

On the limits of perception.

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## Perceiving Nature

I have wondered about consciousness, journeyed through conformity, and communed with insanity. I find nature the best mirror in which to see one's mind. I have been led to recognize awareness as key. One only is, in as much as one is aware.

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*“My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind -- without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos.”*

-- William James, philosopher and psychologist, in *The Principles of Psychology, Vol.1*

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My experience of consciousness is primarily through my experience in altered states. I have learned to navigate and remain in control in them, or else come out enlightened on the other side.

I view everything as a mental construction and, as a result, I don't believe in anything. I have faith as a practical matter, but I don't believe in any reality. I don't need to; it serves no purpose.

*"I don't have any answers anymore. I've learned that answers are things you just make up as you go along. And until it falls apart, it's reasonable enough."*

-- George Plotkin, neurologist, physician, and engineer, in "[The Learning Project](#)."

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## What is Not Natural

Out of curiosity, I'm always picking things apart. I know all truths are provisional, and every theory contrived. The first thing I do when presented with any truth is take it apart. You shouldn't use anything until you know how it doesn't work.

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*"A relativistic approach to the non-synthetic aspects of Newtonian mechanics is not useful in formulating a comprehensive ontology for the metaphysical ramifications of these essentially empirical manifestations!"*

-- From "A Relativistic Approach," by Tom Lehrer

(It's a joke!)

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I was recently described as someone who "overthinks." I had to think about that. The more I think, the less I know, and by this means I uncover new truths. What I call thinking gives more "not knowing," which is a larger set of truths. Thinking is the path to not knowing, reducing every thought to absurdity, just as every breath takes oxygen from the air. I no more overthink than I overbreathe.

Then it dawned on me, "Most people don't think at all!" What other people call thinking is what gets them to knowing. They use their minds to create a picture of things that they believe in, and then they stop. For most people, thinking is what they stop doing when their friends agree with them.

As a philosophically-minded person I recognize many levels of theory, from fundamental to fantastical. From my studies I have learned many methods mathematical.

*"About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o' news,  
With many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse."*

... but getting back to my point.

When my theories and methods are inapplicable I adhere to none, I simply watch from wherever I stand. Here subtle perception starts.

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*“It was evening, and the rising sun was setting in the west.  
The little fishes in the trees were huddled in their nest.  
The rain was pouring down and the moon was shining bright,  
And everything that you could see was hidden out of sight.”*  
-- From “Ain't We Crazy” by Haywire Mac, 1928

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## What is Natural

There is no theory of mind, no method best suited to explore it. As I clear away the verbiage, preconceptions, and false methods I gain clarity. The trail begins with clarity, to which my mentor Jerry's altered state experience attests:

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*“... and when you wake up it is an epiphany. Things stand out with such startling clarity that you cannot quite understand how it was that such a thing as this was not observed... For the next 12 hours Walter Pitts and I were walking in a world in which every single thing became completely clear. The clarity was the likes of which you don't experience ordinarily... It's at this point that curiosity overwhelms you.”*

-- Jerome Lettvin, poet, engineer, psychiatrist, and neurophysiologist, in “[The Learning Project](#).”

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A frog, Jerry Lettvin, and Walter Pitts.

If you want your mind blown,  
look up the amazing story of

[Walter Harry Pitts, Jr.](#)

I feel I am cauterizing the wound intellect has inflicted on experience: reductionism, institutionalism, and egotism to name a few. What is left is simply awareness: the cultivation of perception. To learn anything about consciousness one must drop one's beliefs and simply watch. Watch what's happening inside oneself and outside oneself. One's self exists between the two.

## Perception

Perceiving nature is not about nature “out there” because our perception is not “out there.” Perception resides in between things, and through it both things are revealed. This is how our minds work, defining “us” and “not us,” and we have the opportunity to decide where to direct our attention.

If you want to be a larger person, examine things greater than yourself. The natural world in its living form is such a thing. Deepen your insight into it, and you deepen your insight into yourself.

