

Who We Are:

Reflections on Human Self Being

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Abstract

In previous papers I have focused on the interpretive nature of conscious experience.¹ I have also discussed the strong parallels between my ideas here and the early work of Heidegger (Sein und Zeit). I wish now to turn to an interpretation of self-being based on these ideas. I again point out some parallels with Heidegger (the being of Dasein) and some newly noticed parallels with the neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio. My aim is to first develop a theory of consciousness. Consciousness is the process of realizing our reality. That is, the process of giving structure or interpretation to the data available to our organism. This is an expression of the same impetus toward complex structure that yields order in energy rich systems, and that leads to the development of living organisms. Within us, this impetus points towards a sense of meaning and value.

My second aim is to explore the significance of language for human self-being. I find that language builds on the pre-existing structure of interpretation but leads to richer more complex structures. It gives us a shared reality and makes us creatures of our culture and community. At the same time it discloses our interior subjectivity, and leads us to an awareness of our particularity. This dual affect leads to a dual pattern of development such as that suggested in the work of Robert Kegan.

Third I will try to show how this approach offers a starting point for an account of human values and ethics.

Introduction

In the 1999 Collegium meeting Paul Razor presented a critique of the way the human self is viewed in liberal religion². His focus was that our liberal tradition has inherited the enlightenment view of the human self as predominantly an individual subjective self and that a correction is needed showing the human self to be intersubjective, social, and language embedded. Razor noted that in much recent philosophy and theology it has been noted that this enlightenment view of the human self can be highly misleading. In three different lines of thought recent work has led to greater emphasis on the social and inter-subjective nature of the human self. The linguistic turn in modern philosophy, stemming from Wittgenstein and others, has claimed that our only access to the phenomena of consciousness is through language and that language is a social, not an individual construct. The phenomenological approach stemming from Heidegger and others has emphasized that our conscious understanding is a process of interpretation that is embedded in the categories and concepts given through our cultural heritage. The pragmatic intersubjective approach stemming from Dewey, Mead and others has emphasized that the human individual comes into existence, and needs to be understood, as a phenomena within a social intersubjective context. All three of these approaches have emphasized the role of language in the formation and function of the human self. Razor's constructive approach builds on these points, and on the work of Kaufman, Weiman, and Habermas. I feel that Razor's basic point, that our liberal religious tradition has a tendency to retain too strong a tie to the individualist interpretation of selfhood is well made. Many people within our religious community have recently expressed a concern that we need to develop a stronger focus on community. Another of Paul's key points is that we need to see ourselves as embedded in our social and cultural traditions if we are to be effective in our moral critique of those traditions.

In his response to Paul's paper, Ken Olliff emphasized the critical importance of addressing the issue of our understanding of the human self within the larger context of our understanding of the nature of reality, God, and creation. There is a strong tie between our understanding of ourselves as selves and our larger theological perspective. This has been one of the motivating concerns in my recent work.

Paul's paper was published in "The Journal of Liberal Religion" (on-line journal published by Meadville Lombard School of Theology), and Susan Pangerl wrote a response in the next issue of that journal. Pangerl had high praise for Razor's basic critique, but she questioned some of his points. She felt that he perhaps overemphasized the social and intersubjective aspect of the human self in relation to the individual. Pangerl suggested that we should look for a more balanced weighing of these two aspects of human being. She also questioned Razor's reliance on the assumptions of linguistic turn. She points out some of the studies of brain function that have noted the different types of mental functioning, some of which do not seem to focus on language. She went so far as to say, "To privilege the linguistic as sufficient to circumscribe the human self and the boundaries of religious experience is, I would suggest, to subtly keep the Enlightenment Man (that one of autonomous reason) that Razor set out to dethrone, heir

apparent."³

My own recent work in theology has focused on an attempt to reach an understanding of the human self that would aid in reaching a larger understanding of our world and the theological questions of our being in that world. I have become convinced that while the turn towards intersubjective issues and the recognition of the cultural embeddedness of our human being is correct, the reliance on language has gone too far too fast. I suspect that consciousness arose within the evolution of life before the arrival of humans and language. There are unique aspects of human being that do relate to the development of language, but it is important to consider the pre-linguistic form of consciousness within which these developments came about and the continuing non-linguistic aspects of conscious experience.

This paper is part of a work in progress. It is leading me toward a developmental notion of the self-conscious self like that proposed by Robert Kegan⁴. I also find it leading me toward a strong sense of connection between our human being in the world and a deeper sense of direction that connects with our feelings of meaning and value. This type of model may help us to achieve the balanced awareness of the 'I' and 'we' that Pangerl seeks. I hope that this paper can be a useful part of the dialogue on the nature of the self and the implications of this for theology.

Part I – Consciousness

When I examine various levels and occasions of ordinary experience I am led to the conclusion that we do not experience the world *as it is*, but rather we experience the world with a significant component of interpretation. If we perceived the world merely as sense data input we would understand it far less than we do. Interpretation is a necessary step if we are to go from sense data input to any reasonable understanding of our environment. However, interpretation brings with it the risk of error. In fact it is the rather ordinary occurrence of such error that led me to the original awareness that our experience includes a large measure of interpretation.⁵

Further observation and reflection leads me to believe that all animals that function by the use of sense organs allowing them to sense aspects of the world at a distance must, in a significant sense, depend on a similar process of interpretation.

This interpretation is neither cognitive nor linguistic. The world that we sense around us as we function in everyday activity, with or without conscious reflection, is already the interpreted world. I have tended to use the term *reality* to refer to our already interpreted world of experience. That allows me to use the term *world* to refer to whatever is out there about which, and in reference to which, our *reality* may turn out to include error.

What I am saying about an interpreted *reality* and an actual *world* is a form of *naturalism* though not what has been called *scientism* or *physicalism*. Physicalism would say that modern physics provides all the elements needed for explanation of our world. I would say that physics only provides part of what is needed and it provides that in a rather narrow format. There are elements of experience, consciousness, our sense of values, etc. that are not accounted for in physicalist terms. I would say that modern science, physics in particular, helps us to grasp an understanding of the world and shows us instances where everyday common sense understanding involves systematic errors or limitations due to our physiological and psychological make up. What the sciences have shown us makes it clearer that the *reality* of everyday experience does not equate to the *actual world*. However, physics presents us with one more *reality*, which is again a product of human interpretation. Physics is more consciously a product of interpretation than is everyday *reality*, and for a variety of historical and programmatic reasons (dating back to Descartes and the cultural circumstances of the enlightenment), physics leaves out much of everyday experience.

The interpretation that lies behind my awareness of trees and squirrels and puppy dogs and people and computer screens and keyboards takes place in a pre- or unconscious manner that lies outside the realm of cognitive process. These processes of interpretation take place within the structure of what our scientific interpretations call our human organisms. But they take place largely before our self-conscious selves come into play.

The basic interpretive process that leads us to see trees and clouds and squirrels and people is, I believe, substantially the same as the process that leads dogs to see those things⁶. That dogs, and other animals, do see those things seems obvious from the most ordinary behavior of such creatures. It would be hard to understand how we could train a

dog to fetch a ball if the dog didn't perceive the ball. Yet a scientific interpretation would tell us that the visual data requires some additional act of interpretation to go from 'round colored spot' to 'ball'. We also know, from reflection on our own experience, that what we see when we are engaged in training the dog, is the dog and the ball and the surrounding environment. We do not see funny shaped colored patches that we have to judge to be dogs and balls etc. The process that gives us an interpreted *reality* happens before we engage in conscious experience. As Martin Heidegger said, we are always already in a world, where by world he meant something like what I would call (though he probably wouldn't) our *reality*⁷.

