnosis, you lose the capacity for waking up within the being mode, through aletheia to being and the ground of being in sacredness.

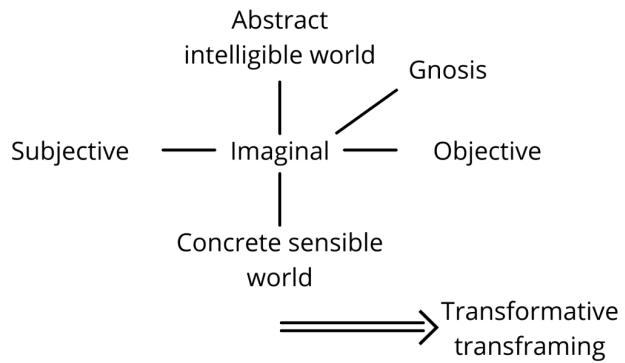


Fig. 7f

This is going to be something we're going to keep seeing. And again, something that Heidegger doesn't make explicit, but it's explicated in Corbin. The deep ongoing criticism to fundamentalism and literalism. It's a deep component of Jung as well. Jung sees fundamentalism and literalism as the antithetical movement of thought and being in the world, to everything he is trying to promote as a response to the meaning crisis. It is also deeply antagonistic to what Barfield is talking about when he's talking about poetic participation.

So we're seeing, again, a potential way in which we can understand Heidegger's critique of ontotheology because there is a tendency—and all of these thinkers keep pointing to it. If we get into the Having mode and we get into ontotheology and we have the supreme being, and we have our propositions about this ultimate being, that we can think that the way in

which we should be, is to have these propositions in a fundamentalist literalist fashion, and we lose all of this.

And what you'll hear is you'll hear the invocation of the symbolic as a dismissive term. Yeah. So that, but yes. Yes, yes, you can read this symbolically, but it's just symbolic, meaning it has no real relevance or importance to you. Corbin is trying to argue exactly the opposite.

If you have an attitude towards the symbolic that is dismissive, then, of course, you have lost the capacity for gnosis, which means you have lost the capacity to remember — to overcome in aletheia — the forgetfulness of being, to come out of the deepest kind of modal confusion.

I see somebody as exemplifying this, although I don't think he's directly influenced by Corbin, I see Jonathan Pageau is trying to bring us back to this gnosis of the symbol. And how we should not be dismissive of it. We should not try and slide it into either a conceptual world or essential world. We should not interpret it as merely subjective, or reject it because we can't make it clearly objective for us. Look at all the jecting going on. Subject. Reject.

So now to try and bring out the imaginal in a way that connects to dasein, your being in the world, because remember, your self-knowledge and your participatory knowing of being are interpenetrating and knowing together. I have to bring out something of Corbin, that if you read it and you haven't done all of this work (indicates Fig. 7f), you, I guarantee, will misread it and misunderstand it. And it's a part that's difficult for me, because it pushes my buttons in ways that I don't like, which is why I keep reading this stuff. Because I have a tremendous sense that it's pushing my buttons in a way that they need to be pushed, so that I could perhaps wear free from them, at least to some degree (erases the board).

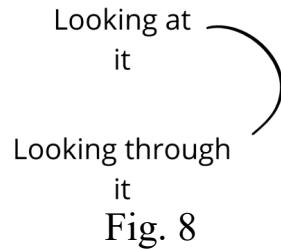
Corbin's Imaginal Understanding Of The Symbol

And here's where Corbin is different from Heidegger, where he really does pick up on the sense of sacredness that is going on within the imaginal.

Okay. Let's talk about how Corbin understands the symbol (writes Symbol), the imaginal understanding of the symbol, as opposed to the imaginary understanding—the dismissive understanding of the symbol.

Okay. So what are these features? The feature that was brought out when Chris and I had that excellent discussion, the translucency of a symbol, you look at it, but you look through it in both meanings of the word by means of it and beyond it, like the way I'm looking through my glasses. The symbol is translucent. I can look at it. But I can also simultaneously look through it. And I can put those two into a important dialogue.

Why do I want a dialogue between looking at it and looking through it? (Fig. 8) (writes Looking at it and Looking through it) why is it so important to have those in dialogue with each other? Because that is how the symbol can help you to capture the non-logical identity between your Agent:Arena now in this frame and the Agent:Arena in a more comprehensive encompassing frame.



So symbols are translucent. As I've already argued, they're transjective. Trying to make them either subjective or objective is aligned with a Having mode dismissal of how the symbol is trying to challenge you to transcendence. If you are not transcending in response to a symbol, you really haven't understood a symbol. If you just treat it as an allegory that you can replace with other literal terms, then you haven't really remembered through the symbol. There has been no aletheia. In your pursuit of the correctness of truth, you have forgotten the aletheia of the symbol. This is why I'm so critical of people who are so dismissive of symbolism.

The symbol is not only transjective, it's trajective. It's putting you on a trajectory of transformation as I was just articulating. The symbol is transformative. Remember the transformative of the inner man, it's transformative you at a fundamental level. And the symbol is ultimately transtemporal, transpatial, because it has to do with this movement between worlds, which really isn't a narrative temporal spatial movement, it's an ontological movement between, a smaller frame and a larger frame. I

represent it with an arrow, but it isn't movement through space and time. It isn't a narrative change. It's an ontological shift. So I'm trying to pick all of these up. The translucency of the symbol. It's transjective. It's trajective. It's transformative, and it's transtemporal, spatial. Aletheia, through the symbol. That's how you do gnosis.

Now let's give the troubling example that is central to Corbin. And I found it disturbing in ways. And some of you will too. And I hope so. What I ask for right now is be patient because I want to unpack this. I don't want to try and be dismissive, but I want to show you that Corbin is not using this notion in a way you standardly will. And like I said—I hesitate to do—so. The most important symbol of this for Corbin is what he calls the angel (Fig. 9a) (writes The Angel below Symbol). And that's why Cheetham puts it in the title of his book. And Avens puts it in the subtitle of his book on The New Gnosis.



Fig. 9a

And soon as I put that up there, many of you are now rolling your eyes as I did. There's a part of me that I can feel there's tension behind my eyes wanting to roll them. Oh no, angels. Oh, silly superstitious idea cherubs and only new age people that swing crystals and the angels and all that stuff. And it's like, oh no, what a disaster.

And I deeply appreciate that. I'm not being dismissive of that. I would say that that's an imaginary understanding of angels. One that Corbett himself repeatedly and deeply rejects. What's he talking about? And why is he using this term? Okay, he's using it because it's a term that is filled, that fills, some of the literature of the Persian Sufism that he reads.

The Notion Of The Divine Double

I want to propose to you an alternative way of understanding this to what our cultural imaginary way of understanding this. Let me go back in our history first (Fig. 9b) (draws an arrow away from The Angel) to try and get a

different way of leading into this notion and then take it into some current cutting edge analytic philosophy, believe it or not, and show how that fits well and comports well with the cognitive science we have been doing throughout this response to the four prophets of the meaning crisis.

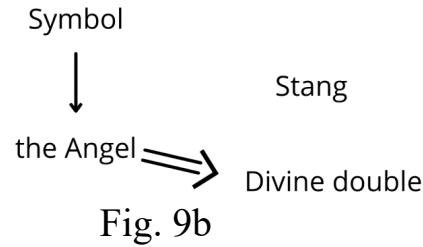


Fig. 9b

Okay. So, this is—now I'm making use of the seminal work of Stang (writes Stang). Stang wrote a book called the Divine Double, which is a followup to a book he wrote on pseudo Dionysus. And he's written some brilliant articles on pseudo Dionysius that brings all this out. Now. So the book is called the Divine Double (writes Divine double below The Angel) and he's pointing to a particular motif that was prevalent in the Mediterranean world during—and remember we talked about the Hellenistic domocide and thereafter and you have the rise of gnosticism and early Christianity? So during this period, and across many different groups, you see it within gnosticism, he makes a clear case—and you know, again, some people are gonna, No! He makes a clear case for this motif showing up within early Christianity, you can see it in Manichaeism, you can see it clearly in Neoplatonism and Plotinus, this notion of the divine double. I'm spending time on this because you won't understand Jung, also, if you don't understand this Divine double.

Okay. So what's the notion of the Divine double? It becomes prevalent through the Mediterranean spirituality of the Hellenistic and post Hellenistic period. And I didn't talk about it that much when I talked about the Gnostics and the Neoplatonists, because I wanted to talk about it here because here is where I think it belongs. This was the idea. And again, part of this is how this is so antithetical to our way of thinking, especially our decadent romantic way of thinking. So the decadent romantic way of thinking that sort of goes back to Rousseau is, you're born with your true self and you have to be true to your true self and you have to express it. And that's what it is to be authentic. So this has become pervasive in our culture.

In this Mediterranean spirituality, the motif is very different—it's this idea. That I'm here, and I have a self right now, or they might say a psukhe, a spirit or soul. I have myself right now. But it is bound to the divine double. There's a double of me that is archetypically more important than me, and that what I am doing, my true self is actually this divine double, and my spiritual path is to reunite this self with that divine double. And to bring it, bring the two together. Then that realization of their interdependence culminates in a kind of mystical union between them.

Now, this is still all very fuzzy language, I'll grant you that. But first of all, notice how this is very interesting. Think—step aside from the mythos for a minute and think about the concept—so you see how this is gnostic. Not in the sense of gnosticism, but well, a little bit in the sense of gnosticism, because there's this transgressive—it's trying to break grammar. It's trying to break the grammar of thinking of your true self as something you have. Your identity is something you have that you're born with it. It's in you. And what you have to do is express it authentically. And that grammar is being subverted and transgressed by the idea that your true self is beyond you and you have to aspire to it. And you see there's a bit of a Socratic element there. That your true self is something you aspire to, rather than something you have. The true self is something realized through the Being mode of self-transcendence, not through the Having mode of inner possession.

And so the divine double, it is pervasive. It's a pervasive mythos. And what I'm, first of all, what I recommend is—and I think this is a very fair recommendation. You understand Corbin's use of the angel as a symbolic way of talking about the divine double (draws an arrow from The Angel to Divine double). And you may say, okay, that's great. And I see why it challenges the grammar, but I don't care about this because, all right, I didn't believe in angels and I don't believe in divine doubles. So telling me about angels in terms of divine doubles, what does that gain me? That gains me nothing.

An Aspirational Process Towards A More Angelic Self

Well, I want you to be very, I want to be very careful here. I want to start a problem. I want to start you on a deep analysis of this. Let's put aside the mythos, let's put aside the metaphysical claims. And let's focus in on this very process of aspiration towards a better self, towards a more angelic self. Because it goes back to the Socratic project, but you can also see it in the depths of our [-] process of aspiration, towards a greater, better, fuller self; is, of course, all the way through Maslow. It's all the way through Jung. This aspirational process is central to a lot of the mythos that we have, about talking about how we are going to normatively improve, not our situation, but ourself.

So is the divine double a crazy idea? Well, in one sense, it is. Again, if you just sort of literalize the mythos into some sort of axial two-world mythology, a metaphysics. Sure. But maybe it's not a crazy idea if we go back and try to ask this question. Instead of asking the question—look, this is what I meant about real dialogue, *philia sophia*, not *philia nikia*. Instead of asking the question, “Should I believe that?” First, ask yourself the question: “Why did so many different groups of people in that world believe it? What was going on there? What was it doing?” And here is where I think I can immediately invoke the important work, which I have discussed repeatedly throughout this entire—the entire argument in this entire series, the important work of LA Paul and transformative experience. And that was bound up with the way we talk about gnosis.

Now I alluded to somebody else's work. Work that was influenced and from the same area, sort of—I don't know what to call it—school? As LA Paul's work. And this is the really important work of Agnes Callard, and her book is entitled *Aspiration*. And she's arguing for a neglected form of rationality that is best understood through aspiration.

Rationality? What? Remember, I don't use rationality to mean [-] just the logical management of argumentation. Rationality means any systematically reliable internalized psychotechnology that reliably and systematically affords you overcoming self-deception and affords you cultivating enhanced connectedness, enhanced meaning in life. That's why the notion of rationality I've argued for is bound up with the—it can culminate, it could point towards the cultivation of wisdom.

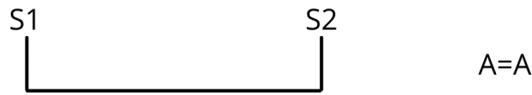
So let's talk about yourself before the transformation, or before you launch into the aspirational process; and the self afterwards: S1 and S2 (writes S1 and S2). (Text overlay appears saying, 'This has nothing to do with the S1/S2 distinction between kinds of cognition). Now, LA Paul tends to represent this as a much more sort of rapid transition. And I think there's important truth in that, the insight. Whereas Callard is representing it much more, not incrementally, that's not the right word, but much more developmentally, having a much more extended developmental trajectory. And you can reconcile those, I think, quite readily by seeing qualitative development as a sequence of insightful transformations. So I don't think there's any deep inconsistency here.

Okay. So what's the problem here? Well, as I've already pointed out (Fig. 10a) (draws a line connecting S1 and S2) with any genuine [-] qualitative development—quantitative elements, you just get, sort of, more things, more beliefs, more experiences. Qualitative development is why I am so different in kind from that kid that was born in Hamilton. It's a fundamental difference of competence of what I can know and what I can do and what I can be rather than just how much.



Fig. 10a

So, I've already pointed out that you have an issue here of non-logical identity (Fig. 10b) (writes Non-logical identity under S1 and S2). So this is not an identity relation that that can be captured by the fundamental identity theorem in logic that A is identical to A, (writes A=A) meaning that they share all the same properties. We do not. John in Hamilton and John in Toronto. John and Hamilton then, and John and Toronto now, we are not, we are not this (indicates A=A).



