

Chapter 11

Five Layers of Consciousness

The consciousness that characterizes human beings contains at least five layers of evolutionary development: (1) the cell-based consciousness that humans share with single-celled creatures, (2) the image-using consciousness that humans share with animal life, (3) the emotion-based consciousness that humans share with the other mammals, (4) the symbol-using consciousness that is unique to humans among existing species, and (5) the consciousness of wonder that is foundational for understanding human religious practices. This fifth layer of consciousness is variously referred to with terms like “aware presence,” “awakenment,” “enlightenment,” “true nature,” “essence,” “holiness,” “the numinous,” “awe,” “the nonconceptual” or simply “wonder.”

Earlier primate species, such as Homo Erectus or the Neanderthals, may have been gifted with: (4) the symbol-using type of intelligence and (5) the consciousness of wonder. But whether the dawning of these last two layers of consciousness took place before our species, with the dawning of our species, or after our species had evolved, it is probable that we now live on a planet on which only humans manifest the 4 and 5 layers of consciousness.

In the following discussion, I will refer to these five layers of consciousness as: (1) cell-based consciousness, (2) image-using consciousness, (3) emotion-based consciousness, (4) symbol-using consciousness, and (5) wonder-based consciousness.

(1) Cell-based Consciousness

As suggested in earlier chapters, I am assuming that all cells including the cells of our own human bodies are characterized by an elementary level of consciousness. A rock does not pay attention to its environment nor take initiatives toward its environment. An amoeba takes in signals from its environment and initiates responses. We can watch that under a microscope. Similarly, each cell in our body takes in signals from its environment and initiates responses. Strict materialists have tended to assume that a living cell is machine/like, similar to a very complex human-made robot. Such materialists tend to claim that a cell is understandable with cause and effect relations, and therefore devoid of self-initiated behavior. Such a view does not look carefully enough at the enigma of life. A cell is a living being.

I do not believe that the cells of our bodies are conscious of being conscious. And I realize that I, though conscious of my consciousness, am unconscious (or only vaguely conscious) of the consciousness in my body's cells. My heart beats without any need for assistance from my self-conscious awareness. It may be true that my self-conscious stress may increase my heart beat. It may be true that my consciousness, intensely applied, can affect my heart beats to a limited degree. But basically, I am unconscious of the work of my heart cells and glad that they do their job without assistance from the conscious me. My limbs grow and repair without any input from my conscious awareness. Billions of life functions go on without my being conscious of them. Nevertheless, we can define these amazing cellular functions as conscious. We can define “consciousness” in a wide enough way to take in these cellular functions. In defining “consciousness” in this manner, we make clear that consciousness is aliveness, and that aliveness is consciousness. What distinguishes a tree from a rock is cellular consciousness. A tree is alive because a cosmic force field called “consciousness” is functioning in the tree. Being alive and being conscious are corresponding concepts. The implications of this perspective are vast.

(2) Image-using Consciousness

By image-using consciousness I mean a capacity for multi-sensory reruns that we humans call "memory." This layer of consciousness is present in all animal life. Snakes, lizards, dogs, cats and other animals appear to function with memory reruns. They learn from their experiences. I believe that the amazing intelligence of some of these animals is nothing less nor more than high levels of skill in associating and projecting the meanings of these vivid memory reruns. To do this, animal life uses what I am calling an image-using intelligence.

Here is an illustration of how this image-using intelligence works. A dog, genetically driven to be curious, chases down a porcupine and painfully injures his nose on one of its quills. This multi-sensory experience is recorded in the dog's brain and reruns as a memory when another porcupine is encountered. Image-using intelligence uses this and other such memory reruns to create projections of possible future outcomes that inform the dog to construct a next response to porcupines that is less painful than the last one. This process does not require what humans call "thinking;" it only requires a form of image-using consciousness that need not be conscious of being conscious. This image-using process is a type of consciousness, however. Evaluations are made, projections are made, decisions are made. Image-using consciousness is not a billiard-ball bouncing process nor a probabilistic process. Image-using consciousness is creative, experimental, trial and error learning.

This mental process of using images (multi-sensory reruns of past experiences) is also an important process within human functioning. Because we, like all animals, are equipped with this image-using consciousness, we can identify with our dogs, cats, horses, frogs, snakes, and other animals. A key issue for defining "image-using based consciousness" is distinguishing it from "symbol-using based consciousness." Our dog or cat does not use words, numbers, or other mathematical and linguistic symbols. We humans do. Our languages, our arts, our mathematics allow us to build grand cultural memory banks that greatly improve our capacity to survive, to know ourselves, to know our world, and to create alternations in the course of events. This capacity for symbol-using is a significantly different capacity than the capacity of using images or multi-sensory reruns. Nevertheless, we humans are also dependent upon our image-using consciousness, just as we are also dependent upon our cell-based consciousness.