I would like to suggest that consciousness is a development of that very process. When the process of interpreting a world rises to a sufficient stage of complexity and connection with other aspects of living we have consciousness. That would imply that any creature that interprets their world may be to some extent, conscious. I would say that most animals with sight or other forms of sensing at a distance are also, to some degree, conscious. In ordinary consciousness we are always aware of some sort of an enviroing world, we always are in some sort of feeling state in relation to that world and ourselves in the world, and we always have some sense, if only vague, of the immediate past and the possible continuations of the situation. From their usual behavior, the parallel structure of living organisms, and our understanding of evolution it seems reasonable to surmize that our dogs and cats, and most of the other animals we encounter have some level of such basic consciousness.⁸

Consciousness is not self-consciousness, however.

People who have looked at the question of self-consciousness seem to agree that most animals cannot be called self-conscious. They say that only a rather small group of the higher primates exhibit behavior that supports the hypothesis that these creatures have a sense of their selves anything like what we humans call self-consciousness.⁹ I am led to conclude that a sense of self arises after a sense of *reality* has developed. Human developmental theory suggests that the awareness of self is a developmental step in the normal process of infant maturation.¹⁰

Thus, in evolutionary terms, we find creatures with self-consciousness only after we previously have creatures that are conscious but not self-conscious. Also, in maturation terms, I believe that self-consciousness develops after there is already some significant degree of consciousness and awareness of an enviroing *reality*, accompanied by the basic feeling components of consciousness.

These ideas are based on my own attempts at philosophic reflection, influenced, of course, by my education in philosophical phenomenology.

Recently I was pleasantly surprised to find support for these ideas in some of my reading in the sciences, in particular in the work of Antonio Damasio¹¹. Damasio presents a theory of human consciousness derived from his work in neuroscience. Although he arrives at his hypothesis from a very different direction, his position is very similar to certain aspects what I have been describing here. There are also strong parallels between Damasio and Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)*. If we broaden our perspective to include essential features from both Damasio and Heidegger I think we get a richer and more plausible understanding.

Damasio starts with the idea of an organism as a self-maintaining system. The simplest organisms, such as single celled amoebas, react to various aspects of their environment by adjustments that tend to maintain their condition. As organisms become more complex we find specialized systems within them that support this process. In mammals there are rather complex systems that provide feedback to the central nervous system on the state of the body, and which support various adjustments needed to maintain body conditions within acceptable limits. In organisms that move and have options of reaction relative to their environment, we find systems that sense the environment and provide representations of that environment to the central nervous system. The organism now adjusts to its sensed environment as well as to its internal conditions.

Some of these adjustments show up as emotional states and background body states. Within the central nervous system there are a number of regions which, taken together provide a representation of the current state of the organism and which function in maintaining the organisms homeostasis. These regions react to various body motions, internal chemistry, and specific organ conditions. They provide what Damasio refers to as a 'proto-self', that is a pre-conscious representation within the nervous system of the state of the organism. This proto-self is closely coupled with the ability of the organism to experience emotional states.

This proto-self would seem to correlate to a feeling of self, not an objectification or knowing of self.

Damasio says that emotions are complicated chemical and neural responses that have some regulatory role to play. They contribute to the well being of the organism. That holds for what he calls 'background emotions' (tension, calm, malaise...) as well as for the traditionally identified primary emotions (fear, anger, joy...). According to Damasio, emotions (both background and foreground) are the feeling dimension of self and they are also necessary for normal rational thought processes and decision making.

There are a number of regions within the central nervous system that react to input from the primary sense organs and through the mediation of these organs, react to the external environment. Closely related to these are systems that react to various body motions and postures. Damasio then postulates what he calls core-consciousness as a representation or feeling of the self (organism) as affected by an object along with the awareness or feeling of that object. This core-consciousness resides in brain systems that relate and correlate the proto-self with object recognitions (interpretations).

Compare Damasio's notion of the relation of the proto-self and emotion and Heidegger's notion of *Befindlichkeit*, *affectedness*, or *mood* and the *Being* of *Dasein*. Heidegger says that we are always in some *mood* and that this is *Dasein's* readiness to be affected by the world. Damasio says that we are always in some body state that is felt as emotion, predominantly background emotion or mood, and that it is the connection between the feeling of self and the feeling of things in the world that constitutes consciousness.

In my terms, the reaction of the body to the external input is an interpretation that always comes to us with some qualitative feeling and always finds us in some feeling state or attitude. Consider what happens when we want to toss a ball to someone. We find

ourselves looking at the other person, feeling the weight of the ball, feeling something of our relation to the ball, the other person, and our intended action. We adjust the way we comport our body for the toss without any cognitive thought. We may not do it perfectly, but most of us can accomplish this task passably well. There is a feeling of reaction to the combined environment, body state and chosen goal. When I reflect on all that is involved I am surprised at how well my body can take in the situation and adjust its response in an appropriate way. There is no abstract knowing involved here. I could not tell you how I do it. Yet it is a fully conscious comportment of the organism. I can feel myself adjusting to the situation. I suspect that kind of adjustment is typical of the way we interpret our world and situation in the world, prior to the acquisition of language and all the added complications that brings.

For a less complex animal, such as a trout in a stream or a mouse in the field, reactions are probably focused around more basic goals of food, shelter, and sex. I suspect the reactions of these creatures to their environment have a lot in common with my reaction in tossing a ball. When the surrounding context is accepted, the reaction of the organism is one of sensing the situation and the condition of the organism itself, and developing a feeling for how the body might react in order to reach some goal, or avoid some threat.

In that sense it is never individual external objects that are sensed but always objects within some environmental context and in some relation to the organism. This again is similar to Heidegger's notion of things being recognized within 'regions of significance' as *ready-to-hand* and as related to some possible task or goal.

In Damasio's theory, extended consciousness arises when the organism has sufficient memory and processing capacity to put together a composite sense of core consciousness taken over an extended time period. It is extended consciousness that accounts for the bulk of what we would recognize as our sense of self. The extended consciousness may provide feedback that can alter the responses of the core consciousness. This provides a mechanism whereby aspects of an organism's response repertoire may be learned.

If an organism possessed only Damasio's 'core-consciousness', its reactions would be like complex instinctual responses. There would be more than a simple sense input triggering a response. Multiple sense inputs could be gathered into some form of recognition and related to the organism's sense of self-condition to lead to a response. However, each situation would be a thing apart.

With extended consciousness there would be an accumulation of memory of situations, and each new situation would be met with an awareness of prior patterns of response, situation outcomes, and feelings in relation to those situations. There would then be an enlarged sense of the possibilities of the new situation, and choices of response would be made within the context of this sense of possibilities.

Here again we have a parallel with Heidegger's notion of the *Being* of *Dasein*. Heidegger says that along with mood, one of the other major dimension of the being of the self (*Dasein*) is that of *understanding*, by which he means a pre-cognitive awareness of possibilities.

I suspect that many animals have some degree of extended consciousness as they relate to the world, and in relation to their potential for action in the world. This fits well with Damasio's notion of an extended consciousness. It also fits with an extrapolated version of Heidegger's analysis of human existence. It is, however, at variance with Heidegger's treatment of the human as unique.

In one sense we could say that the process of interpreting our reality simply goes one more step when we add an awareness of self. However, on further reflection, the awareness of self involves more than that. An awareness self is more than just a collection of memories and would seem to require more than a feeling dimension of self. Damasio's hypothesis requires the capacity for a collection of memories, but to have an sense of self with these requires a further step. There must be some sort of pattern or organization that brings these memories together with a sense of personal agency and self-feeling. The extended self can provide structures that tie together various experiences, behaviors, and feelings. This creates the sort of self-being which can then become the object of a focused sense of personal self or self-consciousness.

A pattern of experience and behavior is different from the sort of pattern that makes up a physical object. A sense of self involves a stance, or comportment toward the world, and a sense of one's role in the world. The composite of world and self is interpreted as involving certain kinds of appropriate reactions, experiences, and behavior. There is in that sort of interpretation, an element of value judgement. Certain kinds of behavior are appropriate or fitting but not all, and of course what is fitting depends upon the situation of the individual in the world.

Every act of interpretation involves some sense of value, as it involves a sense of what fits with a certain pattern. Fit in a geometric pattern has a different significance for us than does fit in relation to our pattern of behavior. A pattern of behavior, how we experience and react to our world, is at least in part, *who we are*.

