



Knowing More of What's Going On

How you see yourself determines what you can do with yourself.

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“It's never too late to be who you might have been.”

— George Elliot

You

We are not continuously aware of the world around us. Awareness is not a continuous process, although we think it is. We think awareness is continuous, because we're unaware of what we're missing.

A road feels smooth because tires roll over the holes. The ride is smooth, but the road isn't. Our awareness is like the ride; what's really going on is the road. This applies to how we see ourselves in the world: it's an illusion.

Like all things that record events—movies, stories, and sound—your input has a frame rate. It's the rate

at which you're able to resolve snapshots of the world. Your brain fabricates continuity because it's what you're aware of. It's not perfect, but as long as there aren't too many holes, it's the simplest strategy. You take about 20 of these per second when you're paying attention, perhaps more if you're under duress.

Everything consequential in our lives happens over durations longer than this. Sudden impacts and flashing lights leave traces, but it's the traces that we respond to, not the impacts. When we react faster than our frame rate, it's reflex that's drives us. We can train reflex, and reflex is faster than thought.

Mastery involves learning by reflex. The world record for mouse clicks is 14.1 per second, and tap dancing is 35 taps per second, basically twice as the two feet are working in alternation. A violist can play a 24-note arpeggio in under two seconds. The mystery is that thinking itself becomes a reflex.



What's Going On

Few events are synchronized with our perceptive abilities. We choose to become engaged with those events we can perceive and control. Tools coordinate our skills and perceptions, speeding us up and slowing things down. Heat speeds things up while cold slows them down, so we cook and freeze things to our eating schedule. We arrange travel, work, and family to fit our circadian rhythms.

Events that occur at more rapid rates excite us. Those that don't demand action allow us to relax, like gardens and campfires. We build houses, shopping centers, and governments to coordinate our control and awareness.

Sustainable profit is the art of nondestructive skimming. The idea is so widely practiced that few complain when a little is taken at our expense. The line between what's sustainable and what's exploitative is often hard to draw. More is taken when the effects are unseen and, since we see little, it's easy to overlook things.

We create environments that are synchronized and suited to us. The benefit is greater control and fewer "accidents." The detriment is that we lose sight of what's outside our limited vision. We're trained to

think we are the center of the universe, and we tune our biology to see things that way.

Our political structures cannot correct the destruction they create when it lies outside their reality. When actions undermine profits, we notice the problem. The larger the system, the more limited the reality.

Occasionally there are surprises. The elderly driver who opens their car door literally does not see the bicyclist approaching. A rush out of equities creates a market crash contradicting everyone's expectations.

Balance requires opposing forces. Events always move between extremes, testing them. The non-dualist who meditates on the oneness of everything is like the clock that doesn't work, which is right twice a day. They're completely wrong otherwise (Quirk, 2018).

An Arctic shark lives 600 years in cold, unchanging, absolute darkness. Rarely coming to the surface, its world has no boundaries. The idea of communicating with such an intelligence is almost meaningless. It's not a lack of a common language—I suspect they could learn the meaning of the word "fish"—it's the lack of a common world.

It's certain that the Arctic shark is attuned in ways that completely escape us. Although we're not inclined to ascribe intelligence to them, I suspect that whatever intelligence they do have is entirely beyond our understanding.



What You Know

While all species do this, humans seem to be first to strategize profit for its own sake. It all starts with how you think, and it's not limited to your analytic mind. In fact, our penchant toward exploitation isn't

intellectual, it's emotional.

As with everything we do, emotion drives intellect. It doesn't inform our reason, but it is the water that guides it, creating the channels in which we think. Emotion starts wars and supports them. Emotion creates the social classes that rise like filo pastry. The intellectuals, corporations, and executives are of no real consequence. The emotional desire to exploit exists in enough of us to recreate those institutions that collapse or explode.

Whatever you think your problems are, the desire to exploit or to be exploited swims among the roots. You might call it learned insecurity, or our culture of scarcity. My doubting of how other people think has led others to call me stupid enough times for me to realize that the ecological imbalance is not in the environment that we've created, it's inside us.