For example, imagine yourself swinging a bat at a pitched baseball. Your eyes pick up a flow of images of that arriving baseball. That flow of images become a flow of memories or reruns that your consciousness observes. Your consciousness uses those memories to predict where that ball is going to go next and how it will be curving or not curving as it passes you. At some point in your awareness about that ball you begin swinging the bat in the hope of meeting that ball where you "anticipate" it is going. All this is accomplished with images. You don't need your linguistic thinking process to bat this ball. You may use such thinking ahead of time to calculate what to expect from this pitcher. But in the act of batting itself, as Yogi Berra once remarked, "You don't think; you just bat." Image-using intelligence is operating in a vast portion of our lives. We would not be able to function as we do without this type of consciousness. We could not walk up a flight of stairs without image-using based consciousness. Without it, a dog would not be able to catch a Frisbee in midair. Without it, a cat would not be able to remember where its cat bowl was located. We would not be effective animals without these mental images that rerun in our "minds." The specific sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches we have keenly noticed in the past are recorded in our brains or nervous systems and these recordings of past multi-sensory experiences automatically associate with our currently happening experiences. This is only a rough sketch of this powerful mode of conscious intelligence.

(3) Emotion-based Consciousness

In mammalian life, sensory inputs have been augmented with the input of highly sensitive emotional feelings. Emotional feelings are a mode of sensitivity that allows for deep bondings and charged responses not yet fully developed in a snake or frog. Emotions require a new layer of brain very minimally developed in reptiles. This mid-brain is highly developed in mammals. Emotions provide us with hot interpretations of the sensory inputs as those inputs pertain to our individual survival, comfort, drives, projects, communal relations, and more. This emotional repertoire of mammalian consciousness is another essential component of human functioning. Without it we would be severely handicapped. Since all mammals appear to have emotions, it is obvious that emotional life can function without the presence of our uniquely human symbol-using consciousness. Emotional life is pre-human. It uses images not symbols. Emotional life becomes further enriched and more complex as symbol-using consciousness evolves. But emotions are part of all mammalian life. Your dog has complex emotional feelings. Your cat discharges anger by scratching on the rug. Your pet snake has the drive for survival, pleasure seeking, pain avoidance, sensual sensitivities, and sexual passions, but its emotional life is paltry compared to a member of a mammalian species. A snake's capacities for bonding with you or with its own young are minimal.

Emotion-using intelligence is one of the developments that distinguishes the mammals from the reptiles and birds. In mammalian life, these complex emotional inputs to consciousness are added to the sensory inputs and the image-making capacities. The remembering and anticipating process in mammals is enriched by the memory and anticipation of emotions. Mammals remember emotionally, anticipate emotionally, and choose their responses emotionally. Like humans, they apparently feel affection, loneliness, sadness, joy, fear, anger, and many other feelings. Again, let us note that this highly developed emotional form of consciousness exists in mammalian (and earlier) life forms that have not yet made the leap in consciousness that was taken by the human species – a leap that I am calling “symbol-using consciousness.”

(4) Symbol-using Consciousness

Symbols are not the same as images. Symbols are not multi-sensory-reruns, not vivid memory recordings. “Symbols” is my term for mental entities that form complex generalizations from the more practical, vivid, and perhaps emotional charged image-formed memory reruns. For example, the symbol “four” applies to four cats, four dogs, four tables, four days, four years, four miles, etc. The mental entity “four” is not a sensory image, but an abstracted quality found in many images. Symbols can associate a large number of images into what we human treasure as abstract thought. Image-using alone, without any use of symbols, creates a high level of intelligence in many animals. A cat or dog does not require symbols to live its life. It is my belief that even when we humans have taught a very smart dog, horse, or chimpanzee to count, these animals still do this trick using their image-using consciousness. A human child of two years old, if raised in a human society, is skilled with symbols in a way that no other species can remotely match. As adults we use words, numbers, art constructions, and other abstractions with a facility that is truly amazing. With ease we compose large generalizations about life and ever more elaborate designs for living. Intelligent animals do something different. Their communication with one another does not use language and art, but “signs.” A bow, a bark, a growl, a posture, and many other sometimes subtle acts are signs that indicate something to other members of their

species or even other species. Humans can communicate with other species using visible movements and oral sounds that operate as signs that communicate with the image-using intelligence of these companions. Humans communicate with one another in the image-using manner as well as with language, mathematics, and art. But words, language, music, painting, dancing, rituals, and so on indicate a whole new order of communication, self-expression, and self-understanding.