My self-awareness is not like recognizing a rock or a chair. I am aware of myself as agent of possible action and as vulnerable to possible affect. My sense of self is primarily a sense of myself as a living entity, as active in and sensitive to a surrounding environment. Part of my general awareness of *reality* includes a sense of continuity over time. I am aware of my self as continuous over time and as having a history. Thus I develop a sense of how I generally behave and how I am affected, or at least, of how I behave and am affected in particular types of circumstances.

This is parallel to the way I develop a sense of various other living things that I encounter. When I see a squirrel or a dog or a sparrow I do not simply see the physical object that is that creature. I see them with an awareness of the way dogs and squirrels and sparrows commonly behave. That gives me a way to grasp what is likely to be happening in the immediate future, and thus allows me to make better choices about how I want to behave. If I see a large, possibly dangerous dog as I jog around the corner I keep an eye on that animal for possible signs of threatening behavior. I seldom worry about threatening behavior on the part of sparrows and squirrels. It isn't just size either. Tarantulas and coral snakes can make me very apprehensive, and they aren't very big. Huge oak trees are not threatening at all. It is a matter of seeing not just a creature but a creature with a particular range of plausible behavior and consequent affect on myself

and/or things around me.

That is all part of the way I sense, or interpret, my *reality*. I do not sense unrelated objects. I sense things that have various types of significance and expected patterns of behavior associated with them. It is almost misleading to say it that way. The awareness of significance is an immediate part of the general awareness of a situation. The basic awareness is part of our perception of *reality*. To put such awareness into the form of stated beliefs is an act that comes later and builds upon the already existing awareness.

We humans develop our awareness of the world within a social setting. We become aware of other persons around us and of their relation to us in a social sense, much as we become aware of physical objects and other living things. We have expectations of behavior and in the social situation we have various notions of our own place in social space. This too develops initially as a non-cognitive awareness. It becomes more complex with the development of language.

It is frequently assumed that a sense of self is uniquely human, but some of my experience would suggest otherwise. Some years ago, when I lived in another town, my evening jogging route took me on a loop in a nearby neighborhood. Frequently when I entered that loop I would encounter a big friendly dog, which would run with me around most of that loop. The dog would usually position itself just ahead of me and a little further out into the road. When a car approached from ahead of us the dog would move still further out into the road, forcing the oncoming driver to swing to the far side of the road, away from me. Whenever I heard any other neighborhood dog bark, my companion would shift position so that she was between that other dog and me. In general, that dog would not only accompany me, but also act as if she were protecting me. That dog seemed to have a sense of her own role in the world, and that role included 'running shotgun' for joggers. I don't know if she did that for all joggers, or if I perhaps remind her of someone in her home family. Her responsibility was limited geographically. She never tried to follow me outside of that area. On the rest of my jog I might be on my own, but in her territory I was under her protection (at least that is the feeling that I got from her behavior). That dog seemed to have a structured sense of self as regards role and responsibility. Whether the dog was self-aware is open to question, but there seemed to be an organized pattern of behavior present, the kind of thing we tend to recognize as selfhood. (It would seem plausible that the structure of interpretation/reaction would develop to at least some degree before it could become an object of attention and awareness.)

The sense of self that we humans generally have is much more complex than what I am describing here. I have not yet addressed those elements of human self-being that arise as a function of language and the affects which language brings with it on human community. There is, however, good reason to believe that some sense of self can arise before we reach these effects.¹²

The obverse side of significance or understanding is what I have called our *readiness-to-respond*.¹³ The things we recognize have significance for us and our ordinary situation in life is to be aware of some real situation toward which we relate with a particular *readiness-to-respond*. I see my coffee cup setting on the desk and I pick it up to take a sip of the warm coffee. The cup feels familiar to my touch and the taste of the

coffee is familiar also. If, when I put the cup back down on the desk it should sink into the desk a couple of inches I would no longer be ready to respond. Instead I would be in a state of mild panic. My world would suddenly not conform to what I had taken it to be. We are always already in a world, and we always have at least some sense of what sort of a world that is. Even when our surroundings are strange, there remain some general feelings about our world that give us a starting place for understanding.

As we develop expectations about ourselves we are involved in a curious situation. The sense of our world contributes to our *readiness-to-respond* which has to do with how we may act in response to whatever happens next. Our readiness to respond is one of the factors that influence our actions as agent in the world. Yet, when it is our self that is the object being attended to our plausible pattern of behavior is part of our sense of this self.

In the case of the outer world, how we take the world to be makes a difference to how we act relative to that world. Yet, the world itself is not different (so far as we can tell) by that fact. The world becomes different by how we act, but only appears different by how we take it to be. We learn how well we have interpreted the world by noting whether our expectations are realized. In the case of our self, how we take our self to be changes the object that we are trying to understand.

When we come to some new awareness of ourselves it really does make a difference in who (or how) we are. If someone points out something to me about my behavior, if, for example, my wife says 'you always try to get the last word', I will tend to become somewhat self-conscious about that. Exactly what will result is not easily predicted, but it is almost sure to make some difference. The processes that we have come to know as 'psycho-therapy or psycho-analysis' depend on the notion that by reaching certain types of awareness about our selves, we can also change our selves. These processes are far from perfect, but they do have some effect.

No matter how well we think that we understand our selves, we sometimes discover that there are still things we don't understand. That is, our own reactions and actions will sometimes surprise us, not conforming to what had been our own sense of what we are like. We will find ourselves, on reflection, struggling to understand where some particular feeling, or action, has come from. Thus, it is clear that the self we would understand is always more than what we already understand.

Just as with the dog who ran shotgun for joggers, there are patterns of reaction and behavior that precede our reflective self-awareness. We are an organized (at least somewhat organized) self before we are aware of being a self.

Interpretation, in general, seems to be a process whereby we strive to put together an organized or coherent picture of our world. We are not totally systematic about it, and we approach it frequently by parts, but in general we feel uncomfortable if, as a minimum, the parts we are attending to at any one time do not seem to go together. Coherence and going together are initially aesthetic rather than cognitive. It is our *reality* as we live in it and act in it that gets put together first, and that process is largely pre-conscious. We put together a felt sense of our world, where we take what is there in our being and our organic interaction with the world and make a *reality* out of it.

However, when I say that *'I put together my reality'*, that may implies conscious action such as the way I stir my coffee. The process I am trying to point to is more like the way that I digest my food. The conscious or self-conscious 'I' is not the 'I' who creates my reality. I find myself living in a reality which I theorize must be an interpretive product because it has certain characteristics. I assign the act of interpretation to this organism with which my conscious self is correlated, and which I recognize as being the creature who I am, but not in quite the same way as my self conscious self is who I am. In my raw pre-conscious awareness, I am this body or organism or whatever I would call this but that should not imply any materialist or biological assumptions¹⁴. In that raw pre-conscious awareness I am also agent of my actions and subject to all sorts of feelings and sensations.

We need to be most careful here about what we think we mean by the use of the pro-noun "I". In its most common use "I" refers to what I would call my self-conscious being. When looking for the roots of that self-conscious being we should be careful in the use of that term. There are obvious difficulties in the use of any terms that are associated with theories or perspectives, explicit or implicit, which we may want to call into question. That is probably why Heidegger chose a term like *Dasein* to talk about a new way of understanding human self-hood. But Heidegger may have assumed too much with the use of a singular noun.

Daniel Dennett, in his book, *CONSCIOUSNESS EXPLAINED*¹⁵, says that our brain-body system can be thought of as a collection of loosely connected systems. There are various muscle and nerve groups, which, when stimulated the right way will produce various results. In an internal evolutionary process, patterns of frequent connection are built up among these systems where the patterns produce useful or positive results. There is no original center of control or key to the whole thing, no original *self*. The self comes about, it does not start the process (I, but not Dennett, might say, we must grow a soul).

