


Possibilities that are **YOU!**



EXISTENTIAL
(Being)

Reflecting



*Being

Planning



Volume 22: Beyond Action

by Alex Bennet
Mountain Quest Institute

This is the final book a series of 22 short books, what we call Conscious Look Books, that are conversational in nature, taking full advantage of the reader's lived experience to share what can sometimes be difficult concepts. We live in a world that is tearing itself apart, where people are out of control and wanting to control others, rebelling from years of real and perceived abuse and suppression of thought. Yet, this chaos offers us as a humanity the opportunity to make a giant leap forward. By opening ourselves to ourselves, we are able to fully explore who we are and who we can become. With that exploration comes a glimmer of hope as we begin to reclaim the power of each and every mind developed by the lived human experience!

These 22 concepts are part of the learning journey of which we are all a part, the Intelligent Social Change Journey (ISCJ). This is a developmental journey of the body, mind and heart, moving from the heaviness of cause-and-effect linear extrapolations, to the fluidity of co-evolving with our environment, to the lightness of breathing our thought and feelings into reality. Grounded in development of our mental faculties, these are phase changes, each building on and expanding previous learning in our movement toward intelligent activity.

These little books share 22 large concepts from the Profundity and Bifurcation of Change (which is written from an academic viewpoint). Each book is independent and includes seven ideas offered for the student of life to help us become the co-creators that we are. These books, available in soft cover from Amazon, support idea exploration, class discussion, other discussion groups or can be used as special occasion gifts.

Possibilities

that are **YOU!**

Volume 22: Beyond Action

by
Alex Bennet



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Human experience
A lifetime of growth slowly rising
Acting, Reacting and Synthesizing

The soul's persona
New experiences remanning
Being, Reflecting and conscious Planning

Divine quiescence
Peering through prisms bending the light
Giving a full spectrum to inward sight.

-Cindy Lee Scott

Preface

This book is for YOU. Regardless of economic success or educational prowess, beyond cultural influences and habitual routines, YOU have been and continue to be a student of life. And since our time in this learning sphere is precious, the challenges and opportunities are both rapid and continuous, always offering new insights. YOU are a verb, not a noun. Forget what you were taught in grammar school!

Now, we live in a world of demanding challenges, where people and systems are rebounding from control, rebelling from eras of real and perceived suppression of thought. With the acceleration of mental development over the past century has come increased awareness of human capacity, with economic success in small bites for many and large bites for the few, and for some coming with an arrogance that says, “Look at me. I’m right, you’re wrong, and I’m not listening.”

Because of our Economy’s focus on the material, economic success begets economic success and the separation of wealth grows larger, flaming the difficulties of surviving in a CUCA world, that is, a world of accelerating change, rising uncertainty, increasing complexity, and the anxiety that comes with these phenomena.

Yet all of this **offers us, as a humanity the opportunity to make a giant leap forward.** By opening ourselves to ourselves, we are able to fully explore who we are. With that exploration comes glimmers of hope as we contemplate the power of each and every mind developed by the lived human experience!

As YOU move through your life of thoughts, feelings and actions—even when you have to repeat things over and over again as part of the experience—YOU are advancing toward the next level of consciousness.

Here's the bottom line. Everything that has been learned and continues to be learned is out there ... and as a student of life, YOU have access to it all. So often it is expressed in ways that don't make sense because of the language and media being used. It just isn't presented conversationally, and you don't have a chance to ask questions from your unique point of view.

So, these little books—which we refer to as Conscious Look Books—are specifically focused on sharing key concepts from *The Profundity and Bifurcation of Change* series and **looking at what those concepts mean to YOU.** While there is not a specific ordering to reading these little books, as we've advanced through some difficult concepts and come to this final book, I'll briefly review those as

needed to develop this final text. For a deeper treatment of those concepts, see the earlier volumes.

These books are conversational in nature, and further conversations are welcome. We invite your thoughts and questions, not guaranteeing answers because there is still so much to learn, but happy to join in the conversation. Visit Mountain Quest Inn and Retreat Center www.mountainquestinn.com located in the Allegheny Mountains of West Virginia or email alex@mountainquestinstitute.com

As my partner David reminds us: *Run with the future!*

Our gratitude to all those who take this journey with us, and a special thanks to the colleagues, partners, friends, family and visitors who touch our hearts and Mountain Quest in so many ways.

With Love and Light, Alex and David

Contents

Introduction What does it mean to exist? Why are we here? (Page 1)

Idea 1: First and foremost, people learn from experiencing. (Page 7)

Idea 2: Neuroscience findings have a significant impact on experiential learning. (Page 13)

Idea 3: Depending on the level from which you look, there are multiple human natures. (Page 19)

Idea 4: There is a divine nature to the individual human soul. (Page 31)

Idea 5: Synthesizing is a gift of the human mind. (Page 39)

Idea 6: We are given hints of what is possible. (Page 45)

Exercise: Practicing Mental Imaging

Idea 7: We plan the infinite journey of the soul. (Page 59)

Exercise: Scenario Building

What does this mean to me? (Page 71)

Introduction

We begin and end with the mystery of existence. Each and every human being is unique, whether considered from the frame of reference of DNA, experience, culture, family, thought patterns, beliefs, values, or emotions and feelings. At the core of all this difference is the *Self*, with a subjective mind, exploring the world from the inside out, a protagonist ready for action. The mind is the seat of consciousness, enabling awareness of our Self as a knower, as an observer and learner, and as one who takes action. But knowing, observing, learning and taking action are not static, nor is the Self. The perception of Self is a *learned pattern*, beginning early in the journey of individuation and shored up by the subject and object relationship. **We are a verb, not a noun**, continuously associating incoming information with stored patterns, creating and recreating a continuous series of NOWs that become our source of thoughts and actions.

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INSIGHT: The mind is the seat of consciousness, enabling awareness of our Self as a knower, as an observer and learner, and as one who takes action.

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The reference to mind inevitably pulls up a vision of the brain. For purposes of this conversation, the **brain** consists of a molecular structure and the fluids that flow within and through this structure. The **mind** is the totality of the *patterns in the brain and throughout the body*, created by neurons and their firings and connections. These patterns encompass all of our thoughts. As used in this book, the term **mind/brain** refers to both the structure and the patterns emerging within the structure¹ *and* throughout the nervous system.

While historically the brain has been presented as the seat of control—and it certainly plays a continuous role in the process of thought—the body-mind acts as an information network with no fixed hierarchy.² As we interact with life, our neuronal circuitry rewires itself in response to stimulation. Neurons are not bound to each other physically and thus have the flexibility to repeatedly create, break and recreate relationships with other neurons, the process of plasticity.

Neurons exist throughout the body! For example, there are neurons in the spinal cord, the heart, the peripheral nervous system and the gut. While these neurons are largely focused on autonomic functions, that is, automatic activity not under voluntary control of the individual such as the heartbeat, all of these neurons provide sensory feedback to the brain, which affects emotions. In a

large sense, at some level all of our body participates in our “thinking” process!

In this conversation, the emergent quality of Self moves beyond biological drives and cultural habits. Rather, it is the totality of the conscious and unconscious mind, the brain and the body. This is an expanded view with Self inclusive of the personality, and—as our consciousness expands and becomes co-creator of our reality—inclusive of every aspect of what it is to be human. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says, “Inside each person there is a wonderful capacity to reflect on the information that the various sense organs register, and to direct and control these experiences.”³ This is rather like a figment of our imagination, “something we create to account for the multiplicity of impressions, emotions, thoughts, and feelings that the brain records in consciousness.”⁴ There is a Conscious Look Book on *Self*.

And reflect we do! The healthy Self is continuously asking questions. *What is reality?* The Hindu say that what we think, see and believe are illusions, what they call the *veils of Maya*. By lifting these veils, we get a closer look at what life is all about. Similarly, more than 24 centuries ago, the pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus (460-357 B.C.) is credited with saying: *Nothing is real, or if it is, we don't know it. We have no way of knowing the truth. Truth is at the bottom of an abyss.*

What is truth? Truth changes. Truth is relative to the amount of information that has been garnered and is, like knowledge, at some level context sensitive and situation dependent. Since we are continuously learning and the situation is continuously changing, new information, different knowledge, expanded knowledge, and new concepts are always emerging, which bring with them new truths. Even concepts, which can provide a higher level of truth than single events, are shifting and changing. When a new situation occurs where a concept that was considered truth does not fit, then a larger concept is discoverable that has a greater level of truth. Our job is to continue this search for truth, the highest virtue on the mental plane. There is a Conscious Look Book on *Truth in Context*.

