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– RUPERT SPIRA

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FOREWORD BY DEEPAK CHOPRA

One of the great mysteries of human existence is so basic that most people never think to ask about it: *Can we ever know who we really are?* Simply posing the question runs into an obstacle if we believe that who we are is a walking package of billions and billions of cells. Cells are little bottles of salt water that process chemicals in totally predictable ways. The same goes for brain cells, and no matter how closely you stare at a CT scan or fMRI of the brain, the hot spots that light up seem a long way from Shakespeare and Mozart. Nobody has convincingly shown how glucose – or blood sugar, which isn't all that different from the sugar in a sugar bowl – suddenly learns to think after it passes through a thin membrane and enters the brain.

Rupert Spira belongs to a completely different branch of investigation, which takes 'Who are we?' as an interior question. Being human isn't about cells and chemical reactions but about exploring the essential nature of ourselves and the world. Following this path, even science reaches non-dual conclusions. The great pioneering physicist Max Planck, who coined the term 'quantum', insisted that 'Mind is the matrix of matter'. He elaborated on the point, speaking to a London reporter in 1931: 'I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness. We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything that we regard as existing, postulates consciousness.'

Needless to say, modern science didn't follow Planck's lead – quite the opposite. We are in the midst of a headlong rush to solve everything in life through technology and compiling mountains of data for supercomputers to digest. But the total inability to explain consciousness by building it up from molecules, atoms and subatomic particles is a clear failure of science. To claim that discovering more and more complex particles will eventually lead to the emergence of mind is like saying that if you add enough cards to the deck, they learn to play poker.

In short, one can divide the argument between the 'mind first' position and the 'matter first' position. Far and away, the 'matter first' camp prevails at the present

moment, since everyone accepts that the physical world 'out there' exists without question. Spira says, in his typically quiet, patient voice, that 'matter first' and 'mind first' are both short-sighted. Taking the simplest possible fact to be true – that there is only one reality – Spira concludes that there is also only one explanation for reality. In these essays he maintains unwaveringly that the only reality is pure consciousness, and everything else, including mind and matter, is a modulation of that reality. A thought is something consciousness *does* – it is not an entity in its own right; likewise an atom. Nature goes to the same place to produce the smell of a rose and a spiral galaxy.

The beauty of this position, which Spira expresses with eloquent conviction, is that the thorny question 'Can we ever know who we really are?' leads to the answer 'Yes'. To be more precise we could say, 'Yes, but...', because finding out who we really are doesn't come in words, but only as an intimate experience, an awakening. And although that experience confronts us at every moment and invites us in, it cannot be compared to any other experience. It lies outside the physical domain and the mental domain at the same time.

Where would such a place be located? Everywhere and nowhere. How do you get there? The journey doesn't require you to go anywhere but here and now. Those answers, however frustrating, are the truth. There's an ancient backlog of discussion on this paradox of starting anywhere and getting everywhere, sometimes called 'the pathless path'. The time-honoured advice, echoed in every spiritual tradition, has pointed inward. The basic notion is that beneath the restless surface of the mind is a deeper level that is unmoving, silent and at peace. This journey relieves our sense of self of all superimposed limitations and reveals its true reality. Illusions fall away. The ego loses its grip. With the experience of the true nature of the Self, a transformation takes place. The key is to transcend our misguided sense of self, and then the light dawns.

In an ideal world, everyone would obey the Old Testament injunction to 'Be still and know that I am God'. Not that religious terms are necessary: the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore declared:

Listen, my heart, to the whispering of the world.
That is how it makes love to you.

In other words, intimate contact with the Self is everywhere, and its allure is the same as love's.

If we cannot hear what the world whispers, there is another way, pointed out by Tagore again:

I grew tired of the road when it took me here and there.

I married the road in love when it took me Everywhere.

To begin with, the outward world seems to be infinite and inexhaustible, but if we pursue it far enough we inevitably come to the conclusion that it is consciousness itself that is infinite and inexhaustible. The outward journey wears itself out, and then the inward one beckons.

If you try saying this to a sceptic, you run into the same objection: 'Go stand in traffic. When a bus hits you, you're dead. End of story.' Materialists keep insisting that the physical world comes first and that no amount of tricky mental gymnastics can get around that fact. Even sympathetic listeners and committed seekers cling to materialism – perhaps secretly, perhaps guiltily, but mostly, I think, because the full story has yet to sink in. In his gentle but uncompromising way, Spira insists upon telling the full story and beyond that, making it an immediate personal experience.

The full story isn't new. Its origins lie in India's ancient past, although, history and human confusion being what they are, many other stories arose to overlap and muddle it. Someone with knowledge of Indian spirituality will read a few pages of this book – or even just the titles of the essays – and say, 'Ah, Vedanta. That's what he teaches.' But to say this is merely to paste a label on Spira's approach, which also includes the understanding found in the Tantric traditions of Kashmir Shaivism and Dzogchen Buddhism. The Vedas are the sacred scriptures of India, and Vedanta, translated literally, means the end of the Vedas. In other words, Vedanta is the last word in spiritual knowledge, the place you arrive at after absorbing everything else the scriptures can teach you. Vedanta's promise can be stated in a single maxim: 'Know that one thing, by knowing which, all else is known.'

There's enormous appeal in Vedanta's truth-in-a-nutshell, so why didn't it become a kind of universal spiritual path? Why not skip the bulk of spiritual teaching – not just Indian but from all sources – and follow this golden thread? Rupert Spira is rare and all but unique in doing exactly that. In India, Vedanta has a reputation for being complex and intellectual, a subject to which professors and religionists devote their entire lives. What was meant to be practical advice – the one thing you need to know in order for all knowledge to fall into your lap – somehow became abstract and exhausting in its obscurity.

Vedanta needed to be revived for modern people who want practical results; otherwise, the most beautiful truths would be unreachable. Vedanta, to be blunt, was like opening a can of tuna with a piece of limp spaghetti. Spira has been through all that – although he modestly doesn't lean upon his learning – and come

out the other side. He has one thing to say because there is only one thing to know: *It's all consciousness*. Because consciousness is creating everything, here and now, and because its creation is endlessly fascinating, he finds beautiful ways to express one thing, often poetically, always compassionately. With a diamond in his hand, he wants to show us every facet.

Forewords risk the pitfall of sounding fulsome, but in all candour, I've gained deeper understanding listening to Rupert Spira than I have from any other exponent of modern spirituality. Reality is sending us a message we desperately need to hear, and at this moment no messenger surpasses Spira and the transformative words in his essays.

Deepak Chopra
September 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have spent forty years pondering the nature of experience, and this book is the distilled essence of that exploration. Strangely – and perhaps not so strangely – when I was six years old I said to my mother, ‘I think our lives are God’s dream’. Almost exactly fifty years later this book makes that intuition explicit in rational terms. So I would first like to thank my mother for nurturing this intuition, and also my father, from whom I inherited the means with which to express it.

To do justice to all those to whom I am indebted would take a book in itself, but in spite of this I will try to condense it into a few paragraphs. The warp of my spiritual enquiry and practice has always been the Vedantic tradition, which I first studied under the guidance of Dr. Francis Roles at Colet House in London, which was like a second home for the first twenty years of my adult life. Dr. Roles had received the traditional Advaita teaching from Shantananda Saraswati, the then Shankaracharya of the north of India, whom I consider to be my first teacher.

However, if the warp of my investigation into the nature of reality was made of one colour, the weft contained many. During these years I learned the Mevlevi Turning, a practice of prayer and movement developed by followers of the thirteenth-century Persian mystic Jalaluddin Rumi. This tradition was preserved at Colet House by my late stepfather, Vilhelm Koren, whose presence in our family, though somewhat distant, was a powerful and subliminal influence in my teenage years that conveyed to me the essence of the Sufi tradition. At that time I also learnt Gurdjieff’s Movements and studied the writings of the Russian Philosopher P. D. Ouspensky, which had a profound and initiatory effect on me.

