

PENETRATING THE HIDDEN NOW: Time and Perception

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Humans have a three-layered consciousness: A surface-consciousness, a sub-consciousness and a core-consciousness. What I call the *mechanisms of perception* are simply the normal operations of this three-part consciousness as it processes the objective-perceptions of the core-consciousness and raises them through sub-conscious layers of subjectification till they reach the totally subjective perceptions of the surface-consciousness.

From birth onward we are taught to live exclusively within our surface-consciousness. We are taught to disregard our sub-consciousness, or at best, to let it out only under very controlled circumstances. We are taught to distance ourselves from our core-consciousness, making of it an enthroned deity instead of an integral part of every self.

One consequence of this is that it places us out-of-focus in relation to objective-reality. It removes us from the objective reality perceived by our core-consciousness, and refocuses us upon the surface-consciousness' totally subjective response to that objective core. In other words, it focuses us upon a subjective response to objective reality, not upon the objective reality itself. And believe me, there is a big difference between the objective reality and our subjective response to it.

Our surface-consciousness naturally treats the subjective-reality presented to it by the sub-consciousness, as an objective thing. The reason for this is that in relation to the surface-consciousness, the sub-consciousness is seen as a separate object (instead of as the integral part of the self). The objectification of the sub-consciousness by the surface-consciousness is a learned response, one that is considered "normal" in most cultures.

To understand this, let's trace a perception as it rises from our core-consciousness and passes through the sub-conscious layers of subjectification.

Three people stand before a tree. One is a very young child who has never encountered a tree before; one is an environmental activist; and one is logger. All three stand before the same objective tree and all three experience the same objective perception with their core-consciousness.

The objective tree is an utterly unique individual, distinguished from other trees by an infinite number of variations. Even though it is similar to other trees, it is not exactly the same as any other tree. But, it does not exist, objectively, as a separate thing; instead, it exists *in context with* and is an *integral part of*, the overall objective universe.

On the one hand, the objective tree is constantly changing. It is subtly different in each and every moment of its existence. And on the other hand, there is continuity to the tree

and the changes it manifests do not exceed the bounds of its tree-ness. Despite its countless changes, it still remains a tree from one moment to the next.

Our core-consciousness perceives all of these details about the objective tree, and more. The core-consciousness is an objective thing and like the tree, it exists in context with the overall objective universe. As an integral participant in the objective universe it possesses a special intimacy with other objective things, such as our tree. In other words, the core-consciousness perceives *all* of the infinite number of details inherent in the objective tree, simultaneously and instantaneously. Thus our core-consciousness doesn't *interpret* the objective tree, it *knows* it.

The human brain cannot process the infinite number of details known by the core-consciousness all at once. Instead it must divide the infinity into small, bite-sized chunks and process those chunks sequentially.

This process of sequentialization requires interpretation. The division of an infinity entails a series of binary decisions as components are sorted by alikeness and difference, importance and lack of importance, etc.

This is accomplished by the sub-consciousness. While the perceptions of the core-consciousness are instantaneous, the sub-conscious processing of the core-perception takes time. Granted, it may take only micro-seconds for our brains to accomplish the task, but each one of those micro-seconds distance us from the objective reality. In the time it takes our sub-consciousness to process the core-perception, the entire objective universe has gone through an infinite number of changes.

The sub-consciousness produces a snap-shot of a single moment, simplifying the infinitude of details and synthesizing them into a controlled number of familiar symbols. In the case of our young child, her sub-consciousness will have very few, if any, memories to associate with the objective tree, so it will seem an unfamiliar thing. Her response would likely be one of awe and wonderment, and she would naturally want to touch it and explore it and thus develop the memories that will later spawn the formation of personally *familiar* symbols.

Our environmental activist however will already have a rich storehouse of tree-related memories. Perhaps the objective tree will remind her of a pleasant childhood experience where she climbed and explored a tree. Perhaps it will remind her of the Latin name for the tree and what she learned of botany, followed by thoughts about the destruction of habitat caused by the logging industry. Countless other memories will associate themselves with the core-perception, resulting in a subjectified, totally static image of the tree. Prominent will be what she *feels* about the tree, what the tree means to her personally. The objective details which individualize the objective tree itself and make it an utterly unique thing, recede to the background as they are replaced by subjective details.