Non-logical
identity

Fig. 10b

We have a non-logical identity and I've brought that out. And how much gnosis is about the difficulties, of trying to overcome the difficulties that this poses (indicates Non-logical identity). Because of this non-logical identity. And I'm not going to repeat these arguments, go back and look at them when I talk about gnosis. We cannot reason our way through this. We cannot infer our way through this. And Callard is deeply in agreement with this aspect. You cannot deliberate your way through it. You can not decide your way through it.

So what is the nature of the relation? Well, Callard thinks it's aspirational. It involves what she calls aspiration. But she's at pains to point something out that LA Paul doesn't, which I think is very important. If you don't include this process (writes Rational beside Aspirational) as part of what you mean by this term, you're going to get into a deeply self-refuting position. Because my relationship to rationality, and my relationship to wisdom are aspirational.

I am aspiring to become rational, precisely because I am not currently that rational. And if the aspiration to rationality is not part of rationality, you're getting into a weird kind of self-refutation. The aspiration of rationality is constitutive of the ongoing process of being rational. And therefore it must be included in your notion of rationality and notice how we're getting back towards the platonic idea of the deep interpenetration of love and reason. Took a long time, eh? It took a long time to circle around back to that. Of course, this is also the case for wisdom.

It's also—look, think about this this way. One of the things I need to do to become rational is to become more educated. And, but Callard argues explicitly, a genuine education—well, there's different meanings to that word now. One is just the accumulation of facts and skills and stuff like that.

But for many, and this was supposed to be, maybe it still is, the defining feature of a liberal education... Liberal, liberal, to liberate you. Gnosis. To save you. To liberate you from existential entrapment. A liberal education is designed to make you into a better self, a better person, which is why it seems so useless to people who want to manipulate and control you. Think about that. When you side with, 'Oh, liberal education, silly,' I think you're getting on the wrong side. Because we're losing something there. Right? So

a liberal education, and this is what it classically meant when you go back into the middle ages, is gnosis. It's aspirational. And you don't know what it's going to be like. Remember all that stuff about LA Paul?

So let me leave you with the example from Callard, and then we'll come back and talk about this in the next episode and expand this whole. [-] What am I leading you towards? I'm leading you towards that this (indicates S1 and S2) is the relationship between the existing self and the divine double. Or another way of perhaps putting it: the divine double is a symbol, in Corbin's sense, that allows you to move from yourself now, to yourself then, to the better self.

One of the examples that Callard gives in aspiration is — and think about how this fits in with a liberal arts education. Somebody who wants to come to appreciate music. And notice how that word appreciation means both understanding and a gratitude. It has a connotative, emotional aspect. It has a denotative cognitive aspect. I will understand music.

So let's say I don't currently 'get' classical music. But I have an inkling that it's really important. I think that — Charles Williams and Barfield and Tolkien and CS Lewis called themselves the inklings. I have an inkling that there's a self and a world there. Remember we talked about the person trapped in this world, but a sense that there might be a better self and a better world over there?

I have an inkling that I should like classical music. But I don't currently like classical music. I have to come to be the kind of being that appreciates classical music. How do I do that? How do I bridge from me now not appreciating, not getting, not liking, not enjoying classical music to somebody who can sincerely say I love classical music. I really get it now. How can I?

We use this phrase and notice how it's so rich and resonant with contact epistemology. But now I have a taste for music. I've an acquired taste for it. Let's get behind the metaphor. How is it? And notice when you taste something, you're putting it into your being. It's not only contact. It's even consumption, not in the Having mode sense, but taking it deeply in. What is it to move that way?

What I'm trying to show you is that Corbin's talk about the angel is a way of him invoking and bringing into activity, all of this stuff about symbolism that we've talked about, and integrate it with this process of aspirational rationality, that is so central to self-transcendence. And so central to us becoming more rational and more wise.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 48 Notes

Aletheia

Aletheia is truth or disclosure in philosophy.

Henry Corbin

Henry Corbin was a philosopher, theologian, Iranologist and professor of Islamic Studies at the École pratique des hautes études in Paris, France.

Gnosis

Gnosis is the common Greek noun for knowledge. The term is used in various Hellenistic religions and philosophies. It is best known from Gnosticism, where it signifies a spiritual knowledge or insight into humanity's real nature as divine, leading to the deliverance of the divine spark within humanity from the constraints of earthly existence.

Robert Avens

Book Mentioned: The New Gnosis – [Buy Here](#)

John Caputo

John David Caputo is an American philosopher who is the Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion Emeritus at Syracuse University and the David R. Cook Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Villanova University.

Book Mentioned: The Mystical Element In Heidegger's Thought - [Buy Here](#)

Angelus Silesius

Angelus Silesius, born Johann Scheffler and also known as Johann Angelus Silesius, was a German Catholic priest and physician, known as a mystic and religious poet.

Owen Barfield

Arthur Owen Barfield was a British philosopher, author, poet, critic, and member of the Inklings

Meister Eckhart

Eckhart von Hochheim OP, commonly known as Meister Eckhart or Eckehart, was a German theologian, philosopher and mystic, born near Gotha in the Landgraviate of Thuringia (now central Germany) in the Holy Roman Empire.

Paul Tillich

Paul Johannes Tillich was a German-American Christian existentialist philosopher and Lutheran Protestant theologian who is widely regarded as one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century.

Ontotheology

Ontotheology means the ontology of God and/or the theology of being. While the term was first used by Immanuel Kant, it has only come into broader philosophical parlance with the significance it took for Martin Heidegger's later thought.

Physis

Physis is a Greek philosophical, theological, and scientific term, usually translated into English — according to its Latin translation "natura" — as "nature".

Book Mentioned: Heidegger and Asian Thought - [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Heidegger's Hidden Sources - [Buy Here](#)

Tao Te Ching

The Tao Te Ching is a Chinese classic text traditionally credited to the 6th-century BC sage Laozi, also known as Lao Tzu or Lao-Tze.

Rumi

Jalāl ad-Dīn Mohammad Rūmī, also known as Jalāl ad-Dīn Mohammad Balkhī, Mevlânâ/Mowlânā, Mevlevî/Mawlawî, and more popularly simply as Rumi, was a 13th-century Persian poet, Hanafi faqih, Islamic scholar, Maturidi theologian, and Sufi mystic originally from Greater Khorasan in Greater Iran.

Neoplatonism

Neoplatonism is a strand of Platonic philosophy that emerged in the second century AD against the background of Hellenistic philosophy and religion.

Gary Lachman

Gary Joseph Lachman, also known as Gary Valentine, is an American writer and musician.

Book Mentioned: Lost Knowledge of the Imagination - [Buy Here](#)

Tom Cheetham

Book Mentioned: The World Turned Inside Out – [Buy Here](#)

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Book Mentioned: All The World An Icon – [Buy Here](#)

Jonathan Pageau

Manichaeism

Manichaeism was a major religion founded in the 3rd century AD by the Parthian prophet Mani, in the Sasanian Empire.

Charles M. Stang

Book Mentioned: Our Divine Double – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I" – [Buy Here](#)

L.A. Paul

Laurie Ann Paul is a professor of philosophy and cognitive science at Yale University. She previously taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Arizona. She is best known for her research on the counterfactual analysis of causation and the concept of "transformative experience."

Agnes Callard

Agnes Callard is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago. Her primary areas of specialization are ancient philosophy and ethics.

Book Mentioned: Aspiration: The Agency of Becoming – [Buy Here](#)

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Ep. 49 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Corbin and Jung

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis.

So last time we followed Heidegger into the depths where we encountered Eckhart and this non teleological relationship to the play of being, and that led us very directly into Corbin. And Corbin's core argument that gnosis, as the way we've been using it—the ability to engage in this serious play—

relates centrally to the imagination. But Corbin is making use of this term in a new way.

He makes a distinction between the imaginary, which is how we typically use the word imagination—mental images in my head that are only subjective and have no objective reality—and the imaginal. The imaginal which mediates between the abstract intelligible world and the concrete, sensible world, and transjectively mediates between the subjective and the objective. And that is not done statically. All of this mediation and mutual affordance is done in an ongoing transformative transframing, and that the symbol captures all of this.

And then I wanted to bring out Corbin's core symbol. And it's a core symbol that relates directly to gnosis because in gnosis, in this transformative participatory knowing, and this goes to the core of Heidegger's notion of dasein, the being whose being is in question, we have to see self-knowledge and knowledge of the world as inextricably bound up together. In order to do that, we are pursuing Corbin's central symbol, the angel, which of course is immediately off-putting to many people, including myself. But I've been trying to get a way of articulating how Corbin is incorporating both Heidegger and Persian Sufism—Neoplatonic Sufism—into this understanding of the symbol.

And I recommended that we take a look at the work of, first of all, Stang. The historical work showing how throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, and up—through the Hellenistic period and beyond, up until the period of, easily, pseudo Dionysus around the fifth century of the common era, there's the pursuit of the divine double. And then the idea is one that is deeply transgressive of our cultural cognitive grammar, of decadent romanticism. Where we are born with our true self that merely needs to express itself, ala Rousseau. And the core virtue is authenticity, which is being true to the true self that you have, you possess. Rather than, for example, a Socratic model in which the true self is something towards which you are constantly aspiring.

[-] The transgressive mythology is that the self that I have now, is not my true self. My true self is my divine double. This is something that is superlative to me. It is bound to me. It is my double. It is bound to me, but it

is superlative to me. It is both me and not me. It's me as I'm meant to be, as I should be. And that the project, the existential project is not one of expressing a self that you have, but of transcending to become a self that is ecstatically ahead of you in an important way.

And then I pointed out that, for many of you, this would still be sort of like, okay, but—I get the transgression, but I still find this notion of a divine double unpalatable. Maybe for some of you, you don't, but nevertheless, I think there is an important way by picking up on, by asking the question: Why did so many people, for so long, believe in this so deeply? Picking up on the question of what's going on there, and focusing on this aspirational process.

And this takes us back into work that was core to the discussion I made about gnosticism. And this had a resounding impact at various places throughout the series, which is LA Paul's work on transformative experience. And then somebody who's from the same school influenced by Paul, having a different view. Whereas Paul's [-] transformations are more like insight, Agnes Callard's notion of aspiration is much more developmental. But I argued that they can be, I think, readily reconciled together, if you see development as a linked sequence of insights that bring about qualitative change in your competence.

So we were zeroing in on this. I'm using LA Paul and Agnes Callard to triangulate into this relationship of aspiration. And picking up, first of all, on Callard's important point that is not addressed—and this is an important point by LA Paul—the deep connections between aspiration and rationality. That rationality is itself an aspirational process. And if we make the process by which we become rational itself, not a rational or irrational process, we will get into a position that is seriously self-undermining.

Similarly, if the way in which you become wise does not involve wise acts and behavior, if the process itself is not itself wise, you're going to get into all kinds of difficulties. If it's not in some sense, a rational process. Again, last time I reminded you how broadly, but I think also deeply, I'm using the term 'rational.' Or being educated. We make ourselves better, maybe even more rational or wiser, by going through an education. But education, at least a liberal education, is a deeply aspirational process. If that itself is not

part of what makes us rational, if it's not itself a rational process, then, of course, our rationality is again being undermined in a self-contradictory fashion.

So the basics of this argument is, if we do not understand a kind of rationality Callard calls proleptic rationality, that's the rationality of aspiration (writes Proleptic). The rationality that emerges in education, that emerges in the cultivation of rationality, that emerges in the cultivation of wisdom, then a lot of human behavior is not going to be called rational. And that is going to render our notion of rationality, as I've said, self-contradictory and self-undermining in some very fundamental ways. And so again, we see the rejoicing of love and reason that was originally talked about so deeply in Plato.

So now we've come back to this problem. I gave you the example of somebody in a liberal education. And this is Callard's example. Here's the self at this time (Fig. 1a) (writes S1) and the self at this time (draws a horizontal arrow and writes S2) and something, I brought out that Callard doesn't, but it's important. Because it's a concise way of talking about the relationship between them and that there isn't a direct inferential relationship between these, which is non-logical identity (writes Non-logical identity).

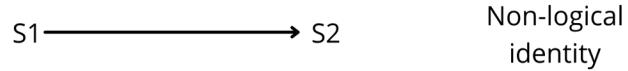


Fig. 1a

This is part and parcel. Think about what I said earlier. how can we broaden the notion of rationality outside of logic? If Callard is right, and we have to include proleptic rationality in our model of rationality and involve its non-logical identity, then, of course, we're stepping beyond sort of a purely logical understanding of rationality, yet again, for yet another reason.

Okay. So what's the problem here? The problem is the problem of non-logical identity. So I don't appreciate—always remember both meanings of that term, [-] and they're interwoven, the two sides of aspiration. I deeply understand it, and I'm deeply grateful for it. I value it.

I [in S1] don't appreciate classical music. I don't have the taste for it, and I don't get it. And I want to be somebody who appreciates classical music

[S2]. Now, if I [-] do that because I want to satisfy a current desire I have, a current value I have, like I value impressing my friends, or I value attracting members of the opposite sex, or something like that, then, of course, I'm not actually aspiring. Because this person doesn't appreciate classical music because it impresses their friends or because it helps them in their dating life, or for whatever other reason. They appreciate it for a perspectival and participatory knowing that S1 doesn't have. That's the point. The appreciation (Fig. 1b) (writes Appreciation below S2) that S2 has, is bound to perspectival and participatory knowing, (writes Perspectival and Participatory below Appreciation) of which S1 is ignorant. And that, of course, is one of the central points who you remember of LA Paul's argument about transformative experience. So that looks like there is something, there's a fundamental discontinuity here.