There are certain sub-systems that are pretty well established by our genetic patterns. People are born with fully functioning heart and lung systems. We do not have to learn how to breathe and circulate our blood. But we can, as both Hindu Yogi's and biofeedback experiments have shown, learn to exert some control over such functions as blood pressure and heart rate. We probably do not know the full range of possible connections, influence and control

In his book, *THE SELFISH GENE*, Dawkins introduces the idea of a *meme*:

a unit of cultural transmission, or ... imitation. ...

*Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. ...*¹⁶

Building on Dawkins' idea, Dennett goes on to claim that consciousness is a complex structure of *memes* operating within a virtual machine in the brain. The virtual machine in question is a process of self-narration. The story we tell ourselves about ourselves is

ourselves, to over simplify Dennett somewhat.

In other words, Dennett is saying that our conscious self grows up as a process of pulling together various strands or patterns of meaning that may arise from disparate parts of the whole organism. He is also saying that various parts come together prior to the larger whole.

I find some examples in experience that would support the idea that there are structures within our conscious being that precede ourselves as organized self-conscious wholes:

- There are many times when we are awake and aware, and yet we would be hard pressed to give an account of what was going on in our minds. Typical might be whenever we are engaged in an action which does not require active deliberation, such as when driving on a familiar unobstructed road. Our 'conscious self' seems quiescent. And yet we have the feeling of various things going on, even if not quite in full focus.
- At a time like those above we may find that a pattern of thought rises to conscious attention without relation to anything preceding it. It seems to do so, not with a specific beginning, but as if it were already in process.
- When we are listening to someone talk we may find that our attention is interrupted, even if only for the briefest time, with various other matters that well up from inside of us. Sometimes the other matters take over our attention for significant periods of time. Here again the 'other matters' come into awareness as if already in progress. It's like walking into a movie that has already begun.
- We consciously engage in multiple simultaneous activities. I may be driving my car, listening to the radio, and getting my sunglasses out of my pocket, all at the same time.

We may ask, who is it that becomes aware of our thoughts?

If we look for an object like other objects in our world I suspect that our use of the pronoun 'who' would be much like our use of the pronoun 'it' when we say 'it' is raining. There is no separate object that is the referent of the pronoun. In some ways I would agree with David Hume who said that when he attempted to locate his inner self all he was able to locate were particular patterns of thought. The problem is not that there is no self, it is more like the old saying about not seeing the forest for the trees. Introspection involves looking within one's self. We are not some curious kernel of mental stuff that we could find within our larger selves. We have a feeling of self, much in line with Damasio's notion of the *proto-self* that founds our emotion and mood states, and we have a perspective on the world, a rough sense of a center from which we encounter experience. There is still something of a mystery to the issue of what constitutes what we

experience as *awareness*, but nothing is gained by postulating an inner being that is supposed to be *aware* of the larger self.

Dennett says that there are many different 'engines' within the brain which vie for attention. Further, his theory would say that there are many different engines within the brain which are separately involved in our various activities. Dennett would claim that the different patterns of thought which come to our awareness are the activities of these different engines. The coming to attention has to do with the pattern of connections with the larger pattern of our mental activity.

In this aspect of his theory I think Dennett is at least partially on the right track. There is a structural quality of self-hood that seems to require development and which involves pulling multiple aspects into greater coherence. However, Dennett seems to further hold that 'consciousness' has no function that could not be reduced to a description wholly within the realm of present day physics as it applies to neurons and brain structures, and here I disagree. Physics offers nothing that will explain the experiential quality of consciousness, and nothing that seems satisfactory in dealing with the concept of choice. There is no reason to believe that the current status of physical theory is sufficient to explain all aspects of experience unless there are successful examples of such explanation. So far there are none in the areas of consciousness and choice. Given that modern physics (since Descartes) has been developed with intentional abstraction from anything having to do with conscious living processes, it would be surprising if this theory did offer a clear account of such things.

I would add my own speculation.

In the development of the human self, there is an underlying impetus to move towards organized structure. Dawkins notion of *memes* goes only part of the way. Those types of patterns are species of a larger genus. The patterns of function that I call on when I walk or talk are of a similar nature. The structure of organization whereby we see a world, not just a pattern of color and line, is still another species of active structure.

In a deeper sense, our human organism is such a pattern. Biological cells, mineral crystals, chemical molecules, and physical atoms are all similar active structures. Ilya Prigogine, in his work on non-equilibrium thermodynamics, argues that there is an inclination towards structure, pattern, and complexity in all of the physical stuff of our world¹⁷. A number of scientists¹⁸ have concluded that new characteristics emerge as various new levels of organization are formed. This throws the notion that all things can be explained by a reduction to the simplest elements into serious question and lends at least some support to a notion of increasing complex structure as a basic characteristic of this world.

When we look at structures of things, I am reminded of the structure of paintings and of pieces of music. In the world of art, it is the fact of structure along with complexity that grasps our attention. Both Whitehead and Dewey placed the category of aesthetic value at the top of the list of all values¹⁹. Taken in a very broad sense, aesthetic value is the preference for complex structure as contrasted to either chaos or uniformity.

If we look behind the process that Dennett is describing as the basis of human consciousness, I think we will find an impetus towards complex structure or aesthetic

value. Dennett argues that the human organism should be thought of as a system of systems. That would also apply to animal organisms in general. My earlier thoughts suggested that animals that move around in the process of gathering food, and otherwise leading their lives, probably go through some process of creating a *reality*, through interpretation of their organic interaction with their environment. Interpretation is one more kind of complex process taking place within complex organic systems.

It would seem clear that such animals have to make decisions about where to move and how to get there if they are to survive. We might think that the animals develop complex stimulus response behavior systems to respond to all of the various possible sense data that might influence such decisions. It seems reasonable to assume that they adopt some economical method of grouping the incoming data into relevant packages rather than developing separate neural pathways for each and every significant variation in such data. The numbers of such pathways would stagger the imagination without some sort of grouping functions. Recognizing²⁰ objects like plants and rocks and animals would seem to be a highly efficient grouping approach for the types of decisions required. It also matches how our own organism seems to perceive the world.

This line of thought suggests that during the course of evolution that led to our human organism, a pattern developed of organizing perception into something like what we experience as our everyday reality. In this process the structures that related to various separate sense organs were tied together to the degree required for generating this larger picture. So too were structures involved in various activity which went on in relation to the perceived world. Thus a pattern of connection developed that primarily involved our sense organs, our systems of locomotion and movement in general, and our decision making as regards gathering food, avoiding dangers and seeking shelter, etc. The evidence of yoga and biofeedback capabilities suggests that influence and control are more general than is necessarily supported by survival alone, however. Similarly, the aesthetic, philosophic, and religious elements of human culture surely reach far beyond what is explained merely by survival of the fittest. If we assume complex structure comes first, and that survival functions after the fact as a rejection filter, we have a more robust explanation for this overabundance of organization.²¹

My further assumption is that the process of bringing sense data together into an interpreted *reality* is what we come to call consciousness. Our consciousness is being conscious of a world. The world of our conscious *reality* is a world of plants and animals and rocks and mountains and lakes and ... stuff like that. That world is not given directly via the sense organs. There simply isn't enough data if we look at the input alone to give us our *reality*. That is the rock that Hume went aground on in trying to explain Human Understanding on the basis of sense data alone. Kant's notion of the organizing function of consciousness was of the right kind, but his approach was too formal and analytic.

My assumption would be that whether in organic evolution, individual maturation, or the gradual development of ideas and attitudes, the process is pragmatic. The impetus towards complex structure leads to organized wholes with various structural relations and qualities. In consciousness, this leads to the development of a *reality* that reflects aspects of the enviroing world. Experience tends to weed out those structures that don't parallel what happens. There must be sufficient correlation between interpreted

reality and the actual *world* for decisions on how to act to generate predictable and useful results.