What Others Tell You

Therapists are moving away from self-justifying theories. These always carry prejudice, privilege, and illusory certitude. Therapy remains mired in confusions between scientific reason and religious belief. Freud's analytic mind-set still lingers, while intuition finds limited acceptance.

People look for both intellectual and intuitive help. Explanations are shamefully easy to market, and those who sell fatuities do so shamelessly. And why not? They're "certified." Judging others' advice is tricky because their advice is based on no theory and questionable observations.

A technique called "Havening" is an approach whose explanations are false and observations exaggerated. Stephen Porges's Polyvagal Theory—which purports to explain how thoughts and feelings interact through the vagus nerve—rides on bogus neurology accepted by therapists who know nothing about the vagus nerve. The power of these techniques lies in the ideas they evoke in the minds of people who apply them, and some of those ideas are good.

Poor science is the norm for clinical psychology, a swamp of agism, prejudice, elitism, and misunderstanding. The experiments may be well done and the statistics carefully collected, but a lack of understanding makes their conclusions spaghetti thrown against the wall.

There are exceptional counselors who are islands of insight, but people in need are too overwhelmed to identify them. Exploring this was the point of my 20-year, 3-book “Learning Project” (Stoller, 2019, 2020a, 2020b). You might find it interesting.



The Root of Your Problem

The root of the problem is that our need to be victim or victimizer welcomes practitioners into this cycle. Most people are happier to pay for someone who will sustain their self-destructive cycle, and—as should come as no surprise—therapists are already members of the club.

I don't accept this. I'm hardly aware of my rejection, I just don't play the game. I learned before I was “taught.” My clients recognize I'm outside of it, while others find my independence frightening. They think I don't understand. They make up all kinds of explanations.

As a result, I deal with the complicated people who refuse to accept simple lives. To listen to their stories, you'd think their problems have no solutions. But these people are stepping outside the cycle, and that means there is a real path forward. I need only draw that path out of them.

We are all towing personal, family, and cultural baggage. Our problems are complicated, but the key component to the solution is not: it's a personality that acts from strength and does not consume itself. The people in your life who create conflict are the problem, not the threats and weaknesses you feel. And in every case, some of these people are inside you.

Chaos always seems unfathomable. You don't need to figure it out. You only need to build a personality that attracts the good and repels the bad. Living amidst chaos isn't your flaw, it's a description of nature.

In this chaos, we create our container that holds us together and keeps pathogens out. It's when our personalities are infected that we need new ideas, people, or energies. But no insight will help until you recognize the pathogenic aspects of yourself. And it is with this, and only with this, that a counselor can help.

Once a person reaches a point where they feel trapped by their personality, then they're ready to change. But this point of recognition is elusive because the limit of what you can tolerate is a personal choice.



Personality Is Not a Prison

There are plenty of ways to continue one's dysfunction. If you're homeless, public assistance may keep you homeless. If you're addicted, enablers maintain you. If you're emotionally dysfunctional, religion's prescribed behaviors celebrate the box you languish in. It's up to you to decide whether you're happy.

If you can recognize your personality as manufacturing your problems, then new paths can appear. The greater difficulty is letting go of what's toxic. People cling to their self-abusive relationships, always thinking it's someone else's problem; always thinking it will get better in the next installment.

Seeing the better alternative starts with accepting the chaos of a new environment. This is much easier, and success is more likely, if you have something to trust. You've been starving on the island of scarcity, and feel trapped because you can't swim.

This is where your light bulb might come on: nature does not limit you to this barren island. Fear and reluctance are real, they're yours, and you must be honest. You must look at what you cannot see.

Dante called it purgatory, and some of us can see you're languishing in it. You can create a new reality, if you can admit you are responsible for the old one. What you need is someone to show you where your feet are.

If you've thought enough about it and you'd like to make a change, or if you want to work toward what some call your fantasy, which seems to escape everyone else, then let's find out who you really are.

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