

The Natural Mind

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The *natural mind* is called by many names, including among others, the unconditioned mind, original-mind, presence and selflessness. It is, in my view, the *unconditioned awareness* that you were born into when you entered this world. It is always present but most of us have "lost" it.

How could you lose your natural mind? The process begins to unfold very early. There are three aspects to the process. The first might be called *primary programs* that are biological in nature. These programs send signals into conscious awareness that we react to. Hunger is one example. When you become aware of a hunger signal, you engage in activity directed at responding to the signal. You engage in activity that results in you consuming food, and the program rewards your activity by eliciting satisfaction. *Secondary programs* come to be built upon primary programs through choices made and repeated. At the earliest stages one has little choice except to reject or accept what is offered by a caretaker. Later, one begins to have a wider range of choices and some independence from caretakers' choices on your behalf is achieved. Through choices and repetition of those choices new programs are acquired.

Once a program is established it becomes automatic. Given a choice of foods, you don't have to consciously think about the choices and, even if you do, the probability favors you making a selection that has a repeated history under similar conditions and in similar circumstances. Your *automatic program* (AP) makes the decision for you and when an impulse to act on the decision enters your *conscious awareness* (CA), you mentally say to yourself something like, "I think I'll have candied yams. They are really tasty." When given choices that you have no history with, such as in an ethnic restaurant whose menu is outside your range of experience, you may

be conflicted without your "inner guidance" and will have to actually apply conscious decision making to the choices by seeking more information about the items on the menu or, failing availability of sufficient information, resort to a random selection.

Even in such a situation, your AP's may come into play as you gain information and an AP partially matches up with a menu item because of some commonality in an ingredient or ingredients with established choices. An AP may make a decision based on additional information and send a choice (as an impulse) into CA and you mentally say to yourself, "Oh yeah, that dish has lamb in it and I like lamb so I'll go with it." Lacking ingredient similarity, an AP may act on similarity in aroma or appearance. An adult with a lot established programs may seldom fall back on a purely random choice.

In addition to secondary programs there are *tertiary programs*. Tertiary programs are programs established through *directed learning* experiences. These may be *informal*, such as being taught a language or languages in the home, that our family doesn't eat pork, Americans support their country, men are leaders and women must pay attention to their appearance. Other informal learning experiences may have other social influences that are outside the family such as a peer group, community organizations and the media. You may acquire AP's related to such things as music preferences, clothing preferences, religious beliefs, sexual attitudes, political ideals, occupational preferences and prejudices. Other directed learning experiences may be more *formal* like those found in educational programs to teach subjects like reading, writing, mathematics, history and physics.

[**Note:** If you would like a demonstration of the reality of these AP's, click here "[Implicit Attitude](#)" and take some of the tests, especially those on social attitudes, and compare what you believe about the topics with what the tests reveal at the unconscious level.]

Many AP's will usually be functional, efficient and of great benefit. Other AP's may do no great harm. Some may be or may become highly dysfunctional and create a constant source of problems, the origins of which are difficult to identify. One simple example might be a woman who repeatedly makes poor choices in men because of dysfunctional AP's that influence what she finds appealing in a man or, conversely, a man who finds problematic women appealing because of dysfunctional AP's.

As you develop and acquire more and more AP's, you begin to engage in a lot of thoughts, feelings and actions that arise from beneath CA. Conscious awareness creates explanations to explain the occurrence of these thoughts, feelings and actions. Over time the explanations are woven into narratives that explain who we are and why we think, feel and act in certain ways. This becomes an evolving self-description or what might be called a *fictive-self*. The fictive-self usually has several narrative variations, which draw on existing AP's and new AP's that may develop out of circumstances peculiar to a particular variation. There is usually a variation for each of the long-term roles that we acquire in the course of our lives, such as student, spouse, parent, employee, partner, friend and so on. Some of these variations may be more functional than others and especially dysfunctional when they are contradictory and in conflict.

Another important process in the creation and maintenance of our fictive-self is memory and imagination. When our "mind" is not externally focused on some attention-requiring task like composing this essay, it goes into *narration mode*. Memories associated with our narrative arise in CA. We ruminate on past accomplishments, pleasures, failures or misfortunes as a way of illustrating and reinforcing our story. If a memory doesn't fit our story well, we will modify and tweak the memory to bring it into better alignment with our story. We also project these memories through imagination into hypothetical future scenarios, which is different from drawing on

past experience in considering how we can accomplish a specific goal. That type of thinking is called planning and is not pointless rumination. Narration strengthens our story and our identification with it.