During those years, I regularly attended the last meetings of Jiddu Krishnamurti, whose school at Brockwood Park in Hampshire, UK, was close to my childhood home. On one such occasion I found myself standing next to him in the queue for lunch and, to this day, the quality of our encounter left a deeper impression on me than anything I ever heard or read him say. His fierce and tender passion were both an initiation and an incentive in the early days of my investigation.

Also during those years, the teachings of Ramana Maharshi accompanied me on a

daily basis, but it was not until I met my teacher, Francis Lucille, that the non-dual understanding became my lived experience. What it is about the relationship with a friend that has the capacity to transform intellectual understanding into felt experience, I do not know. Suffice it to say that everything before that encounter was a preparation for the ongoing revelation of the non-dual understanding that began to unfold under Francis's guidance and friendship.

Until meeting Francis my approach had been primarily a devotional one. Francis introduced me to Atmananda Krishna Menon's incisive lines of higher reasoning, on the one hand, and to the Tantric tradition of Kashmir Shaivism, which he had learned from his teacher, Jean Klein, on the other. Both these introductions opened up new avenues of exploration and experience. Under Atmananda Krishna Menon's meticulous guidance, I felt really free for the first time to think about truth or reality and was, as a result, relieved of the misunderstanding – common among many traditional and contemporary non-dual approaches, and to which I also subscribed in the early years – that thought is inimical to spiritual understanding. From the Tantric approach I learned to take my understanding into the way I felt the body and perceived the world.

However, of the many things I learned with Francis, and for which I am eternally grateful, perhaps the most significant was the realisation that my intense desire to know the nature of reality and my love of beauty were the same endeavour, thus reconciling in me the truth seeker and the artist. In the years I spent with him, I came to understand John Keats's words:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.*

There have been many other influences, too many to be named here, except for Michael Cardew, with whom I apprenticed as a ceramic artist in my late teens. No account of my influences would be complete without reference to him. He taught me, without my realising it, the language of form and the process that an artist must undergo, both within himself and in relationship with his materials, if he wants his work to transmit meaning from the maker to the seer or user through lines of cognition that are not accessible to reason. He taught me what it takes to make an object that has the capacity to indicate viscerally, as Cézanne put it, the taste of nature's eternity.

I would like to thank Deepak Chopra for his characteristically generous comments in the Foreword to this book and for his unreserved support of my work. Likewise, Bernardo Kastrup for his penetrating and insightful Afterword, and for the fearless humility with which he extends the subject matter of this book to a field into which I cannot venture. I am also grateful to Mark Dyczkowski, Paul Mills and

Peter Fenwick for their kind and generous endorsements.

I would also like to thank all those who, in a more direct way, have been instrumental in the fruition of this book, especially Jacqueline Boyle and Rob Bowden for their endless patience and scrupulous attention to detail, and to Linda Arzouni and Caroline Culme-Seymour for their helpful comments about the manuscript.

Finally, I would like to thank my companion, Ellen Emmet. I am not often lost for words and, as you are about to discover, have yet to transpose into my writing the art of 'less is more' that, at least to some extent, I mastered in my studio. However, when it comes to acknowledging my gratitude to Ellen, I am simply lost for words.

Rupert Spira
October 2016

* From 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1820).

The Nature of Consciousness

INTRODUCTION

THE HARD PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Our world culture is founded upon the assumption that reality consists of two essential ingredients: mind and matter. In this duality, matter is considered the primary element, giving rise to the prevailing materialistic paradigm in which it is believed that mind, or consciousness – the knowing element of mind – is derived from matter.

How consciousness is supposedly derived from matter – a question known as the ‘hard problem of consciousness’ – remains a mystery, and is indeed one of the most vexing questions in science and philosophy today. Strangely, the fact that there is no evidence for this phenomenon is not deemed significant enough to dissuade most scientists and philosophers from their conviction that consciousness is a derivative of matter, although more and more are beginning to question it. Most still believe that, with advances in neurology, the neural correlates of consciousness and the means by which it is derived from the brain will sooner or later be discovered, and this belief is reinforced by the mainstream media.

However, until such time, the hard problem of consciousness remains an uncomfortable dilemma for exponents of the materialist paradigm. Ironically, in all other fields of scientific research such lack of evidence would undermine the premise upon which the theory stands, but in a leap of faith that betrays the irrational nature of materialism itself, the conviction at its heart is not undermined by the lack of supporting evidence, nor indeed by compelling evidence to the contrary. In this respect, the prevailing materialistic paradigm shares many of the characteristics of religion: it is founded upon an intuition that there is a single, universal and fundamental reality, but it allows belief rather than experience to guide the exploration and, therefore, the implications of that intuition.

Some contemporary philosophers go further than believing consciousness to be an

epiphenomenon, or secondary function, of the brain. In an extraordinary and convoluted act of reasoning they deny the very existence of consciousness, claiming it to be an illusion created by chemical activity in the brain. In doing so, they deny the primary and most substantial element of experience – consciousness itself – and assert the existence of a substance – matter – which has never been found.

In fact, it is not possible to find this substance on the terms in which it is conceived, because our knowledge of matter, and indeed all knowledge and experience, is itself an appearance within consciousness, the very medium whose existence these philosophers deny. Such an argument is tantamount to believing that an email creates the screen upon which it appears or, even worse, that the email exists in its own right, independent of the screen, whose very existence is denied.

* * *

For many people the debate as to the ultimate reality of the universe is an academic one, far removed from the concerns and demands of everyday life. After all, reality is whatever it is independent of our models of it. However, I hope that *The Nature of Consciousness* will show clearly that the materialist paradigm is a philosophy of despair and conflict and, as such, the root cause of the unhappiness felt by individuals and the hostilities between communities and nations. Far from being abstract and philosophical, its implications touch each one of us directly and intimately, for almost everything we think, feel and do is profoundly and, for the most part, subliminally influenced by the prevailing paradigm in which we have been raised and now live.

As long as we continue to seek the source of happiness on the part of individuals, and peace amongst communities and nations, from within the existing materialist framework, the very best for which we can hope is to find brief moments of respite from the general trend of experience that is growing ever more divisive. However, there have been epochal moments in history when the collective intelligence of humanity could no longer be contained within the parameters that had evolved over the previous centuries for the purposes of advancing it. The cultural forms that evolve precisely to develop, refine and express humanity's growing intelligence are, at some point, no longer able to accommodate it and become the very means by which it is stifled. The beliefs in a flat earth and a geocentric universe are two such examples.

The idea of a flat earth that prevailed in the ancient world was first challenged by

Pythagoras in the sixth century BCE, but it took another two thousand years for his spherical-earth model to be fully accepted by all cultures. Likewise, the idea of a heliocentric universe was first suggested as early as the third century BCE, but it was nearly two thousand years before the Copernican Revolution would make it mainstream.

In each case, a belief that had served humanity's evolution thus far subsequently became the very means of its constraint. But not without resistance! In each case the prevailing paradigm was so tightly interwoven into the ways people thought, felt, acted, perceived and related with one another, and so deeply inculcated into the fabric and mechanism of society itself, that it took two millennia, more or less, for the last vestiges of these ideas to be erased.

In *The Nature of Consciousness* it is suggested that the matter model has outlived its function and is now destroying the very values that it once sought to promote. I believe that the materialist paradigm, which has served humanity in ways that do not need to be enumerated here, can no longer accommodate its evolving intelligence. All around, within ourselves and our world culture, we see evidence that the shell of materialism has cracked. The growing organism of humanity can no longer be accommodated within its confines, and humanity's struggle to emerge is expressing itself in all aspects of society. Nor can its host, the earth, any longer survive its degradation and exploitation.

However, it is no longer sufficient to tinker with the existing paradigm from within its parameters. A new paradigm is required to definitively address the despair and sorrow felt by individuals, the conflicts between communities and nations, and humanity's relationship with nature.

