

THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS: GOING-WITH-THE-FLOW

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Consciousness is personal, constantly changing, continuous and selective, *as* experienced by a particular person.¹ The noesis and noema are the structure of consciousness. The self-witnessing and re-witnessing are the function of consciousness.² Consciousness arises and becomes the noema toward which the noesis is intentionally directed. What is the noema, the noesis is conscious of.

Immediate consciousness, says Mary-Rose Barral,³ is an expression which discloses itself-to-itself. For Søren Kierkegaard:

The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but that the relation relates itself to its own self.⁴

This is self-disclosure of consciousness. The noesis and the noema depend upon the assuring consciousness which discloses itself-to-itself. This allows for a continuity of immediate consciousness and what is already experienced. The noema is the experienced, the noesis is the capacity of experience and the integral consciousness in self-witnessing is the assuring knowledge.

The completion of knowledge is to reassure that which is assured. Verification and justification are by way of immediate consciousness. Intentionality cannot justify itself in its outward projection. If the noesis is true it is immediate. If it is theoretical it is indirect waiting to be justified. If it is imagination it cannot be proved or disproved. The noesis requires justification by immediate consciousness. Immediate consciousness is foundational. Within, the flow is continuous, it is a continuity which is lived. It is artificial, abstract, when conceptual.

The heart is the reflexive. The mind is the reflective. Each is to the other. Both are. Heart and mind is *hsin*. This is not an integration, says Sandra A. Wawrytko,⁵ as integration assumes the two are originally separate, no such separation exists for the Chinese. Experience, immediate experience, transcends any abstraction or conceptualization. The immediate is intuition. The mediate is cognition. To know immediately or intuitively is for the mental content and the object to be identical.⁶ To know mediate or conceptually is a representation of that which was originally experienced.

Intuition is whole.⁷ Cognition is a substitute for the whole. Intuition

is a becoming, cognition pictures to itself an arrangement of that which is already seen. Intuition is an uninterrupted continuity. Cognition is a temporal gap which draws from itself more than it has.

The beginning is the self-witnessing. This self-witnessing, which turns, gives rise to the re-witnessing, which re-turns. The re-witnessing, which re-turns is, says Wawrytko,⁸ a returning to the root, the true self, the infant who has not yet smiled. As foundational the self-witnessing gives rise and becomes the noema toward which the noesis is intentionally directed.

The self-witnessing is centripetal. The re-witnessing is centrifugal. Consciousness is centered, it is a centripetal/ centrifugal dynamism, proceeding inward toward the center/moving outward from the center, respectively.

The reflexive movement of consciousness is intuition, while the reflective movement of consciousness is cognition. Intuition and cognition are both within spontaneity. The structure and function of consciousness, says George Chih-Hsin Sun, presupposes going-with-the-flow, this spontaneity is a unitive-go.⁹ It is following along the way the water goes.¹⁰ Spontaneity is self-forgetfulness, going-with-the-flow. As soon as one becomes aware of one's thinking, one no longer resides within spontaneity. Yet, says Thomas Langan, amidst the flow of being, real things get organized and manage to persist.¹¹ For Kuang-ming Wu:

As for spontaneity. Thinking is a looking-at; spontaneity is a gushing-out. A look is cognitive, with an (ideal) observer and a separate observed object; a gushout is a flow in which everything is, without distinction, much less separation. And so spontaneity thought about is spontaneity stopped, a contradiction. To analyze the "structure of spontaneity" is like saying "We are, and ought to be, spontaneous," and then meticulously begin to argue for it. Most if not all of philosophies of consciousness is infested with such a self-referential contradiction. Thus spontaneity requires a peculiar tactic to present itself in thought.¹²

Chuang Tzu describes the perfectly balanced life in harmony with the Tao, with constant spontaneity:

The men of old dwelt in the midst of crudity and chaos; side by side with the rest of the world, they attained simplicity and silence there. At that time the yin and yang were harmonious and still, ghosts and spirits worked no mischief, the four seasons kept to their proper order, the ten thousand things knew no injury, and living creatures were free from premature death. Although men had knowledge, they did not use it. This was called the Perfect Unity. At this time, no one made a move to do anything, and there was unvarying spontaneity.¹³

This is when the harmonics are heard along with the fundamental note. When considering the yin-yang principle, the yin is the reflexive, the yang is the reflective. This is not a dualism. It is an explicit expressing an implicit unity.¹⁴ The center is the spontaneity in which the reflexive/reflective resides in dynamic interplay. It is a blended harmony. This is a continuous flow. Yet, the mind can upset the flow. Within, the body can beckon illness.

