

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.

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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.

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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.

\* 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).

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.

## CHAPTER I

### 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 orange-tinted 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.

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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.

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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 consist 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.

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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

\*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.

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 ourself has changed innumerable times in our lives, each of us feels that there is some part of ourself 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 ourself accounts for the feeling of always being the same person? What is it in our experience of ourself 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’.

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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

\* 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.

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.