* * *

Most revolutions seek to modify the existing state of affairs to a greater or lesser degree but leave the fundamental paradigm upon which they are predicated intact. In *The Nature of Consciousness* another kind of revolution is suggested, one that strikes at the basic assumption upon which our knowledge of ourselves, others and the world is based. It is the revolution to which the painter Paul Cézanne referred when he said, 'The day is coming when a single carrot, freshly observed, will trigger a revolution.'^{*} It is the revolution to which Max Planck, developer of quantum theory, referred when he said, 'I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness.'[†]

It is the revolution to which James Jeans referred when he said, 'I incline to the idealistic theory that consciousness is fundamental, and that the material

universe is derivative from consciousness, not consciousness from the material universe.... In general, the universe seems to me to be nearer to a great thought than to a great machine. It may well be...that each individual consciousness ought to be compared to a brain-cell in a universal mind.'‡ It is the revolution to which Carl Jung referred when he said, 'It is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing.'§

This revolution is an inner one and addresses the very core of our knowledge of ourselves, upon which all subsequent knowledge and understanding must be based. This book does not explore the implications of this revolution in anything but the broadest terms, but its ramifications touch every aspect of our lives. It is my experience that the implications of the 'consciousness-only' model that is suggested in this book continue to reveal themselves long after the initial insight or recognition itself, gradually colonising and reconditioning the way we think and feel, and subsequently informing and transforming our activities and relationships. It is for each of us to realise and live these implications.

The consciousness-only model is not new. All human beings are at the deepest level essentially the same, therefore there must be a fundamental knowledge of ourselves that transcends the local, temporal conditioning that we acquire from our cultures and thus share with all humanity, irrespective of our political, religious or ideological persuasions. Aldous Huxley referred to this as the 'perennial philosophy', that is, the philosophy that remains the same at all times, in all places, under all circumstances and for all people.

In the East, the Sanskrit term *sanatana dharma* refers to the same essential, eternal truths that transcend all culturally bound beliefs and customs. *Sanatana dharma*, the perennial philosophy, has been available since the dawn of humanity and has appeared in many different forms and cultures throughout the ages, each culture lending its own particular characteristics to it but never fundamentally changing its original understanding or its essential message for humanity.

Nevertheless, in acquiring the local, temporal conditioning of the cultures in which it appeared, the perennial understanding not only acquired new forms, which is a necessary and inevitable outcome of the transmission of knowledge. It was also inadvertently mixed with ideas and beliefs that belonged to the specific cultures in which it arose and was, as such, modified and diluted to a greater or lesser extent. Even in those cultures in which its essential meaning was not modified or diluted, it was often not fully understood and, as a result, was wrapped in a shroud of mystery which, whilst superficially bearing the hallmarks of wisdom, concealed and sanctified this misunderstanding.

The Nature of Consciousness is also, of course, subject to and a product of the conditioning of the culture and language in which it was written, although the essential understanding that is expressed in it transcends cultural and linguistic conditioning. However, it is my hope that its conditioned form will serve to clarify rather than mystify, obscure or dilute the essential understanding that lies at the heart of the perennial philosophy. I hope in this way to bring the non-dual understanding out of the closet of dogma and esotericism and reformulate it in a way that is accessible to those who seek understanding, peace, fulfilment and friendship beyond boundaries; who do not feel the need to affiliate themselves with any particular group, tradition or religion; and who have become wary of referring to any doctrine, authority or institution at the expense of their own direct experience.

In this book it is suggested that consciousness is the fundamental, underlying reality of the apparent duality of mind and matter, and that the overlooking, forgetting or ignoring of this reality is the root cause of both the existential unhappiness that pervades and motivates most people's lives and the wider conflicts that exist between communities and nations. Conversely, it is suggested that the recognition of the fundamental reality of consciousness is the prerequisite and a necessary and sufficient condition for an individual's quest for lasting happiness and, at the same time, the foundation of world peace.

* Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations* (1991).

† From an interview published in *The Observer*.

‡ From an interview published in *The Observer*.

§ Jung, C. G., 'On the Nature of the Psyche', in H. Read et al., eds., *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Princeton University Press (1985; original work published 1947).

CHAPTER 1

THE NATURE OF MIND

All that is known, or could ever be known, is experience. Struggle as we may with the implications of this statement, we cannot legitimately deny it. Being all that could ever be known, experience itself must be the test of reality. If we do not take experience as the test of reality, belief will be the only alternative. Experience and belief – or ‘the way of truth and the way of opinion’, as Parmenides expressed it in the fifth century BCE – are the only two possibilities.

All that is known is experience, and all that is known of experience is mind. By the word ‘mind’ in this context I don’t just mean internal thoughts and images, as in common parlance; I mean *all* experience. This includes both our so-called internal experience of thoughts, images, feelings and sensations, and our so-called external experience of consensus reality, that is, the world that we know through the five sense perceptions. Mind thus includes all thinking, imagining, remembering, feeling, sensing, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling.

If all that could ever be known is experience, and all experience is known in the form of mind, then in order to know the nature or ultimate reality of anything that is known, it is first necessary to know the nature of mind. That is, the first imperative of any mind that wishes to know the nature of reality must be to investigate and know the reality of itself.

Whether mind perceives a world *outside* of itself, as is believed under the prevailing materialist paradigm, or projects the world *within* itself, as is believed in the consciousness-only approach suggested in this book, everything that is known or experienced is known or experienced through the medium of mind. As such, the mind imposes its own limits on everything that it sees or knows, and thus all its knowledge and experience appear as a reflection of its own limitations. It is for this reason that scientists will never discover the reality of the universe until they are willing to explore the nature of their own minds.

Everything the mind knows is a reflection of its own limitations, just as everything

appears orange when we are wearing a pair of orangetinted glasses. Once we are accustomed to the orange glasses, orange becomes the new norm. The orange colour we see seems to be an inherent property of consensus reality and not simply a result of the limitations of the medium through which we perceive. In the same way, the mind's knowledge of anything is only as good as its knowledge of itself. Indeed, the mind's knowledge of things is a *reflection* and an *extension* of its knowledge of itself. Therefore, the highest knowledge a mind can attain is the knowledge of its own nature. All other knowledge is subordinate to and appears in accordance with the mind's knowledge of itself.

In fact, until the mind knows its own essential nature, it cannot be sure that anything it knows or experiences is absolutely true and not simply a reflection of its own limitations. Thus, the knowledge of the ultimate nature of mind through which all knowledge and experience are known must be the foundation of all true knowledge. Therefore, the ultimate question the mind can ask is, 'What is the nature of mind?'

The common name that the mind gives to itself is 'I'. Hence, we say, 'I am reading', 'I am thinking', 'I am seeing', and so on. For this reason, the question 'What is the nature of mind?' could be reformulated as, 'Who or what am I?' The answer to this question is the most profound knowledge that the mind can attain. It is the supreme intelligence.

The question 'What is the ultimate nature of the mind?' or 'Who or what am I?' is a unique question in that it is the only question that does not investigate the *objective content* of the mind but rather the *essential nature* of mind itself. For this reason the answer to this question is also unique. The answer to any question about the objective content of mind will always itself appear as objective knowledge. For example, the question 'What is two plus two?' and the answer 'Four' are both objective contents of mind. But the *nature* of the mind itself never appears in, nor can it be accurately described in the terms of, objective knowledge, just as the screen never appears as an image in a movie.

The mind's recognition of its own essential nature is a different kind of knowledge, a knowledge that is the ultimate quest of all the great religious, spiritual and philosophical traditions and that, although we may not realise it, lies at the heart of each person's longing for peace, fulfilment and love.

* * *

Where to begin? As experience is all that could ever be known, we must start with experience, proceeding cautiously, like a scientist, trusting only our observation,

doubting every belief and assertion, and only making statements that can be tested and verified by independent observers. If something is true for one person but not another, it cannot be absolutely true. If there is an absolute truth, it must be true for all people, at all times and under all circumstances.