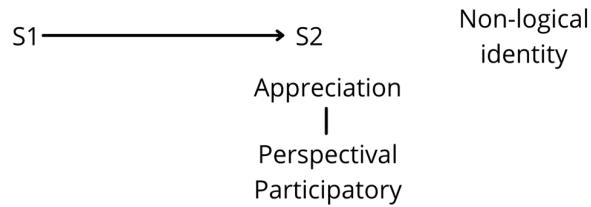


Fig. 1b

Okay. Now they bring up the problem that we need to sort of resolve and bring back and tie this back to the notion of the divine double. I want to talk about a way in which Callard shows us how this (indicates S1 and S2) is problematic as we try to talk about it.

The Paradox Of Self-Creation

And she makes use of the work of Strawson (Fig. 2a) (writes Strawson), Galen Strawson. and he talks about a paradox of self-creation. Now Strawson points out that for self-creation (writes Self-creation)—and doesn't this (indicates S1 and S2) look like self-creation? Here is a self creating itself. For self-creation be truly an instance of self and creation, sort of emphasizing both sides of that, double form, two things are needed.

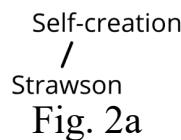


Fig. 2a

One requirement is a continuity requirement. There has to be something deeply continuous between S1 and S2 (Fig. 2b) (writes S1 and S2 below Strawson), because if they are not the same self, then it's not an act of self-creation. [-] So that's the continuity requirement (writes Continuity requirement beside S2). And so I'm going to represent it like this (Writes = between S1 and S2) S1 equals S2. So, what this means is if, like, if S1 is hit by a motorcycle and their brain is damaged and they act and behave in a different way, that's not an act of self-creation. That is not an act of self-creation. S1 has to be totally responsible for S2. Or else it's not an act of self-creation, putting an emphasis on the 'self.'

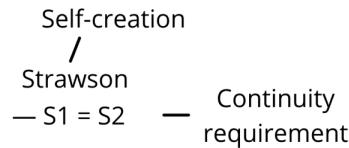


Fig. 2b

Okay. Now let's shift to the creation side. Which is that there has to be real novelty between them (Fig. 2c) (writes S1 and S2 - Real novelty) or else there is no creation involved. If S1 just develops a skill or ability they already have, that is not real novelty. That is just more of the same. That's quantitative development, not qualitative development. So if all that happens is S1 improves the skill, deepens their capacity to acquire something that they already value et cetera, that is not real novelty (writes \neq between S1 and S2). So real novelty means there has to be a fundamental difference between S1 and S2.

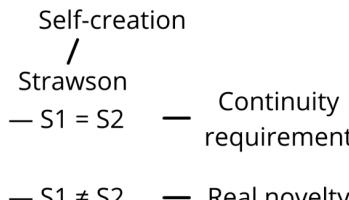


Fig. 2c

Now what Strawson does with this, is he points out, notice how S1 and S2 for the continuity requirement have to be equal, but the real novelty means there has to be a real deep difference between S1 and S2, or it's not creation. And so what he argues is he argues that self-creation is paradoxical. In fact,

the point he's trying to make is, it's self-contradictory. There can be no such thing as self-creation.

So another way of thinking about this, is if you remember when we talked about this in connection with transformative experience, we can invoke Fodor's notion of the idea that you can't sort of create a stronger logic by logically manipulating a weaker logic. No matter how much I manipulate the machinery of predicate logic, I won't get modal logic. Because what I have to do is I have to introduce axioms that are outside—for Godelian reasons, ultimately—are outside the system of predicate logic.

So putting it this way, in order to get the real novelty between S1 and S2, I have to introduce something that's outside the logic of S1, the logic of its values and beliefs, that will then make it into S2. But if it comes from outside of S1, it is foreign and strange, and therefore it is not an act of self-creation. What that shows Fodor's idea about that you can't infer a stronger logic from a weaker logic.

And that goes back to a point we've made before. There is no inferential way; there's no way you can sort of infer yourself from S1 to S2. And this, of course, is part of Kierkegaard's whole point about the leap, and the leap of faith. The leap of faith is to leap into a process of development that is going to put you through this kind of qualitative change in your identity.

But Strawson makes this very problematic by saying, this makes absolutely no sense (Fig. 2d) (draws a bracket connecting $S1=S2$ and $S1 \neq S2$). And so we're caught between two things. Either we can break this by saying there is ultimately no self. We could go rabidly empiricist. I'm just a blank slate. And all that happens is stuff from the outside changes me. And then I go for the novelty (indicates $S1 \neq S2$), but there's no underlying self. Or I can just do the continuity requirement. I can become sort of a Rousseauan romantic. My self is identical throughout. And all I'm doing is expressing what was already within myself. That's all that's happening. You see empiricism and romanticism. Choose one of the two over the other. And then what Strawson says is, you have to make such a choice because self-creation is itself self-contradictory

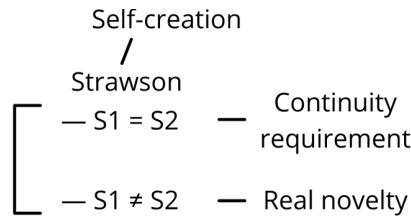


Fig. 2d

Participating In An Emergence Through Aspiration

Callard says this is all a mistake. And I agree with her. She argues that this is both the empiricism and the romanticism, at least the Rousseauan decadent romanticism, is not adequate or accurate of our experimental developmental change. What breaks this (indicates $S1 \neq S2$), I argue, helping her, I believe, is that the relationship between $S1$ and $S2$ is one of non-logical identity. Something, of course, we practice—the narrative practice hypothesis—by engaging in narrative all the time and making ourselves into temporally extended selves that have a non-logical identity through time and through development.

So I think both the romantic expressionism and the empiricist writing upon the blank slate, do not capture what's happening between $S1$ and $S2$. It's not that $S1$ is just changed randomly into $S2$ from the outside. Neither is it the case that $S1$ simply makes $S2$. The first self does not make it. It's neither pure passivity nor pure activity. This, of course, is why I've continually emphasized the notion of participation. We'll see how Barfield is trying also to step above both [-] completely active making and completely passive reception in his notion of participation.

A better way of describing the relationship is $S1$ does not receive nor make $S2$, but participates in $S2$'s emergence. $S2$ emerges out of $S1$ to the point that $S1$ disappears into $S2$. It's an emergence. We participate in an emergence.

So *aspiration* is Callard's name for that process by which $S1$ participates in the emergence of $S2$ out of $S1$, such that $S1$ has disappeared into $S2$. Self one has disappeared into, has become $S2$.

Reformulating The Problem Between $S1$ And $S2$

So Callard now reformulates the problem that remains. Once we acknowledge this (indicates Fig. 1b), there is a problem that remains because

it, again, thwarts our usual cognitive cultural grammar. What's the problem that remains?

Well, here's the problem. S1, in some important sense, causes S2 (Fig. 1c) (writes Causes between S1 and S2). My actions now are necessary and perhaps, in some important sense, sufficient for setting forth a course of development that is going to result in S2. But although S1 is therefore temporally prior, (writes Temporally above Causes) it's before S2 in the arrow of causation (draws an Arrow from S1 to S2), the opposite (draws an arrow from S2 to S1) is the case, normatively.

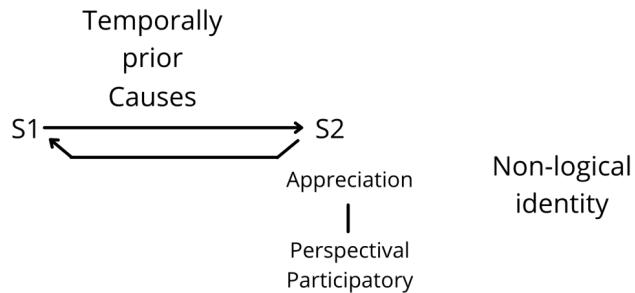


Fig. 1c

S1 normatively depends on S2. All of S1's actions only make sense, can only be justified once S2 comes into existence. Because only S2 appreciates the music. Only S2 is rational. Only S2 understands and justifies the value of rationality, the value of the classical music.

So although S1 causes S2, being temporally prior, S1 is normatively dependent (Fig. 1d) (writes Normative dependent under the arrow from S2 and S1) on S2. In terms of normativity, S1 is not primary, it's secondary to S2. The first self—everything that the first self is doing, ultimately only makes sense when the second self has come into existence. It's only *after* the aspirational transformation that S1's behavior can be made sense of, can be justified, can be understood.

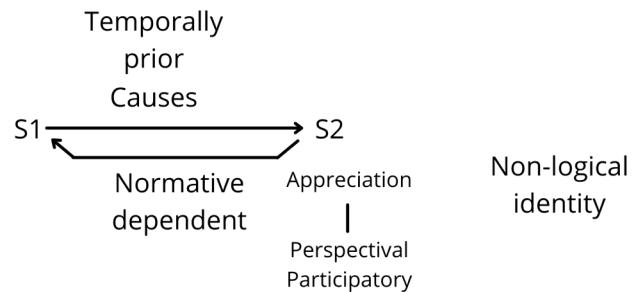


Fig. 1d

It's interesting because the state that justifies S1's action is the state of S1 having disappeared into and through the emergence of S2. Because only S2 understands and appreciates rationality. Understands and appreciates classical music. Understands and appreciates what it is to be a parent. Understands and appreciates what it is to be a spouse.

So this goes against our normal way of doing things. Because we've got S1 being temporally prior, but S2 is normatively primary, in that it's where we find the justification, explanation, legitimization of the aspirational process, that the person has become in S2. And that's weird for us, because normally the thing that is temporally prior and causes is also the thing that is the source of justification and explanation.

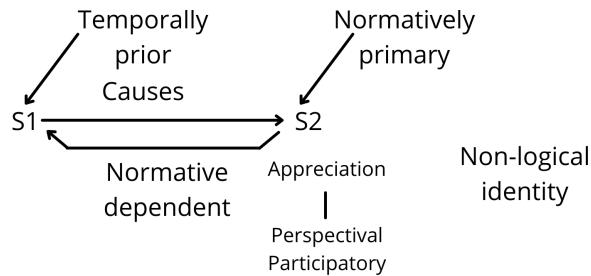


Fig. 1e

Now, the temptation here, of course, is to be teleological. To think that in some sense, S2 preexists us and causes S1. And I think that's partially what's coming out in the mythos of the divine double. Trying to deal with this really difficult way of thinking. An easy way of thinking about it is, well, the divine double preexists, so already there, fully formed, and they're drawing me out teleologically until I eventually become S1.

But we've already, I've already argued last time, and the time before, and earlier on in the series, that the teleological explanations are often thwarting us in important ways. And they are certainly thwarting what Heidegger was talking about.

So let's try and do this a little bit more slowly. I want to say S1 has the causal power, but S2 has the normative authority. So S1 has the causal power, but S2 has the normative authority. So how do we relate to the self, to which we aspire?

So when I am S1, and I'm aspiring to be more like Socrates, more rational, how do I now relate to this S2 that doesn't yet exist, but has authority over me? How do I do that? Well, I sort of slipped it in there. I sort of slipped it in there when I talked about aspiring to be like Socrates.

The Aspired-To Self

So let's take this step by step. I'm relating to this, the aspired fore-self, the self that I aspire to. There's a non-logical identity between my self now and that self then. That self that I'm aspiring to is not logically accessible to me. And those two [-] points are deeply connected. I can't infer my way to it. And my representation of that future self, my current representation to me now, has to afford me, somehow tapping into this non-logical identity, this non-logical process, and that representation has to actually afford the transformation of me into the aspired-to self. It has to actually help me become a more rational person.

Now notice, of course, what this means. What kind of thing does this for me? And this is Corbin's point. It's a symbol, not in the imaginary sense, but in the imaginal sense. It's only a symbol that puts these two (indicates S1 and S2) together in the right way. It's a kind of relationship between things that are non-logically identical, it is not something that is processed in a purely logical fashion. It is a representation that is participatory, and it's supposed to help to actually afford you going through the transformative process.

Now let's add a little bit more. My representation of the aspired-to self is, it's a symbolic self that I can internalize into my current self, anagogically. Remember we talked about this? We become, we transcend ourselves, by internalizing how other people's perspectives are being directed on us. So remember Spencer internalizes my perspective so that it becomes metacognitive; the stoic aspirant internalizes Socrates, so that he can self-transcend and become more Socratic.

So the symbolic self has to be internalized. And notice what's happening in internalization. Internalization is something other than you, yet it becomes something that is completely identified as you. Not just as an idea. It becomes part of your metacognitive, reflective rationality, in the case of

internalizing Socrates. It becomes part of the very guts of the machinery of yourself.

Why anagogically? Because what I'm doing is, I'm internalizing this symbolic self. And what it's doing is, it's reordering my psyche so that I see different ways of being in the world. And as I inhabit those new ways of being in the world, they allow me to then re-internalize. Remember this? I internalize Socrates and then I indwell the world in a more Socratic fashion, which allows me to better internalize Socrates, so that I indwell the world in a more Socratic fashion. Or perhaps for the Christian. Christ comes to live within them, until they live more Christ-like, so that Christ comes to live within them more.

So there's more internalization, more indwelling. And that anagogic process takes off of its own accord, but it's not something that's just passively happening to you. That coupled loop. It's not something you're just making happen. It's something that transcends receiving and making. It is *participating*.

So [-] you have this symbolic self that internalizes other people's perspectives, others who live a way they make viable to you. The self you aspire to. But as you internalize them, and that self is transformed, the world is anagogically transformed also. The world is playing an important role in this.

So what I'm suggesting to you is, the divine double is a mythos way of trying to capture this dynamic process, which we've discussed at length in this series. And it represents this process in kind of a linear narrative, and therefore it simplifies it into a simple kind of teleology.

But there's a sense in which I think that teleology is overly simplistic. It's not capturing the participatory nature. The danger with the teleology, of course, is it tends to overemphasize the passive receptivity on the part of S1 in the face of S2.

