

Imagination

The key to growth, learning, childhood, and healing.

Lincoln Stoller, PhD, 2021. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)
www.mindstrengthbalance.com



“I sense the need for a new kind of mind of individuals who are integrators, as distinct from the reductionists... in the human dimension, as distinct from the molecular/cellular, trying to understand the whole which is far greater than the sum of the parts.”

— **Jonas Salk** (1991), inventor of the polio vaccine

We’ve heard this so much that our eyes glaze over. Salk also noted that you cannot develop what’s needed when it’s needed because then it’s too late.

There must be some prescient guidance that develops abilities before they’re needed. But this cannot be in a molecular/mechanical world that only responds to the feedback of the moment. This is the old argument against evolution by random mutation and natural selection. This is not a rebuttal of evolution, it is not even an argument, it simply makes that point that random mutation plus natural selection is necessary but likely insufficient. Evolution in unlikely directions seems to involve additional processes.

Consider a blind organism, for example. If greater light is rewarded, a photo sensitivity may develop, but an eye would be far more than what’s necessary. Even single-celled organisms have photosensors which allow them to change their behavior in the presence of light, but they don't have eyes..

Beyond photo sensitivity, discrimination may be an advantage and a lens would be beneficial. But a biological lens is far more than a discriminator—it's not a static object. The the benefits of a lens in the eye only accrue when there are other parallel perceptual and cognitive structures in place to make use of the image.

If a simple shutter would suffice, then a lens would not develop with the need for these additional structures. Once a shutter evolved, there would be little opportunity to extend it to a lens which is an entirely different structure.

To see why a shutter precludes a lens, consider the analogy of a house. To let light in we create openings. To keep weather out, we create shutters. A window and a shutter satisfies both needs. There is no need to develop a glass window pane that will do both at once. The kind of feedback that might lead to the development of the glass window pane is different from what leads to a window with a shutter. And if we already have a window with a shutter, then the need for light and weather protection don't give the feedback that would lead to a window. For that, you'd need both new needs and concepts.

To make the connection between the technology of glass and the benefit of windows requires our minds to connect the two ideas. We do this easily using our minds. We understand the development of glass as a new solution to the problem of structures. Nature does this all the time in the evolution of forms. Nature is constantly developing forms that are more capable than they need to be, yet we don't ascribe a mind to nature.

Hands

Consider our hands. They have not changed much in form since we developed fingers. Something far less flexible than ten, 3-jointed fingers would certainly have sufficed for simple grasping and locomotion. A three-toed sloth has three curved claws and that's all. Yet we developed a complex hand and then, when our brains gained the ability to manipulate concepts in addition to sticks, our versatile hands were ready for use.

Consider an octopus, a relative of the clam that no longer grows a shell. Clams don't have brains, but the octopus has nine brains, one that's central and an additional one in each arm. It has suckers with the tactile discrimination of a finger tip, photosensors in each arm, and arms with the ability to wholly regenerate if amputated, brain and all. These features are not necessary for development of the individual and they are not incremental improvements to the clam.

Consider physical illness as it can arise from habitual states of mind. Physical conditions are often—some would say always—expressions of physical pressures extruded by the pressure of mental resistance into the shape of a physical ailment.

People come to me for relief from a physical ailment through a change of mind. These people show me that they have latent mental abilities to affect their physical health. They can make progress in gaining awareness and control, and they can do this one step at a time. In almost every case, they resist. They vigorously refuse to develop these skills and they make up reasons why they can or will not. These reasons draw on their emotions of fear, or blame, or guilt.

Stress

It is almost a tautology that a person who has confounded their stresses into somatic expression will resist attempts at relief. It is as if the body-mind has said, “Look at this. Deal with this, and do not try to think me away from it!” My clients come insisting that I help them do exactly that: to think away their discomfort, fear, guilt, and shame. It is their emotional “body” that carries this. Their intellect wants to resolve it but their emotional body refuses their intellectual manipulations.

In many of these cases our efforts start cautious and clear-headed, sane and organized. We have some clarity and resolve, certainty and commitment. We believe we can, but we have serious doubts. It is not too long before the insanity starts to show. Clarity and certainty start to recede like failing memories. Resolve and commitment are pushed aside as stronger emotions of fear and chaos rise. They’ll blame me or themselves, they become overly sensitive, almost neurotic, and then they flee. This is what you’d expect if you tried to help an injured animal. People are no different.