In judo for example, when ju-doing one resides within spontaneity. One is *in* the immediate experience moving *to* enlightenment. This is a centered movement. It is going-with-the-flow of the moment. This is beyond push or pull. Thinking can get in the *way*. One cannot think spontaneity. When losing one's center of gravity, with the slightest push or pull one is off center. When we cease with theoretic chatter heart and mind is met.

Going-with-the-flow is a way of *sustaining, expanding, uniting* without a loss of continuity. This is a staying-with the phenomenon itself. An investigation of wonder is presented to display this way of doing research. This Experiential Method begins with that which is given in an experiential description. Experiential Expressions (sustaining), give rise to Emergent Experiential Themes. Thematic Amplification (expanding), maintains the continuity of going-with-the-flow of the phenomenon itself. Reflective Synthesis (unifying), is then accomplished to present the experiential findings which are visible in each of these three movements.

The following research example, an investigation of wonder, begins with an experiential description written in response to the research statement, "Please describe an experience of wonder." Experiential Expressions appear in italics in the description and in each Dynamic Movement.

An Investigation of Wonder

Experiential Description

Atop a sea cliff in San Francisco's Suto Heights Park lives a very old monterey pine tree. It stands tall and majestic. It looms large in the middle of a grassy lawned area, surrounded by the sparse remains of another century's time and one man's dream.

Once a witness to the man's vision, standing on the rocky butress of the western California coastline and overlooking its long-time companion the Cliff House, this one particular tree has always *drawn me toward it. Today's visit draws me even nearer, both to it and to my own vision.* I look at it, walk around it and stare up into its huge limbs with

branches adorned green, which house hawks and hummingbirds alike. *I imagine what it must have been like*, those now faded memories of another era, the cable cars rumbling by, Sutro baths down the steep incline, Playland nestled along the ocean side border of salt water and sand. *I wonder and I think* beneath this old monterey pine. I sit on the ground where its roots sink deeply into the earth and listen to the songs sung by the wind in its sighing boughs. I think about how important trees are to me, for that matter to others, to humankind throughout history.

We share our lives and depend on one another. We enrich our lives and exchange the air we breathe. Trees comingle. Even in the ground which supports them. I wonder about this tree and what it has meant to others through time. It stands in the sun now but withstands the harshest weather, standing fast in the violent winds which lash this cliff top. It has survived, grown stronger by going-with-the-wind, not against it.

My attention drifts out to meet the horizon, that constantly changing horizon, where sky meets water. This openness invites me to reflect. *It takes me beyond myself yet questions pop up. What am I doing, where am I going. How can I reveal what I see?* Suddenly I notice the fog beginning to blow in, a familiar cat getting lower into the grass, the old lady that lives nearby who walks her dog along here each day. *These are familiar sights yet today each seems different, precious, alive.*

I hear the hawk's cry above, perched atop one of the highest tree branches, its head cocked to have me in sharp eye. *As usual it screeches three times. I smile and make my familiar sound.* Both of us visit. *I talk to it yet its answers remain my mystery.* We share this tree, this time. I wonder what this tree is for this bird. A familiar roost, a respite, a safe place to rest, a high ground for the hunt.