The Divine Double

So the divine double. I think what people were trying to say with the mythos of the divine double is, it's an imaginal symbol that affords the dynamic

coupling of anagoge that allows you to participate in the act of self creation; or a better way of putting it, the act of aspiration.

The divine double is you, but it's not you. It's the advanced 'other' that you've internalized into you, but eventually becomes you. And so you live differently in that new world. A way of being becomes viable to you. It is the self you will be. Not the self you are now. But if there is no inkling in your current self of [-] an identity possible, and already beginning to be actualized between your current self and future self, then, of course, it's not going to be part of that aspirational process.

Here's you (Fig. 3a) (draws a square). You're in this frame and you're trying to move to this one (draws a larger square above the first). I'm going to separate them just so I have room to write. Normally this one (indicates the larger square) is round and encompassing. So please allow me this just so I have room to write. The divine double allows you to internalize from this more encompassing frame into your current frame (draws an arrow from the large square to the smaller square and writes DD) but that is simultaneously—and here's the shining in (indicates the arrow). Here's the shining in through the divine double. Angels are glorious, they shine. Here's the shining through into your frame. But that shining that internalization affords you moving towards indwelling that more expanded world (draws an arrow from the smaller square to the larger). It engenders a transframing (writes Transframing) so that you can come to indwell, this more expanded frame.

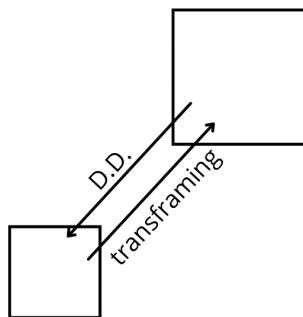


Fig. 3a

The agent and the arena are simultaneously transformed. Here's (indicates the larger square) the divine double which shines the greater frame into the current frame, but it also draws you out by the way it withdraws into the

more encompassing frame. It gives you a sense of the closing into your relevance, but the opening into the greater self.

See the gnosis? The divine double allows you to conform—conform in process to the very play of being itself. The way being is shining but also withdrawing. And how that affords your radical self-transcendence, which is always a process also of becoming a greater or better self (Fig. 3b) (writes DD along the arrow from the smaller square to the larger). So what I'm suggesting to you is that the divine double is a central example of the imaginal, and that that is often represented in the mythos of angels.

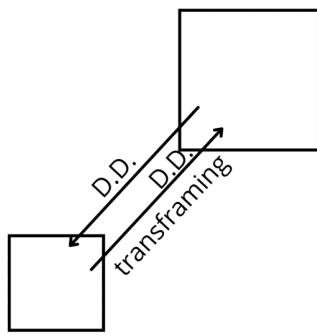


Fig. 3b

So we see how the divine double is transjective, how it's transframing, how it's integrating the abstract form, or a concept, of the better self. I have some abstract sense of the better self. But it's integrating that with the concrete actions, of causal actions of my current self. The abstract and the concrete are being drawn together.

Is the divine double subjective? No, that's not right. Is it part of just the objective part of my world? No, that's not right either. It's deeply symbolic in nature and in action. And although it is a symbol, it is not just imaginary. It is imaginal in nature.

It makes, it affords, the true development. It affords the core of the Being mode. The Being mode is not about having things. It is about Becoming someone. There's a deep interconnection between the imaginal, the divine double, gnosis, and the being mode.

So the angel, in Corbin, is a representation of the divine double. And now, the thing to note is that for Corbin, everything has an angel. Because it's not only the agent that is being transformed. It is also the arena. Your world is

also being opened up. And aspects of being are disclosing themselves that otherwise would not disclose themselves.

Every object is shining and it's also withdrawing into its mystery. Everything is a thing beyond itself. And so you are a thing beyond yourself as an agent, coupled to sets of things beyond themselves as an arena. And you are both going through this coupled process. That's what Corbin means by the angelic aspect of the angelic order of being.

Now, given the way I've tried to interpret and I think explained, but not, I hope, dismissively explained away Corbin— [-] I want to note, as I said, there's deep connections between gnosis and this divine double, between the being mode, between self-transcendence, between all of this. I'm a little bit unhappy with Stang's term though, the 'divine double,' because it seems to bind us a little too much to the mythos, and the teleological simple narrative structure that I think doesn't adequately capture everything that we can see in the work of LA Paul and Callard and the response to Strawson's problem.

And also the notion of 'divine' seems to bind this to theism, which is problematic given its deep connections to gnosis and the Gnostics. And also it precludes non-theistic cultures or sets of religions from having something like this.

Whereas I think you can readily see the 'divine double' in Buddhism, where it's talked about the Buddha nature. And the Buddha nature is very much the aspired-self, but things have a Buddha nature. The Buddha nature is both their ultimate real nature, but not their conventional nature. Or you can say the same thing in Vedanta, when there is a deep identity perhaps between the Atman and Brahman.

What I'm pointing out is that this way of talking about aspiration can be seen clearly in non-theistic religions. It's clearly in gnosticism, which I think very much should not be interpreted theistically. I've tried to show you that. It's clearly the case in Neoplatonism and Stang makes this case for it, both in Plotinus and the Neoplatonic aspects of Dionysus. And that's clearly not theistic.

So I am not going to use the term 'divine double' anymore. Because I want to try and separate this idea from its commitment to theism. And so I'm

going to call this symbolic self, I'm going to call it the 'sacred second self.' The sacred second self. It gives me even more alliteration than the divine double, so I win.

So the idea of the sacred second self. Perhaps this is a way—wow, I don't know. I don't know how, what I'm going to do right now, but I'm going to do it because I have an inkling of its value. Perhaps the notion of the sacred second self is a way of bringing back the idea of having a soul. In fact, that's even the wrong way of putting it. Perhaps that's part of what I'm trying to transgress against. Your sacred second self is the soul that you are becoming, the soul that you are aspiring through and to, and perhaps that is a way of bringing it back.

Carl Gustav Jung

The reason I raise this is because that will allow us to make a bridge to another one of the prophets, Carl Gustav Jung. Because this notion of a relationship to a sacred second self, that is perhaps what we were always talking about when we invoked the word 'soul,' is central to Jung's work.

One of Jung's crucial text for representing the meaning crisis and linking it to his particular particular psychology is the book, *Modern Man In Search Of A Soul*. So the response to the meaning crisis is that modern man has lost his soul. Now that doesn't mean that a ghost has slipped free of a person's corpus and is somehow floating around untethered. Jung is trying to talk about—I'm going to argue—the loss of a real relationship to the sacred second self that is needed for responding to the meaning crisis.

And there are deep connections, therefore, between Jung and Corbin. And this is not just similarity of argumentation. Jung and Corbin had a deep interaction, a deep influence on each other. They met regularly together at the Eranos conferences and discussed. As I mentioned, I find that Corbin is more responsible to that relationship than Jung. Corbin talks more often about it explicitly. Whereas I do not see Jung giving enough credit to the influence of Corbin on his thinking.

Nevertheless, we can move between Corbin and Jung by picking up on this idea of your relationship to your sacred second self. And I think this is the best way to understanding the process that is central to Jung's whole notion

—it's both a notion of development, and a notion of self-transformation, and a notion of how to fundamentally respond to the meaning crisis. This is Jung's notion, of course, of individuation.

So how do we get to this notion? [-] Notice each thinker gets into it in a different way. And what Jung is doing, he's picking up on something that is not really present in Heidegger. It's present in Corbin, but it's present more implicitly than explicitly. And this is psychology. The processes within the psyche that are conducive to responding to the meaning crisis. And by individuation, Jung' clearly uses this adjective to describe this as a psychological process.

Now the way to get a little bit clearer about how Jung is using the notion of psychological,' is right to contrast him to the most important influence on him, his progenitor Freud. And I'm not going to get into a deep analysis of Freud. That would be too far afield.

Freud is a Titan. Even if 95% of what Freud has said is wrong, it doesn't matter. He gets to be in the hall of the immortals because he came up with the idea of the unconscious. He comes up with the idea of it's neither nature or nurture, but the interaction between them in stages of development. These all just become so deeply interwoven with our fundamental way of trying to understand and theorize about ourselves. Like I said. So Freud is a Titanic figure.

However let's pick up on the difference. In what fundamental way did Jung's model of the psyche differed from Freud's? So here, I'm picking up on work done by Paul Ricoeur in his book on Freud, and some work done by Storr, Anthony Storr in his work on Jung in an important contrast.

So Freud ultimately has what has been called a hydraulic model of the psyche. So the psyche is basically a Newtonian machine, like a steam engine. Things are under pressure, and the pressure has to be relieved and it drives and sort of pushes various processes into operation. And, of course, this makes perfect sense. Freud has a Newtonian machine, hydraulic model of the psyche. Jung ultimately rejects that, and this is more in Storr than in Ricoeur, because Ricoeur's primarily concentrating on Freud. But what Storr

argues is that—and this becomes clear in the language and the metaphors that Jung used.

Jung replaces that hydraulic metaphor with an organic metaphor. He sees the psyche as a self-organizing, dynamical system, ultimately as an autopoietic being. So he's sees the psyche as going through a sort of a complex process of self-organization. And that you have to understand individuation as this kind of organic, self-organizing process that you neither make nor receive, but you participate in.

Archetypes

So this takes us to one of the quintessential notions from Jung. Jung gives a psychological analog of Plato's idea of the form, a structural functional organization. This is the archetypes, the archetypos. People should go back... 'Arche' [meaning] 'foundational,' like in archeology, getting to the origins and the foundation. 'Typos' the patterns. So the archetypes are the formative founding patterns of the psyche. These are the structural functional organizations by which the psyche self-organizes. The archetypes are therefore very much psychological versions of the Platonic form. And Jung is much better at acknowledging Plato's influence than Freud is, for example.

So the archetypes are not images. The archetypes are not images. You have to take the images and treat them in an imaginal fashion, not as imaginary things you possess in your mind, but as imaginal things that are leading you into the aspirational process of individuation. Think of the archetypes more the way we talked about earlier. They are systems of constraints. They are virtual engines that regulate the self-organization of what is salient to us.

So if the hero archetype is active in me, it doesn't mean that I'm carrying around in my head images of the hero. It means that this is an imaginal relationship in which my salience landscaping is being transformed. So I'm anagogically interacting with the world, and undergoing aspirational self-transformation so that I am becoming more and more heroic.

Think of the archetypes much more adverbially. than adjectivally. An archetype is a way in which you are anagogically coming to be. Not something in you that you possess and reflect upon.

So Jung argues that all of these archetypes, like the psyche as a whole, insofar as they are virtual engines of self-organizing processes, are autopoietic. They have a life to them. These archetypes are the way—hear this word deeply—way as method and path of development. The archetypes are the way that psyche makes itself as a living organism. That's what I mean when I say, think of archetypes in a deeply adverbial fashion rather than [-] adjectival. [-]

The Sacred Second Self

So where's the sacred second self? Well, let's talk about the Ego, (Fig. 4a) (writes Ego and draws a vertical line below) and what Jung called the Self (writes Self below Ego). And he's influenced right by Vedanta. This is the egoic self (indicates Ego), and this is Atman (indicates Self). And the notion of the Self was such a bad choice in some ways, because unless you've done all this stuff we've just done, and talked about the relation between Self one and Self two [-]—unless you've got the aspirational sense of what Self is—if you come to Jung with just decadent romanticism, you're going to hear: “Oh, but this (indicates Self) is my inner true self that I have to be true to.”



You're going to relate to the self adjectivally, from the Having mode; a very great temptation to get into narcissism. I understand why Jung did this; (indicates Self) because he capitalizes the S because he's trying to point towards, I would argue, the sacred second self.

So the ego is the archetype of the conscious mind. The ego is the virtual engine that regulates (Fig. 4b) (draws a circular arrow from the Ego to the Ego) the self organization of the conscious mind. What's the Self? Well, it's kind of the archetype of the archetypes. It's like Plato's notion of the good, which is the form for how to be a form. The eidos of the eidos. It is the virtual engine (draws a circular arrow from the Self to the Self) regulating the self organization of the psyche as a whole. It is the principle—the Self is

the principle of autopoiesis itself. It's the ultimate virtual engine that constellates all the other virtual engines, so that the psyche can continue its process of autopoietic self-organization.

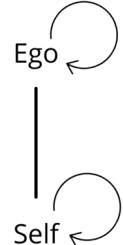


Fig. 4b

Remember when a system is self-organizing, its function and its development are completely merged. It develops by functions and it functions by developing. So this (indicates Fig. 4b) functional model is simultaneously a developmental model. That's what makes it aspirational. It is simultaneously functional and developmental.

So one of the things you can do is, you can set up an interaction with these imaginal symbolic entities, the archetypes, and that interaction can be internalized into the perspective—so I can interact with the hero archetype or the shadow archetype, and that will actually be internalized into the way the ego self-organizes.

Ultimately that can become part of this (indicates the vertical arrow), the dialogue between the ego and the self. What Jung calls, the axis mundi, the axis of the world, a very maybe overwrought way of putting it. But in some ways I understand what he's trying to get at. This is the process, as I dialogue through the archetypes with the Self, the ego's perspectival knowing, and its participatory being, is being fundamentally altered. This is the individuation of the ego. The ego individuates through its dialogue—notice that anagogic resonant way of talking—its dialogue with the sacred second self. And notice ultimately how that falls back to Plato and Socrates. This notion of dialogue.

This, of course, is the basis of Jung—and notice the similarity here, again—of Jung's deep criticism of literalism and fundamentalism. Because, of course, the imaginal (Fig. 4c) (draws a horizontal line across the vertical), the archetype as imaginal, sits right here. It mediates between these.