Not only are there micro-seconds separating the objective reality from the subjective

product, but there is also the factor of change separating them. The objective tree as perceived by the core-consciousness is ceaselessly changing and in each moment of its existence it encompasses a newly infinite number of details. The subjectified perception produced by the sub-consciousness however, is a static image, possessing only a small number of the objective tree's infinitude of details. It is a stop-action snapshot of a moment in objective-time which has already passed.

There is also a difference in context between the two. The context of the objective tree is the overall objective universe. It is changed in precise synchrony with the rest of the objective universe and its context is infinite. The subjective tree however, has a finite context -- the person perceiving. The subjective tree is contextualized more to the person doing the subjectifying than it is to the objective tree itself. As a static thing, the subjective image has been undeniably removed from the ever-changing objective context. Thus a single objective tree will mean different things to different people, resulting in any number of alternate subjective images.

As our environmental activist's personal subjective image of the objective tree solidifies in her sub-consciousness, her surface-consciousness detects it. To the surface consciousness, the static image presented by the sub-consciousness is an objective thing. The surface-consciousness further reduces the snap-shot and treats it as a single detail among many. Depending upon the flavor and intensity of the subjective response to the objective tree, the surface-consciousness will decide whether or not to act in some way. Its actions will be entirely in context with the subjective reality.

For our environmental activist, her subjective response to the objective tree may lead her surface-consciousness to express love for the tree and a willingness to protect the tree and the ecosystem, etc. But for our logger, the difference in the memories he associates during the subjectification of the objective tree, may lead his surface-consciousness to different actions. The logger will see a challenge for his skills and will busily calculate the estimated board-feet of the tree into dollars and cents.

Each of these individuals began with the exact same objective tree, created different subjective interpretations of it, and then acted in different ways. Nonetheless, even though we each live and breathe within unique subjective realities of our own making, we still manage to function together. This is due to the fact that the human surface-consciousness is the slave of culture. Our cultures teach us a basic set of assumptions which allow us enough areas of agreement for our subjective realities to sufficiently overlap. When three people stand before a tree, they agree that it is a tree, setting aside the vast differences between each of their ultimate perceptions.

The familial and cultural programming we receive acts as a template around which we arrange our experiences. In order to communicate with each other, we must first agree upon a set of shared symbols. Even though the subjective perceptions of the young child, the environmental activist and the logger differ radically from each other, they will ultimately set their differences aside enough to each agree, based solely upon what is *shared* in their perceptions, that this is a tree. So, when the logger says tree, he means

both the shared cultural agreement or definition of tree, plus his own personal storehouse of interpretations and experiences of tree. In communication, the personal aspects of tree become subservient to and rotate around, the shared symbol. When the environmental activist says tree, she also means both the shared, generic symbol, plus her our subjective interpretation. Between the logger and the activist, the differences in their subjective responses are factored out by their agreeing upon the shared symbol.

Communication requires a shifting away from the personal and a re-focusing upon the shared. In other words, our surface-consciousness de-personalizes our subjective perceptions and translates them into objective symbols. It objectifies the sub-consciously subjectified perceptions of the core, objective reality, removing itself still further from the essential objective reality. The surface-consciousness therefore, resides in a *shared subjective reality*, one that lags behind the objective reality in terms of time, meaning and content.

There is no denying that even though it is a subjective reality, it has its impact upon the core objective reality. When the logger makes the subjective decision to cut down the subjective tree, it is the objective tree that suffers the consequences.

In other words, the subjective reality is also a part of the objective reality. They penetrate each other and effect each other, and there is no separating them. Without the objective reality, the subjective reality would not exist. Conversely, without the subjective reality, the objective reality would be a different objective reality.

Now we are all familiar with this shared subjective reality. It is the human world of cars, houses, having jobs, saving for the future, wars, starvation and excess, etc. We each know exactly what this shared reality feels and looks like. The question then is what does the objective reality feel and look like? What are the implications of shifting the attention away from the subjective surface and re-focusing it upon the objective core? What sort of life would that produce?

The answers to these questions surround us in the form of the other beings who share the world with us. All we need do is look.

By way of example I will compare four subjects: a human being (myself), a domesticated dog, a wild or feral dog, and a single blade of grass. The human consciousness, as I've already stated, consists of a highly structured surface-consciousness, a vast sub-consciousness, and a core-consciousness. The focus of a human's normal waking consciousness is almost exclusively upon the surface awareness and the shared subjective reality.

