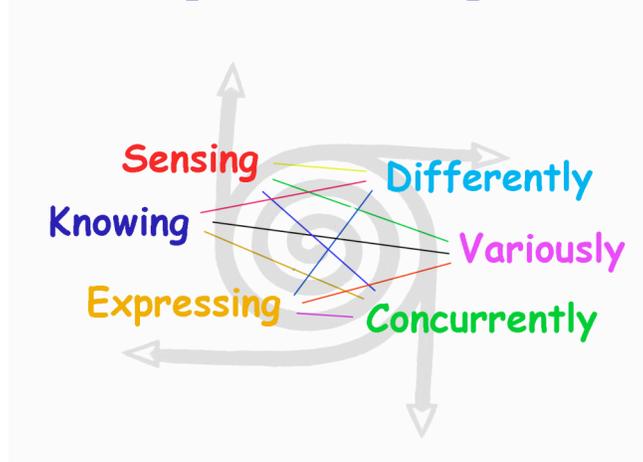




* On Alchemical Yogas of Knowing Variously *

Re-Orienting the Knowing of Knowing



Approaching the Re-Orientations of 'Concurrency Consciousness'

This text is focused upon the difficulties of approaching actual practices for diversifying ordinary habits of knowing. That effort involves re-directing attentive awareness about self and world in unfamiliar, contrasting, and non-reductive ways. The question of concern here, then, is how to actively re-orient self-aware consciousness toward overtly acknowledging and valuing the complexities of 'knowing variously.' That such an effort is fundamentally challenging is illustrated by the formal practices or disciplines imposed on the practitioners of Yoga and Alchemy. At issue here is more than simply a concept of plurality. The intent is to manifest it as identity and experience of phenomenal reality.

The term 'concurrency consciousness' is used here to indicate a state of knowing the variousness of things by engaging different modes and methods of knowing simultaneously. Such a self-conscious 'state of mind' is contrastingly diversified. This suggests a shift to a condition of awareness that necessarily is 'altered' relative to

ordinarily attitudes. The effect of experiencing that shift can be thought of as ‘relativizing’ ones ordinarily reductive attitudes to the greater complexity of ‘the rest of the mind,’ or toward other inherent but typically unacknowledged modes of knowing and understanding.

Practicing overt engagement of concurrency consciousness can be seen as involving three aspects: knowing differently, knowing variously, and knowing concurrently thus non-reductively. Initially one seeks simply to ‘know differently than’ one habitually knows. This does not mean that ordinary knowing is necessarily denigrated or discarded. Rather, one seeks to allow one’s self to become aware in unfamiliar ways and contexts, and to stimulate experiences that challenge one’s assumptions. Once an overt sense of knowing variously is enabled, one can attempt to emphasize knowing the variousness of things concurrently. The intention is not to privilege non-reduction over reduction, but to activate and validate both.

There are a variety of ways to practice more overt engagement with conditions of knowing variously and concurrently. The concern of this text is that *one’s approach to these efforts is as significant for their effectiveness as ‘practicing’ them*. Thus consideration of how to context practicing this engagement is essential. Failure to acknowledge how knowing tends always to be preconditioned by habitual reductions of things to singular states of being obscures awareness of how one is predisposed to ‘see seeing,’ ‘feel feeling,’ and ‘think thinking’ thusly—even if what is seen, felt, or thought is pluralistic, concurrent, and radically complex. That ordinary attitudes tend to regard the world in a reductive manner is practically useful. We depend upon this way of knowing. That is why it is reflexive, And that is why it asserts unconscious limitations on less reductive awareness.

Thus effective efforts to re-orient knowing toward less reductive cognitive strategies and concurrency consciousness involve overt re-contexting of one’s intentions, methods, and goals for knowing. Re-orienting awareness to unfamiliar modes of knowing requires awareness of the habits one is attempting to evade.

Experiencing, Knowing, and Understanding— As Chemist or Alchemist?

Contrasting the intentions of the roles of chemist and alchemist provides a useful illustration of how different motivations for investigating ‘how things are’ can effect the resulting experience and conclusions. In one sense, both chemist and alchemist employ somewhat similar tactics by ‘performing experiments’ to reveal the chemical properties of matter. Yet those tactics are applied in service to significantly different strategies or

purposes. The alchemical model is concerned with more than ‘definitive differentiation of exclusive states.’