Indeed, we humans often overuse our symbol-using consciousness. We get lost in it. We find ourselves living in delusory worlds of our own creation rather than using our symbol-using consciousness to live more consciously and usefully in the real world. This mode of consciousness is our gift and our nemesis. Because of this endowment we are the most powerful and creative species, but we are also the most destructive and dangerous species on the planet. Our potential to be a powerful form of destructiveness is rooted in this symbol-using consciousness.

Symbols are used by humans in the type of mental process we customarily point to with the term "thinking." Thinking uses both the symbol-using and image-using processes. When our thinking is only symbol-using without being rooted in our imaginal reruns of actual experiences, our thinking has become excessively abstract and potentially delusional. Abstraction is not a problem in itself. It is a great gift enabling the kinds of thinking human can do. Our very best thinking, however, remains conscious of its abstractness and remains attentive to the "grounding" of our symbols in our imaginal reruns. When we work puzzles or do word and number games, we are consciously playing with our symbol-using capacity. Being aware of our capacity for abstraction is also an awareness of our capacity to return to the concretely imaged encounters and responses of our practical living. Mathematics is the most abstract of all our abstract thinking. We might define mathematics as the abstract exploration of the human mind's capacities for abstraction. Mathematics is so abstract that the mathematician is often the most aware of how abstract all thinking actually is. It is not an accident that many mathematicians are also musicians or poets. In the arts abstract symbols are used to evoke rich fabrics of our sensory images and emotional images that connect us with our total living. Though mathematics is abstract, our use of it need not be delusional, if we are aware that we are dealing with abstractions. We become delusional when we assume that our mathematics has a reality other than the capacities of the human mind for abstraction. The actual cosmos is not mathematical; it is mysterious to our mathematics-ordered mind. The relevance of mathematical order in our understanding of the cosmos derives from the fact that our mind's capacity for order evolved within this cosmos. But mathematics, like all forms of human logic and thought, are human-made and thus finite, limited, capable of being improved, and potentially delusional if we misapply these patterns of order to our experienced reality. So what is delusional is not abstractness itself, but our confusion of our abstract constructions with the processes that are the real world. This confusion can be called "misplaced concretion," seeing the abstract as the concrete.

It is also important to note that symbol-using consciousness includes more than language or mathematics. A painting is a symbol-using creation; it creates a virtual spatial experience that can call our attention to or give meaning to our actual experiences in space. Similarly a piece of music is a highly abstract symbolization of the flow of emotional feelings. Music helps us become conscious of our consciousness of the emotional flow of our lives. It may seem paradoxical that music is both a very high abstraction and an evoking of deeply concrete emotionally charged experiences. All the arts are symbolic products that evoke imaginal memories and anticipations.

Important for the central aim of this book is the insight that symbol-using consciousness produced the symbols that constitute what we call "religion." Religious symbols are constructed by taking linguistic symbols and artistic symbols and

stretching them into tools of expression for those aspects of human consciousness that can reach into the essential mysteriousness of our experience. Human consciousness has the capacity to reach beyond both images and symbols, beyond emotional and sensory inputs, into the enigma of consciousness itself and into an awareness of the overall, impenetrable Mystery out of which our consciousness comes and to which it returns.

Religion is our temporal, finite, down-to-Earth human attempts to access and express to one another what I will call our wonder-based consciousness. When religious communicators speak of the overarching wholeness of Reality with a capital "R," they are actually speaking of our wonder-filled experiences of actualities that are entirely mysterious to the human mind.

(5) Wonder-based Consciousness

The functioning of image-using and symbols-using consciousness are frequently lumped together under the abstraction "mind." Some psychologists call the image-using conscious the reactive mind. Imaginal reruns of previous experience are reactive in the sense that they require no conscious intentionality for them to function. For example, the sight of something dangerous puts our body in motion before we have time to think with language. This is useful for our survival. Thinking is too slow to be useful in many circumstances. Our immediate experience calls upon our reruns of old experiences and our cellular endowments to initiate movement quickly. This is intelligent activity, but it happens quicker than thought. Thought requires a pause in this reactivity. Thought requires "time to think." Only after such responses are already in motion do self-conscious choices begin to take place. At some point we pause to think and make choices. Our symbol-using mind is used to guide these more time-consuming choices. Psychologists often call this "the reflective mind." Image-using and symbol-using intelligence constantly interact in complex patterns we typically call "thinking."