We become strongly identified with the fictive-self we weave. It becomes us and we go through our lives thinking that we are the story that we have created to explain the AP's operating beneath CA that direct our thoughts, feelings and actions. The more strongly we are identified with our fictive-self, the less aware we are of our original self and the less self agency we exercise. In short, we have lost our natural mind and, in the process, the ability to see the world as it is rather than as it appears through the explanatory filters we have created to explain the effects of our AP's. Literally, I AM my story and my story is ME, but a story is just that -- a story. Many people arrive at such an understanding spontaneously. This epiphany about the fictive-self tends to be powerful, transformative and often viewed as a spiritual event. Such events are also sometimes referred to as *noetic* events.

Personally, I had such a noetic event when I was seventeen years of age that revealed to me that my concept of self was simply a matrix of beliefs in which I had invested my identity. This was a transformative experience for me, but one that took years to manifest its effects and be fully understood. A decade later, I had a second noetic event in which I realized that, not only do we have a personal matrix of beliefs that we identify with, but there is a larger more universal matrix in which our personal matrix is embedded and entangled. If you're interested in these two noetic events in my life, they are covered in [A Personal Odyssey](#). Just click on the title.

Stories can be changed. The first step is to recognize that who you think you are and why you think, feel and act in particular ways is because you're following a script that you've created. The more

strongly you're identified with your fictive-self the more difficult it will be to change your story. The techniques discussed in "[Creative Self-agency](#)" include methods for working on your AP's and the story you have written about them. Self-agency is the tool that needs to be developed, if you want to improve your story and change the way you relate to the world. Self-agency requires that you recognize that you have a fictive-self that you created and that you can change it. The second step is to employ some of the techniques available to understand your story and then to effect functional changes in the story. Just knowing that you are articulated by a story and making that story more functional can make significant improvements in your life.

However, recognizing that you are identified with a story and making improvements to that story will not alone restore your natural mind. Restoring the natural mind requires that you stop identifying with the story that you've woven around your AP's and relax back into the pure awareness of being. Being present with the natural mind will provide a fresh perspective on everything and you can respond to situations as if they were unique happenings, not instances of AP-driven events that make up part of the story that is your fictive self. Being in the natural mind will let life flow through you unimpeded by efforts to control and direct it to make it conform to your story.

Ending identification with your I, fictive-self, ego, personality or whatever term you want to use for the construct is not generally something that people find easy to do even once the idea becomes viable to them. There are many approaches to ending identification with the story and most of them involve extended programs of meditation. Meditation will give you greater access to material that has largely been beneath conscious awareness for most of your life. Coming to know and understand your AP's will lead you to an intuitive understanding of the fictive nature of your ego or self. It is

this direct understanding that begins to free you from identification with your story.

Many spiritual teachings speak of losing the self or getting rid of the ego or living totally in the present moment. All of these notions should be considered as metaphorical ways of saying that you should stop identifying with your story. You can't get rid of your fictive-self because it serves useful purposes. But your phone, computer or car serve useful purposes and mentally healthy people don't invest their identify in them. These and many other useful things in your life are just tools. Likewise, once you stop identifying with your story, your fictive-self simply becomes a cognitive tool that is used as needed and then put aside until needed again.

To illustrate what this might feel like, consider the following scenario. You were selected five years ago by your employer to go overseas to work in a subsidiary. Let's say that you went to Germany. You lived in Germany for five years and became fluent in the language and came to understand the culture. Call this your German identity. At the end of five years, you return home to work in the corporate headquarters.

You now operate in a way consistent with your native culture and speak your native language. One evening you are having dinner in a restaurant and overhear some German tourists having difficulty with the menu and placing their order with the waiter. You get up go over to their table and in German ask them if you might be of assistance. They readily accept and you help them negotiate the items on the menu and place their order for them with the waiter. The Germans invite you to join them and you do so and put your German identity to work during the dinner. When this task is complete and the German identity is no longer needed, it is put to "bed" so to speak.

Think of your fictive-self as similar to this hypothetical German identity. When you can put it to "bed" and wake it up when

circumstances require it, you will bring to an end almost if not all of the narration that has previously had a near continuous run in the theater of your mind. You can now live your life largely in the present moment, which is all that really exists. You will have a much fresher and unencumbered view of events and can respond to them on their own terms rather than in terms of the character in a play of your own authorship. Thus, you have recovered your natural mind. Many spiritual traditions see the recovery of the natural mind as the first step in moving on to a transformation of consciousness and identification with what might be thought of as unity consciousness. For example it might have been the natural mind that Jesus was referring to in the following:

"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

A translation of this into other terminology might read, "Frankly, unless you can regain your natural mind, you will be unable to know unity consciousness." You can replace unity consciousness with whatever terminology works best for you. Examples might include Christ consciousness, consciousness of the divine, God, unified field of consciousness and so on.

Regaining the natural mind is significant in itself. However, for those so inclined, it can become a doorway. Passing through that doorway opens possibilities for several transformations of consciousness that end with unity consciousness, but that is beyond the scope of this essay (see [Creative Self-Agency](http://innerego.com) at innerego.com).