In its search for the absolute truth, science rejects subjective experience on the grounds that it is personal and therefore cannot be validated by anyone other than the person having the experience. For instance, a vision of the Virgin Mary may be true for one person, but many others who have not had the experience will consider it an illusion. However, science has made an error in rejecting all subjective experience on these grounds, for in the ultimate analysis all experience is subjective. Therefore, it is not subjective experience but rather *personal, exclusive or idiosyncratic* experience that should be rejected as evidence of absolute reality.

So we could refine the ultimate question as, 'Is there any element of subjective experience that is universal or shared by all?' or 'If the mind only ever knows its own contents, is there any element of the mind's knowledge or experience that is common to all minds?' That knowledge alone would qualify as absolute truth and, therefore, that knowledge alone would serve as the basis of a unified humanity.

Let us agree that there is experience and that experience must be the test of reality. Our experience consists of thoughts, images, memories, ideas, feelings, desires, intuitions, sensations, sights, sounds, tastes, textures, smells, and so on, and each of these is *known*. It is not possible to have a thought, feeling, sensation or perception without knowing it. What sort of experience would be one that is not known? It would not be an experience! Thus, we can say for certain that there is experience and that experience is known, even though we may not know exactly *what* experience is, nor *who* or *what* it is that knows it.

All experience – thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions – has objective qualities, that is, qualities that can be observed or measured in some way, have a name and a form, and appear in time or space. It is in this context that I refer to everything in objective experience as 'objects', be those objects apparently physical, such as tables, chairs, trees and fields, or mental, such as thoughts, images, memories and feelings. As such, all objective experience has a form in time or space and, having a form, it has a limit.

But with what is all objective experience known? A thought cannot know a sensation, a sensation cannot feel a perception, a perception cannot see a feeling, a feeling cannot know an image, and an image cannot experience a memory. Thoughts, sensations, perceptions, feelings, images and memories *are known or experienced; they do not know or experience*. Whatever it is that knows objective experience can

never itself be known or experienced objectively. It can never be known or observed as an object. It is the *knowing element* in all knowledge, the *experiencing* in all experience. We could say that the mind consists of two elements: its known content and its knowing essence. However, these elements are not actually two separate, discrete entities, and later we will collapse this distinction.

The common name for the knowing or experiencing essence of mind is 'I'. 'I' is the name we give to whatever it is that knows or is aware of all knowledge and experience. That is, 'I' is the name that the mind gives to itself in order to indicate its essential, knowing essence in the midst of all its changing knowledge and experience. I am that which knows or is aware of all experience, but I am not myself *an* experience. I am aware of thoughts but am not myself a thought; I am aware of feelings and sensations but am not myself a feeling or sensation; I am aware of perceptions but am not myself a perception. Whatever the content of experience, I know or am aware of it. Thus, knowing or being aware is the essential element in all knowledge, the common factor in all experience.

'I' refers to the knowing or aware element that remains present throughout all knowledge and experience, irrespective of the content of the known or experienced. Whatever it is that knows the thought 'Two plus two equals four' is the *same* knowing that knows the thought 'Two plus two equals five'. The two thoughts differ and are, as such, amongst the continually changing objects of experience, but each is known by the same knowing subject, irrespective of the fact that one is true, the other false.

Whatever it is that knows the feeling of depression is the same knowing that knows the feeling of joy. The two feelings are different but are known by the same knowing subject, irrespective of the quality of the feeling. The feelings of depression and joy may alternate, but the knowing with which they are known remains continuously present throughout their changes. Whatever it is that knows the sound of birdsong is the same knowing that knows the sound of traffic. The two perceptions differ, and each comes and goes, but they are known alike by the same unchanging, subjective essence of all changing experience. The name 'I' denotes that knowing essence that is common to all knowledge and experience.

I am pure knowing, independent of the content of the known. I am the *knowing* with which all experience is known. I am the experience of *being aware* or *awareness itself* which knows and underlies all experience. Pure knowing, being aware or awareness itself is the essential ingredient of mind – the ever-present, subjective, knowing essence of mind, independent of its always-changing, objective content of thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions. Being aware or awareness itself is the knowing in all that is known, the experiencing in all

experience.

* * *

All minds refer to themselves as 'I'. Our Christian names are the names that our parents give to us, but 'I' is the name that the mind gives to itself. Whatever the mind is experiencing, it knows itself as the 'I' that is experiencing it. Throughout the day the mind says, 'I am thinking', 'I am hungry', 'I am cold', 'I am lonely', 'I am tired', 'I am travelling to work', 'I am forty-five years old', and so on. As such, the mind consists of a continuous flow of changing thoughts, images, sensations and perceptions. However, there is one element of the mind – the feeling of being or the experience of being aware – that runs continuously throughout all changing experience.

If, instead of being interested in the continuous flow of changing thoughts, images, sensations and perceptions, the mind becomes interested in its own essential nature, it will discover that the feeling of being or the experience of being aware is the common factor in *all* experience but does not share the particular qualities, characteristics or limitations of any *particular* experience. All the qualities, characteristics and limitations of experience are temporary and ever-changing colourings or modulations of mind but not its essential, irreducible nature.

In other words, as a first step towards realising the essential, irreducible nature of the mind, we separate out the permanent element of experience from its changing forms. We separate out the experience of being aware from what we are aware of.

'I' is the formless or non-objective presence of pure knowing, being aware or awareness itself, which is temporarily coloured by the qualities of experience but not inherently limited by them. 'I am aware', 'I am aware', 'I am aware' runs ever-present throughout all experience. As such, 'I' is the knowing or aware element that underlies and permeates all experience.

* * *

All objective experience changes continually. Thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions are in a constant state of flux. A thought is by definition always flowing, a feeling always evolving, a sensation always pulsating and a perception always changing, albeit at times imperceptibly slowly. In fact, later we will see that we never actually experience a discrete object such as a thought, feeling, sensation or perception, let alone a mind, body or world. But for the time being let

us agree that all experience continually changes.

However, each changing thought, feeling, sensation or perception is registered by the *same* knowing 'I', the common element in all experience. The knowing 'I' that is seeing or knowing these words is the same knowing 'I' that was knowing or aware of whatever 'I' was experiencing an hour ago, last week, last month, last year or ten years ago. That knowing 'I' – consciousness or awareness* itself – is the common ingredient in all experience. It remains the same throughout all experience.

Each of us feels that we have always been the same person, although the experience of the body and mind, which we normally consider to be ourselves, is continually changing. All we know or experience of the body are changing sensations and perceptions, and all we know of our mind† is a flow of concepts, images and feelings. In fact, the body never knows itself as 'I'. It is the mind that calls itself 'I'. So when I say, 'We have always been the same person', I mean that the mind recognises that there is something in its own experience of itself that always remains the same. Thus, although everything we have ever identified as ourselves has changed innumerable times in our lives, each of us feels that there is some part of ourselves that remains consistently present throughout all experience.

When we say 'I' today we refer to the same 'I' that we were two days ago, two months ago, two years ago or twenty years ago. What part of our experience of ourselves accounts for the feeling of always being the same person? What is it in our experience of ourselves that always remains the same? Only the knowing with which all changing knowledge and experience are known. Only the experience of being aware or awareness itself. Only 'I'.

The known or experienced always changes, but the *knowing* with which all changing experience is known always remains the same. When we were five-year-old girls or boys the experience of our parents, home and garden was *known*. As a ten-year-old child the experience of our friends, teachers and classroom was *known*. As a teenager, our first kiss, our studies and the parties we went to were *known*. As an adult, our activities and relationships are always *known*. The current experience – these words, the thoughts and feelings they provoke, sensations of the body and perceptions of the world – are being *known*. All experience is *known*.