In the context of mechanistically technological modernity, chemistry as a scientific practice constitutes defining elemental compounds of matter and manipulating the properties of their potential combinations. This approach aims at exerting as much control over what is studied as possible. The reasoning behind such efforts has been termed instrumental. Neither the identity of the chemist as a person nor the reality frame of reductive scientific methodology being used are ‘in question’ as part of the efforts to know and control matter. The role of alchemist in its historical contexts also involves investigating the ‘behavior’ of matter as chemical compounds that undergo “phase changes” (as in from solids to liquids to gasses), can combine and differentiate, and somehow constitute the interminable variousness of ‘things.’ However, unlike the chemist, the alchemist’s role is described as involving an attempt to encounter, witness, and ‘experience by participation,’ that metamorphic ‘nature of Nature.’ The alchemist is, as it were, identified as both observer and observed, both inside and outside the experiment contained within the ‘alembic vessel’ held over the heating fire to induce transformations.

That is, the person-as-alchemist is thought to have submitted his or her own sense of identity and reality to a ‘process of knowing totality.’ The chemist ‘stands back’ from the experiments and examines phenomena strictly through an unquestioned mechanistic model, the purpose of which is conclusive definition and control. The Alchemist ‘submits’ to experiencing the dynamic transformations provoked by his or her efforts at inducing chemical changes, the purpose of which is understanding of the transformative nature of being and becoming. The consciousness of the alchemist is part of the experiment or ‘work.’ The consciousness of the chemist is superior to it. This contrast is worthy of consideration when contemplating how one might approach ‘expanding’ one’s modes of knowing phenomena.

Becoming an 'Epistemic Juggler' to Develop a More Pluralistic Sense of Self & Meaning

Enhancing the diversity of one’s awareness and sense of meaning requires a conscious ‘juggling’ of modes of knowing (or epistemic methods). One begins by deliberately attempting to ‘move’ from one condition of awareness to another, then back and forth, then to keep more than one ‘presently valid’ at a given moment. This can involve thinking mathematically and metaphorically concurrently. The efforts proposed here are not about simply ‘being differently’ but rather about practicing overt awareness and

experience of ‘being various’—a condition referred to elsewhere on this web site as a ‘metaphorically metamorphic’ or ‘mythically dynamic’ status.

The mental processes involved in perceiving, cognating, and expressing have a physiological basis in brain function that can be compared to that of the body’s musculature. Both mind and body develop habitual ways of functioning. Yet both are surprisingly ‘plastic’ and can be ‘retrained’ to some degree, regardless of age. The same sense of ‘re-training’ applies to mental ‘habits’ of feeling, thinking, valuing, and expressing. Both the physiological basis of the brain and the thought patterns of mind that create these can be reconfigured. However, if one’s attitudes are habituated, then ‘who’ is going to promote this retraining or re-orienting of sense-of-self to self and world? Sometimes a teacher can be found to assist. But, sooner or later, one’s own sense-of-self, or ‘egoic function,’ must take on the role of ‘epistemic juggler.’ This requires differentiating a self-aspect dedicated to ‘self-re-orientation’ rather than ‘self-reiteration.’ Somehow one must confront an inherent, internal ‘psychic force’ of ‘self-perpetuating sense-of-self,’ just as one confronts the society’s collective reductions of diversified reality to established singular definitions.

That reflexive aspect of personality with its habitual assumptions tends to demonstrate two responses to change. It either resists diversifying experience or else seeks to subordinate such to its existing assumptions about ‘who one is’ and ‘how the world is.’ Habitual identity devotes considerable amounts of conscious effort to accommodating new and different information to existing personal beliefs and preferences—thereby preserving its apparent dominance. That accommodation necessarily involves repressing awareness of internal conflict and contradiction. Contrast between one’s personal attitudes or behaviors and one’s experience or knowledge can become extreme. What we perceive, think, feel, and do are often ‘in conflict.’ Even yogis, scientists, scholars, and artists who accomplish exceptionally subtle and complex expressions of understanding can remain surprisingly reductive in their personal orientation to their actual selves and their immediate encounters with others and world. To be human is to be various—and thus, often, divided or schizoid. Thus personalities tend to assert untenable singularities of identity that require ‘re-orientation’ if consciousness is to become overtly ‘attuned’ to the radical complexity of self and phenomena. Re-orientation of how one knows thus enables one to better know the ‘unconscious juggling acts’ that generate an apparent identity.