Thus human consciousness arises within the human organism as a result of already established organic structure, and takes the form of an awareness of an organized *reality*. Self-consciousness arises later, within and as a part of that *reality*. In our coming to be as self-conscious beings we are always already in a world (*reality*) and we are already somewhat structured as selves (agents). We are also always a work in progress. Our very being is ourselves engaged in our self-development.

However, there is more to our human selves than the forms of consciousness discussed so far. We are language using creatures, and this has made a great difference.

Part Two:

The Effect of Language:

The use of language creates a major break between human and any current non-human species. The theory of human evolution would suggest that language developed over some stages along with other changes that now separate humans from other primates. The absence of an historical record or of any parallel examples makes it hard to identify the specific impact of language on consciousness and experience.

Language is basically the use of symbols, taking one thing in the world to stand for or represent something else. The taking of one thing for another is also the basis of much of human play behavior. Whether it was language or some sort of play that came first is not evident, but they seem to make use of the same type of comportment towards things. We do see what looks like play in some other animals which suggests that play came first.

We recognize structural patterns among systems of symbols, and we create associations between such symbols and objects, events, and circumstances that we recognize in our reality. The origins of such behavior are lost in our evolutionary past and there are no present non-human species that exhibit such behavior on their own. We can train individuals of many species to respond to verbal and other symbols, which shows that a limited ability for symbol use is widespread in animal life. The available data suggests that human language behavior developed within ancestors who were already social. If my hypotheses about interpretation and consciousness are close to the mark then language came on the scene with a well-developed interpretation of the world already in place.

There are at least two dimensions to the development of language. One is the evolution from earlier non-language using animals. The other is the development that takes place in each individual. We humans are born with a capacity, perhaps I should say a propensity, to develop language²². The individual acquires language under the influence of their social environment. They learn the language spoken around them. Yet this is obviously not the whole of how language develops else the original development would be without explanation.

Mead²³ makes a strong argument to the effect that humans do not learn the vocalization patterns of language by simply mimicking the speech heard around them. A strict process of mimicry would not lead to the behavior we actually find. Mead suggests that it is more plausible to believe that the process is one of selective reinforcement. If the infant possesses a repertoire of sounds that includes those that they hear around them, then those sounds heard in the environment become reinforced and the child develops a vocalization pattern that matches the local language pattern.

Mead's argument may be extended to the meaning of language. There is no way that an infant can know what is meant by spoken words purely from what they hear. The situation of an infant trying to learn by pure imitation would be like that of the

archeologists who first tried to understand the Egyptian hieroglyphics. They might find a pattern in the language, but no key to its interpretation.

If that infant was already engaged in the interpretation of their world a repertoire of ideas would exist. The surrounding language could selectively reinforce these ideas, and connections between intention and language would be formed. That would provide motivation to look for more such connections. The patterns within the language environment of the developing individual would present clues to the patterns they might look for in reality. Even ostensive definition, pointing at things to make the connection with words, does not solve the problem unless the infant is already putting together their world such that they recognize the things or activities pointed to as specific things or activities.

We do not learn the specific meaning of language from our earliest language environment. We hear how the language is used in various situations and we develop interpretations of how language and reality go together. We commonly make mistakes in the process. We then gradually refine these interpretations with repeated interactions and reinforcements. This can only work if we already are engaged in world interpretation.

I remember how my oldest daughter first started to use the word *truck*. In her earliest use she applied that word to anything that moved and had wheels. Her friends' tricycles were *trucks*. My automobile was a *truck*. The shopping cart in the supermarket was a *truck*. Gradually, with input from her parents and others, she narrowed down the way she applied that word.

We learn to recognize words in use and grasp to what things or circumstances in our reality they refer. Later we become able to use the terms with at least some success in communication, but with a few miss-uses also. Only late in the learning process are we able to offer a dictionary style definition. Such definitions are frequently not very good at discriminating between the meanings of various words (as an experiment, try looking up *dog* and *cat* in a standard dictionary, and try to figure out from those definitions alone, how the words would be distinguished in use). The foundation of meaning is not in the relation of words to other words, but in the relation of words to our reality.

My wife teaches reading at a local high school. Recently she was working with some students who were not native English speakers, and who were preparing for a critical exam required for their graduation. In this exam they would need to read a passage and answer questions about it. She gave them a sample passage that included some words they clearly did not know. To help them understand how to cope with cases like this, she took a section from the passage and replaced the unknown words with blanks. She then asked them, based on the context of the passage, to fill in the blanks with words that would be appropriate. The words they came up with were generally good synonyms for the unknown words that had been in the place of the blanks. The context of the passage had provided strong clues to the meanings involved.

The fact is, we all learn the meaning of new words that way, it is just that we do not usually focus attention on that process. We encounter new words within contexts that we largely understand, and we make educated guesses about those new words. If we see these new terms in enough different contexts we are liable to develop rather good guesses. However, the process assumes that we can develop new concepts based on our

grasp of a general reality.

It is interesting to think about the way that we understand a narrative account. When someone tells us about something that has happened we generally build a reality image of what they are saying. We get impressions from this process that go beyond what is directly said. We may then ask questions, trying to check out these impressions. If someone tells us they were out hunting when an animal jumped out from behind a row of trees, we may ask if they were startled or scared by this. The question arises because we are imagining a situation and we think that these feelings might have occurred. We also have an impression of the row of trees. We are likely to assume these trees were close together, that the animal could have been hidden behind them.

The example of how my wife got her students to guess the meaning of new words is significant here. When we listen or read we don't just take in the direct meaning content of what is there in words. We also put together an interpreted *reality* that corresponds to what the words tell us. That little slice of *reality* has *more* content than what we are explicitly told. Of course, the *more* is not necessarily accurate. The *more* that is there in our interpretation comes from our sense of the world and from our own tendencies, temperament, and imagination.

One of the sources of error in stories that are passed from one person to another lies in this *more* that we tend to add to the direct content. If we are careful, we can limit the scope of our extrapolations, or recognize what in addition we tended to fill out, but it is very easy to take some things that are only suggested as being an actual part of what we are told. This is especially so if we are emotionally involved in the story. It would take a lengthy process of dialogue to make sure that we had the story exactly as intended.

On the other hand, we all expect people to hear us with an enlarging interpretation. If we had to spell out every detail of what we are trying to communicate, conversations would be exhaustingly long. We do tend to spell out more in written work than in spoken dialogue. In direct dialogue there are usually opportunities to correct misinterpretations.

We sometimes invent words when we want to say something for which we don't have a good word or phrase. Where did terms like *cyber-space* or *nerd* come from? And people who have never heard those words before can frequently understand, because they can grasp from the context, what we were trying to say. The new words, like the blanks in my wife's teaching example, stand as pointers toward an intended reality. If the hearers guess wrong, the following bits of conversation will usually serve as correction.

Some writers make particular use of the way that we build up our own sense of the reality that stands behind any narrative. William Faulkner, in *Absalom Absalom*, wrote long passages tied to key ideas that are initially unexpressed. By the time he finally supplies the missing word or phrase the reader will have built up a degree of tension about what the final key is. One may have guessed, and be waiting for confirmation, or one may be struggling with a puzzle where the vital last piece is missing. This gives added emphasis to these key images.

When we learn words that way, we do not reproduce the identical meaning with which the word was first used. Our understanding brings with it our own grasp of the

world, our own reality. And that is one of the keys to the evolution of language. Every learning of language is an interpretation of both the language and the world, and it is always a new process. As Gadamer says, whenever we understand, we understand differently. However, we could never understand language without first engaging in the interpretation of our world. The understanding of language is mediated by the world and by our active interpretation of the world.

Shared Reality:

The process of learning language while developing one's interpretation of the world leads to a strong commonality of realities within any language using community. The reinforcement provided by others within the community strengthens the feeling that one's reality is the world. Along with this is the feeling that the reality we encounter in communication is just an extension of our experience. When we are comfortable with a language, we hear or read it as a transparent disclosure of an intended reality. We tend not to notice the language itself.