Experience never ceases to change, but 'I', the knowing element in all experience, never itself changes. The knowing with which all experience is known is always the *same* knowing. Its condition or essential nature never changes. It is never modified by what it knows. Being the common, unchanging element in all experience, knowing, being aware or awareness itself does not share the qualities

or, therefore, the limitations of any *particular* experience. It is not mixed with the limitations that characterise objective experience. It is, as such, unqualified, unconditioned and unlimited.

The knowing with which a feeling of loneliness or sorrow is known is the same knowing with which the thought of a friend, the sight of a sunset or the taste of ice cream is known. The knowing with which enthusiasm or exuberance is known is the same knowing that knows our darkest feelings and moods. The objective element of experience always changes; the subjective element never changes. The known always changes; knowing never changes.

This knowing 'I' – the experience of simply being aware or awareness itself – is never itself either exuberant or sorrowful. Being the common element in both experiences, it is not qualified, conditioned or limited by either. In both experiences, indeed in all experience, it remains in the same pristine condition, without qualification or limitation. The knowing with which exuberance or sorrow is known is not itself changed, moved, harmed or stained by the exuberance or sorrow itself. When the exuberance or sorrow passes, the same knowing remains present to know or be aware of the next object of experience, be it the thought of a friend, the sight of a sunset or the taste of ice cream.

Nothing ever happens to the knowing with which all experience is known. It is not enhanced or diminished by anything that it knows or experiences. When a feeling of sorrow appears, nothing is added to the knowing with which the sorrow is known. When the sorrow leaves, nothing is taken away from it. If any thought, feeling, sensation or perception were identical to our essential nature of pure knowing, then every time a thought, feeling, sensation or perception disappeared we would feel that a little bit of ourself disappeared with it. Indeed, if thought, sensation or perception were inherent to the essential nature of mind or pure knowing, it would not be possible for a thought, sensation or perception to appear, because what is essential to mind must always and already be present within it and as it. Therefore, the essential nature of mind does not appear or disappear; it has no beginning or end. It was not born and will not die.

We always feel essentially the same whole, indivisible, consistently present person, only we mistake the essential nature of that person. Although innumerable thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions are added to us and subsequently removed from us during the course of our lives, the person or self that we essentially are remains always the same. That is, *pure knowing*, the essence of mind, 'I', always remains in the same pristine condition.

Exuberance, enthusiasm, sorrow, loneliness, the thought of a friend, the taste of

ice cream, and so on, are not separate from the knowing of them – not separate from ‘I’ – but neither are they identical to it. The knowing with which all experience is known is to experience as a self-aware screen would be to a movie – that is, a magical screen that is watching the movie that is playing upon it. The movie is not separate from the screen, nor is it identical to it. Our changing thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions colour our essential being of pure knowing or awareness itself, but they do not modify, qualify, condition or limit it, nor are they identical to it.

It is for this reason that the essential nature of mind is said to be *pure* knowing or *pure* awareness. ‘Pure’ in this context means unmixed with any of the qualities, conditions or limitations that it knows or is aware of, just as the screen is not inherently mixed with any of the limited forms that appear in a movie. The essential nature of mind – the experience of being aware, pure knowing or awareness itself – is inherently unconditioned and unlimited.

Likewise, just as a screen is never disturbed by the drama in a movie, so pure knowing, being aware or awareness itself is never disturbed by experience, and thus it is inherently imperturbable or peaceful. The peace that is inherent in us – indeed that *is* us – is not dependent on the content of experience, the circumstances, situations or conditions we find ourselves in. It is a peace that is *prior to* and at the same time *present in* the fluctuations of the mind. As such, it is said to be the peace that ‘passeth understanding’.

* * *

Whatever it is that knows, experiences or is aware of all experience is the most intimate, essential and irreducible nature of mind, ‘I’ or our self. Knowing or being aware is not a quality of our self; it *is* our essential self. Our self doesn’t *have* or *possess* awareness; it *is* awareness or consciousness itself. The suffix ‘-ness’ means the existence, state, presence or being of, so the words ‘awareness’ and ‘consciousness’ imply the presence of that which is aware or conscious.*

The danger of using a noun to denote the experience of being aware or pure knowing is that we reify or objectify something – which is not a thing – that we have already discovered to be without objective quality. Conventional language has evolved to describe objective experience, and in using the terms ‘awareness’ and ‘consciousness’ we are borrowing elements of conventional language and adapting them to a purpose for which they were not intended. In fact, if we really want to speak the absolute truth we should remain silent, as indeed some do.

However, others amongst us who feel compelled to articulate reality in words try

to make the best use of these ill-adapted symbols, using them as skilfully as possible and in a way that evokes the reality of experience without ever confining it within the limits of language. Others speak the language of poetry, and portray the relationship between the objective elements of experience and the essential nature of mind as a play of separation and union between a lover and her beloved, thereby avoiding having to frame reality within the confines of reason.

All experience is known, and therefore pure knowing, being aware or awareness itself is present in all experience. It would not be possible to have or know experience if knowing or awareness were not present. As such, awareness is the prerequisite for all experience; it is the primary and fundamental element in all experience. We cannot legitimately assert the existence of anything prior to awareness or consciousness, for if such an assertion were based on experience rather than belief, awareness itself would have to be present to know the experience, and therefore that experience would not be prior to it.

In fact, we can go further than this. Not only is pure knowing or awareness itself the *primary* element of mind; it is the *only* substance present in mind. It is easy to check this in experience. All that is or could ever be known is experience, and all there is to experience is the knowing of it – in fact, not the knowing ‘of it’, because we never encounter an ‘it’ independent of knowing. All there is to ‘it’ is the experience of knowing.

In other words, we never know anything other than knowing. All there is to experience is knowing. There is no object that is known and no subject that knows it. There is just knowing. And what is it that knows that there is knowing? Only that which knows can know knowing. Therefore, only knowing knows knowing. That is, awareness or consciousness is all that is ever known or experienced, and it is awareness or consciousness that is knowing or experiencing itself. Thus, the only substance present in experience is awareness. Awareness is not simply the *ultimate* reality of experience; it is the *only* reality of experience. Experience is a freely assumed self-modulation of awareness itself, but whatever the content of the modulation, at no time does any substance other than awareness ever come into existence.

The word ‘reality’ is derived from the Latin *res*, meaning ‘thing’, betraying our world culture’s belief that reality consists of things made of matter. However, nobody has ever experienced or could experience anything outside awareness, so the idea of an independently existing substance, namely matter, that exists outside awareness is simply a belief to which the vast majority of humanity subscribes. It is the fundamental assumption upon which all psychological suffering and its expression in conflicts between individuals, communities and

nations are predicated. If we refer directly to experience – and experience alone must be the test of reality – all that is or could ever be known exists within, is known by and is made of awareness alone.

Any intellectually rigorous and honest model of experience must start with awareness, and indeed never stray from it. To start anywhere else is to start with an assumption. Our world culture is founded upon such an assumption: that matter precedes and gives rise to awareness. This is in direct contradiction to experience itself, from whose perspective awareness is the primary and indeed only ingredient in experience, and must therefore be the origin and context of any model of reality.

* The terms 'awareness' and 'consciousness' are used synonymously throughout this book.

† The word 'mind' is used here in the conventional sense, to indicate thoughts, images and feelings.

* Being 'conscious' in this context is not meant in the conventional sense of being aware of an external object or a thought or feeling, but rather the simple experience of being aware, independent of objects.

CHAPTER 2

ONLY AWARENESS IS AWARE

Our world culture is founded on the assumption that the Big Bang gave rise to matter, which in time evolved into the world, into which the body was born, inside which a brain appeared, out of which awareness at some late stage developed. None of this could ever be verified, because it is not possible to legitimately assert the existence of anything prior to awareness or consciousness. Therefore, any honest model of reality must start with awareness. To start anywhere else is to build a model on the shifting sands of belief.