As awareness of Self emerges through interactive experiences and reflection, consciousness expands and creativity is unleashed. *This creative urge is our birthright*. Much like the behavioral model of the child coming of age—and often concurrent with full development of the executive brain which occurs around 28 years of age—the Self has developed an understanding of who and what it is, making conscious decisions through its mental faculties and in anticipation of the outcomes of those decisions and actions. Not only is the Self creating its life through a conscious understanding of *who and what it is* in relationship to others, but it also understands *who and what it wants to be*, with the

aspiration to be anything and the inspiration to be something great.⁵

What does it mean to exist? From the physical perspective, we can answer from a biological viewpoint, as a perceived individuated object that exists in space. (And from a symbiotic viewpoint, we understand that space wouldn't exist if it weren't for the objects within space.) From a mental perspective, we can answer from the viewpoint of our individuated thought patterns. From an emotional perspective, we can answer from the viewpoint of our feelings. And from a spiritual viewpoint, we can offer our personal beliefs and values. In this set of answers, we've very much "separated" ourselves out from others and our environment, yet we could not "exist" without either!

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INSIGHT: When reflecting on our existence, we tend to separate ourselves from others and our environment, yet we could not "exist" without either!

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Clearly—at least from our limited knowledge—the perception of existence has a great deal to do with our mind, which is a continuous product of all that we've experienced and are experiencing. Where is all that experience happening? Our environment. Our interactions with

others. **We are existential beings in an experiential world.**

This is the jumping off point for the ideas in this little book.

[Your Thoughts]



Idea 1: First and foremost, people learn from experiencing.

We begin with that which is known, or at least that which we perceive is known: the meaning of experience, and the learning that occurs *through* experience. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines experience as an apprehension, that is, the ability to understand (1) an object, thought, or emotion through the senses or mind; or (2) an event, or series of events, participated in or lived through. In describing the relationship between *reflective observation* and *experiential learning*, authors and educators David Boud, Rosemary Keogh and David Walker forward that “experience consists of the *total response* of a person to a situation or event: what he or she thinks, feels, does and concludes at the time and immediately thereafter.”⁶

Experience is the fundamental way people learn. This term covers much territory, from living in a certain environment to a direct interaction with another person, to a frightening event, to the internal experience of dreaming, meditation, reading or reflecting on actions. All of these are ways that information can come to the attention of the mind and thereby interact and influence our thoughts and perceptions of the world. Historian Michael Oakshott

offers that *experience*, “of all the words in the philosophic vocabulary, is the most difficult to manage.”⁷ Different people will learn different things from the same experience, and can learn similar lessons from different experiences. And there are so many ways that individuals can make sense of their experiences. Internally, this might include reflection, a meditation experience, or sleeping on it. Externally, this might include discussions with friends, collaboration with colleagues, or virtual interactions on the Internet!⁸

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INSIGHT: Experience is the fundamental way people learn.

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Educator Eduard Lindeman offers that “the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner’s experience”⁹ and educator Malcolm Knowles argues that the role of experience in adult learning is becoming increasingly important, particularly in the professional development arena. He suggests four ways that an adult’s experiences affect learning. These are through (a) creating a wider range of individual differences, (b) providing a rich resource for learning, (c) creating biases that can inhibit or shape learning, and (d) providing grounding for the self-identity of adults.¹⁰ Perhaps the reason we agree with both of these educators is

because we are now learning so much more about just how we learn.

David Kolb was an early champion of experiential learning. He chose to call his model *experiential* learning to tie its intellectual origins to the work of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget (discussed in more detail below) and to emphasize the strong role of experience in the learning process.¹¹ Putting experience in terms of creating knowledge, David says that, "Knowledge is continuously derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner."¹² While David differentiates his model from the rationalists, behaviorists, and other cognitive theories of learning, he posits that *experiential learning complements both cognitive and behavioral theories of learning*. Cognitive theories give heavy emphasis to abstract symbols and their manipulations and behavioral theories ignore consciousness and subjective experiences in the learning process. In his use of the expression *concrete experience*, David intended his approach to be a holistic integrating perspective on learning and tends to consider the combination of experience, perception, cognition, and behavior.¹³

However, these theories were all based on cognitive psychology and educational theories developed from the behaviorist approach of observation and experiments. This approach measures behavior, inferring that learning comes

from behavior.¹⁴ While this has yielded considerable knowledge about learning, it is an outside in, black box approach that provides little understanding of the what, why, and how that goes on inside the mind/brain.

Advances in brain measurement techniques at the turn of the century accelerated research in, interest about, and public awareness of, the importance and potential of neuroscience and related fields. This new technology has been a significant increase in our understanding of the internal workings of the mind/brain. Although there is still very much that is not known, some of the emerging findings have the potential to significantly enhance adult experiential learning. In addition, there are indications that related fields of inquiry, such as biology and evolutionary psychology, need to be integrated with cognitive psychology and education to advance the art and practice of learning.¹⁵

We increasingly recognize that we are holistic beings, and that the mind is an integrated, biological and complex part of our human system. Accordingly, exploring the intersection of neuroscience and adult learning has significantly contributed to our understanding and implementation of experiential learning. In this regard, it is easy to resonate with E. O. Wilson's work on consilience, the bringing together of two or more disciplines, or when two or more inductions drawn from different disciplines

come into agreement.¹⁶ It is humans that separate knowledge into different domains, not nature. Observing from a systems perspective, limitations and challenging problems often derive from our inability to rise above the tendency to categorize and specialize in separate disciplines. While disciplines are convenient artificial constructs that may be effective within their boundaries, they may also be limited by their own frames of reference and accepted procedures and practices.

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INSIGHT: We are holistic beings, and the mind is an integrated, biological and complex part of our human system.

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As we move into a quantum frame of reference, recognizing that energy and matter are indefinite and that thought affects energy,¹⁷ more and more individuals are realizing that the limitations and boundaries we create close us off from fields of possibilities. This can happen within a discipline as well as across disciplines. Just such an example of a limitation within a discipline was the dominance of behaviorism on learning research in the 20th century. As David Kolb posits, "In the overeager embrace of the rational, scientific, and technological, our concept of the learning process itself was distorted first by rationalism and later by behaviorism."¹⁸ And

today, we open to the new possibilities offered by neuroscience learning and Quantum thinking.

[Your Thoughts]

We do live in unprecedented times; indeed, turbulent times that can arguably be defined as ushering humanity into a new Golden Age—a time of "Lightenment"—transcending the limitations of the past and offering the opportunity to embrace new ways of living and learning in a globally and collaboratively entangled connectedness.¹⁹ In this shifting and dynamic environment, life demands accelerated cycles of learning experiences.

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INSIGHT: In our shifting and dynamic environment, life demands accelerated cycles of learning experiences.

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Fortunately, we as a humanity are looking more deeply within ourselves to better understand the way our mind/brain operates, the amazing qualities of the body that power our thoughts and feelings, and the reciprocal loops as those thoughts and feelings change our physical structure. This emerging knowledge begs us to relook and rethink what we know about learning, providing a new starting point to expand toward the future. As

educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom describes, “Because of its broad implications for individual and social well-being, there is now a general consensus in the scientific community that the biology of the mind will be to the 21st Century what the biology of the gene has been to the 20th Century.”²⁰

While there has been some criticism of David Kolb’s experiential learning model since its publication in 1984, nonetheless it quickly became the generally accepted model for experiential learning. In 2015, physicist David Bennet published a new model of experiential learning described as the Intelligent Complex Adaptive Learning System (ICALS).²¹ This model was based on ten years of findings emerging from Neuroscience. Those findings fall into 13 areas, which are loosely grouped as described below. While it is not our intent to delve deeply into the neuroscience, we will provide top-level examples of those findings in terms of their impact on experiential learning.

Group 1 represents foundational areas that are always involved in learning. These are the unconscious (1), memory (2), and emotion (3).

Examples for (1) include: thinking is mostly unconscious; *the unconscious can influence our thoughts and emotions without our awareness*; and we may act for reasons of which we are not aware. Examples for (2) include: memories are re-created each time they are recalled and therefore never the

same; emotional tags impact memory; and memory patterns cannot be erased at will. Examples for (3) include: emotions miss details but are sensitive to meaning; the entire body is involved in emotions and the body drives the emotions; and emotions influence all incoming information.