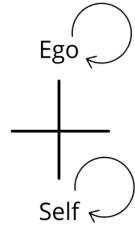


Fig. 4c

Why is Jung so critical of literalism and fundamentalism? Because it is to reduce the imaginal nature of the archetypes into simply being imaginary. It is to lose the Being mode and it is the simply having of subjective representations, rather than engaging in the process of individuation. It's a form of inflation, in which the ego pretends that it is sufficient unto itself and tries to take on the complete role of the self, tries to just 'have' an identity rather than continually 'becoming' in the process of individuation. It is deeply disturbing to see someone who would claim to be committed to a Jungian approach, being deeply enmeshed or involved with proponents of literalism or fundamentalism. This would be, I believe, a deep form of self-contradiction.

Criticism Of Jung

What's my main criticism of Jung? Which will then allow me a counter-criticism to Corbin. And this is a criticism that Corbin makes of Jung, but it's also independently a criticism that Buber the existentialist, the person who talked about the I-It and I-Thou, and picked up on the difference between the Being mode and the Having mode as well. There's also convergence with the criticism that Buber made of Jung. (Text overlay appears "For a good discussion of the Buber/Jung debate" beside book, The Search For Roots)

Jung understands all of this (indicates Fig. 4c), and that's how I've explained it to you as intra-psychically happening within the psyche. Now my friend and colleague, Anderson Todd, tells me that towards the end, Jung seems to be breaking out of this purely psychological way of talking. But for most of his writing, Jung understands all of this—and this is, of course, problematic, and this is what Corbin was trying to get him to see. He was understanding all of this as subjectively. His Kantianism was making him see this as all happening, in a very deep sense, within the mind. That the archetypes are understood ultimately for a very long time in Jung as subjectively, rather

than transjectively. And because of this—and then this is where Buber's criticism bites into Jung—Jung misses all of the existential modes that Buber wants to talk about. Jung can't talk about the Having and the Being modes, because he doesn't have a way of representing the transjective relationship.

For Corbin, Jung seems to be reducing the imaginal to the imaginary. And for Corbin, this is a mistake, because the mystical, for Corbin, doesn't just disclose the depths of the psyche. The mystical also discloses the depths of the world in an integrated, coordinated fashion. That's because Corbin is ultimate Neoplatonic and not Kantian. This is why I said, if you don't understand Kant, you don't get Jung.

Now, in fairness to Jung, Jung can say, but what's missing from Corbin is the psychology. What's missing from Heidegger is the psychology. How does all of this existential, ontological, Neoplatonic stuff play out within the psyche? If you're going to talk to [Jung] about internalizing, [-] he can say, 'I get it. I leave off the indwelling in the world that Corbin is pointing to, and Heidegger has been pointing to.' But what Jung can say is: yeah, but you haven't told me what the internalization looks like. How does the imaginal get internalized into the depths of my psyche?

So what I'm suggesting to you—this is neither Corbin nor Buber, nor is it Jung. But Vervaeke is arguing to you that you can integrate the three of them together. And then you get something much better than either Jung or Corbin or Buber. I want to take a look next time at somebody who shares a lot with all three of these: Corbin, Jung, and Buber. And like them, is deeply influenced by Heidegger. And that's Paul Tillich.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

- END -

Episode 49 Notes

Heidegger

Martin Heidegger was a German philosopher who is widely regarded as one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century. He is best known for contributions to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism.

Henry Corbin

Henry Corbin was a philosopher, theologian, Iranologist and professor of Islamic Studies at the École pratique des hautes études in Paris, France.

Gnosis

Gnosis is the common Greek noun for knowledge. The term is used in various Hellenistic religions and philosophies. It is best known from Gnosticism, where it signifies a spiritual knowledge or insight into humanity's real nature as divine, leading to the deliverance of the divine spark within humanity from the constraints of earthly existence.

Active imagination

Active imagination is a conscious method of experimentation. It employs creative imagination as an organ for "perceiving outside your own mental boxes."

Dasein

Dasein is a German word that means "being there" or "presence", and is often translated into English with the word "existence".

Charles M. Stang

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a Genevan philosopher, writer, and composer. His political philosophy influenced the progress of the Enlightenment throughout Europe, as well as aspects of the French Revolution and the development of modern political, economic, and educational thought

L.A. Paul

Laurie Ann Paul is a professor of philosophy and cognitive science at Yale University. She previously taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Arizona. She is best known for her research on the counterfactual analysis of causation and the concept of "transformative experience."

Agnes Callard

Agnes Callard is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago. Her primary areas of specialization are ancient philosophy and ethics.

Book Mentioned: Aspiration: The Agency of Becoming – [Buy Here](#)

Galen Strawson

Galen John Strawson is a British analytic philosopher and literary critic who works primarily on philosophy of mind, metaphysics (including free will, panpsychism, the mind-body problem, and the self), John Locke, David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Søren Kierkegaard

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic, and religious author who is widely considered to be the first existentialist philosopher.

Advaita Vedānta

Advaita Vedānta is a school of Hindu philosophy, and is a classic system of spiritual realization in Indian tradition.

Ātman

Ātman is a Sanskrit word that means inner self, spirit, or soul. In Hindu philosophy, especially in the Vedānta school of Hinduism, Ātman is the first principle: the true self of an individual beyond identification with phenomena, the essence of an individual. In order to attain Moksha (liberation), a human being must acquire self-knowledge.

Brahman

Brahman connotes the highest Universal Principle, the Ultimate Reality in the universe. In major schools of Hindu philosophy, it is the material, efficient, formal and final cause of all that exists.

Plotinus

Plotinus was a major Hellenistic philosopher who lived in Roman Egypt. In his philosophy, described in the *Enneads*, there are three principles: the One,

the Intellect, and the Soul.

Carl Jung

Carl Gustav Jung, was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology. Jung's work has been influential in the fields of psychiatry, anthropology, archaeology, literature, philosophy, psychology and religious studies.

Book Mentioned: Modern Man in Search of a Soul - [Buy Here](#)

Eranos

Eranos is an intellectual discussion group dedicated to humanistic and religious studies, as well as to the natural sciences which has met annually in Moscia (Lago Maggiore), the Collegio Papio and on the Monte Verità in Ascona, Switzerland since 1933.

Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, a clinical method for treating psychopathology through dialogue between a patient and a psychoanalyst.

Paul Ricœur

Jean Paul Gustave Ricœur was a French philosopher best known for combining phenomenological description with hermeneutics.

Book Mentioned: Freud and Philosophy - [Buy Here](#)

Anthony Storr

Anthony Storr was an English psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and author.

Book Mentioned: Jung - [Buy Here](#)

Jungian archetypes

Jungian archetypes are defined as universal, primal symbols and images that derive from the collective unconscious, as proposed by Carl Jung. They are the psychic counterpart of instinct.

Martin Buber

Martin Buber was an Austrian Jewish and Israeli philosopher best known for his philosophy of dialogue, a form of existentialism centered on the distinction between the I–Thou relationship and the I–It relationship.

Alfred Ribi

Book Mentioned: The Search for Roots - [Buy Here](#)

Jerry Fodor

Jerry Alan Fodor ('fōdər/; April 22, 1935 – November 29, 2017) was an American philosopher and the author of many crucial works in the fields of philosophy of mind and cognitive science.[1] His writings in these fields laid the groundwork for the modularity of mind and the language of thought hypotheses, and he is recognized as having had "an enormous influence on virtually every portion of the philosophy of mind literature since 1960."

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

[Additional Notes on Bevry](#)

Useful Links

[TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes](#)

Ep. 50 - Awakening from the Meaning Crisis - Tillich and Barfield

Welcome back to Awakening from the Meaning Crisis.

So last time we looked in depth at Corbin and Jung. And I tried to draw out very deeply the notion of the relationship to the sacred second self. I launched into sort of mutual criticism between Corbin and Jung and brought in some Buber along the way.

And then I pointed to somebody whose work, also deriving from Heidegger, integrates aspects of all of these together in kind of a profound way. Tillich is deeply influenced and aware of what he calls depth psychology, the kind of psychology in Jung. He, of course, is deeply aware of Heidegger. I don't think that Tillich was aware of Corbin, but he is deeply aware of the symbol in an imaginal rather than in a merely imaginary way.

Tillich takes the meaning crisis seriously. He writes, perhaps, his most well-known, and I think it's a masterpiece book, *The Courage To Be*, as a response to the meaning crisis. Like Jung and Corbin, and for very related reasons, he's deeply critical of literalism and fundamentalism throughout. But he takes it deeper, as I mentioned, he really deepens it in terms of Heidegger's critique of ontotheology. And he becomes critical of literalism and fundamentalism as forms of idolatry in which we are attempting to Have rather than Become.

So there are some excellent books on the relationship between Jung and Tillich. This is a series of ongoing work by John Dourley. I recommend two books to you, *The Psyche as Sacrament*, which I have tweeted about in my book recommendations. I would also recommend his later book, *Paul Tillich, Carl Jung and the Recovery of Religion*. But make no mistake. Dourley is not talking about a recovery in a nostalgic sense. He writes another book called, *Strategy For A Loss Of Faith*, where he is trying to get beyond classical theism. And so I recommend Dourley's work as a comprehensive way of bringing about a deep dialogue and a kind of integration between Jung and Tillich.

En-couragement

Okay. So Tillich says the main response to the meaning crisis and here's how Tillich is not just theorizing. He is trying to give us guidance on how to live. And let's remember that this really matters because of the way Tillich resisted the Nazis. Because what Tillich talks about in *The Courage To Be*, is courage.

Now he's careful to note that this is a kind of existential courage that ultimately allows us to confront and overcome meaninglessness in its depth.

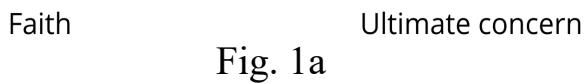
But also, of course, to more practically respond to perverted responses to the meaning crisis itself, like Nazi-ism and its Gnostic nightmare.

This process of en-couragement. Now he is like Aristotle. He's not talking about something as simple as just bravery facing danger, or fortitude, the ability to endure. No. For Tillich, courage is a virtue. There's something of wisdom in courage. Courage involves within it that central feature of wisdom, which is seeing through illusion into reality. The brave person faces danger, but that's all we can say about them. The person with fortitude endures difficulty, but that's all we can say of them. The courageous person sees through the illusion and the distortion of fear or distress to what is truly good and acts accordingly.

Faith As Ultimate Concern

So what is this seeing through, and how does it help us confront the meaning crisis? So this notion of seeing through, seeing to the depths, as Tillich often says, is related to Tillich's notion of faith (writes Faith). And here, notice how we're circling back around. And this isn't really a circle because Tillich's notion of faith is not the assertion of propositions to believe. He is circling back to the ancient Israeli Hebrew notion of the Da'at. And now we can add that that participatory knowing, in a course of being, is an aspirational process.

Tillich understands faith as ultimate concern (Fig. 1a) (writes Ultimate Concern). That which concerns us ultimately. His notion of idolatry is to treat something that could be a symbolic icon through which you articulate and develop your ultimate concern. You transform that into an idol, an object to have and possess, to control and manipulate. And you, thereby, are using the machinery that it's appropriate for ultimate concern, for something that is not ultimate.

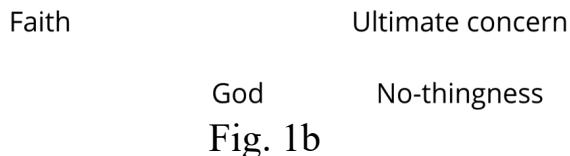


What is ultimate concern? What is concern? Well, when you're concerned about something, you care about it, but you're also coping with it. You're committed to it. You're involved in it. It encompasses you, even though you are being involved in and through it. It is deeply perspectival and

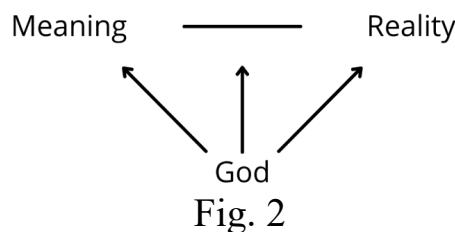
participatory. That's what he's trying to get at. And it is aspirational, and it is open ended. It points towards the inexhaustibleness of the ground of being.

So, of course, Tillich's notion is directed at Heidegger's notion of dasein. This concern that dasein is the being whose being is in question, and therefore by our perspectival participatory knowing of our being, we come into deeper contact. But remember for Heidegger that requires a deep remembering, an overcoming of our forgetfulness, an aletheia. We have to have the ontological wonder towards the ground of meaning. The ground of being. This leads into Tillich's notion of God (writes God), which, I'm going to try and propose to you, is transgressive of classical theism in important ways, without it being identifiable with atheism in important ways.

So Tillich understands God as an icon, as opposed to an idol. As an imaginal symbol for the ground of being. God symbolizes the ground of being, and therefore God is no kind of being. There is a no-thingness (Fig. 1b) (writes No-thingness) to God, God is no kind of thing. And any attempt to reify, to think of God as a thing is, for Tillich, a form of idolatry.



So here's what I'm trying to get you to see what Tillich means. Here's meaning (Fig. 2) (writes Meaning). And here's reality (writes Reality). And here's the relationship between them (draws a line between Meaning and Reality). God is the simultaneous grounding of all of these (writes God below and draws three arrows to Meaning, the line, and Reality).



You can see the influence of Heidegger here. God is the ground of the meaning making, of reality, and of the relationship between them. And any attempt to limit God to any one of these three components, just to the meaning, just to the reality, just to the relationship between them is, for

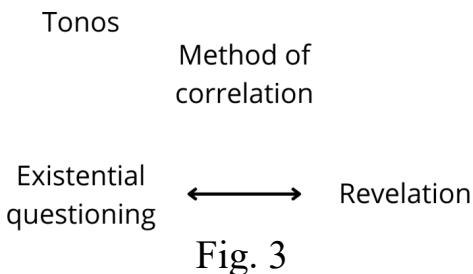
Tillich, a profound kind of idolatry. This is why literalism and fundamentalism are so pernicious to him.