This is what psycho-somatic illness is: a form of insanity that bridges the separation between the mind and body. It’s an insanity where the delusion is expressed in the body but, if you try to think it away, the delusion inflames the mind.

In these cases, I am led to a point along the path where I can almost predict my client’s success at regaining an important element of physical health, and, just at the point where the path is clear, they start acting pathological. It is the nature of their dysfunction that in the realm of the critical issue they become horrified, or petrified, or aggressive. They do anything to avoid the issue that, almost by definition, they could not confront in their minds alone.

Solving a mind-body problem requires a mind-body change, not a change in just one or the other. If you want a change in your somatic situation you must work toward psychological change as well. This

is not just a change in patterns but a change in spirit. A fundamental change of character, but to this, the ego never agrees.

It is in this sense that the ego—your sense of self reference and the confluence of your intellect and emotion—gets in your way. The problem is not that you have an ego, as some believe, but that your ego cannot do its job of protecting you from yourself. You must get beyond the ego; few are ready to do this. Few have the clarity and resolve. As a result, I see most of my clients make a few steps into this new territory and stop. It may be that they'll gather further strength and make further progress, or it may be that they'll succumb to their somatic illness.

Time

It is often the case that the simplest solution is a dead end, and greater, long-term potential comes from the less expeditious solution. If left to themselves, molecules would have to explore and reject a multitude of dead ends before being rewarded for the “mistake” of a less efficient and more flexible solution. But we don't see that happening in the evolution of either our bodies or our minds.

Using the lens in our eye and the muscles that control it, our receptors and nerves integrate perception into a 3-dimensional image. To develop an eye from a photo receptor requires foresight that's greater than the what's in the photo receptor. There is some force that conceives what might be useful, uses a process of induction, and develops an imagination of the future.

It is slowly dawning on physicists (Castro-Ruiz, Giacomini, & Brukner, 2018) and philosophers that causality may not be a dichotomy between cause and effect. Some other relationships may exist between events than a simple ordering, something that is not linear in time. This is fundamentally contrary to our worldly experience and it may contradict our reality. As such, it may be structurally inconceivable to us and, if it is true, it will generate experientially inconceivable predictions. That is, predictions which involve experiments that lie outside the envelope of what humans can experience.

How can people gain courage and conviction that lies outside their present experience? How can your ego be convinced to dissolve itself and reform in a different fashion? Perhaps we can use the metaphor of time to say that there is a way to a future different from what our ego is sure will befall us and which our ego will do anything to avoid. Anything including beating your kids, berating your neighbors, or working yourself to death.

The path to a different future starts with imagination. The realm of alternate reality starts in your mind. It need not be a literal image, it could be a feeling or the lack of feeling. It could be embodied in a new connection or a new disconnection. It's not that imagination is reality, but that it can be a force that releases chaos and fosters new formations.

Play

Maybe this is why children have good imaginations: they need to grow themselves into a form that's consonant with the physical world. I believe this is why you must cultivate your imagination. It's not enough to have one, you must use it. You must apply it to your life. It's not enough to paint on canvas, play music, or dance, you must paint, play, and dance your life.

This is what real therapy is about; it's about leading you out of the corner of your mind and back onto the playground of imagination. This is why I object to most psychotherapy as it amounts to further negotiations with a hostile ego, something akin to convincing your parents that you're grown up.

Altered state work is the alternative: hypnosis, dreamwork, psychedelics, and somatic experience. Each of these takes you out of your container and offers you a chance to reorganize, and to open your frame of mind. Psychedelics, extreme somatic experience, and natural altered states of creative immersion are authentic paths to change.

To subscribe to this newsletter, click on **[Newsletter-Subscribe](#)**.

Salk, J. (1991, May) Academy of Achievement Interview, San Diego, California. Retrieved from <https://achievement.org/achiever/jonas-salk-m-d/#interview>

Castro-Ruiz, E., Giacomini, F. and Brukner, C. (2018). Dynamics of Quantum Causal Structures, *Physical Review*, X8, 011047. Retrieved from <https://journals.aps.org/prx/abstract/10.1103/PhysRevX.8.011047>

