

MORE ABOUT INNER STRUCTURES IN AWARENESS

by Greg Goode

(This is another excerpt from my upcoming book, which is like a user-friendly userguide to the direct path.)

Last time, in "[Does Awareness Have an Inner Structure](#),"¹ we took a quick look at the "grid" notion of a structure that some have proposed exists within awareness. We also saw that in direct experience, there is no structure. But these notions come up frequently, and sometimes even nondual teachings imply that awareness has a structure. So let's look at this in more detail.

There are many notions of structures that awareness is supposed to have. They tend to serve different purposes. They are usually based on notions like the following:

- Levels of awareness
- Causality
- Regularity
- Why there is something rather than nothing

LEVELS OF AWARENESS

Notions of levels in awareness usually come from nondual teachings themselves. Here is a quick list of some notions or models that one may encounter:

- The *vyAvahArika* (relative) level and the *pAramArthika* (absolute) level of consciousness
- *Saguna Brahman* and *Nirguna Brahman*
- The five "sheaths" in Advaita-Vedanta (physical, energetic, mental, wisdom, bliss, and pure Atman)
- Consciousness with attributes and consciousness without attributes
- Consciousness at rest and consciousness in motion
- The working mind and the thinking mind
- Waking, dreaming, deep sleep
- The lower witness and the higher witness
- Witnessing awareness and pure consciousness

¹ I use the words "awareness" and "consciousness" as wholly synonymous, though I'm aware that some teachings define them differently and draw a distinction between them.

I'm actually glad that models like these are available. In my own inquiry, a few of these models grabbed my attention and drew me into the teaching. If all nondual teachings said only that "awareness is all, period," I wouldn't have known where to begin.

I needed some sort of hook or handle to get me into it. Many skillful teachings have these hooks, carefully crafted to respond to the needs and presuppositions of those inquiring into the truth. And the same teachings are able to deconstruct their own hooks. So it's OK for teachings to have these notions of levels and layers, especially at the **beginning** and **middle**. It's OK and even helpful for the student to provisionally glom onto some sort of structure as an actual feature of reality. I glommed onto several of these in my own inquiry.

But by the **end** of inquiry, none of this should be left over. One doesn't regard any of these models as notions about the way things really are. As one's understanding and stabilization comes to fruition, one becomes free from the very same models that the teaching used in presenting itself. This goes for the entire teaching itself as well. At best it is self-erasing. In direct experience there are no levels or layers.

CAUSALITY

The aspirant wants to know, "Why does one appearance cause another? Why do certain thoughts cause suffering?" People have told me they think something is present inside awareness that relates one appearance to another. It's like there are unseen strings tying appearances to each other, and an unseen puppeteer of awareness pulling the strings. Sometimes it's very easy to think of awareness the way the monotheistic traditions think of God.

Of course awareness is not a personal, psychological entity, no matter how vast. And even if there were an awareness-puppeteer, it would be an object with features and characteristics. If it had features and characteristics, then these would be nothing more than arisings in awareness. In other words the characteristics of the puppeteer would be just like the features of a person or a movie character: arisings in awareness. And arisings **are** awareness because there's nothing else for them to be made out of. They aren't external or independent or made of something else. So even if awareness had the seemingness of causality, investigating this seemingness would be another way to realize "awareness all the way down."

There is also another way to realize that causality can't be taking place inside awareness. It is this - causality is never observed or experienced in the first place. Let's take the example of a thought causing suffering. "When I think of my mother-in-law, I get anxious and uncomfortable."

But in direct experience, what happens?

1. Thought of mother-in-law.
2. Feeling of anxiety.
3. Thought that says that (1) caused (2).

Notice that a phenomenon of "causality" is never part of experience. Causality is nothing more than a thought that says so. We never experience anything truly causing anything else. Causal stories can be helpful at some point, but as understanding stabilizes, the reliance on causal stories diminishes.

Causality is never our direct experience - it is not experienced as being built into the nature of awareness.

REGULARITY

Even after a person realizes that there is no true causality, they still might think that there is regularity and predictability in awareness. They think that awareness is doing something to make things look orderly and not chaotic or incoherent. Here's the notion: what awareness is doing is behind-the-scenes of course, but it **must** be doing something, or else things would seem chaotic, not orderly. "Maybe the thought of my mother-in-law doesn't **cause** anxiety, but the thought is **always followed by** anxiety."

This ASSumes that there is truly regularity in the first place. To verify regularity, memory is required. But memory never tells the truth, because it always points to something that is not given in direct experience. When the earlier appearance happens, there is no memory-appearance present to record it. And when the later memory-appearance happens, the "remembered" appearance is no longer present to verify it. They are never co-present and can never establish each other.

So even if there seemed to be a chain of appearances one never directly experiences regularity. Let's take a look at the appearances that may seem to be happening:

1. Thought of mother-in-law.
2. Feeling of anxiety.
3. Thought that says that (2) usually follows (1).
4. Thought that claims “Something deep inside in awareness is enabling this.”

Notice how when (3) is the current appearance, any earlier historical instances of (1) and (2) are not present. There is no basis for looking back in time to conclude that something “usually” happens. There is no direct experience of “usually.” It is just a thought that says so. And without “usually,” there is no basis for regularity. It is never experienced that thoughts actually refer outside themselves to any other object. The object is implied within the thought itself; actual verification is never directly experienced.

So other than a thought (i.e., arising) that makes a claim, there is simply no basis for regularity. There is no reason to believe the thought that claims that awareness has a structure responsible for regularity. Regularity is not directly experienced, so there is no need to attribute a regularity-structure to awareness!

SOMETHING RATHER THAN NOTHING

I have a dear friend, a very literal-minded friend. He loves to talk about nonduality. He really wants to wrap his head around it. He wants to understand it intellectually, and can't. He doesn't quite grok that this isn't the point. The babbling I do has nothing to do with “an accurate intellectual understanding,” but rather a movement of the heart. Anyway, as he expresses his frustration, he usually says, “Well, you have to admit that SOMETHING's happening. It's not NOTHING!” For him, “what's happening” must fit into one of two categories for him. “Something” or “Nothing.”

But of course these alternatives already assume too much. In a way they beg the question, assuming what they try to prove. They are like someone asking you to choose between (a) and (b).

- a) I have stopped robbing banks.
- b) I have not stopped robbing banks.

Both “Something” and “Nothing” assume that there is a potential object independent of your immediate direct experience, and that this object can be present or absent. But in direct experience there is no experienced object which can be present or absent. Direct experience is always free, undivided and borderless.

“Something” and “Nothing” also assume that there is a separate entity which is monitoring things. “Something” ends up meaning “Something present as seen from the separate viewpoint of this entity.” “Nothing” means “I’m here looking, and everything is absent; nothing is showing up.” But in the clarity of direct experience (which is the nature of all our experience), there is no separate entity experienced, and no object experienced as either “present” or “absent.”

In other words, in direct experience, the entire structure of “Something” versus “Nothing” doesn’t even get off the ground. Nothing like this is our direct experience.

The book has lots of experiments that allow you to discover that you never directly experience the “presence” of an object or the “absence” of an object, no matter how subtle. In the depths of direct experience, which is the nature of all your experience, it is all radically nondual, without edges or limits.

NO STRUCTURES IN AWARENESS

The only possibility of evidence is direct experience. So why speculate that there must be a wizard behind the curtain of awareness? Nothing like that is given in direct experience....