The blade of grass however, has only a singular core-consciousness and does not have a sub- nor a surface-consciousness. It is focused exclusively upon the objective reality.

Whereas the feral dog, possesses a dual consciousness composed of an *integrated* sub-

and core-consciousness. The feral dog integrates the objective reality with its subjective response and there is no resulting displacement of focus. In other words, it instinctively exists in sync with the objective reality.

Now the domesticated dog is another matter. It has been given a subjective focus due to its participation in human culture. When we domesticate a creature, we train it to develop a surface-consciousness patterned upon our own and thereby enable it to take part in our shared subjective reality. Compared to a human, a domesticated dog has a much less complex and more simply structured, almost primitive surface-consciousness. Compared to our feral dog, our domesticated dog has a shifted focus of attention. It is to a certain extent, forcibly turned away from its integrated sub- and core-consciousness, and re-focused upon its rudimentary and essentially artificial, surface-consciousness. Nonetheless, instinct and the functions of its sub-consciousness remain the strongest forces in the domesticated dog.

The domestic dog straddles the gap between the human's shared subjective reality and the objective reality, but lives primarily in the objective. Similarly, the human straddles the two realities, but it lives primarily in the subjective. The feral dog and the blade of grass on the other hand, do not straddle this gap at all for they exist exclusively within the objective reality.

In the objective reality of the blade of grass, there is no time as we know it. The blade of grass remembers no past nor does it speculate upon its future. It does not act or do. Instead, it simply exists. It does not perceive that the sun is shining upon it and therefore decide to grow; instead, it grows in perfect synchrony with the immediate demands of sunlight. For the blade of grass, there is no sequence of finite moments, there is only the infinity of the immediate moment.

The objective immediate moment is similar to the subjective present-moment, but they are not exactly the same thing. The objective immediate-moment is both singular and infinite, while the subjective present-moment is a finite thing contextualized to the poles of past- and future-moments. Whereas the objective immediate-moment contains infinite change within the bounds of continuity, the subjective present-moment encompasses only the continuity, and, by necessity, disregards the infinitude of change.

The subjective experience of time is sequential, but the objective time is a non-sequential now. Essentially, the sequential passage of time is an illusion. It is a human construct produced by our highly sequentialized surface-consciousness. We can demonstrate this by considering the subjective present-moment.

Question: What differentiates the present-moment from past- and future-moments?

Answer: The experience of now-ness. Only in the present-moment do I feel the immediacy of things. It is only in the present-moment that I can reach out my hand and touch physical objects. But once the present-moment has been experienced, it loses its now-ness and becomes a memory. I can no longer go back and re-experience it with the

same quality of now-ness with which I originally experienced it. I can't physically touch the objects of a past-moment. And likewise, I can't touch the objects of a future-moment until I reach that moment and turn it into a present-moment. It is our experience of now-ness that converts future into present into past, etc.

Question: What is the temporal duration of a/the present-moment?

Answer: There are three answers to this, one subjective and two objective. The subjective answer is that our surface-consciousness experiences a present-moment of varying duration. When our surface-consciousness is paying close attention to the present-moment, it seems to be quite brief and very full. Conversely, when our attention is focused upon the past (memory) or future, the boundaries of the present-moment can seem nearly endless.

To a great extent, this is a product of the stop-action snapshot habits of our subconsciousness. We naturally treat the present-moment as a static thing and then we connect our snapshots together in a string, like a motion picture with its 24 frames per second. We assume it has a beginning, middle and end, and we think of it as possessing a quantity of duration, only because that is how our consciousness processes the objective perceptions of our core-consciousness. In effect, we take periodic samples of the objective universe, convert them into static images, string them together, and then play them like a motion picture. This gives us the *illusion* of motion and of duration.

Please take careful note of what I've just said, for it points out one of the most important cultural agreements of our shared subjective reality: that time is a sequential series of finite present-moments.

Objectively however, this is not the case. Upon close examination, the present-moment turns out to have a temporal duration of absolute zero. A simple exercise is to set a clock in front of you, preferably one with a sweeping second hand. Now consider all of the changes going on right now inside your body and outside. Consider all the atoms bouncing around and all of the planets speeding through the sky. The number of changes is literally infinite, no?