One of the new things that would happen with the advent of language is that one individual could describe to another something about the world that the first had experienced in the other's absence. One individual could come back from a hunting trip and describe how they had found and caught the game they were bringing back for dinner. Or the second individual could describe what had happened while the other was gone. Thus the individuals in a language using community would have access to a wider range of experience, to a wider reality, than any single individual could have.

When we listen to a narrative our world interpreting function gets involved. We do not react to language as a logic of propositions. We build an image of a slice of reality. Within a social community this leads to each individual having access to a reality that is far more extensive than the direct experience of any one individual. In our modern world this wider reality is vastly extended by means of our expanded means of communication. I get up in the morning and read a newspaper or listen to the news on the radio or TV, giving me information about a reality that extends all around this earth. Not long ago I remember reading accounts of an observation vehicle that had been sent into the atmosphere of the planet Mars. I have looked at pictures of distant galaxies taken by the orbiting Hubble telescope. I recently watched a TV program about a science project aimed at measuring the rate of expansion of our universe.

The combination of language and some sort of social community leads to a situation where each individual has at least indirect access to a vastly enlarged reality. This larger reality becomes the context within which the individual interprets specific objects and situations. It is also the world within which the individual finds their self to exist. Our sense of the reality around us is made up largely from our social contacts. Our communal reality is far larger than the reach of our own personal experience and it is structured in a manner that evolves within the culture. Since our *readiness-to-respond* and significant aspects of our self-being are founded on the character of our reality, we too are creatures of our culture.

The ability to describe events that the hearer was not present for leads to another

very important social development. It becomes possible for a social group to develop and pass on stories about the group past. The members of a social group can develop a group history and from this comes a deeper kind of group identity.

Damasio says that our extended consciousness and primary sense of self-awareness comes from placing primary consciousness within the context provided by an extended memory. The extended memory of communal history may be a major factor in the development of a strong sense of group identity. The individuals in such a community would not merely be in a different group from others, but would understand themselves as having an identity uniquely defined by their place within a communal history.

Here again individuals find themselves to exist in a larger reality, this time in a temporal dimension. Each individual has a sense of being part of a story that extends beyond their own life. Their personal identity is involved in a history that includes others who lived before them. The life of the community is vastly larger than that of any one person. The sense of a history that comes before also leads to the expectation of a future that will go on beyond.

The individual would have some capability to consider future events and possibilities without the use of language. When I am playing golf, and I watch as my shot goes off the fairway towards some trees, I have expectations about where the ball will come to rest. I begin to picture the possibilities that I may be faced with as I walk towards the area where I lost sight of the ball. When I find the ball I look at the position and the shot possibilities and start to envision possible ways of playing the shot. All of that takes place with little or no linguistic expression. It has to do with visualization and the feeling of possible bodily movement.

With the use of language I can describe those possibilities to another person. I can also hear the ideas of that individual. Perhaps they will suggest an alternative that I had not thought of. The various ideas expressed also become available as objects of thought and discussion. In dialogue, new ways of looking at the situation may emerge. The realm of future possibility becomes richer.

In a community setting, future planning would become a far more significant element of life with the development of language. This would come to include situations where one individual is involved in the planning of an activity by another, where the first individual will not be present for any of the planned action. This sort of thought opens up the sense of future possibilities to a realm that reaches well beyond the possible experience of any individual. The future of the community itself can become an object of thought, and the community as such is not inherently mortal. The possibility of an unlimited future then takes on a more realistic feeling.

The narrative stories of group history will tend to carry with them particular feeling tones. The various ideas about the group future will give a sense of the future as a particular range of possibilities. These factors again reflect Damasio's and Heidegger's notions of what defines the human self. This supports the thought that there may be a feeling of self that connects with the social group.

John Searle has written a most interesting work²⁴ describing the way that language facilitates the creation of social reality. There are features of human

communities that only come into existence through language, and through the way that individual communities evolve. Particular languages fall into this category, as do systems of government, economic structures (money, etc.), and a variety of aspects of our social world.

These various elements of social reality are unique (in their particular forms) to individual communities. (Searle does not address local uniqueness as an aspect of social reality) When individuals of differing communities encounter each other they can generally find strong commonalities in their understanding of the physical world, at least on an everyday level. The world provides a common reference. The elements of social reality, however, may be drastically different. It is through the creation of social reality that language facilitates the creation of major differences between differing social groups. This makes cultural differences between human communities much greater than between communities of non-language using species (*e.g.* chimpanzees).

These elements of social reality also enlarge and strengthen the sense of shared communal reality. Social reality is shared in a very special way. If the members of a social community did not share in the acceptance of a particular form of money, for example, then that form of money would not exist. Elements of social reality, such as money, depend for their very being on their shared acceptance.

Interiority:

In an isolated society the experience of an individual encounter no significant break between physical reality and social reality. The world of everyday experience would be the shared social world, largely without discontinuities. This would enhance the feeling that the interpreted reality was *the world*. When there is encounter between social groups with some difference of interpretations, and with unique features of social reality and language, the feeling of certainty in regard to the accepted social interpretations would be undermined.

One of the common reactions to this is likely to be anxiety. It is very unsettling to feel that there may be something amiss with one's sense of what is real. The *other* group, in such a case, may be attacked as being in some way *demonic*. There can be very strong conflicts between groups who generate this sort of anxiety in each other.

When there is enough exposure between differing groups, and when the feelings of anxiety can be reduced in one way or another, the members of the groups may come to recognize the plausibility of the views of the other group. When that happens, there is a loss of the feeling of seamless coherence between language and world, and between interpreted reality and world. People come to see a separation between their commonly accepted social reality and the world. They also become more aware of differences between individuals.

In a single culture social environment it would seem plausible that there would be no strong sense of boundary between individuals, any more than there would be a sense of boundary between the reality given by direct experience and that provided by social experience. In a more pluralistic society the individual might develop a stronger sense of

uniqueness and separation.

Prior to the use of language members of a social group would get feedback relative to each other's interpretation of the world through observation of behavior. If one person out of a group failed to see the snake near the path, they would probably realize there was something up when the other people stopped, or changed their way of moving. This would lead to some commonality of interpretation. Group members would probably form a common idea of what constituted food, and what constituted threat. There could be differences in detail of interpretation, but if these differences had no significant practical consequences they would not be recognized.

Language would lead to a more detailed level of comparison among people's interpretations of the world.

Language would open up the way to explanations and interpretations that were not limited to directly observable things. A social group may have learned that certain types of berries were good to eat, and that others would make them sick, but the individuals in the group might have very different ways of interpreting this difference. With the use of language it becomes possible to refer to a property of the fruit that would make it poisonous. Thus a new level of content of reality would become available for mutual comparison.

Without language, one person could indicate to others by their behavior that they wanted companionship, or that they wanted to be alone. But that sort of feeling could be displayed only in very limited ways. The use of language would allow more nuanced expressions of attitude and preference. Feeling states and moods could be named and talked about.

One of the consequences of the increased ability to compare realities and to express feelings and attitudes would be a discovery of differences between people.

In the most ordinary circumstances we take our reality to be the world, even though there is good reason to believe that our reality is an interpretation that sometimes errs. It is also normal to assume that everyone else is experiencing the world as we are. If I see a rabbit, I first assume that everyone can see the rabbit. It is only as a function of experience that I realize that sometimes that is not the case.

Even when we are aware of differences between one person's reality and another's we tend to assume that those differences are a matter of simple error like not noticing the rabbit. The use of language opens us up to differences that are not so simple. Sometimes it takes the other person a very long time to find the rabbit. Sometimes we discover that the rabbit was really an odd shaped tuft of grass and there never was a rabbit there. We discover that other people have feelings and attitudes that we might never expect if they did not tell us about them. Even more surprising, we discover that other people have no idea of how we are feeling until we try to tell them, and even then they may not get it quite right.

Language leads to the discovery of subjective interiority. We discover that there is an aspect of our own experience that is closed to other people except to the degree that we can communicate about it through language, and we discover that other people have a similar aspect of their own experience.