It is commonly believed that awareness is a property of the body, and as a result we feel that it is 'I, this body' that knows or is aware of the world. That is, we believe and feel that the knowing with which we are aware of our experience is located in and shares the limits and destiny of the body. This is the fundamental assumption of self and other, mind and matter, subject and object that underpins almost all our thoughts and feelings, and is subsequently expressed in our activities and relationships.

However, it is not 'I, *the body*' that is aware; it is 'I, *awareness*' that is aware. A body doesn't have awareness; awareness 'has' the experience of a body. The body, as it is actually experienced, is a series of sensations and perceptions in the finite mind, and the only substance present in mind is pure knowing or awareness. It is thought alone that conceptualises and, as such, abstracts the body as an object made of matter appearing outside awareness. However, if we stay strictly with the evidence of experience, the body is an appearance in awareness; awareness is not an appearance in the body.

An inevitable corollary to the belief that awareness is a by-product of the body is the belief that awareness is intermittent, that it appears and disappears, that it starts at one time and ends at another. However, to assert the absence of awareness as an actual experience, something would have to be aware of that experience, and that very 'something' would be awareness itself. Therefore, such a

claim confirms the *presence* of awareness rather than its absence. It is our experience that we are continuously aware.

When I say that *we* are continuously aware, one might legitimately ask who is the 'we' that is being referred to. Who is the 'we' that is aware that we are continuously aware? Who or what has the experience of being aware? Who or what knows that there is awareness? Awareness is the aware or knowing element in all experience and is, therefore, the only 'one' present to know whatever is known or experienced, including its own presence.

Therefore, the experience of being aware, or the knowledge 'I am', 'I am aware' or 'There is awareness' is *awareness's knowledge of itself*. Only awareness knows that there is awareness. Only awareness is aware. As such, awareness is *self-aware*. Just as all objects on earth are illuminated by the sun but the sun alone is self-luminous, so all experience is known by awareness, but awareness itself is self-knowing. Thus, it is *awareness's* experience that it is continuously or, more accurately, eternally aware.

Being aware is awareness's *primary* experience. Awareness knows its own being before it knows any other thing. Thus, awareness's knowing of its being is the original knowledge, the primary, fundamental and subjective knowledge upon which all objective knowledge is based. It is the ground from which all experience rises and upon which it rests, just as the colourless screen is the foundation upon which all images play.

Awareness's knowing of its being is also its *ultimate or final* knowledge, that is, the knowledge that remains over after every thought, feeling, sensation and perception has vanished, just as the screen remains over after a movie ends. It is to this understanding that Jesus refers in the Book of Revelation when he says, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.' It is also the knowledge to which the term Vedanta, meaning the 'end of knowledge', refers.

* * *

Because we normally believe that it is 'I, the body' that is aware or has awareness, the body and, by extension, the world are considered to precede awareness. Thus, awareness is considered to be derived from the body, as an epiphenomenon of the brain. However, in order to legitimately claim this, we would have to experience the body prior to the experience of being aware, and then notice the experience of being aware arising *in the body*. Nobody has ever had, or could ever have, this experience. If we maintain the honesty and rigor of the scientist, who is willing to

state only the facts of experience without any regard for their implications or consequences, we must acknowledge that awareness is the primary element in all experience.

Being aware or awareness itself is not a property of a person, self or body. All that is known of a body is a flow of continuously changing sensations and perceptions. All sensations and perceptions appear in mind, and the only substance present in mind is awareness or consciousness itself. Thus, the body is an appearance in mind, and the ultimate reality of mind, and therefore the body, is awareness.

The essential nature of awareness is to be aware, just as it is the nature of the sun to shine. Simply by being itself, awareness is aware of itself, just as the sun illuminates itself simply by being itself. Awareness cannot cease being aware, for being aware is its nature. If it ceased being aware, it would cease being awareness. Where would awareness go if it were to cease and therefore disappear? There is nothing in our experience – that is, there is nothing in awareness’s experience – that is prior to or ‘further back’ than awareness itself, into which awareness could disappear.

It is thought that mistakenly identifies awareness with the limits and destiny of the body and thus believes that awareness is intermittent. However, in awareness’s own experience of itself – and awareness is the only ‘one’ that is in a position to know anything about itself – it is eternal, or ever-present.

Although awareness is eternally aware of itself, it is not always aware of the body. The body is an appearance in and of the finite mind, and the finite mind is itself a modulation of awareness. Thus, the body is a temporary modulation of and an appearance in awareness; awareness is not an appearance in the body. Awareness itself is not intermittent. It is a continuous, or, more accurately, ever-present, non-objective experience.

How could something that is ever-present be a by-product of something that is intermittent? To believe that awareness is a by-product of the body is like believing that a screen is produced by the movie that appears on it. The screen is continuous; the movie comes and goes. The movie is a by-product of the screen. Awareness is like a self-aware screen: in its own experience of itself it is continuous or ever-present.

* * *

Awareness vibrates within itself and assumes the form of the finite mind. The finite mind is therefore not an entity in its own right; it is the *activity* of

awareness. There are no real objects, entities or selves, each with its own separate identity, appearing in awareness, just as there are no real characters in a movie. There is only awareness and its activity, just as there is only the screen and its modulation.

Awareness assumes the form of the finite mind by identifying itself with the body, through the agency of which it knows the world, in the same way that at night our own mind collapses into the mind of the dreamed character from whose point of view the dreamed world is known. Just as the activity of our individual mind appears to itself in the form of the dreamed world, so awareness appears to itself as the world in the form of the activity of each of our minds. It is only from the point of view of the apparent awareness-in-the-body entity – the finite mind – that awareness now seems to be limited and temporary, and that the body and world seem to have their own independent status as objects.

Awareness assumes the form of the finite mind in order to simultaneously create and know the world, but it doesn't need to assume the form of mind in order to know itself. Awareness is *made* of pure knowing or being aware, and therefore knows itself simply by being itself. Awareness doesn't need to reflect its knowing off an object in order to know itself, just as the sun doesn't need to reflect its light off the moon in order to illuminate itself.

A child sometimes takes a mirror and catches the light of the sun with it, reflecting the sun's light into a friend's eyes. To believe that awareness needs a finite mind to know itself is like believing that the sun illuminates itself by reflecting its light off a little piece of mirror. The sun doesn't need a mirror to illuminate itself; it illuminates itself by itself. Likewise, awareness doesn't need to shine in or on an object, such as a mind or a body, to know itself through the reflected light of that object. The only substance that is present in awareness is being aware, aware being or pure knowing. Therefore, the knowing of itself is what it is, not what it does.

In order to illuminate an object, the sun must direct its rays away from itself, towards that object, but in order to illuminate itself the sun doesn't have to direct its rays anywhere. Likewise, to know an object, other or world, awareness has to rise in the form of mind, which it does by locating itself in a body, from whose point of view it can now direct the light of its knowing towards that object. But in order to know *itself* it doesn't need to direct its knowing in any particular direction. It doesn't have to go anywhere or do anything. For awareness, being itself is knowing itself, just as for the sun, being itself is illuminating itself.

All objects and selves are known by awareness, but awareness is known by itself

alone. Thus, all objects and selves depend upon and are relative to awareness, but awareness is relative to nothing. All knowledge is relative except awareness's knowing of its own being. Awareness's knowledge of itself is thus absolute. In fact, awareness's knowledge of itself is the only absolute knowledge there is, and is as such the foundation and fountain of all relative knowledge.

Just as the sun is too close to itself to turn round and illuminate itself in subject-object relationship, so awareness is too close to itself to stand apart from itself as a separate subject of experience and know itself as an object. Thus, awareness's knowledge of its own being is utterly unique. It is a category of knowledge that transcends all other knowledge and experience. It is sacred knowledge. It is absolute. It remains the same at all times, in all places, and under all conditions and circumstances. It is the only certainty, from which all other knowledge borrows its relative certainty.