Group 2 represents findings that influence learning in specific situations. These areas are stress (4), creativity (5), mirror neurons (6), anticipating the future (7), and social support (9).

Examples for (4) include: emotional fear inhibits learning; voluntary learning promotes Theta waves that correlate with little or no stress and positive feedback; stress depends on how we perceive a situation; and there is an optimum level of stress for learning. Examples for (5) include: an enriched environment can produce a personal internal reflective world of imagination and creativity; the unconscious produces flashes of insight; and volleying between the conscious and the unconscious increases creativity. Examples for (6) include: cognitive mimicry can transfer active behavior and other cultural norms; through reliving we recreate the feelings, perspectives and other phenomena that we observe; *neurons create the same pattern when we see some action being taken as when we do it*; and mirror neurons facilitate neural resonance between observed actions and executing actions. Examples for (7) include: the neocortex

constantly tries to predict the next experience; the mind/brain unconsciously tailors internal knowledge to the situation at hand; and *the mind/brain creates an internal representation of the world*. Examples for (9) include: language and social relationships build and shape the brain; affective attunement contributes to the evolution and sculpting of the brain; and the brain actually needs to seek out an affectively attuned other for learning.

Group 3 supports the capacity for, and enhancement of, lifelong learning. These areas are social interaction (8), epigenetics (10), plasticity (11), exercise and health (12), and aging (13).

Examples for (8) include: physical mechanisms have developed in our brain to enable us to learn through social interactions; and social interaction mechanisms foster the engagement in affective attunement, consider the intentions of others, understand what another person is thinking, and think about how we want to interact. Examples for (10) include: genes are not destiny; the environment can change the actions of genes via non-expression; and *what we believe leads to what we think leads to our knowledge base, which leads to our actions*. Examples of (11) include: plasticity is a result of the connection between neural patterns in the mind and the physical world—what we think and believe impacts our physical bodies; and *thoughts change the structure of the brain, and brain structure*

influences the creation of new thoughts. Examples of (12) include: meditation and other mental exercises can change feelings, attitudes and mindsets; exercise increases brainpower; and *positive and negative beliefs affect every aspect of life.* Examples of (13) include: At any age, mental exercise has a global positive effect on the brain; the best mental exercise to slow aging is new learning and doing things you've never done before; and despite certain cognitive losses, the engaged, mature brain can make effective decisions at more intuitive levels.

The examples that are italicized above hold some level of significance to our continuing development of the theme of this little book. For an in-depth discussion of these findings and the neuroscience supporting them, see *Expanding the Self: The Intelligent Complex Adaptive Learning System* written by David Bennet, Alex Bennet and Robert Turner.

The historic David Kolb model forwards there are four modes of learning: *Concrete Experience*, *Reflective Observation*, *Abstract Conceptualization* and *Active Experimentation*. From neuroscience findings, the ICALS model recognizes that the environment is actively engaged in the learning process. Thus, the ICALS model adds a fifth mode of learning, that of *Social Engagement*. Further, the "Self" is added as an underlying foundation. There are five major characteristics essential to the ICALS

model, with (1) and (4) the same as those David Kolb developed for his model.

- (1) Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
- (2) Learning is a continuous process that is either grounded in experience or *an emergent property of consciousness*.
- (3) Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
- (4) Learning invokes transactions between the person and internal and external environments.
- (5) Learning is a self-organizing system.

From this short discussion of the ICALS model, it is clear that *learning is a characteristic common to all people throughout the living experience, and that people learn through experience*. In the next Idea we are going to explore other potential characteristics of human nature.



Idea 3: Depending on the level from which you look, there are multiple human natures.

Since each and every human being is unique both in terms of genetic endowments and learned experiences, it only makes sense that it would be difficult to talk about the entirety of humanity as having a specific human nature! Yet, Western thinkers from the pre-Socratic age to the present day have tried to identity “human nature.” The various topics in this discussion focus around nearly every aspect of what it is to be human. For example, I’ve joined many a discussion around meaning, reality, consciousness and self, and, indeed, these are talked about in the Conscious Look Books that are part of this series. Then, there are the ever-present questions around the differences between males and females, the relationship of language and thought, the difference between values and ethics, and whether people are driven by emotions or thoughts. And, depending on who you are conversing with, you will have entirely different opinions expressed!

The prevailing notion across these thinkers is that human nature is a “single, fixed, inherited attribute—a common property of all members of our species.”²² Since we tend to use the term “human nature” in the singular, this concept is certainly

implicit in the term.²³ Paul Ehrlich, an educator and biologist, strongly disagrees with this idea. He argues that human nature is not the same across the human race at large, across societies or across a group of individuals. Thus, as he describes (in the plural), “human natures are the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of Homo sapiens.”²⁴

Are there universals?

This begs the question: Are there universals? Universals theory looks at resemblances of identity in terms of properties and relations. From these properties and their relationships, natural classes of things emerge. We add the term *conditions* to this description of universals, and defer to Armstrong’s description that universals are the substance of the world, with substance something that is capable of independent existence.²⁵

As a path to understanding the role of universals in the laws of nature, we look to *Natural Class* theory, which includes individuals, first-order tokens and classes of higher order (with definite truth conditions). In other words, there is a hierarchy of truth. This makes sense. Higher-order patterns, which apply to a larger number of events or experiences, have a higher level of truth. See the Conscious Look Book on *Truth in Context*.

The well-established discipline of *Set* theory supports the concepts of classes that have definite truth conditions. Further, Natural Class theory

requires *relations among* individuals and classes of individuals, with the naturalness of the class a property of the class.

While there are certainly solid arguments against the acceptance of universals, we agree with philosopher David Armstrong that (1) the less than exact resemblance of universals is analyzable in terms of an incomplete identity of universals, which themselves are universals, and (2) that there are irreducibly higher-order relationships holding *between* universals,²⁶ both of which help substantiate the existence of universals. This refers to discovering patterns among universals.

Wow, what a bunch of words and thoughts! I'm getting confused. Another way of looking at this is through thinking about best practices and lessons learned. From Knowledge Management we've learned that both practices and lessons are context-sensitive and situation-dependent, that is, you can't just take a specific practice and apply it in a different situation and get the same results. However, if you understand the *pattern* of the practice in context, you can often adjust that pattern in the new context to achieve similar results.

Concepts as formulas facilitate rapid processing of large amounts of information coming in through all of our senses. Rather than addressing each sense separately, these formulas help build a predictive approach to accurately determine the

outcome of various actions and interactions.

Discernment and discrimination—representing the ability to identify and choose what is of value, and the equally difficult ability to toss aside that which is not of value—enable our thinking to challenge a concept and try to apply it to different situations. For example:

Within a specific domain of knowledge, when this action is taken within this situation and context, this is what is going to happen.

OR, as a higher-order pattern,

*Within a specific domain of knowledge, when this **type** of action is taken within this **type** of situation and context, this is the **type** of response that will occur.*

In the latter case, **type** refers to sameness in identity, although this may be a loose and popular identity,²⁷ that is, similar. Each example would represent a token of this type. This sameness in identity *may* mean that two things are different parts of some wider unity that includes both (two branches on a tree), *or* they are both different members of the same class of things (two trees), *or* they are different parts of a resemblance structure (two pictures of trees), *or* they fall under the same concept (photosynthesis).²⁸ While we do not hold with the *Realist* belief that two things of the same type are strictly identical, we do not agree with the *Nominalist* belief that there are no strict identities

reaching across different tokens of type. Again, where a relationship lies between these two extremes is dependent on the level from which we look. We can certainly say that a universal for humans is learning, but the activities and experiences they go through while learning are certainly diverse. We can certainly say that the heart beats and the neurons fire, but the pace of that beating and the patterns created in the firing are NOT consistent across humans.

So, we begin to recognize that there are patterns of patterns, and the higher we look at how things relate, moving beyond the particulars of context and situation, the more similarities we can recognize. This is the underpinning of big data, where learning algorithms connect differentiating features of the information being searched to identify key features and higher order patterns.

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INSIGHT: There are patterns of patterns, and the higher we look at how things relate, moving beyond the particulars of context and situation, the more similarities we can recognize.

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An example of a universal across cultures is Joseph Campbell's discovery of the hero's journey, an archetype of myths around the world.²⁹ The hero's journey moves through tragedy (which shatters forms and our attachments to those forms)

into comedy, which is labeled as “the wild and careless, inexhaustible joy of life invincible.”³⁰ Joseph sees the myth following the rites of passage: separation, initiation, and return. “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”³¹ This is the story of Prometheus, who stole fire from the heavens, and Jason, who faced the Clashing Rocks and a guardian dragon to steal the Golden Fleece, and Aeneas, who was able to fool a three-headed watchdog to talk with his dead father. This same cycle appears in sacred writings across all the continents.