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*“The perception and awareness of subtle energies expands a person’s sense of the world and of himself or herself. The earth becomes a larger place. This can have its challenges — access to a wider vision also brings more responsibility and a greater need for integration — but it also has its rewards.*

*“Perception is sometimes thought of as a passive process: we receive sensory impressions from the environment. But it may also be seen as an active process, that we are extending ourselves into the environment and into connection with the world around us through perception and it is extending itself into us. Perception is an active process at a threshold that transforms the world into us and us into the world.”*

-- David Spangler, “Subtle Awareness”

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## Learning to Perceive

Learning perception is both learning to perceive more and learning to perceive other ways. You have untapped perceptive abilities latent within you, abilities that are unused because they are not part of our shared experience.

Our subtle perceptions have gone subconscious. There are many such cues we get from sight and smell and touch of which we're not consciously aware. Things too faint to be sensed by others, too uncertain to be understood, too personal to be shared or even examined. Without expression these impressions are lost, like the ideas you neglected to write down, like the memories of dreams.

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*“We are accustomed to perceiving first and then engaging; after all, how, we may ask, do we know what to engage with if we can’t perceive it? But the trick in developing subtle perception is often to reverse this and to engage first, then perceive.”*

-- David Spangler, “Subtle Awareness”

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There is a paradox here: how can you focus on what you cannot see? There is an answer, in fact there are two. First, focus on what you can see but focus more deeply, patiently, and intently.

Second, allow, invent, imagine, conjure, create, and concoct. Creativity is the action of bringing things into being, and this applies to all that we experience. The difference here is that we bring into being things that were not there before, but isn't that what we want to do?

Is this fantasy or perception? Reality or imagination? The answer is that you will not know at first. It is the nature of new things to be not fully formed, not fully identifiable as to their nature or origin. What you are looking for, really, is the nature of things behind their appearance because truth lies in feeling, and feeling develops.

What do you hear in the wind, or see deep in the forest leaves? And if you see a signal, who put it there? When developing finer perception you can ask these questions but you must not demand answers. Accept the answer, "You will find out!" Be satisfied with just a change of feeling. Maybe it's a new impression or an idea.

Use your imagination to give your experience a home to remember. Give the wind a voice. Give the leaves a face. It's not because those things are there, it's because you don't want to forget the sensations brushing past you. There is no clear difference between perception and conception, sight and insight. Both come together. To loose your senses you must loose your mind.

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*"When I speak of entering stillness and silence, I'm not speaking of entering an altered state but rather a state of poised alertness open to this world but undistracted and attentive, the kind of stillness and silence one seeks in order to hear something more clearly or ably."*

-- David Spangler, "Subtle Awareness"

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## The Tuning-Inward Exercise

Here is a little exercise. You'll need to memorize it because you must do it with your eyes closed. Read it now, and then close your eyes and do it.

Begin by finding a comfortable place where you can close your eyes and fully relax without being disturbed for a few minutes. Place your hands at your sides or on the arms of your chair. Place all your attention in your hands as they become warm and heavy.

Feel the muscles relax and feel the backs of your hands pulse as your heart beats circulation through them. Feel that pulse in your arms and across your shoulders, connecting both arms where the pulse comes together at your neck.

As you continue to feel this, imagine a small black "X" sitting at the top of the bridge of your nose directly between your eyebrows. Let this X slide down your nose, over your upper lip, your lower lip, over your chin, under your chin, and into your neck where your pulse is.

When the X moves inside your neck and reaches your pulse, imagine that this pulse shoots the X up your spine and out the top of your head. And as it does this, feel the involuntary recoil that sets your neck back an inch. And then, as this X sails up, out of your head and out of sight, relax and just feel your pulse.

That's the exercise. Do that: feel your pulse in your hands, then your arms and shoulders. Let the X slide down to your throat and up and out the top of your head, and then be still.

If this exercise worked, you are now in a dreamy, sensitive state, a state that you have both imagined and created. And in this state you are now attentive to new things. Take this state and be in this state in nature. Use this state as a magnifying glass and apply it to the experience of nature. Not a visual magnifying glass, but as a sensory one.