So ultimate concern, if we allow ourselves to truly come into question and quest in a wondering way, if we participate in an aspirational trajectory motivated by ultimate concern, this puts us into a resonant relationship. This gets to what is known as Tillich's Method of correlation (writes Method of correlation). This is how he saw himself doing theology.

I know it's kind of odd for a naturalistic, cognitive scientist to be talking about theology again. But I think we've gotten to a place where that seems to you as a viable and valuable thing to do.

Method Of Correlation

What's the method of correlation? That there is always this ongoing tonos (Fig. 3) (writes Tonos)—there's polar tension, which we talked about earlier—between existential questioning (writes Existential questioning) , understood as existential questing, and what Tillich calls Revelation, the way the depths of reality reveal themselves (draws a double-headed arrow and writes Revelation).



These are always resonating with each other. The revelation has to fit the existential questioning, but the existential questioning has to fit itself. So there's a mutual dynamic fittedness going on—no, that's not, I want to get a verbal rather than an adjectival. Yeah—there is an ongoing resonant fitting, mutual fitting togetherness of the existential questioning and the revelation.

You can see how this is very similar to anagoge. I think one of the problems that I see in a lot of interpreters of Tillich—and I've read quite a few—is that this correlational method has been misunderstood as just propositional theology. That this is all about propositional proposals—listen to the word

‘proposition.’ Propositional proposals. And then what we get are we get other propositions from the sacred texts, the Bible, and what we’re doing is, we’re putting the propositions of theology into concordance with the propositions of the Bible. And I think that’s to fundamentally trivialize Tillich, to not get at the existential depths of the method of correlation.

I want to propose a different way of understanding that that picks up on the tonos and takes us towards God as the ground of being, as I’ve represented it to you. (erases the board) And this is the language Tillich uses. Tillich talks about the Depths of reason (writes Depth of reason). This is a Platonic notion. That which makes reasoning possible. It’s all the relevance realization machinery, I would argue. The recursive machinery of rationality, the aspirational rationality, that Callard talks about. All of those things, the depths of reason.

And Tillich talks about that we have an ekstatic relationship (Fig. 4a) (writes Ekstatic below Depth of reason) ecstasy. The depths of our reason we’re standing beyond ourselves. It’s the depths of the psyche, but not just in the psychological way that Jung means, but also the depths of the grounding depths of our rationality.

Depth of reason



Ekstatic

Fig. 4a

And then what stands between is a symbol (Fig. 4b) (writes Symbol beside Depth of reason) in Corbin’s imaginal sense. And Tillich is so clear about that. The symbol to the depths of reality (writes Depths of reality beside Symbol). So in the psyche, the depths of reason are experienced as ekstasis, self-transcendence moving beyond myself. So crucial to aspiration, genuine transcendence in genuine self-transcendence.

Depth of reason — Symbol — Depths of reality



Ekstatic

Fig. 4b

The depths of reality Tillich talks about, he uses two words here. Sometimes he uses the word ‘miracle,’ (Fig. 4c) (writes Miracle below Depths of reality) and I know for me, that's like, ‘oh no!’ That's like ‘angel,’ because this looks like ‘magic’ in the pejorative sense of the word. He also talks about it as ‘mystery.’ (writes Mystery below Miracle). I think there's two ways using some Heidegger, which is fair because of the Heideggerian influence on Tillich. We can think of miracle as that aspect of being that we've talked about as the shining (writes Shining beside Miracle). And we can talk about the mystery as that aspect we've talked about as the withdrawal into the moreness (writes Withdrawal and Moreness beside Mystery). The combinatorially explosive depths of reality.

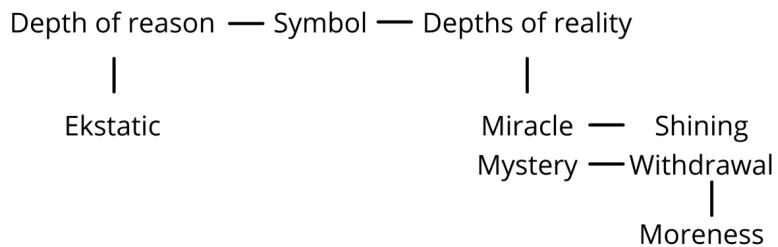


Fig. 4c

And, of course, I tried to argue through Heidegger and through Corbin, especially through Heidegger how these two (indicates Shining and Withdrawning) are interaffording in our sense of realness. And then the idea, the method of correlation is basically, as I suggested to you, the anagoge (Fig. 4d) (draws a double headed arrow between Ekstasis and Miracle & Mystery and writes Anagoge) between the ekstasis, as we resonate with the depths, the grounding and formative depths of reason are resonating with the grounding informative depths of realness and they are anagogically cycling together.

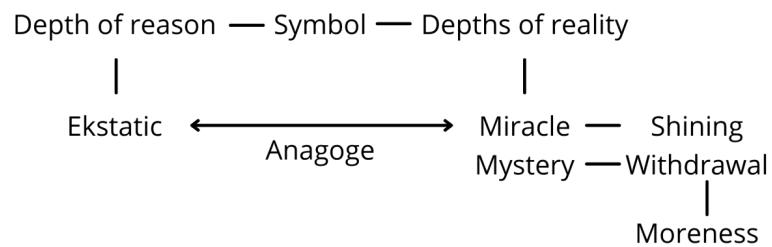


Fig. 4d

So you've heard all of this before, but let's quickly repeat it. For Tillich, the symbol is much more than a sign. Chris Mastropietro in his first discussion

with me brought this out excellently. And that is clearly the case in Tillich. Symbols are participatory. The symbol opens up levels of reality otherwise closed to us. The symbol opens up levels of ourselves otherwise closed to us, and it does this in a mutually affording resonant fashion. Symbols are not made by us. And this, of course, is something we've talked about before, and we'll see it come out when we get to Barfield.

They are self-organizing, and they grow out of the unconscious within us, and the unconscious without us. Symbols have a life. They can die, they can be born, they can live, they can die. Tillich worries that many of the symbols in Christianity are dying. And that fundamentalism and literalism are an inappropriate way of trying to hold on to them and keep them alive, rather than [-] affording the new birth of a new symbol that brings back the resonant relationship that the old symbol possessed. Perhaps this is what Jonathan Pageau means when he feels that Christianity in the meaning crisis is going through a profound death and rebirth of its symbolic structure.

For Tillich, symbols have a surplus of meaning. There is a moreness to them. If they're not resonating with moreness, they're not symbols. They have a numinous character grounded in the resonant depth of mind and reality, and therefore symbols are deeply transformative. They're deeply transjective, their deeply translucent, et cetera. So this is why correlation is not just propositional theology. If you're not undergoing a profound transformation, you're not doing Tillich's correlational method.

So [-] how is it realized symbolically? [-] How is it realized by you? (erases the board) Both senses of the word realized: taken into your frame, but also actualized in reality. How is this transformative power of the symbol realized? It's realized in the relationship between the existential self (Fig. 5a) (writes Existential self) and the essential self (writes The essential self beside Existential self). And do you see what's coming here?

Existential self — The essential self
Fig. 5a

This is the relationship of the current self (indicates Existential self), the self in existence, to the sacred second self (indicates The essential self). The essential self is the self in the fullness of being. Remember Plato's anagoge.

The self in its fullness of being that is capable of recognizing through conformity, the fullness of being in the world.

This relationship that Tillich is pointing to use, we can use language we've carefully worked out together. This relationship between the existential self and the essential self is aspirational. Tillich repeatedly talks about how the essential self is ahead, of course, not causally ahead. Normatively ahead. The essential self is ahead, not causally, but normatively. It's ahead of the existential self. The essential self beckons the existential self towards fulfillment. It's constantly tempting, if you'll allow me this language, the existential self to a better way of being. It's trying to tempt it out of the world in which it might be existentially trapped. This is the gnosis within Tillich.

So the sacred second self. For Tillich, this is bound up like, when Saint Paul was talking about agape? I used to be this way, I acted like a kid. Now here's the new way. I act like a man. This is the way of agape. So my salience landscape is sophrosyne, it naturally self-organizes to constantly tempt me towards the good. And Tillich wrote a very excellent little book on agape (Morality and Beyond). I highly recommend it to you.

So this aspirational, transformative journey of en-couragement, literally embodying courage. Encouragement (Fig. 5b) (writes En-couragement). Encouragement gets us to confront, seriously, meaninglessness. Now In The Courage To Be, Tillich goes through various historical developments. In the ancient world, the meaningless is confronted in our being as the finitude of our being. And he talks about how the Stoics responded to that. And then he talks about during the Christian period, and especially during the Protestant reformation. Because Tillich is deeply influenced by Lutheranism, in a very critical way though, of course. And the meaningless is confronted within our self-knowing, as guilt. And he talks about the Protestant reformation as an attempt to seriously respond to the issue of guilt. And then now, in our current period, we are experiencing meaninglessness in our self as despair, and he says that is being represented by the existentialists.

Existential self — The essential self

En-couragement

Fig. 5b

Of course, Tillich is writing in the period of the fifties and sixties when existentialism was still more prevalent. We, of course, can talk about things following on existentialism if we have more time, like postmodernism and other things, that are [-] discussing and articulating a deeper way in which we are embodying the meaning crisis. But nevertheless, you can follow this trajectory through *The Courage To Be*. You can go through the Stoics. You can go through the Protestant Christians. You can go into the existentialists.

The No-Thingness Of God

And this trajectory leads us to a position beyond all three. The position that Tillich is arguing for, which he calls the response to faith. Remember faith is Da'at for Tillich. It is not the willful assertion of belief. And here's the thing. And this is why idolatry is so pernicious for Tillich. The no-thingness of God... coming to really encounter the no-thingness of God, is central to this notion of faith.

[-] The no-thingness of God takes into itself the nothingness of meaninglessness, and it overcomes it. The no-thingness of God has a transformative power over the nothingness of despair. So this is the notion of a fundamental aspect, identity shift.

And here's where if I had time, and I'll bring it out when I get into this other series. I would talk about Nishitani, because his book *Religion and Nothingness* is an extended, philosophical, profound examination of this fundamental aspect shift, identity shift.

Remember what an aspect shift is. Remember the Necker cube, right? (Fig. 6) (draws a 3D outline of a cube) You're looking at something and the thing doesn't change, but the aspect by which you're seeing it changes. It flips. And what's salient? What's foreground and background? But this isn't just a shift of aspect, that's why I'm creating this neologism. Right? It's an aspect identity shift.

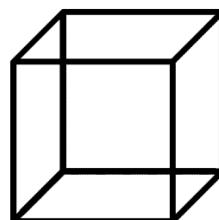


Fig. 6

What does it mean? You come to see the no-thingness of God. You come to experience it as the inexhaustible creation of meaning. It is an inexhaustible fount of meaning cultivation. It is the ground of meaning intelligibility, the relationship between them, et cetera, for Tillich. Nishitani thinks the same thing can be found within Buddhism. That when we deeply realize the nothingness of shunyata, when we participate in it, when we identify with it, we gain the competence, the ability to aspect shift the nothingness of meaninglessness, so that we come to see it instead as pointing to its ground, which is an inexhaustible source of meaning cultivation that cannot be drained dry by our despair.

There is a fecundity at the level of fundamental framing and the way it's coupled to being, that cannot be drained dry by despair. When we stop trying to push away the nothingness, but have instead an imaginal relationship to it, and move through it, anagogically, in an imaginal fashion, with the nothingness of God, then we overcome meaninglessness. We overcome meaninglessness.

Nietzsche bumped up against this. He got close to it. If you stare long enough into the abyss, it begins to stare [back] into you. But you know what Nietzsche didn't do? He didn't stare long enough. He didn't look deeply enough. That's Nishitani's critique of Nietzschean nihilism.

This fundamental aspect shift, in which the nothingness of despair is transformed into the revelation of no-thingness as inexhaustible being meaning. This takes—and Tillich talks about the mystical tradition. There's a term from Gregory of Nyssa (writes Gregory of Nyssa) in the Eastern Orthodox Neoplatonic tradition. And you see it also in John Scotus Eriugena picks it up. This notion of epek-tasis (writes Epek-tasis).

Epek-tasis. Which is such a cool sounding word. It sounds so cool anyways. So this is the idea. So there's a sort of standard, I suppose you might call it a teleological model of sort of salvation. Where the point is I'm moving towards a final destination, the promised land in which I will see God and I will come to rest in the promised land. So, the whole point of a purpose is

that it it self-dissolves. When I've achieved my purpose, I've realized my goal, then the pursuit has ended.

But Gregory of Nyssa and Eriugena have this different notion of *epek-tasis*. So here you're not trying to rest in God. God is not ultimately had, even in resting in him. Instead, what the human being is engaging in—now for them, there's a mythos of this continuing on after your death, in a life after death; and I'll put that aside. But nevertheless, the notion here of infinite self-transcendence in the infinity of God. There is no resting. There is only the constant disclosure of the inexhaustibleness of the ground of being. The transjectivity and the transframing never stop. They never stop.

So the method of correlation and the en-couragement are therefore emphasized as transjective in nature. Tillich explicitly and repeatedly argues that the symbol joins together and grounds—it joins together, but also grounds, the subjective and the objective. He talks about how even Nietzsche uses this in the notion of will to power.

Nietzsche in his notion of will to power is trying to use something that has a subjective meaning, 'will,' but also, like, the will to power, power in existence, the way everything is sort of like Spinoza's *conatus*. Like, pushing itself and maintaining itself in existence. He's trying to get something that bridges between the subjective and the objective.