A simpler sense of self might be based on the notion of perspective. We become aware that the world looks different from different places, and to some degree we become aware of the fact that the world feels different for people in different social roles. As we become aware of a sense of interiority we recognize not just differences in the perspective one has on the field of experience, but segments of the potential field of experience that are available to one individual and not to another.²⁵

We can see this discovery of interiority in the maturation of young children. At a very early age they tend to think that others can know how they are feeling and what they are thinking before they start to talk. To a degree this is a problem from which we are never completely free. Our own reality always does seem as though it ought to be more accessible to others than it actually is (except for when we want to deceive). It seems harder to explain exactly what we mean than it ought to be. There is good reason to believe that the discovery of interiority was a major element in the development of human culture following the development of language.

Prior to this sort of discovery, there would be no clear boundary between subjective and objective in one's reality. Reality would simply be there as one's experience of the world. Other people would also be a part of reality, but with no sense of the special otherness of subjective interiority. The commonality of reality is enhanced within a society that has a singular culture. Pluralistic societies are more likely to lead to earlier and stronger senses of individuality and interiority.

The idea that there is some special development required to go from a recognition of a reality that includes other people, and a reality that includes one's self and others as having subjective interiority, is now an accepted part of personality development theory. It is commonly discussed under the term, 'object relations'. It has to do with developing a sense of the boundaries between one's self and the other people involved in one's life. However, it is not simply a matter of boundaries. We remain culturally and socially embedded regardless of some of these other developments.

Robert Kegan²⁶ presents a highly nuanced theory of the successive evolutions of personal reality involving the dual poles of individuality and communal connectedness. The infant starts out merely expressing reflexes and feelings as they occur. They gradually develop an ability to recognize objects in a world apart from their self. That is the sort of world that, I suspect, precedes language, and the sort of world that many animals may experience. In what Kegan refers to as the second stage of development the child becomes aware of their self as having a private aspect, and of others as having a separately private subjective aspect.

Kegan's approach fits well with the basic hypothesis that I am putting forward, that what we think of as the human self, the entity pointed to when we use the pronoun, 'I', is a product of evolutionary development. Kegan is focusing on the development within the life of an individual within a cultural environment. I am trying to look at the development of both the culture and the individual, and of the character of human nature within the broader pattern of living things.

It is probable that the theory that Kegan has developed is biased by virtue of its development within our modern western culture. The 'I' and the 'We' of our human self-consciousness have developed within this culture and to some degree as a function of the

social reality of this culture. When a human person starts to develop a sense of who they are, they are always doing so within a social structure. Peter Muhlhausler and Rom Harré have presented a detailed argument to the effect that the pattern of pronoun usage within a culture reflects and reinforces a particular cultural set of factors²⁷. Pronouns function in large part as indexicals, that is they point out who is who within a conversational matrix. The basic English pronouns, *I, you, and he/she/it* usually identify a speaker, one spoken to, and a subject spoken about (there are exceptions that are also of importance). In many languages there is a more complex pattern of pronouns that also carry information as to the social standing or rank of these various persons. The very fact that modern English doesn't distinguish in that manner is a factor in the kind of social structure that exists in our culture. A person learning any one of these languages is also taking in a social reality and their²⁸ own place within that social reality.

I would tend believe that the basic notion behind the theory which Kegan developed might hold over a rather wide range of cultural variations. That is the notion that there is a pattern of development that moves back and forth between emphasis on the individual and emphasis on the connections that situate that individual within their society and culture. I would expect there to be differences that are a function of culture, and I would expect different cultures to develop somewhat different balances between these factors. It would require extensive comparison to determine how well this expectation fits with the circumstances of our world.

The consequence of these viewpoints is that the treatment of human selfhood in most modern philosophy fails from the start by being either static, or unbounded. There is a definite pattern and character to our humanness, yet there is not so much a human nature here, as a human tendency for development. This tendency is founded in the nature of the biological human being and shows up in the processes of biological maturation and of culture development. Self-being in a particular instance reflects both biological and cultural factors. A full understanding of this tendency will enlarge our understanding of our own nature, and of the natural world.

If my hypothesis holds, our self-conscious being is an expression of an impetus that is inherent in the nature of our world. In the emergence of consciousness we have a new expression of this basic impetus. This expression has become still richer with the development of human language and language based culture. It is not the sort of thing that predetermines how we should turn out, not a blueprint. It is a foundation for value, a definition of direction and of justification. It points ahead of us as much as it helps to explain how we got here.

Part Three:

The Structure of Value

I look up as I am out for my midday jog and I see a tree up ahead. The visual data available at the moment defines only a single visual aspect of that tree, but what I am aware of is a spatially coherent tree. I sense it as an object with a full three dimensional presence and am confident that as I jog past I will see various aspects of that same tree. I also am confident that trees are the sort of things that will still be there the following day, and week, and year. If not, I would expect to see evidence that the tree had been removed. It is not the sort of thing that just vanishes. It will have some significant history through time.

A typical tree will go through a coherent pattern of changes with the passing seasons. This tree looks like an oak tree. I expect it to develop a rich green foliage as spring passes into summer, and I expect to see those leaves change color to shades of red and rich brown as the days grow shorter in the fall. Being a typical oak tree, those leaves will be slow to fall and some of them will still be hanging on until the new buds start to swell in the early spring. Most of the time I do not stop to think about all of this, but I bring these images to mind now out of a vague continuum of living expectation that is already there when I see this oak tree. That is just one part of how I normally sense my *reality*.

My self awareness is also something with temporal coherence. I like chocolate chip cookies, and I liked them yesterday and I expect I will still like them tomorrow and next year. Yet I do not like the ones that are made too sweet. I really like dark chocolate that is a little bitter. I do not usually think about that much. It is just one of those things that I know about myself (my self).

I also knew whether or not I took the last cookie from the cookie jar that day. I can remember what it was that I did. I remember that my mother asked me if I took the last cookie, and I felt uncomfortable about admitting it. I thought she would not be happy with me. I ended up feeling even more uncomfortable about saying that I didn't. I was incoherent with myself. I was in the process of discovering that there is a real ethical demand in this world. It isn't just the desire to please our parents, or to avoid punishment; it is our own internal need to be coherent (honest).

That doesn't mean that we always are coherent (honest). It simply means that whether or not we are coherent is always an issue with significance, significance for ourselves. It has to do with being a coherent self at all. And being coherent is part of being real.

Saying that I didn't take that last cookie came from a part of me that I didn't, at that moment, fully understand. I heard the question, felt something in my mother's tone and aspect that led me to feel that saying yes was not going to go well, and so I said no. Saying that was not only not believed, it made me feel uncomfortable, and that too came from somewhere not yet known inside of me. But it also made a difference in me. As soon as I felt that sense of internal diss-ease I was no longer quite the same. My own behavior and my awareness of that behavior were affecting who I was.

That probably wasn't the first time my mother told me I shouldn't lie, but it may

have been the first time I felt that way inside. And when we feel that sort of discomfort with whom we are, we are faced with choices about who we are going to be. That is the sort of feeling that gradually leads to the occasion when we tell someone that we were the one who broke that window, or whatever it was, even though there was no way they could have known. It also leads to those occasions when we don't tell anyone, and feel less good about ourselves because we don't.

One of the things that develop gradually with our sense of self is a desire to make the facts that we know about our self and the stories that we tell about our self go together.

That can be something of a double-edged sword. The facts that we know about ourselves are also a part of that reality that we interpret, and we sometimes interpret things in our own favor. But interpreting things in our own favor is just a part of what I'm talking about here. The very sense of 'our own favor' has to do with this desire to build a picture of our self that hangs together. And that picture includes the way we would like to be able to see ourselves.

That would seem to land me right in the middle of the post modern camp that says there isn't any actual truth or any real values, there are only individual truths and individual value judgments, and every opinion or interpretation is as good as any other, or as good as the cultural backing it can lean on. That is what Heidegger seemed to be saying when he concluded that the only measure of human life that was significant was that we be resolute in whatever value we take up. Unfortunately he took up with the national socialist in Germany in the 30's and spent most of the rest of his life trying to slide out from under the consequences of that choice.