Do this exercise a second time outdoors. Find a comfortable place in nature, a place where you are warm, nothing is disturbing you, and nothing is changing. Gather into you the impression of what's around you, the air, the clouds, the sounds and sensations on your skin. Release your memories and put your mind into neutral where it can just babble quietly or be in silence. Then repeat this exercise and sense how it feels differently.

Do this exercise a third time when something significant occurs. Maybe after meeting a significant person, or accomplishing a significant task. Regain a calm position and state of mind, repeat the exercise and, as your head goes back, ask yourself simply, "How do I feel?"

Once you've succeeded in doing this exercise in these three ways you will have created three different experiences. You will have perceived three situations in three new ways. What are the differences between these situations, how has this exercise changed them?

Your answer will have subtle elements. They will be hard to describe. Perhaps you'll notice that you cannot describe these results to the people who normally surround you. If so, that is good because now you see how much what you share in perceiving limits what you perceive.



Amplification is a processes of resonance. An effect becomes greater when you resonate with it. If you don't resonate you are unmoved, and if you are unmoved the effect passes through you. Because you can tune your attention, you can tune your resonance and, by this means, your awareness.

## The Tuning-Outward Exercise

I'd like to teach you to develop a resonance with the earth, and you'll find this isn't hard to do. Among the earth's many vibrations one is called the Schumann Resonance, and it's the speed at which electricity in the atmosphere bounces around the globe. It's a rather slow vibration, about 8 cycles per second. This is the speed at which you can count to eight if you count out loud fast. Try it: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8!

Do you remember watching lightning on a dark night, and do you remember how it flashes? Remember the battering sound as the thunder rolls in? The time between the flashes of a single lightning bolt is the same as the Schumann resonance. In fact, it is the Schumann resonance! It is the earth raising its head and looking at you.



When you next go outdoors, especially when you find yourself in front of a wide landscape, I'd like you to do something different. Instead of lazily glancing into the distance, or picking a few objects to look at, I'd like you to dart your eyes all around to take eight quick snap shots of the vista before you: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8!

Pause and reflect on how you have seen the landscape differently. Something is different: instead of looking at the earth, you have engage with it. You have connected with its frequency.

The frequency with which you attend to things will amplify the frequency in the things you're attending to. Imagine that there is something going on around you at this frequency, something and you've never noticed it before. It may be something seen, heard, or felt.

The result of your interaction will be subtle. It may change the tone of your speech, the cadence of your gait, or the color of your mood. Engage the world mindfully, with focus, and without expectation. Give it some time. Be aware of any differences. What is not the same?



## Subtle Perception

Subtle perception is the desire to see new things beyond the obvious. This novelty may be something more, as in filling in the blanks, or it may be something else, entirely new.

It is certain that if you take the time and effort, you will perceive more. That's how we're built, we take in a fixed amount of information no matter how much is given to us. Simply enlarge your focus and slow your clock and more of what is there will emerge. Even staring at a white wall reveals more information because our mind itself will fill in the space, if nothing else does.

Being aware of more can mean being more deeply aware, or being differently aware. It can mean something you might recognize but didn't expect, like seeing an outline. Or it can mean having feelings you cannot fathom, like being a spirit. It's not clear what will come of the effort, or when.

Don't mistake small changes as unimportant, or no changes for nothing at all. You may find what you look for regardless of what is there, so keep looking.

You want to feel safe, comfortable, and supported. Some gainful processes are painful -- as an athlete I know -- but that is a different path. You do not need to take risks, and you do not need to pay extra. The emergence of subtle perception is entirely between you and your environment.

Perceiving more is not better or worse, it's just different. You must decide what to do with what you get, and just because you see more does not mean that you understand more or benefit from it. What you perceive has to be relevant. In fact, it's relevance you're looking for, not information.

I've mentioned the conundrum of resolving whether new ideas are coming as fact or imagination. The answer is both at first. Once you've found a new perspective, you can resolve what sights are new and what are just perspective. That is the building of a theory. Recognize that you're looking for new understanding and the sight you gain will be your own.

I have spent years climbing mountains and wandering jungles looking for new powers, and I found them. They were inside me. They are in you, too. The most valuable sight is insight.



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