And this is one of the ways in which therefore Tillich is different than Jung. (erases the board). And there's criticism in Tillich of Jung. Also appreciation of Jung. Tillich sees, of course, the process of individuation (Fig. 7a) (writes *Individuation*), very similar to the way Jung does. And this is perhaps the more subjective side of this symbolic imaginal relationship. But Tillich always, and this is the *tonos* (writes *Tonos* above *Individuation*) again, always puts that into creative tension with participation (draws a double-headed arrow and writes *Participation*), not just in groups, although he's not excluding that, but this is your participation in being.

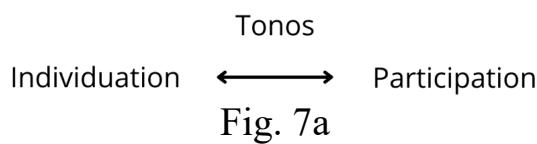


Fig. 7a

And he relates that neither [-] the autonomy of reason (Fig. 7b) (writes Neither the autonomy of reason below Individuation) emphasized in the Enlightenment, nor what he calls a heteronomous (writes Heteronomous below Participation) or sometimes he even uses the more religious term, the demonic imposition of authority from without (writes Demonic imposition of authority from without).

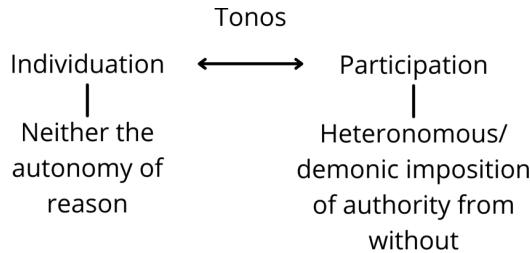


Fig. 7b

And see how this just so beautifully lines up with the problem of aspiration? Remember it can't be something that just slams you from the outside that you passively receive. It can't be something that you just autonomously make, or you don't actually get genuine self-creation, or what I would call self-transcendence.

Tillich sees this overcome in what he calls theonomous (Fig. 7c) (writes Theonomous). Which literally means God-ordered, God-governed. But, of course, God here means the ground of being, the ongoing Epekk-tasis of the inexhaustible, the affordance of ongoing transframing.

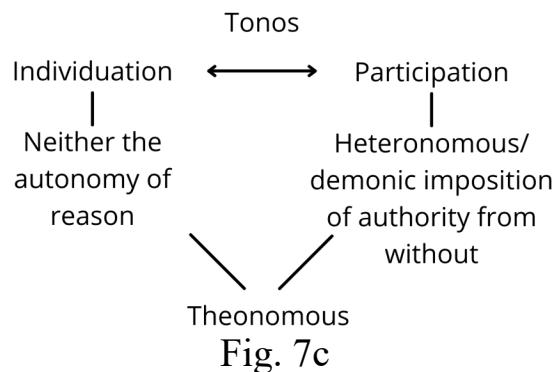


Fig. 7c

So, what we see here is transjectivity, the sacred second self. We see the anagogic ascent joining reason and revelation together, and the fundamental aspect shift, the deep criticism of fundamentalism and literalism. And there is, of course, therefore, something that is deeply about gnosis. And the

connection to gnosticism and the transgression of theism is explicit in Tillich.

Tillich talks about this whole process, and this is why I qualified so much the use of the word theonomous. He qualifies this whole process as the process in which we are responding deeply to the meaning crisis. He calls this as a realization of ‘the God beyond the God of theism.’ The God beyond the God of theism, which is a deeply transgressive statement. It's very Gnostic in the sense of seeing God as that which is the demiurge entrapping us within existential entrapment. The existential entrapment of the meaning crisis. This whole process is so transjective and so transformative in nature, and it is so deeply resistant to literalism, fundamentalism, and idolatry that it is going to take us to the God beyond the God of theism.

Non-Theism Of Tillich

This is the non-theism of Tillich (writes Non-theism). Non-theism is a position that tries to transcend theism and atheism. Many people are talking about it now. There's related ideas like anatheism (writes Anatheism), which is sort of the kind of theism that you get after going through atheism. I think this is a better way of talking about it, non-theism. Non-theism is the correct and appropriate way, as I've already mentioned, of talking about religions like Buddhism and Taoism. Non-theism is the rejection of the presuppositions that are shared by both theism and atheism. I will go into this in much greater detail in another series.

Let me just give you—and this is not an exhaustive list. It is just a preliminary list, but nevertheless, I think a good starting point. What are four shared presuppositions between the classical theist and the atheist?

Number one: God is the Supreme being. The theist accepts that. Gives a yes to that. And the atheist gives a no to it, but they both accept that proposition as the one they are debating about. The non-theist rejects that.

Number two: God is accessed primarily or even solely through belief. The theist and the atheist agree to this. They just disagree about whether or not there's really any access to be found. The non-theist rejects both of these.

Number three: theology or anti-theology, which is what atheism often engages in, although I'm not equating atheism to anti-theology, but theology and anti-theology do not require transformative anagoge. All you need to do is have possession of the propositions and be able to infer the correct implications. Thereby losing everything that we've been talking about in these last four episodes. The theist and the atheist agree with that proposition, the non-theist rejects it.

Number four: sacredness is personal or impersonal. The theist and the atheist disagree about which one of those to pick. The theist says it's personal. The atheist says it's impersonal. I agree that trying to say that the atheist has nothing that functions like sacredness in their life—this just does not sit with their performative existence. But I do agree when the atheist says that they do not share the theist notion of sacredness as something fundamentally personal. The non-theist rejects that. The non-theist rejects that sacredness is personal or impersonal. Rather, because the non-theist rejects the Cartesian grammar that drives it, the non-theist argues that sacredness is transjective, participatory. It is aspirational. This is what Tillich was going on about.

My main criticism of Tillich is, although in one way he's way more practical than Heidegger. He's giving us guidance on how to live, how to cultivate courage and faith. He does not offer practices of transformation. See, Jung actually created a practice, intra-psychic though it might be, he created a practice for enacting and cultivating the imaginal. He created active imagination, which is not just to, in an imaginary sense, call up images. It's not just to conceptually think about things. It's to allow images to self-organize in an autopoietic fashion, such that the depths of the psyche are revealed so that the self and the ego can talk to each other. Jung creates a practice of active imagination. He creates a practice of dream interpretation, and that is sadly missing in Tillich. Tillich is better than Heidegger, I would argue, in that Tillich gives us a way to live, courage and faith, deeply reinterpreted, but he does not give us the processes that Jung gives us.

Owen Barfield

This notion of deep symbolic participation that is translated into practices, I think goes to the heart of Owen Barfield's work. So Barfield is one of the inklings. He is part of the ongoing discussion and fellowship between

Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, of course Barfield, Charles Williams. Those are the core four, and then a bunch of other people.

I would recommend three books to try and get a better sense of Barfield. Lost Knowledge of the Imagination by Lachman, which I've already recommended to you. The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings—and there's that word inkling again. The Literary Lives of the Inklings by Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski. [-] That's a very good book. And then the book I would most heartily recommend, it's a book that I'm finding brilliant. It's the book, Owen Barfield: Philosophy, Poetry, and Theology by Di Fuccia. (writes Di Fuccia)—all of this will come up, of course, on the panels.

So a couple of things. Barfield is definitely influenced by Gnosticism. He's influenced by Rudolf Steiner. And I won't go into it. You can read the book in depth. Steiner has like—I'll either say too little or too much about Steiner. It's a mystery to many people, myself included, why Barfield was so taken with Steiner, and thought so highly of him. But if you reinterpret Steiner as basically a modern Gnostic, who's generating a gnostic mythology, the two worlds and the divine spark and all this kind of stuff, then you understand perhaps why Barfield was so enamored with Steiner. I think Steiner was the vehicle whereby Gnosticism comes into Barfield's thinking.

So Barfield is therefore influenced by gnosis. He's influenced by Neoplatonism through Coleridge, the Romantic poet, who also engages in some important philosophy. Di Fuccia makes very clear, this is one of the most profound parts of the book, the deep indebtedness that Coleridge had to the early Romantics or the post-Kantians, people that followed Kant and go on a different path from the later Romantics and Hegel. So a prototypical figure here from these early Romantics or post-Kantians is somebody like Schlegel. And what these early Romantics emphasized is they emphasized the infinity of reality (writes In-finity)

The Infinity Of Reality

This is really interesting. I find it so. When I'm trying to get the non-finiteness, the lack of being bound, being fully frameable, rather than just being uncountable, although I'm alluding, of course, again, to combinatorial

explosion. So they emphasize the infinity of reality. And this term is used by them and by Di Fuccia in his examination of Owen Barfield. This is the inexhaustibleness, the inexhaustible moreness. And the idea is that the inexhaustible moreness is that which continually draws us, constantly draws us and affords us into self-transcendence, that inexhaustible moreness.

So Schlegel had a way of putting this. ‘The finite longing for the infinite.’ The finite longing for the infinite. It is this eduction (Fig. 8) (writes Education)—I’m using this word ‘to draw out,’ which, of course, became our word education (writes Education below Education), which if we think of education aspirationally is fine. The way Callard does. It is this eduction that discloses or reveals the sacredness.

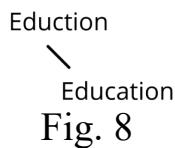


Fig. 8

So our transjectivity, our finite, [-] our epek-static (writes Epek static) trajectory are finite—are always finite, are always framed, longing for the transframing that discloses, but never completely discloses the combinatorially explosive inexhaustible moreness of reality, and simultaneously discloses the ongoing capacity of relevance realization to adapt to that in a coupled manner.

We experience and we participate. I’m using this as a transitive verb. We experience and participate this in creativity, not creativity just in the sense of making, but the creativity that you experienced in the flow state. See how this is different from the later Romantics? This is not to find the contact in realness in some irrational locus in the psyche, or in Hegel as the dialectic of a system, a propositional system. But instead it’s to find sacredness in the flow of self-transcendence within creativity. And this is what is meant by poesis (writes Poesis). What we translate as poetry.

Poesis As Ekstasis In Creativity

Barfield picks up on this poesis as ‘ekstasis in creativity,’ the way we stand beyond ourselves in creativity. And he’s very clear about how this is a transformative experience. There’s a felt change in consciousness. The self after, is both continuous and discontinuous from the self before the

transformative experience. All that stuff we've been talking about with the sacred second self and aspiration.

There's an ekstasis in creativity. There's an ekstasis in creativity found within poetry and the poetical aspects of everyday language that can reawaken us to this kind of connectedness. To the inexhaustibleness. A connectedness that experiences as sacredness.

So Barfield looks at words, the etymology, the history of words. And I touched on this briefly earlier when I was talking about symbols, and I made some, sort of, criticisms of Barfield, which I noted at the time were preliminary and promissory. And I promised to come back to them in more depth as a way of trying to both defend my criticism, but also to defend a deeper reading of Barfield.

So you remember (erases the board), the idea here is we have a word like *pneuma* (writes *Pneuma*), the Greek for *spiritus* (writes *Spiritus* beside *Pneuma*). And Barfield knows for the Greeks, for the Latins, for the Romans, for *spiritus*, it can mean both wind, (Fig. 9) (writes *Wind*) or what we now think of the word 'spirit,' sort of the self-moving aspects of the psyche (writes *Self-moving aspects of the psyche*). And we divide it into 'spirit is this' (indicates Fig. 9); we really can't see it that way, but there's a division here and for Barfield, this division replicates this sort of Cartesian division between the objective world of wind, and the subjective world of what's going on in the psyche, in its self-movement or self-contact. But what Barfield says is, when you go back, there isn't this (draws a line between *Wind* and *Self-moving aspects of the psyche*). These terms are used and they're treated as if they have a kind of identity, what I would argue as a non-logical identity; [-] they interpenetrate, they inter-afford each other, these meanings that we see as so antithetical, so disjunctive with respect to each other.

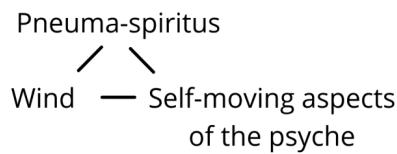


Fig. 9

For Barfield, people who used the word *that way* were engaged in a form of participation. This is a way of being before the division, before the Cartesian disjunction, I would argue that what Barfield is pointing to is that these people had a more transjective anagogic resonance with reality, so that the *wind* is *imaginal* for them, in that it discloses the self-moving aspects of reality and themselves in a highly resonant fashion.

The reason I want to say that, is because I'm not quite sure about his evolutionary hypothesis. I pointed to the work of Lakoff and Johnson, that show we, unlike the people of the ancient path, we use language in this fashion. A way that is pervasive through all of our cognition and speech. Words have these dual meanings, an inner and outer meaning.

I pointed to work that I've published on and work that they published on (erases the board). How we use the word 'attack' (Fig. 10) (writes *Attack*). There's many examples. This is only one. That's the point. There's many, many of these examples. We use the word 'attack,' and we mean physical destruction (writes *Physical destruction* below *Attack*). Like I attack the castle; at least the intent to physically destroy it. But we also mean critical argumentation (writes *Critical argumentation*). Like he attacked that point that I just made. And we don't feel... they're not ideologically identical, but we don't feel them as radically disjunctive from each other.

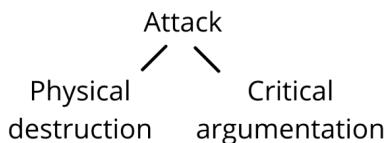


Fig. 10

Notice we do it with ['See'] (writes *See*).[-] There's something here (Fig. 11) (draws a circle and draws a line below) and we'll use the word *See* to mean either visual experience (writes *Visual experience* below *See*) or we can use *See* to mean to understand (writes *Understand* below *See*). And then that converges back. We can use *understand* or originally *understand*, but we changed it to *understand* (writes *Understand* below the circle), and that can mean to stand under (writes *Stand under* below *Understand*), but it can also mean conceptual understanding (writes *Conceptual understanding*). And so there's a weird synonymy between *Understand* and *See*. I'm trying to point out to you how complex this is.