I do agree with the break from the old view of the enlightenment that reason can bring us to agree on absolute truth and on an absolute scale of values. But I'm not in the same camp as those who would say that there is no truth and no reference for values except one's own opinion, or the general opinion of the culture.

So how is it that I think I can escape from that bad choice?

Well, let me go back to the cookies and who took the last one.

Our need for coherent self-interpretation involves more than how we would like to see ourselves and how we would like to be seen by others. It also involves the way we put together our background reality. And the way we put together our background reality gets us involved with something I call *the world*. And *the world* involves things like who actually took the last cookie.

Our sense of coherence needs to include our experience of the world. Now I have already said that what we experience is already interpreted as our *reality* so it is clear that we don't experience a world that is free of the influences of what we already believe, and want to believe. But we also do not experience simply what we believe or want to believe.

I may want to believe that I can fly, but the last time I jumped off of the garage roof (I think I was about ten) I hit the ground rather hard. It's hard to give that sort of experience an interpretation that fits well with the idea that I can fly.

The reason that some philosophers get hung up on the idea that we must choose between absolute truth or rampant relativism is that they are hung up on a misguided notion of what truth is. Most of us, even including philosophers when they are off duty, don't have any problem with the notion of truth. We ordinarily believe stuff when it checks out in our actual experience, and we also know that whatever we believe based on our experience is open to refinement or correction. We don't expect truth to be absolute; it is more a matter of degree.²⁹

At a philosophic level I might explain that this way.

Truth is something that we attribute to ideas and opinions. The tree out there in the yard isn't something that we think of as being true or not. The fact that I think there is a tree out there is the sort of thing that we call true, or not. The way we decide if what I think is true is to go and look. However, what we do when we go and look is to interpret what we see. Now there is nothing about the world that makes it necessary that we classify that thing out there as a tree. There is a whole chapter in Melville's *Moby Dick* where Melville argues with the scientists of his day and says that they were wrong to say that whales were mammals and not fish. He has some good points. But the scientists, because of the way they were putting together their theories about biology, found it useful to classify whales as mammals not fish, and they had some good points as well. So the truth about whether there is a fish out there, if what I see is a whale, depends on how I come down on that sort of argument. There just aren't any statements that we ever make about the world that aren't subject to variation based on our structures of interpretation. But Melville and the biologists at Woods Hole would probably agree as to whether there was a whale out there. And I'm rather sure there is a big thing growing out in the yard, whether or not you would call it a tree. There is stuff out there in the world that goes the way it goes whether we like it or not, and without much concern for what we call it. We get messed up when we start to think that the stuff out there in the world is defined by our theories or our interpretations. Our theories and interpretations are always incomplete and inexact when compared to the world. The world is not a theory. But as long as we try to make a coherent reality out of our experience we are always dealing with what is there in the world, or sometimes in us.

The world does not dictate the content of a coherent account that we can give of our selves. However, it does present us with constraints on what such an account might be. The combination of the requirement of coherence and that of fit with the world creates our reference for truth and value in that realm. There, it seems, is one of our primary encounters with ethical demand.

My choice of example to develop this issue was, I am sure, biased by my own cultural background and personal idiosyncrasies. I believe, however, that the basic issue of desire to find a sense of fit while constrained by the facts of the world, would be found in any culture or personal situation.

¹ Tarbell, David; *Collegium Papers*, various 1989 - 1999,

² Razor, Paul; *The Self in Contemporary Liberal Religion: A Constructive Critique*.

³ Pangerl, Susan; Religion Without a Soul: A Response to "The Self in Contemporary Liberal Religion: A Constructive Critique"; The Journal of Liberal Religion, Vol 1, No. 2, April 2000.

⁴ Kegan, Robert; THE EVOLVING SELF: Problem and Process in Human Development; Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1982.

⁵ Tarbell, David; Collegium Papers – 1994 Embodied Theology, 1997 Language, Reality and the World.

⁶ There are, of course, differences. Especially when it comes to things like computer screens and keyboards. These have to do with language and social reality. See part II.

⁷ Heidegger seemed to take phenomenal experience to be ontologically basic in a way which I do not.

⁸ That all consciousness seems to involve interpreted structure, feeling tone, and a sense of temporal process is a kernel for future analysis and development.

⁹ Chimpanzees, and a few other creatures will make use of their own image in a mirror for purposes of grooming, but most animals either don't recognize such images or take them to be other animals. It is, of course, possible that this interpretation places too much emphasis on vision. Dogs make far more use of their sense of smell than we do and may recognize their self through structures based on that sense.

¹⁰ See Stern, Daniel N; THE INTERPERSONAL WORLD OF THE INFANT: A View From Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology; Basic Books Inc, New York, 1985.

¹¹ Damasio, Antonio; THE FEELING OF WHAT HAPPENS: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness; Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1999.

¹² Stern; *op. cit.*

¹³ Tarbell, David; "Theology Beyond Tradition"; Collegium October 1989, Craigville MA.

¹⁴ If consciousness is a function of the organism we cannot simply conclude that consciousness is then explained by the hypotheses that have been successful in treating biology (although clearly we would give that approach a trial). It may well be that the successful explanation of such differing phenomena as we find in consciousness calls for new and different hypotheses to describe the organism that exhibits such phenomena.

¹⁵ Dennett, Daniel; CONSCIOUSNESS EXPLAINED; Little, Brown, and Co., Boston, Toronto, & London, 1991.

¹⁶ Dawkins, R; Quoted in Dennet, CONSCIOUSNESS EXPLAINED, page 201.

¹⁷ Prigogine, Ilya; ... various ...

¹⁸ *e.g.* Laughlin, Robert B, and Pines, David; **The Theory of Everything**, Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences, vol 97, no.1, January 4, 2001.

¹⁹ There is a less well known but extremely interesting body of work by our contemporary, Robert C. Neville, that again places aesthetic value at the top of the hierarchy.

²⁰ The term *recognizing*, would suggest making known (cognizing or cognizant). The term *realizing* would, in a parallel sense, suggest *making real*. That, for me, has been one of the motivations for the way I have used the term *reality*. I suspect that we do *make* in a significant sense, our *reality*. I would not argue (as Heidegger might) that this linguistic connection shows that some ancient culture knew, or intuited, the truth of *realizing* and constructed the language that way. Such arguments seem to be without significant weight.

²¹ . The impetus towards complex structure supplies a major missing link in evolutionary theory. Natural selection is only a survival filter. Up till now the only explanation for the stuff being filtered has been random chance (otherwise known as the absence of explanation).

²² . Stephen Pinker provides an interesting and informative treatment of this in his book, *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*; William Morrow and Co., Inc.; New York, 1994.

²³ . Mead, George Herbert; *Mind Self and Society*, Vol. 1 of Works of G. H. Mead, edited by Charles W. Morris; The University of Chicago Press, Chicago IL, 1934.

²⁴ . Searle, John R.; *THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL REALITY*; The Free Press, New York, NY, 1995.

²⁵ . There is a more subtle element that usually comes later, when we discover through feedback that other people may be aware of things about ourselves that we are not aware of. Not only do we have an interior that is not immediately available to others, we have an exterior that is not immediately available to ourselves.

²⁶ . Kegan, Robert; *THE EVOLVING SELF: Problem and Process in Human Development*; Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1982.

²⁷ . Muhlhausler, Peter and Harre, Rom; *PRONOUNS AND PEOPLE: The Linguistic Construction of Social and Personal Identity*; Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1990.

²⁸ . Muhlhausler and Harre point out that historically the pronouns 'they, them, and their' were used to represent the third person singular when gender was not identified. It is only relatively recently that 'he, him, and his' became used this way, and then more in academic work than in common speech.

²⁹ . Haack, Susan; *EVIDENCE AND INQUIRY: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*; Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Malden MA, 1993.