It has often occurred to me during my visits to my favorite perch, that *this vision was given by the spirit of the man* who built his home here over one hundred years ago. From this cliff top, the western edge of this continent, the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean lets the eye roam out as far as it can see. On the right of this vision are the spires of the Golden Gate Bridge, the entrance to the San Francisco Bay. To the left, down the seashore, the windmills in Golden Gate Park seem like ghosts of the past. I recall being here 30 years ago and the photos I have seen. I visualize the lush gardens which would have surrounded me, planted with rare plants and flowers and the lovely statuary which graced the grounds of this once white wooden palatial estate. *Now all gone.*

One or two deteriorating pieces nearly overgrown by foliage are but lingering memories of once grand and stately beauty. It has been

preserved in skeletons of stone and cement as a national park. Right in the middle of this scene lives this huge, sprawling monterey pine. For me it seems to be the spirit of this adventurous and influential, wealthy man who chose this panoramic cliff side dwelling for his home.

Sutro Heights Park, it bespeaks his name and this tree, the largest of them all, *stands fast, flexible and tall* to commemorate a vision, a dream. I am in awe of this moment where life seems so clear to me, so rich, full and free. *It is a gift.* I then begin to realize there are things I must do. Thoughts emerge of purposeful planning and organizing of the day. It is now time to leave, the spontaneity of the moment is lost.

Thematic Amplification

Unsolicited Invitation

Looking at this description of something in experience which set me to wonder, a tree, includes not only what the tree means for me but what it means to experience wonder. Wonder just happens. It arrives unannounced and you are already there.

To begin, it is clear that this tree has *drawn me toward it.* The tree itself seemed to bring my presence, thoughts and wonderings about both its life and my own into focus but not in a purposeful and directed way. Its presence was an opening, a pathway to life as it was revealed to me in its being. The context for the meaning of this tree includes its history, its location, its current day surroundings. Questioning, imagining and thinking seem to flow from my own being to the meaning of existence, the tree's and my own as well. *I wonder and I think.* In this way I moved from the now of daily life. I was open to an unsolicited invitation.

This invitation was recognized for what it was only after the experience of being with this tree and reflection upon it and the qualitative difference of my experiences on this particular visit. On many days I have had occasion to come to this location. Only on this day it was different. *These are familiar sights yet today each seems different, precious, alive.* Familiar sights and sounds took on new height and depth of meaning, new life, new intensity. *Today's visit draws me nearer, both to it and to my own vision.*

Time Stopped and Space Vanished

In many respects, my spontaneous involvement with the immediate surroundings already included the historical facts of what this tree's life served witness to and now brought forward in my own reflections the frequency of humankind's link with trees and experiences of wonder. I

pondered the many intricate roles of the tree in our everyday life. The practical, symbolic. In so doing my vision was enhanced. For example, the Buddha was Enlightened as he sat beneath the Bo tree. It occurred to me how trees are an integral aspect of our search for understanding or for simple enjoyments. We share life with them. They are symbols of life itself.

This particular tree called me to another time revealing to me the wonderings of another man. *I imagine what it must have been like.* It provided an opening for me to center my thoughts on my own life, to open to my own wondering and thinking. *It takes me beyond myself yet questions pop up. What am I doing, where am I going. How can I reveal what I see?* Its age, beauty and size inspired awe and I realized too that it is different in its meaning for me than it was for the man who surrounded it with his life and whose spirit now lingers in its boughs like the sharp-eyed hawk who sits in its topmost branches each morning. This tree is a living monument to another man's moments of wonder in another time before mine, *this vision was given by the spirit of the man.* It now serves not only as a reminder of another's life but solicits my own from me. Its existence let meaning and life reveal itself. *It is a gift.* I questioned who I am, what I am doing, where I am going. This was all brought forward by sitting beneath this fine old monterey pine.

Visiting Moments

This moment of wonder visited me. It is not something I anticipated or planned. This is unlike the tug and pull I experience in the purposeful directing of my thoughts in active, cognitive thinking and planning such as was necessary to create this presentation. Although many thoughts about my own life crossed my mind, I wondered also about the tree, its time, the man who lived near it. I saw familiar sights in my daily routine but they were of another moment, another height and depth of experience. The hawk's cry calls my attention to mystery. *As usual it screeches three times. I smile and make my familiar sound. I talk to it yet its answers remain my mystery.*

This thinking about breaks in and wonder recedes beyond its own horizon until the next. The experience was recognized in another way for what it was after living through it and reflecting upon it. It arose spontaneously, unexpectedly and is something which although overwhelmed me, also left as quickly as it came. I felt revitalized, whole and peaceful. I returned home. I became involved in the routine of my daily work and other activities, this was re-integrated and for the moment, forgotten. But the meaning of this moment stays with me in a significant way as the tree *stands fast, flexible and tall* on that cliff top where I visit it. *Now all gone.* The spontaneity of the moment is lost. I know that each visiting moment is new since there is no consciousness without memory.