Now notice the passage of the clock's second hand and try to feel how long the present-moment lasts. How many present-moments fit into a single second? The answer is: an infinite number. In other words, a single present-moment has a temporal duration that is infinitely finite -- absolute zero. The subjective present moment is a static snapshot of a thing, but in the objective reality, there is no stasis, no duration of time in which change stops and things remain the same. Objectively, the static present-moment doesn't exist.

This brings us to the objective immediate-moment. The immediate-moment is composed of three factors: change, continuity and now-ness. These factors exist simultaneously and without sequence.

Objectively, the past is a function of memory and, in and of itself, has no physical

existence. The only thing that truly exists, is what is right now. But what-was and what-will-be do not have objective physical existence. They did and they will have existence respectively, but they do not have existence right now. What is, right now, is the only thing that has physical existence. But what is, right now, is in a ceaseless state of flux. What is, right now, has already changed into what is, right now.

In the universe that exists, right now, there is both continuity and change. The continuity arises from the fact that change effects only what is and this is what makes things appear similar despite the infinite number of changes happening continuously. It's as if the force of change weaves itself among threads of continuity, ceaselessly creating and re-creating the fabric of time/space. But that fabric exists only in the immediate-moment, only right now.

The quality of now-ness which defines the subjective present-moment is also what defines the immediate-moment. With the present-moment, that now-ness is finite, arrayed sequentially, and contextualized to past and future. With the immediate-moment however, that now-ness is infinite and eternal. Objectively, it is all that exists, all that ever has been or will be. The now-ness of the objective immediate-moment is unbroken and non-sequential.

We exist in an eternal bubble of now-ness that, while it has a subjective duration of absolute zero, is objectively infinite. The ideas that we either pass through time or that time passes around us, are both illusions produced by the mechanisms of our consciousness. Neither is true in an objective sense.

Consider again, our blade of grass. The blade exists only in the immediate-moment. It has no memory, so it does not reference its existence to a past, nor is it capable of imagining a future. It does not *do* in the human sense (*doing* requires cognizance of a past and a future), instead it simply exists. It is changed in absolute synchrony with the forces impacting it. At no moment is it a static thing for each of its moments encompasses an infinite number of changes. For our blade of grass, there is no *passage* of time, there is only an unending change-filled now.

Our feral dog on the other hand does have the capacity (albeit limited) for memory and for individual action. But because the dog's sub-consciousness and core-consciousness are so integrated, it too is changed in exact synchrony with the forces impacting it. The feral dog, lacking a surface-consciousness, retains its focus upon, and direct participation in, the objective reality. When the feral dog is hungry, it seeks food, when tired, it sleeps. The feral dog likewise has no experience of the *passage* of time, for it too exists in an unending change-filled now.

Our domestic dog however, peeks out from its natural objective perspective and into the human's shared subjective reality. While it feels the same influences as the feral dog, it has learned to place them in a human context. For example, our domestic dog may experience hunger, but since it knows that its usual feeding time is near, it will not bother to hunt down a meal. Instead, it will wait near its food bowl and postpone the sating of

its immediate hunger. Yet always the domestic dog struggles internally between obeying the human culture and obeying its own instinct. And while it may have a dim perception of the *passage* of time, to the dog this passage will mean something entirely different than what it means to a human.

In a sense, the domesticated dog represents a functional *integration* of the surface-consciousness with the sub- and core-consciousness, especially when compared to the human *dis*-integration of consciousness in which the focus is shifted almost exclusively to the surface-consciousness and away from the sub- and core-consciousness.

Of course, in my effort to explain I have had to simplify and generalize. The more particular truth of the matter though, is that individual humans vary greatly in their degree of dis-integration. Some individuals are in fact highly integrated and are capable of referencing their reality to the objective core instead of the shared subjective reality. Conversely, some individuals are almost totally dis-integrated and are not cognizant of anything other than the shared subjective reality experienced by the surface-consciousness.

Likewise, some cultures are more integrated with the objective reality than others. For example the culture of an indigenous tribal group of hunter-gatherers produces a surface-consciousness more readily integrated with the sub- and core-consciousness. The resulting shared subjective reality is closely in sync with the objective reality. Contrast this with the culture of a modern American city. The urban culture produces a surface-consciousness that is referenced entirely to the shared subjective reality. This dis-integration results in a shared reality that is not only out of sync with the objective reality, but one which is inimical to and damaging to, the objective reality.