

# Consciousness and Addiction

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Before the beginning  
there is  
no womb nor tomb  
nor life nor way  
no thing nor nothing  
neither dual nor One  
nor heaven nor earth  
nor moon nor sun  
Before the beginning.

Buried in the earth  
the potential packed shell  
the seed  
awakens.  
Enwrapped within,  
confined walled in,  
its expanding begins to crack and heave.  
Kept and restricted,  
trapped and constricted,  
stretching and pushing,  
shoving cleaving  
wrenching groaning,  
the racked need of the stored seed  
at last bursts  
blasts forth  
potential freed  
into kinetic force  
into form.

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Form being the perpetual kindling of creation,  
the language of creation manifested to sensation.  
The mortal shell of immortal possibility.  
The positions between which arises tension.

The form that is consciousness is the ultimate manipulator of forms.  
The pattern that is consciousness is the ultimate manipulator of patterns.  
Consciousness is the particularly human strategy of survival, the eco-niche of humanity.  
It's the mediator of the human immune system with its environment.  
It's the locus of personal identity.

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The etymological roots of consciousness are from the French *conscience* (con + science) which traces back to the Latin *con*, meaning 'with', and *scire*, 'to know'. The roots of *scire* are related to the idea of 'cutting through', of 'distinguishing and separating', and of 'deciding'. *Scire* may have originated from the Sanskrit *chyati*, 'he cuts', and the Iranian *scian*, 'a knife'.

The process of transformation and development described by Creation myths the world over (Brihadarinyaka Upanisad, Enuma Elish, Genesis, etc.), traced by psychoanalysts and child psychologists and termed "individuation" (Freud, Jung, Piaget, Kohlberg, etc.) and followed by the birth and rise of civilizations and technology (Toynbee, Sorokin, McLuhan, etc.) are parallel descriptions of the birth and intensification of consciousness. In every case there is a sense of primordial unity which is subsequently split or separated. Adam and Eve "decide" to eat from the tree of knowledge and are immediately barred, separated from the unity of Paradise (Paradise: Iranian para, around, and daeza, wall [Mary Daly: "Gyn-Ecology"]). Piaget argues that in the infant there is "no definite differentiation between the self and the external world" (Piaget, "Six Psychological Studies") while Freud, Jung and Kohlberg describe an increasing level of "individuation" (individuation, in the most general way, is understood to be the development of the ego and personality. The delineation of a sense of self and identity, a coherent and integrated pattern and a way of life) and "autonomy" as the sine qua non of healthy ego development. Toynbee and McLuhan refer to the collapse of the unity of tribal societies as they move into the fragmented, specialist, analytical modes of civilized societies.

This journey from "innocence" into "experience" has been crucial for the survival of the human species in that humans, more than other organisms, are dependent on the separation, abstraction, of the psyche from the "here and now" as a means of developing strategies, techniques and tools for survival. However, in a seemingly insurmountable exponentially intensifying feedback loop these strategies, tools and techniques are increasingly developed to adapt to human constructions and extensions - culture and technology - and to the real or imagined threats of other conscious persons, nation-states or organizations. Thus consciousness - individuation, autonomy, fragmentation and analysis - spins, gyrates in an ever increasing build-up, identical to an arms race. Consciousness is, after all, a "winner." The greater the consciousness, the greater to degree of power to manipulate, the greater the degree of security and control.

This degree of security and control is, naturally, bought at a certain price. This price is an equally exponentially increasing feeling of separation, alienation and isolation from that "primal unity" which can now be called "Being." In fact, at a certain point, consciousness comes to definitively dread "Being" because it has become so foreign, and because experiencing it requires the relaxation of all the skills that consciousness has so arduously acquired. As the 14th century mystic Meister Eckhart wrote, "For the more helpless and destitute the mind that turns to God for support can be, the deeper the person penetrates God and the more sensitive he is to God's most valuable gifts." (Eckhart, Talks of Instruction.)\* The last thing that consciousness is or wishes to be is "helpless."