Reflective Synthesis

Wonder itself is something which cannot merely be described or defined. It is revealed (elucidated) only through experience. It is spontaneous and qualitatively distinct. The experience of wonder demands an uninterrupted going-with-the-flow. Wonder is an experience which just happens. It arrives unannounced and departs in like manner. Neither can it be achieved by purposeful directing of one's thoughts nor by an act of will. In this respect, *It is a gift*.

Wonder visits unexpectedly. The guidelines to familiar and taken-for-granted experience are briefly suspended. The unfamiliar is found in the familiar. The once familiar takes on dimensions of meaning which were not recognized before. For these brief moments an alteration in time and space occurs. In wonder, the vision of the eye is not the vision expanded. It is not what is physically seen that is the expanded dimension. Wonder is astonishment in root of existence. The wholeness and ongoingness of life's flow is but for a moment, in view. This mystery stands present and although unsolicited, reveals itself as something beyond the self. *I wonder and I think*. Experiences of wonder allow one to come more into oneself, to center life in one's own being.

Concluding Remarks

Thomas Langan presents the integral continuity which flows through the ontological introduction and the application of this method. In the ontological, amidst the flow of being, things persist. In the application:

The great pine has outlasted Sutro, and will outlast you — yet all of you, pine, Sutro, Jim, the hawk are *Seinenden* which nature has distinguished and allowed to stand out from the flow from which they emerge and into which they will return — and each becomes a (temporary but for a while stable) reference point.¹⁵

Following out that which stands out from the flow, Langan points out that:

Phenomenology has so emphasized consciousness as process that it underplays the intentional transcendence towards the persisting-in-themselves things which get revealed within the horizons of consciousness and guide us in its deployment.¹⁶

The structure is the process of consciousness. It vanishes in its own end. The structure depends upon the assuring consciousness which is the function in self-witnessing. (Re-witnessing is to reassure that which is assured.) The self-witnessing persists within the flow. It is temporary but

for a while stable, a flow within the flow. It is going-with-the-flow that flows. Going-with-the-flow is to release oneself into the open-dimension of ongoingness.

Intentionality, for this Experiential Method, is located within the reflexive, self-witnessing. For Pierre Thévenaz:

Intentionality can very well be revelatory and constitutive of the objective world; it none the less remains that the immediately reflexive consciousness of self is a *constituting power* more original, a fact more primitive, than intentionality.¹⁷

Notes

- 1) Cf. William James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, foreword Gardner Murphree (New York: Collier Books, 1972), p. 167.
- 2) Thomé H. Fang, *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development* (Taipei: Linking Publishing Co. Ltd., 1981), p. 279. Fang presents an elaborate scheme in this work of this complicated situation of knowledge.
- 3) Direct communication from Mary-Rose Barral at the International Society for Philosophy and Psychotherapy, Las Vegas, Nevada, 11 October 1986.
- 4) Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death; A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening*, trans., intro. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 17.
- 5) Written communication from Sandra A. Wawrytko, San Diego, California, 24 November 1986.
- 6) William James, *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to 'Pragmatism'* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914), pp. 49–50.
- 7) Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1946), p. 39.
- 8) Wawrytko, *op. cit.*
- 9) Telephone communication from George Chih-Hsin Sun, Mobile, Alabama, 22 February 1987.
- 10) *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 205.

