

Q: Hi Robert.

I'm reading your book *The Ten Thousand Things* again. I've done the non-duality Tony Parsons, John Wheeler, Sailor Bob thing. By done, I mean read all the books, been to meetings, personal conversations, phone calls. I even had my satori in 2014: "oh this is it and once seen it never goes away." It went away.

My question: Are you saying the opposite of the "you are awareness" guys? They'll say you are not your thoughts or feelings, you say that's all I am, my thoughts, feelings, no one looking from awareness?

Many thanks,
Clayton

A: Hi, Clayton. I don't think I am saying the opposite of anyone. I express what I see, feel, and think without regard to what others claim to know or believe.

I see things naturalistically, by which I mean that some 13.8 billion years ago all we now call "the Universe" was concentrated into a tiny mass perhaps the size of a soccer ball which exploded outward and continues expanding as I write this. There is robust evidence for this view.

What we call "the Universe" might be the one and only universe, or there could be multiple universes--perhaps even an infinity of universes. No one knows because no human is in a position to know such things.

What "I" am, seen naturalistically, is a living being that was born some 76 years ago on one insignificant planet amid countless plants as the result of the sexual fun and games of my now-departed parents.

This planet, revolving around a rather third-rate star located near the edge of one particular galaxy that is one of two trillion such galaxies that formed around 4.5 billion years ago as the intense heat of that Big Bang explosion cooled down enough to allow molecules to exist which, existing first as hydrogen gas, and later as swirling dust clouds of various elements, conglomerated into a firm mass we call "Earth."

Upon that mass, the first primitive life forms appeared around 4 billion years ago and gradually evolved into the species we see today.

That is what "I" am-- an evolved life form with a beating heart and a nervous system--before the "nothing but consciousness really exists" people begin their hypothesizing, logical flim-flam, and appeals to the testimony of so-called "realized beings."

Mine is a naturalistic view of reality. No philosophy or metaphysics needed. I find plentiful evidence in evolutionary biology, astrophysics, and cosmology for that kind of approach to finding oneself here, conscious and self-conscious, and little evidence against it. Those who demean science as "materialistic," to me sound like scaredy-cats who, when faced with ideas that don't match their preconceptions, react to the discomfort of cognitive dissonance by name-calling.

When people say, "All 'I' am is pure consciousness" or "nothing exists but consciousness"—and assert that with questionless conviction and a complete lack of epistemological modesty—I can't even listen anymore. That kind of talk is just absurd to my ears. It's babble with nothing to back it up.

As I see it, no one knows what any of this "really" is. Any claim to know looks to me like pure egotistical inflation and never any actual "jnana."

To me, it makes more sense to see "awareness" as one among many faculties of nervous systems than as some kind of container or field in which nervous systems arise or as the "material" from which nervous systems are constructed, but I don't KNOW that.

Seeing naturalistically, not idealistically, is just the way my mind works. I lean more towards understanding things scientifically and less towards traditional dogma or philosophical idealism. Philosophy may be interesting, but its conjectures cannot be backed up with any solid evidence. Logic can be used to "prove" almost any proposition. In my view, the philosophy one embraces is "chosen" pre-logically and later, logic is used to justify the philosophy that best meets one's largely unknown needs and biases which express themselves mechanically as premature cognitive commitments defended by a filter of confirmation bias.

When I say that I find myself awake, I mean that I am free of attachments to unsubstantiated beliefs, such as claims that consciousness is real but the material world is not real or is less real. No one is in a position to know that, I say.

For all we know, consciousness evolved naturalistically and is entirely dependent upon living beings, not the other way around. For all we know, what we call "awareness" is simply another word for "noticing," which is one of the things that complex living entities do with the nervous systems they have.

So for me, as for Socrates, "awake" is when you admit to yourself that you and your fellow humans don't know jack shit about ultimate matters.