When "thinking" and "mind" are so defined, we view a very powerful tool; nevertheless, mental functioning is not the deepest layer of consciousness. We have to look deeper to see the true essence of consciousness that undergirds all the other layers of consciousness described above. For example, when we meditate for sustained periods of time, we begin to notice that our conscious being is able to watch the mind function without engaging in its busy patterns. The experience of being the "watcher" points to a truth about human consciousness. We can notice that consciousness precedes reason – is more basic to our existence than thinking. We exist as a conscious being in a way that is deeper than and prior to thinking.

Competent contemplative inquiry can also assist us to be aware of an inability to put into words this experience of being conscious of consciousness. Consciousness has a transrational quality. To speak of this quality we have to twist words into poetry, myth, analogy, paradoxes, parables, koans, and other such constructions that allow us to communicate to one another our consciousness of a consciousness that is beyond words – indeed beyond art, beyond mind, beyond rational understanding. Such communication can only be communicated with persons who likewise possess this transrational awareness. Here are three poems that can assist us to notice our personal experience of this transrational quality of our own being.

Alert

I am an alert deer.
Dread gets my attention
and I can move quickly
in many directions.

I am a surprise
and hard to predict.
A fear of real enemies
is the alertness of a deer,
While my alertness is
dread of a mysteriousness
no deer can know.
And I am unpredictable
in a manner
no deer can match.
Dread of the Unfathomable
is my essence.
Surprise
is my being.

Ode To Wittgenstein

Words cannot say how words say anything
Words can only point to REALITY beyond words.
"Reality" is itself a word,
a word which points to what is not a word.

And yet, since the word "reality" is itself
part of REALITY,
there has to be a relationship between
"reality" the word
and REALITY which is not a word.

"Can this relationship," the philosopher asks,
"be expressed in words."
"NO!" is the answer.

In other words, REALITY is a MYSTERY
not reducible to words,
And the relationship between words and MYSTERY
is itself a mystery beyond words.

The logic of words is not, no, never,
the "LOGIC"
of MYSTERIOUS REALITY.
"Logic," when applied to REALITY,
is a metaphor
stolen from the experience of
human languages and mathematics.

The world of rational understanding
is a world of made not a world of born.
Trees, squirrels, birds, rainfall, grass,
are a world of born gleaming there
quite beyond our mind-made world of words.

So thinkers, let us think
about these matters that humble all thinkers,
that render us mere children at play,
children who play with words
who play with REALITY

who play with the relationship between
words and REALITY.

I asked REALITY, this morning,
if what I am saying in words is correct,
and SHE said, "It is very close."

What is the Purpose?

"The purpose of life,"
some theologian said,
"is to trust the Mystery
and to enjoy Mystery forever."

Some sage in the East put it this way,
"Those who say what the purpose of life is don't know,
And those who know what the purpose of life is don't say."

The Infinite seems to be silent on the subject.

So I say, "The purpose of life is to ask
what the purpose of life is continually,
but to never know or expect to know –
indeed to know
that the purpose of life is
not to know
what the purpose of life is.

So let us choose in freedom
some finite purpose for our lives,
knowing that we have chosen it
and that we can choose again
when its limitations appear.

Through the aid of such poetry (and other means) we can notice the limitations of our image-using and symbol-using minds. And when we do, we are ready to grasp with our consciousness, if not our minds, how and why religion is part of every human society and how healthy religion is a means of aiding consciousness to journey into the depths of consciousness. Like any social process, religion can be unhealthy; it can provide substitutions for the authentic journey into our real depths. And even the most healthy religion has been created by humans not by gods or goddesses or God. Indeed, "God," "gods," and "goddesses" are all symbols created by human beings to indicate our experience of transrational Reality. For example, the word "God," as it appears in the Bible, is not an idea that makes sense of anything. The word "God," as used in the Bible, is a word that points to the FINAL NONSENSE, the FINAL MYSTERY, the FINAL UNKNOWABLE. Paradoxical as it sounds to our rational minds, we can "know" the UNKNOWABLE directly through contemplative inquiry. This sort of knowing is transrational. And, transrational knowing is the deepest kind of knowing; it defines what knowing is. We know Reality with our consciousness. Our mind is just a tool with which we reflect upon what our consciousness already knows. This reflection can make conscious knowing more useful and even expand what our consciousness knows. And certainly our reflective mind is enormously useful in communicating our consciousness to other conscious beings. But the mind as mind knows nothing. Mental knowing is an illusion. "Knowing" as well as "being" and "doing" are categories that describe consciousness, and consciousness in its essence is transrational. The rational is a tool of transrational consciousness.