What are our human natures?

Agreeing with Paul Ehrlich that, as lower-order patterns, behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of Homo sapiens are part of human natures (plural), what *types* of things are included in those human natures? Further, and an even larger question, are future generations tethered to these human natures? Let’s start with the first question.

There is a part of “human natures” that we haven’t mentioned, and that has very much to do with the physical aspects of our existence. We are temporal beings participating in a living experience,

and each of us has limits, that is, capacities and capabilities tied to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual planes. For example, we are mortal, we each have various physical anomalies, and the ravages of age corrupt the mortal body. We are each gifted with some level of intellect, howbeit with different capacities, and then we choose how that intellect is developed and used. *That* choice represents free will; we have agency.

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INSIGHT: We are temporal beings participating in a living experience, and each of us has limits, that is, capacities and capabilities tied to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual planes.

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Now, come to think of it, can some of those things be considered universals? Mortality of the physical form is certainly universal for the human! And we *do* have free will, even if some of us don't believe that we do, or choose not to use that free will.

A few weeks before writing this, I began asking friends, colleagues and visitors to the Mountain Quest Inn (located in the Allegheny Mountains of West Virginia) what characteristics represent human conditions. While I set out to organize these responses in terms of behaviors,

beliefs and attitudes, I realized that rather than beliefs, these characteristics fell easily into the areas of behaviors, attitudes and *conditions*. Here's what those people had to say.

Behaviors: Consciousness expansion, Creativity, Choosing right and wrong, Mental structure we develop, Learning by doing, Making mistakes, Development of self, Humility, Sympathy-Empathy-Compassion, Choosing energy out, Co-service, Helping people, Magnanimous/giving, Generosity, Patience/tolerance, Music, Grounding, Work ethic, Atonement, Urge to do more, Drive, Ambition, Seeking perfection, Persistence, Resilience, Tenacity.

Those that have more of a negative tone: Consciousness loss when stagnant, Stress, Holding on to feelings/memories, Allowing senses to drive our behavior, Influenced by logic, Judgmental, Mean, Ugliness, Responsive to evil.

Attitudes: Kindness, Caring, Respect, Desire, Desire freedom, Excitement, Doubt of self-worth, Why me?, Dissatisfaction, Disappointment, Distrust, Poor me, Often hold grudges, Emotions tied together (love/hate), Greed, Selfishness, Coveting, Fear.

Conditions: Innocence when little, Naiveite, Boundaries of abilities, Ability to learn, Ability to grow, Fallibility, Limitations, Limited

understanding, Naturally-occurring deficiencies, Relativity, Context significance, Conditioned experiences/responsiveness, Social beings/need others, Team players, Chivalrous/earned respect, Beauty, Carelessness, Forgetfulness.

In the area of beliefs, one person felt that “religion” was a part of human natures. Hmmm. Well, certainly beliefs are, in general, and so our personal beliefs regarding a specific religion would be part of “human natures.” However, religion, by definition, is focused on *how* we apply our beliefs, the dogma connected with our beliefs, the way we worship that in which we believe.

Spirituality certainly is part of our human natures. Spiritual means pertaining to the soul, or “standing in relationship to another based on matters of the soul.”³² This definition from the Oxford Dictionary requires us to also define soul. Soul represents the animating principle of human life in terms of thought and action (BEHAVIORS), specifically focused on its moral aspects, the emotional part of human nature (ATTITUDES), and higher development of the mental faculties. From the philosophical aspect, it is the vital, sensitive or rational principle in human beings (CONDITION).³³

From these definitions it is clear that Spirituality is part of “human natures,” and while it

Spirituality has to do with how we act in the world.

As Csikszentmihalyi says, “An enduring vision in

both work and life derives its power from soul—the

energy a person or organization devotes to purposes

INSIGHT: Soul represents the animating principle

INSIGNII. Soul represents the animating principle of human life in terms of thought and action

emotional part of human nature, and higher

development of the mental faculties.

These things are not separate, of course.

Everything works together. We live in/with

conditions, feel (and often express) attitudes, and

choose behaviors, at least some of the time, although

we have many reactions that are unconscious

responses. We act and react. And then we synthesize

After this discussion, it *feels* easier to explore

the answer to the second question: Are future

generations tethered to these human natures?

Considering that each and every human being is

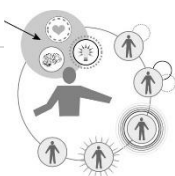
unique both in terms of genetic endowments and

learned experiences, and that we live in a

continuously changing world, again, it only makes

sense that future generations, who will inhabit a world that we can only imagine, *will create and choose their own human natures*. Yet, at the highest levels of learning, and emotions, and the need for connections to others, these are universals, a part of our Human Nature.

[Your Thoughts]



Idea 4: There is a divine nature to the individual human soul.

As a philosophy, Existentialism emerged in the thinking of 19th and 20th century philosophers who shared the belief that all things begin with the living, acting, feeling human. The individual is the center of reality. Everything is subjective. The meaning of life created by each individual is all that exists. As a definition, we choose that provided by Merriam-Webster: “A chiefly 20th century philosophical movement embracing diverse doctrines but centering on analysis of *individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong or good or bad.*”³⁵

There are several important points alluded to in this definition. First, that there was disagreement among those who thought of themselves as Existentialists as to exactly what that meant. I remember as a young girl reading Jean-Paul Sartre’s short story “The Wall”, which conveys a random reality of a political prisoner filled with pain and social amorality. I identified with this story, and sadly felt this was what the life experience was all

about. Indeed, this certainly aligns with the word “plight” in the definition above.

Second, there is the idea of an *unfathomable* universe. Of course, the universe IS unfathomable from our point of view, yet as we grow and learn, we begin to recognize patterns that play themselves out in nature at various levels of focus. For example, all the mineral substances that are part of the Earth’s crust can be described by the Platonic solids, five shapes that each have equal faces, lines and angles. These are the tetrahedron (4 triangles), the cube (6 squares), the octahedron (8 triangles), the dodecahedron (12 pentagons) and the icosahedron (20 triangles). These five simple shapes are a template for all three-dimensional forms in the Universe. *So below, as above.*

Third, about that word “plight”, which has a negative context in terms of life, representing an unfortunate situation that is difficult or dangerous. In the definition, this term is used *with* the idea of human beings having to accept responsibility for, and make decisions regarding, something they cannot fully understand. I liken this to the current analogy of a glass half-full or a glass half-empty (which means you have a choice how you look at something). Certainly, in the changing, uncertain and complex environment in which we live we make choices based on incomplete knowledge, and, as we have learned from Knowledge Management,

knowledge is always incomplete. Yet, we *do* have choice, and that is part of this definition of Existentialism when it states that the individual “must assume ultimate responsibility for acts of free will.” It is interesting that the concept of free will carries across various definitions. For example, the definition in *Oxford Dictionaries* for Existentialism is, “A philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as *a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will.*”³⁶

Finally, there is the idea within this framing of Existentialism that there IS a right or wrong and good or bad! This is surprising, since Existentialism is very much focused from the total viewpoint of the individual, so the determination of right or wrong and good or bad would be the *individual’s perception* of those concepts. Of course, this is only *one* definition of the concept, and as is understood in our reality of accelerated mental thought, and confirmed in our first point above, whether you are a business leader or a researcher, a politician or a student, EVERY concept is defined and understood in different ways by various people. And so it is for Existentialism.

As a church musician early in my younger life, one of my favorite—and most challenging—soprano solo pieces was “Lord Jesus Christ!”, with the words by Søren Kierkegaard and music by Samuel Barber,

which is part of a larger cantata entitled “Prayers of Kierkegaard.”³⁷ Søren, both a philosopher and theologian, is often touted as the “bridge” from Hegel to Existentialism.

In the words of this song, and in the yearning of the music, the description by musician Samuel Barber rings true. “One finds here three basic truths: imagination, dialectic, and religious melancholy. The truth Søren Kierkegaard sought after was a truth which was a truth for me.”³⁸ In this work, in these words and the powerful music that conveys them, there is an unfailing belief in God’s redemption which, in my vernacular, is offered to those who expand their consciousness, achieving conscious choice and choosing positive actions for the greater good.