It can be understood, then, that consciousness is in conflict with Being. The development and evolution of consciousness is precisely "original sin;" "the fall" and the guilt associated with it is precisely the separation from, and dread of, Being. As Chuang Tzu, one of the very earliest Taoists, wrote:

The knowledge of the ancients was perfect. How perfect? At first they did not know that there were things. This is the most perfect knowledge, nothing can be added. Next they knew that there were things, but they did not yet make distinctions between them. Next they made distinctions between them, but they did not yet pass judgments upon them. When judgments were passed, Tao was destroyed.

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The fall outs of the fall are manifold, as are the attributes of consciousness - individuation, a nostalgia for order and symmetry, the differentiation between good and evil, increasing strategic competence, abstraction, time consciousness (narratization, teleology), consciousness of choice, 'duality,' the power to deceive and the potential for delusion, guilt and dread, alienation and addiction - which emerge simultaneously, which mutually arise. Much of this list of attributes can be underpinned by the desire for security and control which, increasing beyond a certain level, becomes a psychosis. This psychosis is directly associated with that which absolutely limits all security and control, death. Extreme consciousness has a neurotic fear of death. Death is the absolute reminder of mortality and, as Buddhist philosophy has been reminding us for a very long time, it's the delusory desire of the ego for its own immortality which is the source of ignorance and therefore suffering.

Which brings us to "apocalypse." Apocalypse comes from the Greek *apo*, 'away from', and *kaluptein*, 'to cover', 'to reveal'. 'uncovering' carries the implication of something hidden, that which is to be 'uncovered'. It is the nature of people who are conscious to 'cover' certain aspects of themselves. This 'covering' may be conscious - a secret or conspiracy that one doesn't wish to be revealed - or unconscious - a complete denial of a certain aspect of the self which is too uncomfortable to admit to. A true conspiracy, like an effective ideology, is unconscious because it has become encoded into a person or culture's description of itself. It has been sublimated into a person or culture's identity. As identity, it is assumed, presupposed, pre-reflective. As such, it can't be "seen" without a transformation of identity, a "metanoia," a conversion.

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'Revelation' comes from the Latin *reuelare*, and *reuelatio*, words associated with the pulling back of a curtain or veil, and the disclosure of that which was previously hidden or unknown. Addiction is all about making and living in patterns and circles of evasion and denial and so, the fact is, the last thing the addict wants is revelation. We don't want our evasive patterns to be shown up. We've built our identities, cultural and personal, with them. We cling to them and we don't want to leave them. Revelation, apocalypse, then, is a challenge to our identity.

Where there is a strong resistance to disclosure, where there is addiction, that is, where there are conspiracies and denials and personal and cultural identities founded on those conspiracies and denials, "revelation" is naturally perceived of as cataclysmic. It's not that "apocalypse" is in itself cataclysmic. It's the encounter of a force of energy which is in essence revelatory with that which resists revelation that is cataclysmic. If there is no resistance to revelation - if there is no addiction, conspiracy, ideology, or denial - there is no cataclysm associated with apocalypse.

Love, real love, is essentially apocalyptic in nature. Resistance to revelation, then, can be comprehended as resistance to love. Apocalypse is the character of love when it eventually breaks through the resistance and denial. That is, we experience love as apocalyptic, as violent and cataclysmic, because it is overthrowing an order that we value and cling to. It exposes our weakness and our brokenness, it reveals our vulnerability, it deeply humbles us, and so we associate it with death.

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Denial and love can't cohabitate. Love incessantly seeks to compassionately reveal truth, denial despises such revelation and hence despises love. If a society is living in a state of denial then it inevitably seeks to ensure that love has no possibility of setting up its tent anywhere in the vicinity. If love endures and demonstrates the tenacity to persevere in being heard and felt it will be dealt with in a variety of more or less subtle ways; from being ignored, to being ridiculed, to banishment, to outright murder.

This situation has been repeated so frequently throughout history that, were it not genuinely tragic, it would be monotonous. This conflict, of love and denial, can in fact be understood to be a central dynamism in the progress of human civilization and consciousness. It can also be understood to be a central dynamism in the development of personal consciousness.

The great paradox of extreme consciousness is that its desire for security and control, and its fear of death, involves it in a kind of panic-stricken blind flight which leads it straight to disaster and death. Its flight from death leads to death. Fortunately love is something more sublime and powerful than death. Perhaps this is why we seem to fear love even more than we fear death.

Love struggles on.

No denying

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