So when consciousness becomes conscious of its essential nature, it is revealed to be a Wonder-based reality. Consciousness can have a direct experience (a knowing) of the UNKNOWABLE. Our rational mind can come to such an experience with all its rational screens still operating, but consciousness, not mind, is having the experience. Mind, we might say, can only “sit by” in infinite bafflement. These statements are not just arbitrary opinions of some weird, anti-intellectual philosopher; they are poetry for an experience that we conscious beings can experience every day as we view deeply the passing flow of our lives. Life is a Mystery, and our consciousness can know that, even while our thinking mind has no comprehension whatsoever of this Mysteriousness.

In addition to pointing to the absolute Mysteriousness, the biblical use of the word “God” includes meanings like commitment, choice, loyalty, and trust. In other words, the word “God” is a relational term like “sweetheart.” In the Bible the word “God” means that to which we are ultimately loyal. So to name the FINAL NONSENSE “God,” means that we are committed to living realistically within our awareness of this FINAL MYSTERIOUSNESS. This awareness is also the awareness of our profound ignorance. Our thinking minds are wondrous, but more wondrous still is the limitation of our minds and the capacity of our transrational consciousness to be aware of the overarching MYSTERIOUS REALITY within which we and our minds are one tiny part.

Sometimes research physicists and biologists and other empirical scientists become contemplative and thereby honestly tell about the experience of living on the edge of empirical scientific research. Here is a commonly heard admission, “The more we know about the natural world the more we know we don’t know.” Every new bit of order we discover in nature brings up new questions, new mysteries, new unknowns that we may or may not one day know more about. In post-relativity, post-quantum-mechanics physics, physicists have learned that physical nature is, in the final analysis, unpicturable by the human mind. I have already used the illustration of how the natural actuality we call “light” requires two contradictory pictures to cover all we know about light. Having one mental picture that holds the nature of light may never be found. Nor do we have one picture that fully comprehends an electron or an atom. Surprisingly, we need contradictory pictures to hold what we experience about the basic building blocks of the physical cosmos. Contemporary biology likewise confronts the boundaries of human mental capacity. It remains enigmatic what life is or how life began or how it is related to the pre-life functioning in which it is embedded. All our disciplines of empirical learning silently witness to the FINAL NONSENSE, the FINAL MYSTERY, the FINAL UNKNOWABILITY of the overall “Reality.” The scientific disciplines are customarily silent about such matters, but being human beings, scientists know or can know that their science is an exploration into Mystery. Our conscious knowing of this same Unfathomable Mystery is also the root experience that has made religion a recurrence in every human culture.

Persistent contemplative inquirers in the artistic and religious fields of expression continually witness to the unknowability of Reality. One of the most important mystical writings of Western history is named *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Again and again the Bible indicates that its use of the word “God” points to a Final Reality that is Mysterious beyond human understanding. Here are a few lines from Psalm 139:

How deep I find thy thoughts, O God,
how inexhaustible their themes.
Can I count them? They outnumber of the grains of sand.
To finish the count, my years must equal thine.

In other words, God’s thoughts (Final Reality’s Intelligent Designs) are incomprehensible to the human mind. The Infinite Reality is experienced by the finite mind as Unfathomable Mystery. What we call “natural law” is actually human

creations of order that seem for the time being to fit our experience of the natural world.

When we human beings (as writers of religious works, or as theologians, rabbis, pastors, mullahs, gurus, shaman, witches, or seers) dare to speak about the thoughts of God, we are speaking in metaphors. We are using the experiences in our finite human minds as metaphors for pointing beyond thinking to the enigmatic processes of Final Mysterious Reality. No human has actually thought Reality's thoughts. When we speak of God's thoughts we are composing a type of poem. We are saying that if Final Reality had thoughts, this is the sort of thinking that Final Reality would be thinking. This is fiction – like Homer or Shakespeare or Little Red Ridding Hood. But this can be serious fiction, seeking to express through the limitations of words and fiction an experience of THAT which is infinitely beyond words.

If we picture THAT Reality as love for us from a Personal Father or Mother, we are poeticizing our trust in this Final Mysteriousness. We are not describing Final Reality. Some religions do not emphasize personalized symbols for Final Reality. Instead they use more impersonal metaphors like "Tao" (The WAY it is) or "Dharma," (the Wisdom). Without recourse to a personalized metaphor, these religions evolve practices that have to do with being devoted to the same Final Reality that is indicated by religions that prefer the intimate metaphors of Father to son, Mother to daughter, or I to Thou.

A fully "realistic" philosophy of religion needs to begin with some basic axioms: (1) Consciousness itself is transrational. (2) Consciousness of consciousness is transrational. (3) Overall Reality is transrational. Any religion that loses touch with the transrational quality of human consciousness is a perversion of the basic function of religion. Good religion is that religion that is capable of connecting human society to THAT which is beyond all cultural canopies of understanding created by humans.

