

Getting Real about Reality:

Countering our Reductive Delusions with a Therapy of Dynamical Knowing

What if we don't really know 'how things happen?'

- ▲ What if our lives are configured by patterns of activity we do not even recognize?
- ▲ What if our familiar descriptions and interpretations of events are dynamically incomplete?
- ▲ What if the ways we habitually 'see' and think are radically inadequate to understanding reality?
- ▲ What if our ignorance of dynamic complexity is causing us to destroy the earthly web of life upon which we depend?

➔ *If what actually happens is concurrently interactive, dynamically nonlinear, and chaotically self-organizing—then Realistic Thinking requires a Therapeutic Re-Imagination of Self and World*

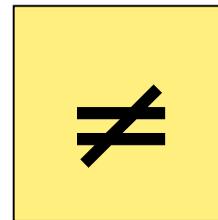
Ignorance of Dynamic Complexity is Debilitating—and Eventually Disastrous

Reducing the status of things and events to separate parts and hierarchical sequences that can be measured and controlled is technologically useful. However, this perspective obscures the workings of natural systems in ways that delude us about the reality of 'how things actually happen.' Failure to comprehend the behaviors of dynamically complex systems causes us to act simplistically toward both our selves and our environments. The results are often catastrophic. Human-induced global climate change is a prime example.

The Reductions of Techno-Logic

- > Measurement
- > Quantification
- > Calculation
- > Prediction
- > Exact Definition
- > Centralized Control
- > Mechanization
- > Linear Hierarchy
- > Programming

can blind us to



The Interdependencies of Eco-Logic

- > Interactivity
- > Chaotic Self-Organization
- > Emergent Order
- > Cooperative Conflict
- > Mutual Modification
- > Concurrent Causation
- > Nonlinear Creativity
- > Dynamic Equilibrium
- > Disorderly Ordering

> The Logic of Abstract Manipulation <

cannot comprehend

< The Logic of Life's Disjunctive Interconnectivity >

Dualistic Oppositions Obliterate Awareness of Interdependence

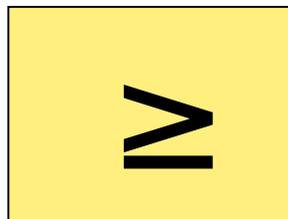
Thinking and speaking in terms of 'either / or' categories, or opposed states of being, appears to be an inevitable habit of human perspective. It is also inevitably destructive to our capacity to notice how actual conditions and events are intimately interdependent.

Binary Judgments

- > On or Off
- > Good or Bad
- > Right or Wrong
- > True or False
- > Fair or Unfair
- > Win or Lose
- > Function or Dysfunction
- > Objective or Subjective
- > Success or Failure
- > Present or Past

> Dualistic Oppositions <

denigrate



deny

Inclusive Understanding

- > Paradox
- > Ambiguity
- > Symbol
- > Metaphor
- > Codependence
- > Relativism
- > Mutuality
- > Indeterminacy
- > Ambivalence
- > Contingency

< Interdependency of Origins and Meanings >

Some Deluding Limitations of Reductive and Dualistic Thinking

- > The "Laws of Physics" reduce phenomena to definitive formulas—yet cannot explain self-organizing processes
- > Technology leads us to believe we can control both society and Nature—but natural systems can't be controlled
- > Obsession with quantification compels us to 'measure' everything—even happiness, pleasure, and art
- > Good/Bad, Right /Wrong, Fair/Unfair categories are useful--but block understanding of actual psychological dynamics

'Telling How It Happens' Requires Re-Thinking Our Thinking about Dynamical Relationships

The Cognitive Therapy of Dynamically Holistic Description and Interpretation

- > Engaging multiple perspectives and paradigms shows how interactivity makes wholes 'greater than the sums of their parts'
- > Using symbolism, metaphor, and parable makes the interdependencies of seeming oppositions 'visible'
- > Formulating logical concepts that represent the disorderly ordering of dynamically complex contexts expands our reasoning
- > Cultivating tangible experience of chaotically self-organizing, nonlinearly generative, and unpredictably emergent processes validates these strange facts of reality

Asking What We Are Missing: Questioning our reliance upon reductive description and definition