I wish this little book had a sound button, although nowadays it is certainly not *my* voice I would share. Still, I remember. In the music, there is almost an immediate syncopation following the initial call of this prayer. And then, the voice heightens into the opening of a wail, acknowledgement of the pain suffered for us, and another insertion of syncopation as lower tones bring the divine to a human level. *This is music of the heart.*

I offer now a new direction for the concept of existentialism, *no longer tethering the concept to the physical body but rather to the divine nature of the*

individual human soul. In this description, “divine” refers to perfection or godlike. Recall from Idea 3, that soul represents the animating principle of human life in terms of thought and action, specifically focused on its *moral aspects*, the *emotional part of human nature*, and *higher development of the mental faculties*. From the philosophical aspect, it is the vital, sensitive or *rational principle in human beings*.³⁹

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INSIGHT: I offer now a new direction for the concept of existentialism, no longer tethering the concept to the physical body but rather to the divine nature of the individual human soul.

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From this viewpoint, you exist, you still exist, you always exist as an individuated expression. Yet this concept of existentialism is in *full relationship with concrete human experience*, starting with the authentic thinking, acting, feeling individual who has freedom in terms of free will, or choice, and the learning and expansion that result from choices.

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INSIGHT: You exist, you still exist, you always exist as an individuated expression.

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In Idea 3 we explored human nature and human natures. The new direction offered for existentialism (and note we're using a small "e" for this term now) refers to the *divine nature of the human soul*. While there is certainly much literature on the topic of divine nature, similar to when we were exploring the concept of human nature, I decided to ask friends, colleagues and visitors to Mountain Quest what characteristics they felt represented divine nature. Amazingly, nearly all, if not all, of the words/concepts expressed by this group are *conditions*, which themselves are existential in nature! For example, these responses included: knowing, creator, the grounding rod, pure, perfect, source of power, authority, full consciousness, infallible, omniscience, the best there is, immortal, above situation, protective, not subject to corruption, miracle maker, and has the ability to make a beautiful change in circumstances. You might have some additional conditions that come to mind. Feel free to add them.

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INSIGHT: Nearly all the concepts expressed are conditions, which themselves are existential in nature!

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Responses that could refer to states or conditions, yet also have something to do with attitude or approach—if it is possible to think about the divine in terms of attitudes—are *unconditional love, mercy, sacrifice and service*.

From the viewpoint of the soul, these characteristics relate to the development and expansion of thought and action in terms of morality, emotions and the higher mental faculties. Hmmm. Certainly, unconditional love, mercy, sacrifice and service represent high ideals toward which we can choose to strive.

[Your Thoughts]



Idea 5: Synthesizing is a gift of the human mind.

In the human journey of experiential learning, we are acting, reacting, then synthesizing, with each new action building on all of the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycles that have come before. The mind is an associative patternner, which means that all new incoming information is associated with everything that is known to create new knowledge for the situation at hand.

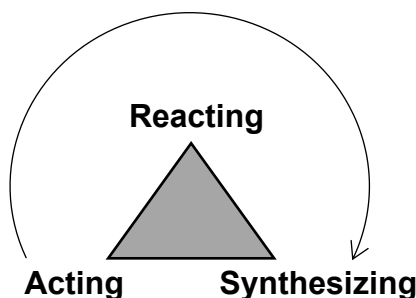


Figure 1. *The human experiential cycle of Acting, Reacting and Synthesizing.*

Synthesizing is both simplification and explanation, and the ability to create a coherent whole from various pieces or things. For example, information is studied, analyzed and evaluated to discover the relationships among that information

and what is already known in order to discover or create something new. In today's knowledge economy, information synthesis is a critical skill. Synthesis also requires discernment and judgment. As psychologist Howard Gardner, best known for his theory of multiple intelligences, says, "The ability to decide what information to heed, what to ignore, and how to organize and communicate that which we judge to be important is becoming a core competency for those living in the developed world."⁴⁰

Synthesis consists of much more than just organizing information. While the process of synthesis is both simplification and explanation, since it results in the emergence of something new, it is also a *creative process*. Creativity is the emergence of new or original ideas, or seeing new patterns in some domain of knowledge. In other words, creativity can be considered as the ability to perceive new relationships and new possibilities, seeing things from a different frame of reference, realizing new ways of understanding, or having insight. Synthesis, then, is a subset of the creative process, *specifically focused on connecting and simplifying that which is being synthesized and being able to communicate that which emerges*.

Bob and Gregg Vanourek, a father and son team, forward that synthesis is an important leadership skill. Since synthesis is a learned skill,

they list seven steps to promote that learning. These are: immersion into the area of interest, sorting, hunting for patterns, stepping back to look for themes, drafting a simple statement of what you are discovering, asking for feedback (verification) and presenting to a wider audience.⁴¹ Verification is the process of consulting a trusted ally. This means going to a recognized expert with whom you have a relationship (often a colleague or friend) to get their opinion, that is, grounding your work through implicit information.⁴²

Note that the synthesis process assumes strong reading, writing and speaking/communicating skills. (I just bet some of you were waiting for me to say “reading, writing and arithmetic!”) Patterning is also important. It’s an innate skill for us. Humans are always looking for relationships among things—events, happenings, people, thoughts. The human mind has actually evolved to discover patterns! In fact, the search for, and identification of, patterns is at the very core of our information and knowledge management systems. For example, data mining, including the use of artificial intelligence such as automated reasoning programs, emerged to support identification of patterns.

So how does synthesis play out in our living experience? One of the main jobs of consciousness is to tie our life together into a coherent story, a concept of self.⁴³ Moving through various life

experiences, the individual singles out and accentuates what is significant and connects these events to historic events to create a narrative unity, what could be described as a *fictionalized history*.

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INSIGHT: Synthesis is at play in our everyday life as we tie our life together into a coherent story, a concept of self.

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From the viewpoint of clinical psychology, “[J]ust as the novelist is selective with respect to character development, plot, etc., so the person who seeks the connective threads in the history of his life ... has singled out and accentuated the moments which he experiences as significant; others he has allowed to sink into forgetfulness. The result of this process is narrative unity as something akin to fictionalized history ... [The] narrative unity which results from this process is not discovered; it is the result of selective attention, emphasis, dim remembrance, and possibly even forgetting. **The person makes choices about the importance of persons and events, decides on their meanings ...** These choices and decisions – like those of a novelist – are not arbitrary; they are guided by the desire for the “good story.” The finished product is the “fictionalized” history of a life, neither a lie nor ‘the truth,’ but instead a work of imagination, evaluation and memory.”⁴⁴

The autobiographical self—the idea of who we are, the image we build up of ourselves and where we fit socially—is *built up over years of experience and constantly being remodeled*, a product of continuous learning. While much of this model is undoubtedly created by the unconscious, *it is the conscious mind that perceives the idea of self* and, through active experimentation with objects and the external world, is typically very aware of the perceived boundaries between the individual and the external world.

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INSIGHT: The autobiographical self is built up over years of experience and constantly being remodeled, a product of continuous learning.

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The story of you lives in the mind—the what, why and how of your life, a summary of the conclusions you have made about yourself and about life, *which often include the harshest judgments you have about yourself*. Neale Donald Walsch, who writes international best sellers on spirituality and personal development, clarifies that this is not the “looking within” place where we search for answers to life. As he reminds us, “Burrowing deep within that mess rarely produced clarity. In fact, I will say that it never does, because your story is not real. It exists only within your mind. It may seem very real

to you, but it is not reality.”⁴⁵ As can be seen, *synthesizing is a gift of the human mind*.

Participating fully in the human experiential journey, the soul is expanding, hopefully moving toward the high ideals of unconditional love, mercy, sacrifice and service, and expressing these ideals in the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle. We are a verb, not a noun. And so it is throughout life, we continue experiencing, learning and expanding as the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle repeats itself ... until the action ceases.

What is beyond action? We are given hints throughout life. Many of these hints are embedded through the *Possibilities that are YOU!* series. We will briefly explore several of these hints from the existential frame of reference that is the focal point of thought beyond action.

As we know, energy conserves itself. There is never any waste, merely transitions. For the sake of this discussion we use the term soul to represent the pinnacle of all that has been experienced and learned in the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle. Recall that the soul relates to the development and expansion of thought and action in terms of morality, emotions and the higher mental faculties.

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INSIGHT: Since energy conserves itself, there is never any waste, merely transitions.

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While action is no longer a focal point, all of the patterns created during the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle remain. Nothing of value is wasted. In Idea 4, we noted that as we grow and learn, we begin to recognize patterns that play themselves out in nature at various levels of focus.