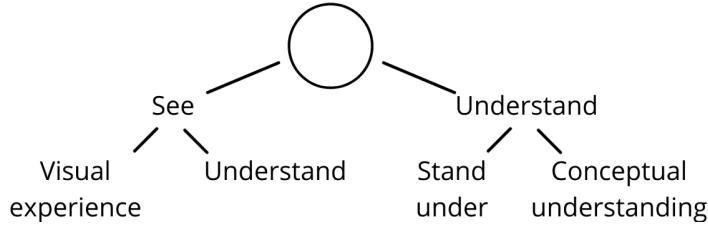


Fig. 11

Now what's interesting about Lakoff and Johnson is they don't claim this as an evolutionary thing, pointing to ancient ways of being conscious. This is something pervasive in our cognition and our culture right now. And it doesn't point to the evolution across generations. It points to psychological development within individuals.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, we start out in sensory motor seeing, and then that gets taken up into this conceptual sense of seeing. We start with a sensory motor way of understanding that gets taken up. We start as a sensory motor way of attacking. And that gets taken up. It's a psychological process of development, and it is ongoing right now and it is pervasive. There might be something sort of fundamentally wrong, therefore, with Barfield's evolutionary analysis.

Now Vervaeke and Kennedy argue that the psychological development is deeper than what's being represented by Lakoff and Johnson. We argued that the model is too simplistic. As I mentioned, we argued that there should be a top-down aspect to this psychological development, not just bottom-up.

So there's a sense in which we agree with Lakoff and Johnson that there's stuff coming up from the sensory (Fig. 12) (writes Sensory and draws an upward arrow above it), but we think—and here's the influence of Corbin, especially on me. I don't know if there's an influence on John Kennedy, but definitely on me. Here's the abstract intellectual (writes Intellectual above Sensory and draws a downward arrow below) and here's the concrete sensory, and then they meet together in the imaginal (writes Imaginal between Intellectual and Sensory). When I say, 'I see what you're saying,' this is an imaginal way that's getting a bottom-up from seeing as a sensory motor thing, and then bringing into imaginal expression this abstract not yet speakable sense of understanding.

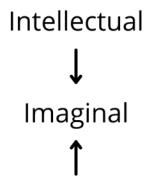


Fig. 12

That helps to explain why these two (indicates See and Understand) very different sensory motor things: verbal experience, standing under—or a totally different one: grasping—or yet another one: getting. Why do all of these converge? Because there is something like an intellectual form that they converge upon, but it is also expressed, developed, through these different imaginal renderings that connect back to concrete instances of the sensory motor.

I argued that we can link that to Michael Anderson's notion of the massive redeployment hypothesis. The circuit we use, cognitive exaptation. I went through this idea of how the symbolic—now you can understand that's the imaginal, is this process of re-exaptation (writes Re-exaptation). How I can invoke balance.

I can evoke balance to talk about justice. And then I have the image, not an imaginary, the imaginal statue of lady justice, as a way of using, re-exapting the physical balance machinery, and using that machinery to give a structural functional organization to this hard-to-articulate ineffable sense of justice. Recycling that whole process and inducing new functions. It's an enacted metaphor. It's an enacted symbol. This is poiesis, I think, in its deepest sense.

This helps to explain the translucency of the symbol, why we can see through it. See it and see through it. I can look at it as physical balance, but I can see through it into justice. And justice and balance are not logically identical, but they're not separate from each other. It also explains our temptation to literalism and idolatry. We can forget, we can forget justice, and focus just on having balance. We can lose the iconic seeing through, and only look at the concrete.

Final Participation

Now back to Barfield's evolutionary schema, he talks about that we had original participation, and then there's the division, which is the meaning crisis. And he's really explicit about the meaning crisis. Read the opening essay in *The Rediscovery of Meaning*. He's really clear about that. And then we have the two worlds of mythology and everything is being broken up. The inner and the outer are being separated. The subjective, the objective, blah, blah, blah. You know, all of this. The idea is, what we need to do is to move to what he calls final participation as a response to the meaning crisis.

Final participation is a recovery of participation integrated within the gains of the rational sciences. Now he says that, and that's explicitly and importantly what he means. And I take him at his word. Part of what that means, and this is what he emphasizes, is the recovery of the perspectival and the participatory. And I think that is deeply right and deeply consonant, but here's where I'm critical of Barfield.

But I think it also means, and this is where Barfield does not do, I think, good work. It also means a science of meaning cultivation. How does that participatory and perspectival participation fit into our scientific processes, our scientific way of being? If you're going to integrate in final participation, participation with the scientific, rational mind, both sides have to be involved in this marriage, or it will fail. That, of course, is what I've tried to do with relevance realization theory, and then put it into discourse with spirituality, symbolism, sacredness, and these great prophets of the meaning crisis.

Now here's more of a criticism of Barfield's followers. I think there needs to be more understanding of how much Barfield is indebted to Coleridge and Schlegel, and understanding sacredness as a poiesis participation of the inexhaustible within transformative creativity. You can't simply import Barfield into classical theism and say, Oh, he's just talking about the things we've always been talking about. How is that going to bring about final participation? That is not fair to Barfield's argument or his ideas.

This leads to the point that Di Fuccia argues, that this is what makes Barfield different to Heidegger. Heidegger, as we saw, took from Eckhart, this notion of 'letting the rose be.' And he takes up this notion from Eckhart: Gelassenheit (writes Gelassenheit) . John Caputo talks a lot about this, the

letting be. And he tends to emphasize a deep—so you can see what Heidegger's doing. He's trying to respond, but like Nietzsche, he's overcompensating Descartes' notion of the complete activity of mind. So Heidegger responds by a complete passivity, Gelassenheit. Letting be, letting be. It's a deep passivity. It's so bloody Lutheran!

And there's something deeply right about that aspect of Eckhart, but Heidegger forgets the other important term in Eckhart: Durchbrock, Durchbrock. Breakthrough! Breakthrough! (writes Breakthrough). You know what breakthrough is all about? It's about attentional scaling (draws an arrow pointing to Break), breaking the inappropriate frame (draws an arrow pointing to Through) moving through and making the new frame.

Durchbrock is just as important as gelassenheit . And this is something Barfield picks up on. That his notion of creativity as participatory, is not to be just passively receptive. Of course, it's not what Heidegger criticizes either. The Cartesian technological imposition of our will on the world. That's not what's meant by poiesis either.

Poiesis is synergistic. “God”—because I think Barfield is ultimately non-theistic in some very important ways—God plays the leading role, but we contribute. And this was the original Hebrew insight of the da'at. We're not just passive recipients of history, nor are we its complete authors. We participate history. We participate in history and we are synergistically working with God in its making.

Is Barfield a non-theist? I don't know. I can't make that argument as clearly as I can make it for Heidegger, for Jung, for Corbin, for Tillich. I suspect though, if Barfield were to talk to these other prophets of the meaning crisis, he would also be led into a kind of non-theism. That is clearly the case with people like Schlegel, who so deeply influenced him.

What have I tried to show you? I've tried to show you that the language, the vocabulary, the grammar, the framework of relevance realization, and how it can be developed to talk about spirituality and sacredness can be put into deep dialogue with Heidegger. Deep dialogue with Corbin. Deep dialogue with Jung. Deep dialogue with Tillich. Deep dialogue with Barfield. And also afford deep dialogue, critical but creative dialogue, between them and

afford a potential synoptic integration. All of this is what I've meant by, and what I mean by, awakening from the meaning crisis.

Thank you so very much for this long journey we have traveled together. I've often taxed your attention, your patience, your understanding, your good spirits. I thank you for the ongoing support and appreciation and encouragement many of you have given me. And I look forward to an ongoing dialogue in the next series that I will create. Thank you very much. And I want to thank deeply the crew, constant here. My brothers in this project who continually afforded it and made it possible to be presented to you at the time exemplary level of excellent quality.

Thank you very much one and all.

- END -

Episode 50 Notes

[Paul Tillich](#)

Paul Johannes Tillich was a German-American Christian existentialist philosopher and Lutheran Protestant theologian who is widely regarded as one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century.

Book Mentioned: The Courage To Be – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Morality & Beyond - [Buy Here](#)

[John Dourley](#)

John P. Dourley was a Jungians analyst, a professor of religious studies, and a Catholic priest. He taught for many years at Carleton University in Ottawa, his doctorate being from Fordham University.

Book Mentioned: The Psyche as Sacrament – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: Paul Tillich, Carl Jung and the Recovery of Religion – [Buy Here](#)

Book Mentioned: A Strategy for a Loss of Faith - [Buy Here](#)

[Da'at](#)

In the branch of Jewish mysticism known as Kabbalah, Da'at is the location (the mystical state) where all ten sefirot in the Tree of Life are united as one.

Dasein

Dasein is a German word that means "being there" or "presence", and is often translated into English with the word "existence".

Aletheia

Aletheia is truth or disclosure in philosophy.

Jonathan Pageau

Sophrosyne

Sophrosyne is an ancient Greek concept of an ideal of excellence of character and soundness of mind, which when combined in one well-balanced individual leads to other qualities, such as temperance, moderation, prudence, purity, decorum, and self-control.

Keiji Nishitani

Keiji Nishitani was a Japanese university professor, scholar, and Kyoto School philosopher. He was a disciple of Kitarō Nishida.

Book Mentioned: Religion and Nothingness – [Buy Here](#)

Necker cube

The Necker cube is an optical illusion that was first published as a Rhomboid in 1832 by Swiss crystallographer Louis Albert Necker.

Śūnyatā

Śūnyatā – pronounced in English as /ʃu:n 'ja:.ta:/ (shoon-ya-ta), translated most often as emptiness, vacuity, and sometimes voidness – is a Buddhist concept which has multiple meanings depending on its doctrinal context.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was a German philosopher, cultural critic, composer, poet, writer, and philologist whose work has exerted a profound

influence on modern intellectual history.

Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory of Nyssa, also known as Gregory Nyssen, was bishop of Nyssa from 372 to 376 and from 378 until his death.

John Scotus Eriugena

John Scotus Eriugena or Johannes Scotus Erigena or John the Scot was an Irish Catholic Neoplatonist philosopher, theologian and poet in the Middle Ages.

Will to power

The will to power is a prominent concept in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. The will to power describes what Nietzsche may have believed to be the main driving force in humans. However, the concept was never systematically defined in Nietzsche's work, leaving its interpretation open to debate.

Spinoza (Other names: Benedictus de Spinoza)

Spinoza, Baruch, Dutch philosopher, of Portuguese-Jewish descent; also called Benedict de Spinoza. Spinoza espoused a pantheistic system, seeing 'God or nature' as a single infinite substance, with mind and matter being two incommensurable ways of conceiving the one reality.

Richard Kearney

Richard Kearney is an Irish philosopher and public intellectual specializing in contemporary continental philosophy. He is the Charles Seelig Professor in Philosophy at Boston College and has taught at University College Dublin, the Sorbonne, the University of Nice, and the Australian Catholic University.

Book Mentioned: *Anatheism: Returning To God After God* - [Buy Here](#)

Owen Barfield

Arthur Owen Barfield was a British philosopher, author, poet, critic, and member of the Inklings.

Book Mentioned: The Rediscovery of Meaning, and Other Essays - [Buy Here](#)

Gary Lachman

Gary Joseph Lachman, also known as Gary Valentine, is an American writer and musician.

Book Mentioned: Lost Knowledge of the Imagination - [Buy Here](#)

Philip Zaleski

Philip Zaleski is the author and editor of several books on religion and spirituality, including The Recollected Heart, The Benedictines of Petersham, and Gifts of the Spirit.

Book Mentioned: The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings - [Buy Here](#)

Michael Vincent Di Fuccia

Book Mentioned: Owen Barfield: Philosophy, Poetry, and Theology - [Buy Here](#)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an English poet, literary critic, philosopher and theologian who, with his friend William Wordsworth, was a founder of the Romantic Movement in England and a member of the Lake Poets.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was a German philosopher and is considered one of the most important figures in German idealism.

Friedrich Schlegel

Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel was a German poet, literary critic, philosopher, philologist, and Indologist. With his older brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel, he was one of the main figures of Jena Romanticism.

George Lakoff

George Philip Lakoff is an American cognitive linguist and philosopher, best known for his thesis that people's lives are significantly influenced by the conceptual metaphors they use to explain complex phenomena.

Mark Johnson

Mark L. Johnson is Knight Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Oregon. He is known for contributions to embodied philosophy, cognitive science and cognitive linguistics, some of which he has coauthored with George Lakoff such as *Metaphors We Live By*.

John Caputo

John David Caputo is an American philosopher who is the Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion Emeritus at Syracuse University and the David R. Cook Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Villanova University.

Book Mentioned: The Mystical Element In Heidegger's Thought - [Buy Here](#)

Gelassenheit

Often translated as "releasement," Heidegger's concept of Gelassenheit has been explained as "the spirit of disponibilité [availability] before What-Is which permits us simply to let things be in whatever may be their uncertainty and their mystery."

Meister Eckhart

Eckhart von Hochheim OP, commonly known as Meister Eckhart or Eckehart, was a German theologian, philosopher and mystic, born near Gotha in the Landgraviate of Thuringia (now central Germany) in the Holy Roman Empire.

Poiesis

In philosophy, poiesis is "the activity in which a person brings something into being that did not exist before.

Other helpful resources about this episode:

[Notes on Bevry](#)

Additional Notes on Bevry

Useful Links

TiagoBooks.com Lecture Notes