Awareness's knowing of its own being is imperturbable, indestructible, inextinguishable, indivisible, immutable, immortal, invulnerable. It cannot be touched, but all knowledge and experience is touched by it. It is the only knowledge that does not require the division of experience into an apparent duality of subject and object, and so it is said to be non-dual knowledge.

The self that knows is the self that is known, just as the sun that illuminates is the sun that is illuminated. All other knowledge and experience requires the division of experience into an apparent subject from whose perspective an object, other or world may be known. In relation to all objects, awareness can be said to be the ultimate subject of experience, but its knowing of its own being transcends the duality of subject and object.

The belief that awareness needs a mind in order to know itself is a common misunderstanding in the field known as Consciousness Studies, where the disciplines of non-duality and science meet, and particularly in contemporary expressions of the non-dual understanding. Awareness need only assume the form of an apparently separate subject of experience, the finite mind, in order to know a separate object, other or world. To know *itself* it need not assume the form of a separate subject, nor can it know itself as an object.

For awareness, there is no distance between itself and the knowing of itself. It is simultaneously the subject and the object of its own experience. The essential, irreducible nature of awareness is to be and know itself alone. The knowing of its own objectless being is awareness's primary experience. Just by being itself, it knows itself. Awareness is the knowing element in all that is known or experienced and is, therefore, the only 'one' present to know or experience

anything, including itself. The ordinary, intimate and familiar experience of simply being aware is *awareness's awareness of itself*.

* * *

The mind can never know or find awareness, although everything that it knows or finds is made of awareness alone, just as a character in a movie can never know or find the screen although everything that she knows or finds is made only of the screen. The mind that seeks to know or find awareness is like a character in a movie that travels the world in search of the screen. It's like a current in the ocean in search of water. The mind is made out of the very stuff for which it is in search, but it can never find that stuff on its own terms, that is, as an objective experience in time and space.

Imagine physical space prior to the appearance of any object within it, just a vast, borderless space. Now imagine adding to this space the quality of being aware or knowing. The space is now a vast *aware* or *knowing* field, without borders and empty of objects. If we were now to remove the space-like quality from this aware or knowing field, we would end up with pure, dimensionless knowing or being aware, that is, we would end up with awareness or consciousness itself.

In fact, it is not possible to imagine something that has no dimensions. Indeed, something that has no dimensions is not a *thing*. Whatever we can think of must have objective qualities and therefore a dimension in time or space. Awareness itself has no dimensions and is thus not a thing or object of any kind, and yet the experience of awareness or being aware is an undeniable, albeit non-objective experience. However, this does not invalidate the attempt to think of awareness. In trying to imagine the very awareness out of which it is made, the mind will bring itself to its own end, and as a result, objectless awareness will shine as it is.

There is actually no such experience as the ending of mind. Indeed, there is no such thing as *the* mind or *a* mind. The only entity present in mind, if it can be called an entity, is awareness or consciousness itself, and awareness or consciousness never ends, nor indeed starts. Mind only *believes* that awareness starts and ends because it identifies awareness with the limited and temporary body. However, in awareness's own experience of itself – and awareness is the only one that knows anything about awareness – awareness is ever-present.

Mind is the *activity* of awareness. Therefore, in the same way that the screen doesn't come to an end when a movie ends but simply loses its temporary colouring, so awareness doesn't end when the mind stops, but simply ceases colouring itself in the form of mind's activity.

Mind is a self-colouring of awareness, just as a movie is a self-colouring of the screen. In the attempt to know the awareness out of which it is made, the mind simply loses its colour and stands revealed as pure, dimensionless, colourless awareness – pure in the sense that it is not mixed with anything other than itself, and dimensionless in that it has no objective qualities extended in time or space. This zero-dimensional awareness is not an abstraction of thought to which no one has access or knowledge. It is the very awareness with which each of us is currently knowing our experience.

In fact, it is not the awareness *with which* we are knowing our experience. This non-dimensional awareness is not a quality *of* our self, nor does it belong to our self. It *is* our self – and not even *our* self. It is *the* self, if it can be called a self. There is no ‘me’ or ‘us’ to whom awareness belongs. It belongs to itself.

We do not *have* awareness; we *are* awareness. Awareness is not an attribute of the body, just as the screen is not a property of a character in a movie. Nor is awareness *in* the body; rather, it is ‘in itself’. Just as the screen does not appear in the space and time that exist for the character in a movie, so awareness does not appear in the space and time that seem to exist for the finite mind.

As a concession to the mind that wants to think about the nature of awareness, it is legitimate and even necessary to add a subtle space-like quality to it to give it apparently objective and thus conceivable, describable qualities. So, to accommodate our desire to think and speak of awareness, let us conceive of it as a vast, borderless, empty, self-aware space, a field or medium whose nature is simply knowing or being aware. In time, thinking about awareness gives way to the contemplation of awareness – its contemplation of itself – of which more will be said in subsequent chapters.

* * *

Everything appears to mind in accordance with its understanding of itself. ‘As a man is, so he sees. As the eye is formed, such are its powers.’* It is for this reason that science cannot tell us anything about the nature of awareness. What passes for the increasingly popular field of Consciousness Studies is, in almost all cases, a study of brain activity, not a study of consciousness. Only consciousness knows about consciousness. Only awareness is aware of awareness. Science is an activity of the finite mind, that is, an activity of thought and perception, and necessarily superimposes the limitations of mind upon everything it knows or perceives.

Everything that is known by the mind is an expression and reflection of its own limitations. Being temporary and finite itself, the mind believes awareness to be

likewise. Most minds, through which objective reality is known, forget their own limitations and project them instead onto whatever they know or perceive. Thus, everything experienced by the mind appears to be temporary in time and/or finite in space. Forgetting that it has projected its own limitations on reality, the mind believes that the time and space it seems to experience are innate qualities of objective reality itself, whereas in fact they are simply reflections of its *own* limitations.

Time and space are, in fact, dimensionless awareness refracted through the prism of the finite mind, that is, refracted through thought and perception. They are the filters through which awareness perceives its own reality in the form of the world. If reality is refracted through the mind of a flea, it will appear in accordance with the limitations of a flea's mind; if through the mind of a dog, in accordance with the limitations of a dog's mind; and if through the mind of a human being, in accordance with the limitations of a human mind.

However, mind is not something separate from reality. It is reality itself – awareness itself – which assumes the forms of each of these minds and through their agency is able to know or perceive a segment of its own infinite potential in the form of the world. In other words, the illusion of a multiplicity and diversity of objects known by a separate subject remains; ignorance of its reality goes. As the eighth-century Zen master Huang Po said, 'People neglect the reality of the illusory world.'

Even when the essential nature of mind has been recognised, reality will still *appear* as a multiplicity and diversity of objects and selves, in accordance with the limitations of the mind through which it is known. However, this appearance will be informed by the understanding that the apparent multiplicity and diversity of reality is not a quality of reality itself, but of the mind through which and as which it is perceived. It will be recognised that the reality that underlies the appearance of multiplicity and diversity is itself an infinite, indivisible whole, and this understanding will inform all the subsequent activities of such a mind.

The mind cannot know the nature of reality until it knows its own nature, thus the science of mind is the highest science. By 'science of mind', I do not mean the study of the *content* of mind; I mean the knowledge of the *essential nature* of mind. The essential nature of mind is that element of mind which remains continuously present throughout all its changing knowledge and experience. It is that element of mind that cannot be removed from it. It is original, unconditioned mind, pure knowing, awareness or consciousness itself. Thus, the ultimate science is the science of consciousness.

However, the science of consciousness is a unique science, because it is the only branch of knowledge that does not require consciousness to rise in the form of the finite mind and, as such, direct itself towards objective knowledge or experience. The science of consciousness is entirely between consciousness and itself. It is about awareness's knowledge of its own being.

Awareness's knowledge of itself is the only absolute knowledge. It is sacred knowledge; in religious language it is God's knowledge of Himself.* It is the highest understanding, upon which all subsequent knowledge must depend.