We exemplified that all the mineral substances that are part of the Earth's crust can be described by the Platonic solids, five shapes that each have equal faces, lines and angles. Recognizing that patterns repeat themselves throughout various levels of nature, we can imagine a "being" cycle based on thought versus action, howbeit thought no longer bounded by the limitations imposed by the physical mind/brain.

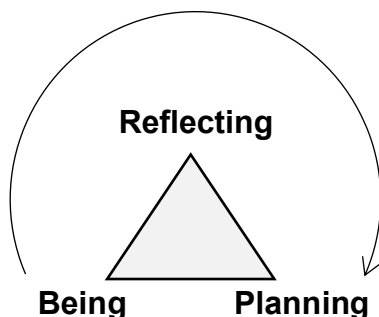


Figure 2. *The human soul existential state of Being, Reflecting and Planning*

While patterns created during the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle serve as the foundation for the soul's existential state of being-reflecting-planning, these are indeed patterns, which are not exact replicas, that is, blow-by-blow details of events and experiences. To understand exactly *what* patterns are part of this foundation, we briefly consider the process occurring in the mind/brain

during the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle. (“As below so above” translates to: “As above, so below.”)

The brain (as distinct from a computer) does *not* store exact replicas of past events or memories. Rather, it stores *invariant representations* in a hierarchical and nested fashion. These forms represent the basic source of recognition and meaning of the broader patterns.⁴⁶ As Nobel laureate Eric Kandel describes this process: “By storing memories in invariant forms, individuals are able to apply memories to situations that are similar but not identical to previous experiences. Cognitive psychologists would describe this as developing an internal representation of the external world, a cognitive map that generates a meaningful image or interpretation of our experience.”⁴⁷

What this means is that patterns represent the core (invariant form) of a thought or picture, with those patterns connected through neuronal firings, their synaptic connections and the strengths between the synaptic spaces to information, ideas and feelings already in the brain.⁴⁸ This particular phenomenon of relating external and internal forms of experience is called “appresentation”⁴⁹ and is an example of *the mind’s search for meaning*. As Jennifer Moon, an educator and expert on reflective and experiential learning, explains, “Appresentation is the manner in which a part of something that is perceived as an

external experience can stimulate a much more complete or richer internal experience of the ‘whole’ of that thing to be conjured up.”⁵⁰

This *hierarchy of information* represents “an order of some complexity, in which the elements are distributed along the gradient of importance.”⁵¹ It is analogous to the physical design of the neocortex, “a sheet of cells the size of a dinner napkin as thick as six business cards, where the connections between various regions give the whole thing a hierarchical structure.”⁵² Through this process, the mind/brain develops robustness and *deep understanding* derived from its capacity to use past learning and memories to complete incoming information and, instead of storing all the details, ***it stores only information meaningful to this individual mind/brain.*** Related to thought and emotion, these are the meaningful patterns available to the higher mental faculties, which is by definition the soul.

In the existential state of the soul, negative energies and heavier emotions connected to painful experiences that have perhaps plagued us during the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle of life, while no doubt significantly contributing to our learning, are no longer available to the higher mental faculties. We are given a hint of how this works through the transcendent power of beauty, the subject of the first volume of the *Possibilities that are YOU!* series.

A Hint of the Possible: Transcendent Beauty

Beauty is an individual choice, that is, your perception of beauty is different than mine, and so forth. When we choose beauty as our expression in life, or sense beauty around us, we are simultaneously exercising our individual choice and engaging larger concepts of truth.

There is a direct connection between our senses and beauty. In the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle of life, the way that we learn and grow is through experiencing and interacting with our environment. *This begins with our senses.* If there is no information coming into our mind, then the mind would be mindless, that is, it wouldn't have any resources to construct itself! Fortunately, the human body is built to experience life.

When we as human beings think about our senses, we generally think of the five senses of physical form—seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. We also have two powerful “inner” senses that are a very important part of our everyday experience. The first inner sense is located in the heart center and has very much to do with our connectedness with others. The heart has long been associated with compassion and love, which help us deepen those connections. We *need* other people in our lives, and our lives are the richer for those experiences. Helen Keller, who was both blind and deaf, recognized the beauty of these connections

when she shared, “The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched—they must be felt with the heart.”

The second inner sense is located in the crown, right at the middle of the top of our head, that soft spot that begins to close shortly after birth. This sense connects us to the larger whole, whether we perceive that larger whole as the ecosystem of the earth, a global humanity, an energy field, a consciousness field, a quantum field, the God field, or any other variety of names. Whatever your belief, we as individual human beings are part of something larger, and, if we listen carefully, we can sense that larger field of which we are a part.

When *you* are experiencing beauty, it is the most important thing in your mind; in fact, it is the **ONLY** thing in your mind! The full experience of beauty **engages ALL your senses**. There’s no room to be thinking or feeling anything else! And when you are fully engaged in the **NOW** experience of beauty, there’s little room for any negative energies to enter your thought.

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INSIGHT: The full experience of beauty engages ALL your senses.

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This process provides an example of the transcendent possibilities of higher vibrational

thought, that thought which is part of our higher mental faculties (the soul), and gives us a feeling for the *meaningful patterns available in the existential state of being*. While clearly our five senses of form have ceased to operate in this state, the memory of experiencing those senses is very real.

A Hint of the Possible: Mirror Neurons

As we dwell in the existential state of reflection, we can reflect back on what we have learned about mirror neurons as a way of understanding this state.

The phenomenon of mirror neurons is a form of cognitive mimicry that transfers actions, behaviors and most likely other cultural norms.¹⁶ What this means is that, “Simply observing someone moving activates similar brain areas to those activated by producing movements oneself. The brain’s *motor regions* become active by the mere observation of movements even if the observer remains completely still.”⁵³

Thus, when we *see* something being enacted, whether in our external or internal environment, our mind creates the same patterns that we would use to enact that “something” ourselves. Mirror neurons link our perception to the priming of the motor systems that engage the same action. In other words, “what we see, we become ready to do, to mirror other’s actions and our own behaviors.”⁵⁴

We borrow a short exercise from the Conscious Little Book on *Attention and Intention* which helps you consciously participate in this process.

* * * * *

EXERCISE: *Practicing Mental Imagining*

In 1970, long before we learned much about the inner workings of our mind/brain, M.R. Kopmeyer, the owner of a publishing company in Louisville, Kentucky, wrote in the Dedication of his book: "May your thoughts be stimulating and our results rewarding ... because your THOUGHTS will determine what you ARE."

"M," as we will refer to him, said that, based on the soundest of psychological and physiological principles, the only way to really become an expert—in almost any endeavor—is to practice intensively in your *imagination*. For example, a person cannot possibly think of all that needs to be done in golf to make a perfect drive, stroke or putt while actually doing them. Nor can a person consciously move their hands and fingers when playing the piano or keyboarding. The point is that the conscious mind cannot *think* that rapidly; but the unconscious mind can.

The way you do this, M informs, is to:

STEP (1): First, physically do the thing you are practicing, and then

STEP (2): Practice each movement over and over again in your *imagination*, impressing *mental pictures* into the unconscious mind.

As M describes, "... relax in an easy chair in a quiet room away from all distractions ... Then you, mentally, take each perfect movement at a time and consciously visualize your performing that movement to perfection. Over and over again ... Practice does not 'make perfect,' as the old saying used to tell us. Only practice of *perfection* makes perfect. And until you become a real expert, you can only *practice perfection* in your *imagination*."⁵⁵

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INSIGHT: "Until you become a real expert, you can only practice perfection in your imagination."

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M had it right. Neurons scattered through key parts of the brain fire, not only when we are performing a certain action, but when we are *watching someone else* perform that action, and imagining that *perfect* action over and over again as movies in our brain.⁵⁶

Following many cycles of acting-reacting-synthesizing, there is much to reflect upon in the existential state of being. As suggested by the

phenomenon of mirror neurons (as below, so above), what is truly exciting is that this reflection is NOT limited to your personal experiential cycle, but only by your exposure, observations and imagination. Let me share a personal story.

A few weeks ago, I was working in a support role with a large internationally renowned orchestra. My job was to make sure everyone had the sheet music they needed, run errands for the Maestro, and generally handle the small emergencies that regularly occur when you bring together nearly 60 professional musicians! How I enjoyed my work! During rehearsals I had a folding chair right behind the Maestro. And, over the years, many of these musicians had become personal friends. Just imagine being right in the middle of things as the orchestra recorded Mahler's and Tchaikovsky's symphonies. But it was the operas that tugged at my heart. I've heard it said that the first time someone attends the opera they either love it or hate it. For me, it was definitely the former.