Thereby, the main attitude required to become a more conscious ‘epistemic juggler’ can be the assumption that one’s habitual modes of knowing are to be distrusted—not because these are necessarily inaccurate but because they might be incomplete. One must become a skeptic about how one knows what one knows and, thereby, ponder limitations that have been placed upon one’s awareness. However, the larger purpose of

these practices is not to ‘arrive at the real truth’ of ‘manifest a pure self’ but rather to experience unfamiliar and inherently dissimilar—yet paradoxically complementary—modes of perceiving and making meaning. The intention being to practice engaging the variety of ‘how things really really are’ as a ‘truthful concurrency.’ Seeming contradictions are intrinsically relational in such a view.

In short, then, broadly activated (diversified) and inter-related consciousness involves some function of ‘epistemic juggling’ that promotes ‘knowing things variously concurrently’—a status of identity and reality that are not ‘uniformly consistent.’ As to motive for seeking such a ‘non-linear status of being and knowing,’ it is proposed here that such a shift in awareness is a necessity to both an individual seeking a ‘full’ life and to communities seeking continued adaptation to actual, changing environments. So engaged, human consciousness appears more likely to ‘make choices’ that appropriately promote the fullness and continuance of its ‘participation in totality’—either as their own psychological relationships or within ecological environments. However inconvenient it might seem, such a ‘fullness’ appears to necessarily involve elements of both alienation ‘from the world’ and dissociated conflict ‘within selfhood.’ To consciously participate in the chaotic complexities of mind and matter is not to be ‘one way or the other.’

Understanding and Interacting with Inclusive Consciousness as Chaotically Organized

A normally pragmatic perspective will tend to resist subjecting one’s sense of self and world to what appear (at least to such perspective) to be disorganized and incoherent ‘states of mind’: ‘What is the point in that?!’ Ordinary attitudes tend to be ‘exclusive’: to selective view phenomena as orderly and controllable, not chaotic and unpredictably interactive. In contrast, a more ‘inclusive’ perspective must accommodate such discontinuity. The motive and methods mentioned here for attempting to diversify awareness derive in part from a scientific perspective on the disorderliness of consciousness. Brain studies indicate that the total field of cognitive activity composing human consciousness vastly exceeds what a person is ‘self consciously aware of.’ That is, what one thinks one is thinking turns out to be a tiny fraction of the ‘what the mind is doing.’ As a result the complexities of one’s own awareness and experience are effectively ignored. More to the point here, though, is that one tends to not notice that the organization of one’s thoughts emerge from a relatively chaotic non-linear interplay of cognitive capacities and interpretive processes. Brain and mind generate an impression of continuity out of a context of self-ordering chaotic behavior. One’s sense of identity and reality are ‘chaotically organized.’

Given this notion of the totality of consciousness as constituting what is termed “deterministic chaos,” it is not surprising that humans impose upon it a more manageably reductive ‘sense of self.’ However, given the existence of an ‘underlying’ consciousness constituted by contrasting, mutually modifying, non-linear interactivity between ‘layers’ of perceptions, response, memory, and interpretation (which vary between and even *within* individuals from moment to moment), there must be some essential importance for a ‘chaotic nature of knowing.’ It is proposed here that this relatively unstable, unpredictable, multi-directional dynamism of inclusive consciousness functions as the ‘engine of adaptive creativity.’ That is, human intelligence and flexibility actually depend upon this underlying disorderly activity of minding.

Naturally enough, if the mind’s multiple and divergent perceptions, impulses, appetites, and interpretations are to be effectively ‘channeled,’ some ‘agency of coherency’ is required. Thus a relatively consistent, ordinary personality develops. The problem arises then of how to re-orient sense of self and world to ‘take into account’ more of that ‘unconscious consciousness’ which might prove effective in enhancing both adaptive survival and the personal satisfaction of ‘living a more meaningful life.’

Descriptions of actual practices for engaging experience of less reductive cognitive strategies and non-linear complexities of consciousness are provided in the **Specific Exercises** text on the **Alchemical Yogas** page of this website.