Modernity's Triumph of Reduction and Its Disastrous Consequences

Wisdom traditions from many cultures reiterate a theme about the limits of 'knowing for sure' and 'being in control.' In archaic societies that understanding was mostly composed in the mode of mythic representation associated with spirituality and religion. Historical attitudes toward what is knowable changed dramatically in modern times with the Enlightenment's conjunction of rigorously self-consistent reasoning, mathematics, and empirical study of phenomena. The rationalistic philosophy, empirical science, and mechanistic technology that resulted produced profound insights into 'the workings of Nature,' creating astonishing new capacities for manipulating our environments. This modernist triumph of reductive definition and control suggested that 'absolute knowledge' and the perfection of human society were soon to be attained. In the 19th Century, myth was deemed empirically inaccurate and thus the 'bad science' of primitive peoples. Myth came to be regarded as a quaint but irrelevant vestige of 'humanity's childhood.' Subsequently, infatuation with rational reduction and the power of mechanism made possible the tumultuous 20th century's industrialized global warfare, monumental tyrannies, factory-line genocides, consumer societies, environmental devastations, weapons of mass destruction, and now catastrophic climate change. The pursuit of absolute knowledge and technological control have not gone as predicted. Expectations of a perfectly just, rational society and freedom from superstitious delusion have not been even remotely approached. Many who study the aftermath of 'the Age of Reason,' with its grand "meta-narratives" intended to define truth and reason for everyone everywhere, have concluded that the reductive triumph of Enlightenment thought was not only 'incomplete,' but devastatingly so. We seem to have missed something of great importance. Subsequently, recent decades have seen the emergence of non-reductive perspectives in many fields of knowledge, producing what can be termed a 'post-modern perspective' that questions the reality of our cultural view of reality.

Limitations of Ordinary Attitudes and the Need for a 'Re-mediation of Reality'

We know reality through various paradigms or models of 'how things work'—these are primary epistemological concepts we use to perceive what happens. Those paradigms 'mediate' or constrain our sense of reality. Ordinary, practical awareness typically assess events through a mechanical model that 'reduces' phenomena to linear sequences, quantifications, or in reference to simple oppositions like 'right or wrong.' Consequently, everyday terms in language tend to represent 'what happens and how' in a reductively simplistic 'shorthand'. Either/Or categories and the linear paradigm are expedient but ultimately delusional as methods for understanding natural complexity. Our reliance on them leads to frustration in human relationships, economic incompetence, social conflict, political naivete, and environmental devastation. When linear perspective and the simplistic judgment it promotes begin to dominate awareness the result is necessarily debilitating and dangerous because complex awareness of 'how things actually happen' is obscured. To avoid these limitations of ordinarily reductive perspective we must frequently ask ourselves, 'what are we missing?' Restoring realistic understanding requires new paradigms and models that 're-mediate' how we know the dynamical realities of self and world.

Changing Our Story: Re-Telling Reality through a Therapy of Dynamically Complex Knowing

Confronting the Debilitating Consequences of Reductive Mentality with a 'Therapeutic Response'

Industrial and technological culture have greatly amplified the predominance of reductive mentality. This dependency upon a linear model of dynamics has become so extreme it can be considered a debilitating 'cultural illness.' The consequences are demonstrated by the global failure to preserve and protect the very ecosystems and climates upon which we depend. For all its vast enhancements of human power, mechanical modeling has seriously misrepresented everything from personal life to the global economy and the biosphere. Combined with reliance upon simplistic 'good versus bad' judgments, linear modeling poses phenomena in a way that favors opposition, competition, and dominance over complex awareness and cooperative engagement. Privileging such reduction can promote so much conflict and self-destructive behavior that it constitutes a pathologically debilitating condition—the quality of human life is diminished and the survival of society put in doubt. Such a condition suggests the need for a therapeutic response—one that expands how we know and understand beyond our reflexive reductions. Such a response constitutes an 'epistemological therapy'—meaning a 'treatment' that 'attends to' the distortions of understanding caused by reliance upon excessively reductive modes of knowing. Too much reduction calls for the cultivation of non-reductive practices of perception, interpretation, and expression.