The Maestro was well-respected, a recipient of the National Medal of Arts from the President, and the Gold Baton from the American Symphony Orchestra League. Little wonder that the owner of the theatre was sitting in the front row stage right grinning, thoroughly enjoying the rehearsal. The focus on this particular occasion was Bizet's Carmen; the last hour had been spent reviewing a

few hot spots throughout the score. Now, the Maestro wiped his brow, stuck the red handkerchief in his pocket, and announced “No. 1. The Prelude.” There was a slight scuffing of chairs, rattling of paper and a soft swish as bows were renewed.

By way of context, all the detail provided above is more of a knowing that all this was happening. And now, the essence of the experience.

The Maestro turned his head to give me a wink, smiled at the theatre owner, then, turning back to me, handed me the baton and said, “Take them through this. I’ll be right back.” And he was gone, heading out the back of stage right.

From the edge of my eye I see the owner’s mouth hanging open. But I hop right up on the rostrum and raise my arm. I glance quickly at the music. *Allegro giocoso fortissimo*. The slight smile I know is on my face expands. What fun! 2/4 time. I set the tempo with two beats and we are off and playing. Perfect staccatos. Four measures in, a perfect trill. Repeat. Now, piano. Flow, staccato, flow, staccato ... *Pianissimo, crescendo molto*. My body bounces, softly, with the rhythm, tears move down my face, coming from I know not where since I’m immersed in pure joy. I KNOW this music. I FEEL this music. And near the end we move into 3/4 time *Andante moderator*, expressive movement weaving note-into-note-into-note, building to a final chord that is staccato fortississimo!

My body is shaking while simultaneously rooted in place. *Pausa lunga*. The Maestro is behind me, smiling. And then I woke up in my bed here at Mountain Quest, eyes wide open, still filled with all the joy and fullness and majesty of the experience.

How could this be? How could an experience so real happen? I began to flick back through my life experiences. Yes, I knew and had the opportunity to work with Maurice Abravanel when he joined the Music Academy of the West for summer programs. Yes, I've sung in the chorus in Carmen productions and studied the role of Micaela, so there is no doubt that at some point I've watched and heard an orchestra play the Prelude to Carmen. Yes, I've conducted choral groups, small bands and small string groups, and even the 7th Fleet Band in Yokosuka once, so the *feel* of conducting is familiar. STILL, I've never conducted a large orchestra, and certainly never the Prelude to Carmen! Yet, I JUST DID THAT, perfectly, accompanied by all the activity and feelings of the moment. Have you had this kind of experience happen to you?

And, as I reflect, here are some of the things we discovered during our acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle that hint at the wonderful learning that is possible in the being-reflecting-planning cycle:

1. The description of invariant forms by Nobel laureate Eric Kandel: "By storing memories in invariant forms, individuals are able to apply

memories to situations that are similar but not identical to previous experiences.”⁵⁷

2. The explanation of appresentation by Jennifer Moon, an educator and expert on reflective and experiential learning: "Appresentation is the manner in which a part of something that is perceived as an external experience can stimulate a much more complete or richer internal experience of the 'whole' of that thing to be conjured up."⁵⁸
3. A synthesis of the mirror neuron phenomenon described by neuropsychologist Sarah-Jane Blakemore and neuroscientist Uta Frith: "Simply observing someone moving activates similar brain areas to those activated by producing movements oneself."⁵⁹

These serve as BIG hints for the reflecting state of existential being. I guess, in essence, we are still fully experiencing. I still feel the tingle of joy from my "experience" directing the Prelude to Carmen! *Only this "full experience" is not in the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle of experiential learning, but rather in the being-reflecting-planning state of existential learning!*

[Your Thoughts]



Idea 7: We plan the infinite journey of the soul.

Ah! The wonderful mystery of it all! At one point in my life when I'd just completed a degree and was feeling good about all I'd accomplished, I had a celebratory party in my dream state. It was quite interesting. I was at the top rung of a steep ladder and stepped into a party room, with a table full of wrapped packages and lots of balloons and streamers. There was laughter, although I couldn't see who was there. So, I laughed back and started opening packages, only there was another ladder that appeared right in front of me, urging me to climb. Only, now, I was on the bottom rung, and when I looked up, the end was not in sight! So it is with experiencing, existing, and learning. The journey is never ending. There is always something new in front of us and so many possibilities beyond that are not only unknown but unperceived! Still, as we climb, or leap, from one point to the next, each rung of the ladder brings us a new vantage point such that we can perceive a bit further.

We have free choice. What do we want to learn next? We're looking through a prism, bending the light, with the full color spectrum available. It's time to plan your next learning adventure.

Planning is forethought—a higher mental activity focused on achieving a specific goal and

associated with all the phases of our learning, although our competence expands with our consciousness. This is because when we expand consciousness, we expand our ability to see patterns and develop good predictive success. Thus, planning, related to forecasting and predicting the future, is an interactive part of consciousness. The planning in the existential state of being-reflecting-planning is in anticipation of entering the next acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle.

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***INSIGHT:* The planning in the existential state of being-reflecting-planning is in anticipation of entering the next acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle.**

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Of course, if you are reading this, you are still engaged in the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle. From this viewpoint, perhaps it would be useful to do some meta-planning, that is, planning to plan. During the experiential cycle, planning occurs as an executive function of the frontal lobe and encompasses neurological processes that formulate, evaluate, select and sequence thoughts to move toward a desired goal. From the instant those thoughts emerge, we are on the path of creation. As Prentice Mulford, a literary humorist and author, described: “When we form a plan for any business, any invention, any undertaking, we are making

something of that unseen element, our thought, as real, though unseen, as any machine of iron or wood. That plan or thought begins, as soon as made, to draw to itself, in more unseen elements, power to carry itself out, power to materialize itself in physical or visible substance.”⁶⁰ There is a Conscious Look Book on *Intention and Attention*.

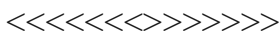
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INSIGHT: That plan or thought begins, as soon as made, to draw to itself, in more unseen elements, power to carry itself out, power to materialize itself in physical or visible substance.

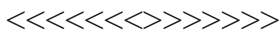
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In the Industrial Age, plans became the mechanism to create the conditions (resources and events in time and space) to maximize the likelihood of future success. There was the general faith that a systematic approach consisting of decomposition, specialization and optimization of components would handle even the really challenging problems.⁶¹ Military plans included five elements: missions, assets, boundaries, schedules and contingencies. In a steady environment this approach worked most of the time. However, it became problematic in more dynamic environments.

Planning is a property of intelligent activity and always has a purpose. It is different than forecasting (predicting what the future will look like) in that the



INSIGHT: Planning is a property of intelligent activity and always has a purpose.



Planning is a learning process which includes two parts: the creation of myths about social realities and the process of emergence.⁶² For an expansion of our planning capability we look to the expanded experiential learning model introduced in Idea 2. This model adds a fifth mode of social engagement to the experiential learning model, that is, in our focus, recognizing the global connectivity of people and the need for interoperability in the strategic planning approach, which brings an emergent quality into the process. Thus, as we plan to plan, we need to ensure that we take into thought and embed in the plan intelligent activity with others, and the potential emergence of unforeseen events.

*There is always an element of the unseen when we create a plan, or any business, invention or undertaking. This element is our thought, which, while it may be unseen, is as real as any visible material object. After it is made, that plan or thought draws to itself other unseen elements which provide the power to execute the plan or the thought. As literary humorist Prentice says, we have the "power to materialize itself in physical or visible substance."*⁶³ Thus, the planning process in the existential state of being-reflecting-planning lays the foundation for the next acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle.

Marrying the mental faculties and creative imagination, the planning process includes identifying goals and objectives, creating strategies to achieve these goals and objectives, mentally organizing the resources and means to accomplish the strategies, and thinking through implementing those strategies, all in preparation for action. The secret of success is ensuring that the planning process represents, prepares for and plans for, intelligent activity, that is, *a state of interaction where intent, purpose, direction, values and expected outcomes are clearly understood and communicated among all parties, reflecting wisdom and achieving a higher truth.*

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***INSIGHT:* The secret of success is to ensure that the planning process represents, prepares for and plans for, intelligent activity.**

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A tool for future thinking is scenario planning, or scenario building. Higher-order consciousness, as seen in humans, includes the ability to build future scenarios, and planning, related to forecasting and predicting the future, is an interactive part of consciousness.