- 11) Written communication from Thomas Langan, Ontario, Canada, 2 March 1987.
- 12) Written communication from Kuang-ming Wu, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 28 October 1986.
- 13) *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu, op. cit.*, p. 172.
- 14) Pierre Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology?: and other Essays*, trans. James M. Edie, Charles Courtney and Paul Brockelman, ed., intro. James M. Edie, preface John Wild (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962), p. 131.
- 15) Langan, *op. cit.*
- 16) *Ibid.*
- 17) Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology?*, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

Reflective Commentary:

The Structure and Function of Consciousness: Going-with-the-flow

I must begin by stating that I can claim no expertise in phenomenology, being more properly described as a friend of Taoism. Hence my comments constitute an accompaniment more than a critique, a series of passing observations and earnest questions.

In this presentation, focused as it is on the theme of experience and self, I was struck by what is revealed about the experience and self-concept. Sunnie and Jim tread this academic road, and have gifted us with delightful spontaneity born of wonder. In this presentation there is a complementarity and interpenetration most instructive as a merging of theory and practice.

As for more specific comments, Sunnie and Jim's choice offering I applaud. The audacity in incorporating the hackneyed phrase "Going-with-the-flow," despite its compromised heritage and emerging triumphantly with a fresh vision. The spirit of Chuang Tzu seems to suffuse Sunnie and Jim's account of the Monterey pine, the words meandering spontaneously amid the habitual haunt of that Chinese sage. Even the choice of topics is one to truly gladden the heart of a Taoist—soaring birds, receptive plants and the elusive invisible wind. Moreover, would not Chuang Tzu delight in the section title, "Time Stopped and Space Vanished"? Sunnie and Jim have been able to write about wonder with a sense of wonder—a feat which is itself wondrous.

And yet the western ear and intellect is surely not excluded here. Sunnie and Jim's discussion delves a topic of continuing urgency for the western mind and does so in a way which spans cultural imperatives and presumptions. The dynamic interaction between reflexive and reflective, the immediate and the abstract, is confronted head-on. The glimmer of Sunnie and Jim's *Experiential Method* which we have been afforded here demonstrates that it merits further exploration, given its potential for contributing to the ongoing project of phenomenological praxis.

Without explicitly referring to Taoist texts, Sunnie and Jim's words are punctuated with images that resonate with Taoist thought/imagining: heart and mind, (*hsin*), analytic part and synthetic whole, spontaneity as self-forgetting being among these. But Sunnie and Jim go further in contributing telling poetic images born of creativity "thinking about breaks in and wonder recedes beyond its own."

Nonetheless, a few obscuring clouds block the horizon, at least from my perspective. One question which I would like to raise here concerns the concept of wonder as a gift. Are we to assume that the gift of wonder is

purely random in nature, appearing or not appearing at its own volition? Or is it possible to evoke wonder? Can we make ourselves more receptive to the “gift” of wonder or perhaps even make ourselves more likely to be gifted? Further, when it is said that “Wonder allows one to come more into oneself, to center in one’s own being,” is this a reference to a form of self-transcendence, a transcending to the human *Teh* which is ultimately Tao?

A related question arises in connection with the comments quoted from Thomas Langan, in which Langan refers to objects which nature has “allowed to stand out from the flow.” Is this standing out necessary or even consistent with the process described? Is there not a contradiction with the later comment that “Going-with-the-flow is to release oneself into the open-dimension of ongoingness,” that is, a release into the self-forgetting which is the antithesis of standing out?

I am reminded of D. T. Suzuki’s metaphor of wave and ocean, in which the out-standing wave has a fleeting illusion of separateness from the ocean. Can it be said that nature *allows* this illusion, in the sense of condoning illusory experiences? Or is this phasing not only excessively anthropomorphic but equally reflective of the western mindset obsessed with power and control? Might we not rather view the waves as engaged in spontaneous play, thus playing at separateness? Just so, perhaps, the pine, Sutro, Sunnie and the hawk play with each other (as others) in their encounters.

To conclude I find this presentation a cross-cultural and comparative exploration excursion conducted with mutual benefit to both philosophical trends. More importantly, we see that cultural boundaries need not constitute barriers in philosophy. This work has pressed forward with insights to contribute something palpably alive and breathing for the audience to ponder as we stand poised inhaling and exhaling.

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