Good religion is founded upon trust in that Overall Mystery that never makes sense. Nevertheless, the sense-making function of our human minds can be affirmed as good (as gloriously human) by the same religions that witness to and trust the Overall Mystery that never makes sense. Sense-making is a function of our symbol-using form of consciousness. In order to live within our transrational consciousness, we do not need to negate the task of sense making. We simply need to be aware that our sense making is finite, temporal, provisional, ongoing, never ending. Our sense of things is never permanent. The FINAL NONSENSE is permanent, and will continually undo whatever sense we have made or will make for the living of our lives. A viable human culture is one that is, to a large extent, supported by Reality, yet in the end Reality undermines all of our cultural, political, and economic creations and challenges us to create better ones.

Once we have noticed this limitation of our thinking minds, we can notice ourselves noticing a much deeper noticing within our beings. We can call it "consciousness." We can notice that consciousness is essentially Wonder based. And as the wondrous 'I' that we each are, we can notice ourselves noticing these basic realms of noticing: (1) our inward body's sensations, (2) the environmental inputs to us through our senses – through sights, sounds, taste, smell, touch – and how these inputs are imaged in multisensory reruns, (3) our emotional responses, (4) the thinking of our symbol-using minds, and (5) the noticing of ourselves as noticers filled with Wonder.

When this fifth layer of wonder-based consciousness is full blown, we can call it "enlightenment." It can also be called "presence," for this awareness exists only in the Present in which we are Now living. We can also call ourselves "saved," "delivered," "healed" from the despair of fighting Reality, or insisting that our self-made sense of things should be substituted for the enigmatic glory of WHAT IS.

Visualizing the Whole Spectrum of Human Consciousness

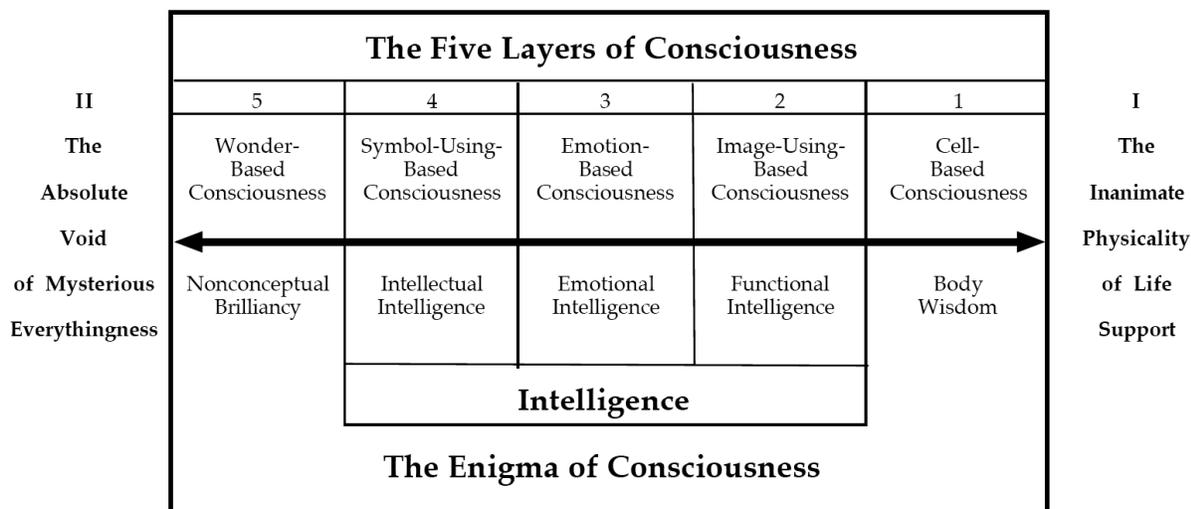
So far in this chapter I have expanded my description of “consciousness” by describing five layers of consciousness. These five layers have developed through the evolution of life on this planet. And all five layers exist and function within the current life of each human being. I have named them: (1) cell-based consciousness, (2) image-using consciousness, (3) emotion-based consciousness, (4) symbol-using consciousness, and (5) wonder-based consciousness.

Instead of picturing these elements as five layers of evolution, we can picture them five aspects of being humanly conscious – five segments on one line that stretches between two limits: Limit I – The Inanimate Physicality of Life Supports, and Limit II – The Absolute Void of Mysterious Every-thing-ness.