The Cultural Challenge of the New Scientific Paradigm for Non-Reductive Understanding

Scientific analysis in the fields of complexity and chaos studies has now provided the empirical basis for a logically non-reductive paradigm of knowing reality. It demonstrates how reality involves not only linear but nonlinear dynamics, chaotic self-organization, and ultimately unpredictable creative interactivity. In this view of causation, ordinarily mechanical processes interact to produce autonomously self-regulating, adaptive sets of relationships—or "complex dynamical systems." In these contexts there are in effect two orders or types of causation, one predictably mechanistic and one unpredictably creative. By presenting this extra-ordinary 'vision' of reality, science has now taken on a traditional role once played by mythology in archaic societies—that of confronting ordinary attitudes with a more dynamically complex 'other world' of phenomena and influences that 're-mediate' our sense of 'how things happen.' The two types of causation now articulated by science closely resemble the two realities of ancient myth—the profane and the sacred. However, modernist culture remains based on mechanistic science. We have rejected mythological representation and have yet to incorporate this new science of complexity into our shared social standards for understanding. Thus our continued reflexive reliance upon linear modeling renders us incapable of readily embracing the implications of nonlinear dynamics. A fundamental cultural change is required if humans are to re-imagine reality in the terms of dynamic complexity and, thereby, re-direct behavior in ways that assure our survival. If we are to learn to live 'in relationship with' both Nature and our own psyches—rather than continue attempting to impose reductive control over self and world—we must confront the need to re-perceive, re-conceive, re-experience, and re-express 'how things happen.' We must learn to 'think like Nature acts' so that we can 'tell what happens' more realistically.

Moderating Reductive Delusion by Emphasizing Constellation of Dynamic Relationships

When dependency upon reductive thinking and the paradigms of mechanical modeling dominate our perception, awareness of interactivity becomes dangerously obscured, causing us to become 'dynamically delusional.' Consciousness becomes 'stuck' in a narrow pattern that can promote compressive personal depression, inflated self-righteousness, and collective social manias such as consumer culture or political fascism. Reductive delusion promotes a tyranny of simplistic thought in societies as well as within individuals. When we 'tell the tale too simplistically we truncate our own experience of self and world. A shift toward emphasizing the constellation of dynamic interactivity in relationships between factors, events, and meanings can expand our awareness of 'what is happening' in any given moment or situation. This is a therapeutic 'move' that moderates the delusional tendencies of ordinary attitudes.

Dynamic Constellation as a Conceptual and Expressive Therapy of Thought

The practices of *Dynamic Constellation* correlate the logic of complexity science's non-reductive paradigm with a broad range of disciplinary approaches to complexity. These associations promote a therapeutic expansion our epistemology—of how we know and understand. By overtly performing dynamic constellation upon familiar situations, habitual concepts, and reflexive behaviors, we can reveal unexpected insights into origins, causes, meanings, and potential developments. This effort reveals 'movement,' diversity, contrasts, affinities, and interdependencies that reflexively reductive perspectives tend to ignore. In this regard, the constellation of dynamic patterns of interaction performs a 'cognitive therapy' by 'massaging' one's ordinary perception and understanding into a wider, more inclusive perspective. Re-perceiving the world in this way also enables one to 'tell it differently' by using expressions that more overtly convey the interactivity thereby perceived. That effort involves representations (as images, concepts, language, or behavior) that more effectively model particular interactive patterns of association. The metaphorical and metamorphic representations of art, literature, and myth are ancient means of expressing such dynamic constellation. Metaphorical thinking and expressing constitute a therapeutic response to habitual reduction because these modes tend to defy reductive definition and mechanical interpretation. Thus, when accepted as a truthful version of 'what is and how it is,' the metaphorical mode of representation can enhance appreciation of nonlinear dynamics. When correlated with insights on complexity from other disciplines of knowledge, artful representation becomes a conceptual as well as an expressive therapy by manifesting concepts as tangible experience.

How you know What you know matters.

Multiple perspectives are required to perceive the interactivity of events—

Pluralize Your Paradigms

How you tell what happens 'makes the world'—

Develop 'Dynamic Literacy'

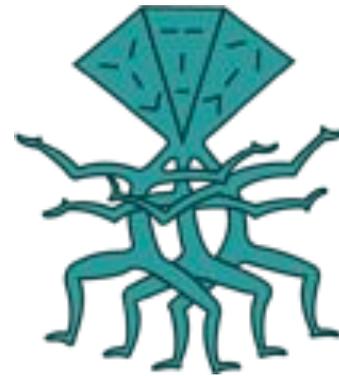
The way you express yourself defines you—

Learn to Narrate Non-Linearity

Think More Realistically—Constellate Your Consciousness

Browse the site or [contact me now](#) for information on how these concepts can benefit you

Psyche and world are mirrors of each other's turbulent interactivity



Please [contact Leslie Emery](#) for permission to reproduce and use content from this website