Scenarios are a form of story that serve as planning tools, providing a structured process for consciously thinking about—and planning for—the longer-term future. Introduced in the 1950's by Herman Kahn, scenario planning was first used in military war games in the 1960's, with a focus on the "predict and control" approach. Later, the emphasis shifted to analyze "cause and effect" relationships in order to better prepare for the future. As a foresight methodology, it is used to consider *possible, plausible, probable and preferable outcomes*.

Possible outcomes (what might happen) are based on future knowledge; plausible outcomes (what could happen) are based on current knowledge; probable outcomes (what will most likely happen) are based on current trends; and preferable outcomes (what you *want* to happen) are based on value judgments.⁶⁴

Exercise: Scenario Building

Scenario Building is a creative and shared process that involves groups or teams while allowing time for reflection and creative dialogue about the current and future environment and what the organization may become. This specific process was developed for the U.S. Department of the Navy.

STEP (1): Identify a central issue or question. This step involves clarifying the strategic decisions the organization faces that are critical to the future, establishing the inter-relationship among them, and establishing a horizon time.

STEP (2): Identify the key decision factors within the immediate (micro) environment. This is generally done through brainstorming and answering a series of relevant structured questions.

STEP (3): Identify the larger drivers of the key decision factors in the macro environment (social, technological, economic, environmental and political).

STEP (4): Develop the structure for the scenario by grouping high impact/high uncertainty forces and drivers and potential responses. Wild cards, that is, low-probability, high-impact events such as a terrorist attack or disrupted water supply may be considered. Pre-thinking these events offers the opportunity to examine their implications and

make better decisions should they occur. This process develops a ranking of possibilities.

STEP (5): Explore the implications of each scenario in relation to current and future strategy, and identify early indicators. This step should result in core strategies and contingency strategies. The aim is to identify strategies that are robust across all scenarios, given what is known and what might occur in the future.

STEP (6): Flesh out the details of the scenarios, creating a logical cause-and-effect flow and timeline.

STEP (7): Refine and rewrite the scenarios to take them into a narrative form that is easily understood.

HINT: Consider the tenets of Appreciative Inquiry as you develop and refine these scenarios.

While these scenarios may prove useful, a significant advantage of this process is the perceptions, awareness and attitudes of the participating strategists relative to their organization, its environment and its evolution into the future. In other words, they will become much more sensitive to changes and potential risks and opportunities that may arise, and potentially more open, and responsive, to unknown and unperceived events.

Creative imagination has a role to play in scenario planning. There are two parts to this. When creative imagination is disconnected from the mental faculties such that pictures in our mind are unstructured and conflict with one another, it is not actionable and considered fantasy, although still may offer ideas for future actions. The second part of creative imagination represents actual or potentially actual occurrences based upon the situation and context of an event or series of events; this is actionable in the situation and context at hand.⁶⁵

The focus on critical uncertainties necessary to move through scenario planning is often quite difficult. Management consultant Woody Wade argues that scenario planning is all about *thinking the unthinkable*.⁶⁶ Yet, we are moving closer to understanding that we are co-creators of our reality, using the powerful impact of attention and intention and our very thought in this process of co-creation. Thus, an intelligent approach is necessary for effective scenario planning, that is, building scenarios that are based on *creative imagination* while simultaneously ensuring the opportunities offered by every situation are creatively planned into the scenario, always ending with multiple options, multiple choices.

This approach offers the freedom of the NOW, that is, an emergent quality of decision-making in the instant at hand that is aligned with the direction of

choice. This, of course, is the beauty of higher mental thinking that recognizes patterns, rather than being caught in the limited lower mental thinking of cause-and-effect. There's a mental freedom and deeper knowing that comes with this quality.

When I was with the Department of the Navy, we talked in terms of a *connectedness of choices*, that decisions made across the organization, while different, all headed the Department in the same direction toward a shared vision of the future. From the individual perspective, this means that the decisions we make and actions we take in different situations all head us in the direction of choice, there is a consistency representing who we choose to be, how we choose to act, and the future we choose to create.

Ultimately, *planning is about the future* and, as we have learned along the way, living is a continuous journey of change. There is a moral challenge associated with planning. Planning is intended as a fundamental guideline in the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle, with the objective of planning to *maximize the options of future decision-making*.⁶⁷ While we cannot control that future, we can nurture its unfolding, and prepare for the potential of creative leaps. Thus, planning, which sets intent, becomes a tool for change, and provides an opportunity to help the best future emerge.

In this short treatment of meta-planning, that is, practicing in the acting-reacting-synthesizing experience and planning to plan in the existential state, we still have time (a tool in our current learning cycle) to embrace our divine nature while our soul is fully embodied. We still have time to move closer to the high ideals of unconditional love, mercy, sacrifice and service.

At the soul level, we had a divine plan when we began this acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle. We also have free choice, and lots of surprises come our way as we engage experiences in a changing, uncertain and complex world. Reflecting that choice, the manifestation of the divine plan is as varied as snowflakes. Since energy is never wasted, all of this learning offers powerful potential for *our* continuing journey as well as the *expansion of others* with whom we connect. All we need do is grasp the opportunity offered to us.

What does this mean to me?

While the focus of this little book is beyond action, we are writing and reading it amidst the acting-reacting-synthesizing cycle, and so we act-react-and-synthesize to this material. If it resonates with you, then react accordingly, perhaps using it as a reminder to use the NOW to accomplish all the things you want to accomplish, making your unique contribution to create a better world. If it does not resonate with you, and yet you have read through it, then plant it away in your unconscious and perhaps a few seeds will make sense later in life. At the very least, it may spur your own thoughts tied to your personal experiences in life. Only YOU can decide your actions and reactions. As a writer on my own continuing journey of growth, my purpose is to open our eyes to the Possibilities that are US!







Here are a few highlights from this little book.



The mind is the seat of consciousness, enabling awareness of our Self as a knower, as an observer and learner, and as one who takes action.



In our shifting and dynamic environment, life demands accelerated cycles of learning experiences.

-  There are patterns of patterns, and the higher we look at how things relate, moving beyond the particulars of context and situation, the more similarities we can recognize.
-  Soul represents the animating principle of human life in terms of thought and action, specifically focused on its moral aspects, the emotional part of human nature, and higher development of the mental faculties.
-  You exist, you still exist, you always exist as an individuated expression.
-  Synthesis is at play in our everyday life as we tie our life together into a coherent story, a concept of self.
-  That plan or thought begins, as soon as made, to draw to itself, in more unseen elements, power to carry itself out, power to materialize itself in physical or visible substance.
-  Since energy conserves itself, there is never any waste, merely transitions.

**We are existential beings in an
experiential world!**

Grasp the moment!

This volume of **Conscious Look Books** builds conversationally building on the ideas presented in *The Profundity and Bifurcation of Change Part IV*, largely presented in Chapter 26: “The Mental Fabric.” Co-authors of the original text include David Bennet, Arthur Shelley, Theresa Bullard and John Lewis. Full references are available in the original text, which is published by MQIPress, Frost, WV (2017), and available as an eBook on www.amazon.com

This volume also builds on *Expanding the Self: The Intelligent Complex Adaptive Learning System* by David Bennet, Alex Bennet and Robert Turner, which is published by MQIPress, Frost, WV (2018), and available in softback and Kindle on www.amazon.com

Endnotes

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The Volumes in
Possibilities that are YOU!

All Things in Balance

The Art of Thought Adjusting

Associative Patterning and Attracting

Beyond Action

The Bifurcation

Connections as Patterns

Conscious Compassion

The Creative Leap

The Emerging Self

The Emoting Guidance System

Engaging Forces

The ERC's of Intuition

Grounding

The Humanness of Humility

Intention and Attention

Knowing

Living Virtues for Today

ME as Co-Creator

Seeking Wisdom

Staying on the Path

Transcendent Beauty

Truth in Context

Fully engaging the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual natures of higher vibrational experiences.

**EXPERIENTIAL
(Acting/Doing)**

Reacting

***Acting Synthesizing**

**MIRROR
NEURONS**

BEAUTY

The background of the page features a scenic landscape with green trees in the foreground and blue mountains under a cloudy sky. On the right side, there is a vertical graphic element consisting of a series of white, wavy lines on a dark background, resembling a stylized DNA helix or a signal waveform.