* William Blake, letter to the Reverend John Trusler (1799).

* Referring to God as 'Him' is used simply as a convention and has no other significance.

CHAPTER 3

PANPSYCHISM AND THE CONSCIOUSNESS-ONLY MODEL

The understanding that only awareness is aware is one of the most challenging aspects of this approach and, at the same time, the most important to grasp.

If we start with the belief that it is 'I, the body' or 'I, the person' that is aware, everything we subsequently know will be conditioned by that belief. I would suggest that the reason contemporary science has so much difficulty fitting consciousness into its model of the universe is precisely because the investigation is founded on the assumption that consciousness is a property of the body.

Having made the assumption that the body or the person is aware, most people in general, and scientists in particular, legitimately assume that animals are also aware. If we tread on our cat's tail it screeches, and from this it is reasonable to conclude that the cat is aware, in this case aware of the pain. The belief that the cat is aware is simply an extension of the belief that the body is aware, or that awareness is an attribute of the body or person.

Reasoning in this way, the scientist who is open to the possibility of fitting consciousness into his model of the universe continues down the animal chain, granting various degrees of consciousness to birds, fish, snails, flies, amoeba, and so on, eventually wondering where to draw the line between what is aware and what is not. Wherever they draw the line poses an uncomfortable question: How do inanimate objects on one side of the line evolve into aware beings on the other? In other words, how does insentient matter give rise to consciousness? This question, known as the hard problem of consciousness, lies at the heart of the debate in science and philosophy today.

The idea that consciousness is derived from inert matter is profoundly inimical to our deepest intuition. Recognising this impossibility, many physicists conclude that a degree of consciousness must be present throughout the universe, and this conclusion leads to the statement, common in the field of Consciousness Studies, that consciousness is fundamental to the universe. This formulation eliminates

the need to explain how the universe generates consciousness – that is, it seems to solve the hard problem of consciousness.

The belief that consciousness is fundamental to the universe, which is known in philosophy as panpsychism, does not in fact solve the problem. It simply posits that consciousness is fundamental to *matter*, thereby doing away with the problem of how matter generates consciousness. It doesn't address the relationship between consciousness and matter but merely postpones it. I would suggest that the belief that consciousness is fundamental to the universe is still a subtle form of materialism.

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Panpsychism, the belief that consciousness or mind (in philosophy these two terms are equated, unlike in the non-dual tradition, where they are distinguished) is an essential and fundamental property of things, is not a new idea. It was prevalent in early Greek philosophy. The word 'panpsychism' comes from the Greek *pan-*, meaning 'everything' or 'all', and *psyche*, meaning 'mind' or 'soul'. Aristotle, for example, believed that 'everything is full of gods'.

The belief that all things are full of gods, or that consciousness is fundamental to all things, depends upon the existence of *things*. It starts with a multiplicity and diversity of things! It is equivalent to saying that the screen is fundamental to an image. Although this appears to be a true statement, it contains a misunderstanding, and it is in this subtle misunderstanding that the real problem for contemporary philosophy lies.

To suggest that the screen is a fundamental property of the image is to credit the image with more existence than it deserves. It is to start with the image and work backwards from there to the screen. Likewise, to state that consciousness is a fundamental property of the universe is to start with the universe and work backwards from there to consciousness. In other words, it is to start with the materialist assumption that there is something called a universe.

If we start with the assumption of a universe and try to fit consciousness into that model, we end up with the classic panpsychist statement that all things have a degree of consciousness or, more simply, that the universe is conscious. However, from the perspective of consciousness there is no 'all'. From consciousness's perspective there is just its own seamless, indivisible, unified, infinite whole.

The belief that the universe is conscious is New Age non-duality, and it is this confusion that leads so many people who would otherwise be open to the

consciousness-only model to reject it. The belief that the universe is aware is simply an extension of the materialist belief that the body is aware. Fleas are not aware; fish are not aware; dogs are not aware; trees and rocks are not aware; human beings are not aware; the universe is not aware. Only awareness is aware! Only consciousness is conscious.

The word 'universe', from the Latin *uni-*, 'one', and *versus*, 'turned', means 'combined into one; whole'. What is it in our experience of the so-called universe that is whole, one, undivided? Only consciousness! Everything else we know about the universe comprises a multiplicity and diversity of objects. The only element of experience that is one, undivided and whole is consciousness itself, or self-aware being. The universe is not conscious; consciousness *is* the universe!

In fact, the more scientists look for a universe, the less they find it. The more they look for matter, the less like matter it seems to be. Why? Because they are looking for it in objective experience. Sooner or later science will realise that consciousness is the reality for which they are seeking in objective knowledge and experience.

If we want to build a model of reality, we must start with first principles. What is the primary element in all experience? Consciousness! To build a theory based upon anything other than consciousness is to build a house on sand. No matter how well the house may be constructed, it will sooner or later collapse due to the insubstantial nature of its foundation.

The belief that consciousness is fundamental to the universe credits the universe with too much existence. The universe does not *exist!* That is, it does not 'stand out from' consciousness with its own independent reality.* Only consciousness truly *is*. The apparent existence of the universe is consciousness itself – indivisible, self-aware being – refracted through the activity of the finite mind. The universe borrows its apparent existence from consciousness, just as the landscape in the movie borrows its apparent reality from the true and only reality of the screen.

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Matter is the way consciousness appears to itself when viewed through the prism of a finite mind. The finite mind always knows experience in duality, that is, in subject-object relationship, so the object must appear in a way that is distinct from the subject. Without this distinction there could be no manifestation. In other words, manifestation must appear as something *other than consciousness*. In order to distinguish it from consciousness, manifestation must have qualities that consciousness does not have. Consciousness is transparent, empty, non-objective,

formless. Therefore, manifestation must seem to be solid, full, objective and with form. This is why the rocks and trees in our dreams seem to be solid.

The reason we believe that the universe exists as an object is that we believe the self exists as a subject. That is, the belief in an external universe is predicated upon our belief that our self, the knowing element in all experience, lives in and is a property of the body. The sand upon which materialism, and by extension panpsychism, is built is our belief in ourselves as temporary, finite minds or entities living in and sharing the destiny and limits of the body.

The scientists and philosophers who subscribe to the materialist assumption that dominates our world culture, as well as those who have moved closer to the consciousness-only model and propose panpsychism as the answer to the hard problem of consciousness, will never find the answer to their questions until they discover the ultimate nature of themselves, that is, until they discover the essential nature of the mind.

Everything that is known by the mind appears in accordance with its own knowledge of itself. As long as we start with the belief that 'I, the body' is aware of experience, we are conducting our investigation on a faulty premise. All our subsequent discoveries will contain this fundamental error more or less subtly concealed within them. Materialism and panpsychism both start with things and proceed from there to consciousness. Both approaches try to graft new understanding onto an old model; they put new wine into old skins. We have to start with the understanding that only awareness is aware. Only consciousness is conscious.

Whilst the panpsychist view may be a welcome and necessary intrusion into the prevailing materialist paradigm, it will, I would suggest, sooner or later have to be abandoned. Of course, new paradigms are not born overnight. It was over a hundred years ago that it was first suggested by Albert Einstein, Max Planck, Niels Bohr, Erwin Schrödinger and others that the observer may affect the observed, opening the debate as to the relationship between consciousness and matter. Although this debate fell into decline during much of the twentieth century, it is enjoying something of a renaissance.

Panpsychism is a stepping stone that will, hopefully, at least usher in a new paradigm in which our model of the universe starts with and is built upon consciousness itself. Sooner or later our culture must wake up from the dream of materialism, of which panpsychism is a subtle extension, and establish consciousness in its rightful place as the absolute reality of all that seems to be. The universe is consciousness itself: one seamless, indivisible, self-aware whole in

which there are no parts, objects, entities or selves.

* The word 'exist' comes from the Latin *ex-*, meaning 'out of', and *sistere*, meaning 'to stand'.