This line of consciousness is pictured on the following chart. Human consciousness is depicted as a line limited by the above two limiting factors. Consciousness arises out of the mud of the physical world and gains in intensity until it meets an internally experienced limit, a sort of “stone wall,” a “can’t-go-farther” in being conscious. Beyond this point consciousness does not exist. We can be conscious of this Absolute Void of Mysterious Every-thing-ness, but the Void itself devours consciousness just as it devours everything else. In becoming aware of this Void, we also meet the boiling Source of all things, including consciousness. We also meet the tomb of all things, including consciousness. This Void is the Every-thing-ness in which all things cohere. This Absolute Void of Mysterious Every-thing-ness starts us, sustains us, and ends us as the conscious beings that we are.

Our awareness of this Void tells us something about the enigma of consciousness. First of all, such awareness tells us that our fifth layer of consciousness is in close conversation with this Void. As a wonder-based consciousness we are or can be conscious of the presence of the Void, but we cannot consciously enter the Void. We have reached a limit that dramatizes a truth about consciousness: consciousness, like gravity, is a finite field of force within the terrain of temporal nature.

I have already described the five layers of consciousness that appear above the heavy line in the following chart. Beneath the line are companion categories that I will describe next.



Body Wisdom

I will use the term “body wisdom” to exemplify how humans can experience the cellular-based aspect of their human consciousness. A common example of body

wisdom is experienced by many athletes. It is often called “being in the zone.” This happens in many sports, but basketball is perhaps the example most easy to understand. Sometimes a player finds himself or herself in a *zone* where it seems that shots just don’t miss. This is a state of consciousness that has nothing, or little, to do with the mind. It is as if the body knows what to do; the mind just follows along. When someone is in this zone, his alert fellow players give that player the ball. The defense attempts to do something that will “interrupt” this zone state. This is a deep truth about the game of basketball, one of the things that makes it the unpredictable game that it is.

A similar zone can be experienced in dancing, painting, composing music, even writing. The body knows what to do. Consciousness relaxes the mind into paying attention to this bodily knowing and goes along with it.

And there are more controversial examples of Body Wisdom. Many alternative health practitioners rely on something they call “muscle testing.” The practitioner asks yes-or-no questions of the arm muscles or finger muscles or feet muscles of the patient. “Is this herb what is needed by this body at this time?” “Is three times a day enough?” The muscles selected respond with strength or weakness as answers to the questioning. The theory here is that the body knows something that the conscious mind does not. So the conscious minds of the patient and the health practitioner devise ways of asking the muscles of the patient about what these cells of the body know. Many reject this entire practice as superstition. But for those who use it and trust it, it may be just another example of what I am pointing to with the term “Body Wisdom.” And there are other seemingly “spooky” phenomena that our ordinary, rational, scientific culture tends to find too odd to consider. Some of these may turn out to be examples of Body Wisdom. Much of what is customarily said about these areas is indeed superstitions. But maybe some of these so-called superstitions are simply Body Wisdom that our scientific and contemplative approaches to truth have not yet incorporated into our categories of common sense.

Intelligence

On the above chart I have labeled the layers of consciousness 2, 3, and 4 as forms of intelligence. I will next seek to clarify further our human experience of these three layers of consciousness and what I mean by “intelligence.”

In some of our conflicts with other persons, we can notice a conflict between intellectual intelligence and functional intelligence. Those who major in functional intelligence tend to call those who overemphasize intellectual intelligence nerds or egg heads. I am visualizing here the common view of a Texas oil-rig worker of a New York City scientist or poetry writer. Functionally oriented persons frequently view the more intellectual members of our species as lost in worlds of abstraction that lifts them above the needed competencies of ordinary life. On the other hand, those who major in intellectual intelligence tend to view those who overemphasize functional intelligence as dullards, commoners, slugs, or with other demeaning names. The truth is that both ends of this polarity are important, and there are individuals who balance this polarity pretty well. I think of the nobel-prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman. He was not only a competent mathematician and research physicist, but he was also a quite humorous, practical, approachable person who was a skilled musician on the bongo drums. But balance like this is not all that common. A young house repairman I know could care less about my intellectual pursuits, but he is a genius in creating fixes for anything that goes wrong on our property. At the other extreme I know people with several postgraduate degrees who are helpless with a hammer or with figuring out practical solutions for the simplest of household problems.

Emotional intelligence is another aspect of human consciousness that manifests in a stronger way in some persons than in others. While there are many women and men who have accessed deeply both their emotional intelligence and their intellectual intelligence, it is frequently the case that a friendship or mating happens between a man who has accessed his intellectual intelligence quite deeply but has accessed his emotional intelligence much less deeply than his woman friend or mate. The woman in this relationship may depend more fully on her emotional intelligence than on her intellectual intelligence. What happens in such a relationship? It may be that each deeply respects the other and uses the other to enrich what is less developed in his or her own self, thereby finding that that two of them form a more balanced access of intelligence than either do alone. But it may also happen that tensions develop between them. The woman may become irritated that this man who is so emotionally slow or so negligent in noticing when she is simply expressing her feelings. Rather than hear her feelings, the man may view her as putting forth a set of thoughts that cry out to be elaborated or contested. Similarly, the man may become irritated with the woman when she finds some of his finest insights overly abstract, irrelevant, and boring rather than personal enough for her liking. Variations on this little drama are quite familiar to many of us. The truth beneath these conflicts is that emotional intelligence and intellectual intelligence are both important aspects of human intelligence; they are both important gifts, rather than grounds for holding one another in contempt.

Our male-biased, hierarchical, over-intellectualized culture has typically ignored or demeaned emotional intelligence. Some subcultures have even been loath to admit that there is such a thing as emotional intelligence. The emotions have been dismissed as meaningless approaches to truth or exaggerated expressions of the trivial. The truth is that each of us would be severely handicapped without our emotional intelligence. For example, in chapter one of Antonio R. Damasio book *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* we find the amazing story of a man who lost portions of his brain that enable emotional intelligence. He could move and talk well, but in decision making he was greatly hampered, in ordinary practical ways almost helpless. As Damasio illustrates, our bias against emotional intelligence needs to be overcome if we are to enjoy a fully realistic appropriation of human life and consciousness. And we need to end the war between the intellectual and emotional aspects of human consciousness. We need a balanced and holistic appropriation of human intelligence in order to create a grasp of the truth that enriches us and provides us with the intelligence we need to handle the huge challenges we face.

Nonconceptual Brilliancy

In addition to the complexities and conflicts within human intelligence, we also need to access what is being called the "nonconceptual" aspect of consciousness. This aspect of consciousness has been strongly resisted and even denied by many specialists in intellectual consciousness. Indeed, for them to admit the importance of nonconceptual consciousness means they have to fully embrace the limitations of intellectual consciousness. The defenders of intellectual truth frequently oppose the very notion that human consciousness can be conscious of an aspect of consciousness that precedes all thinking and exceeds all thinking in realism. But this is precisely what is meant by the non-conceptual layer of consciousness that I have described as "wonder-based." The wonder-based layer of consciousness is beyond symbol-using, emotion using, and image-using consciousness. And it is beyond these important forms of intelligence, not in the sense of being more or less important, but in the sense of being the very essence of intelligence, a brilliancy that lights up every aspect of human intelligence. For a full development of this important point, I recommend a book by A. H. Almaas: *Brilliancy: The Essence of Intelligence*.

Nonconceptual consciousness is more easily accepted by many of the defenders of emotional consciousness, but this is not always the case. Nonconceptual consciousness is also an aspect of consciousness that precedes emotional feelings and exceeds emotional intelligence in realism. So defenders of emotional intelligence are also forced to face the limitations of their emotional clarities and understand that while emotions are extremely useful, they are also limited. Emotions are often useful as guides into the realms of wonder-based consciousness. Nevertheless, the brilliancy of wonder-based consciousness is trans-emotional as well as trans-conceptual. The trans-conceptual realm is beyond emotion in the sense that it reveals the limitations of emotional truth.

For example, our emotional feelings can simply be reactions based on our personality constructions, our self images, our systems of thought, and other clearly partial perceptions of reality. Fear can arise when we mistake a stick for a snake. Anger can happen in our bodies when we mistake a friend's helpfulness for an attack on our lives. This undependability of the emotions can be very complex. Whatever we *think* is real about the world or about ourselves affects what we feel. Nevertheless, the emotional capabilities of our bodies are doing their best to help us live our lives and in that sense emotions are quite trustworthy. Also, as we move beyond our conceptual and emotional realms of truth into our nonconceptual consciousness, our feelings become more dependable. Feelings attend each state of Wonder, and these feelings are useful for describing our awareness of Wonder. We might say that Wonder-based consciousness tends to cleanse the emotional aspects of our lives of their unrealism. More on this later.

In conclusion, the nonconceptual or Wonder-based aspects of human consciousness is a brilliancy that both transcends what we usually mean by intelligence and undergirds all forms of intelligence. In Chapters 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16, I will use my conceptual mind to chart and describe the domain of nonconceptual consciousness. The fact that a human being can do such a thing is one of the enigmas of consciousness that I will describe. It is indeed a paradox that we can use our minds to poetically describe what is beyond the concepts of our minds. Such poetry-type descriptions communicate to others only to the extent that these others find themselves also willing to be aware beyond the concepts of their minds.