

## Managing Your Illusions and Delusions

Whenever we find ourselves confused, angry, or frustrated at the crossroads of life, we have an opportunity to improve our perceptions of how things are going and why they are going that way. This essay is built on the idea that our perceptions of things are never anywhere near as accurate as we think they are. To start with, our perceptions of things are always both limited and conditional. They are limited in that they only consist of short little flashes, tiny portions of a much larger whole. These short flashes are also shaped by the conditions we are in when and where we see or hear them. Things look foggy on a foggy day, and they look dark on a foggy night. The idea presented here is that the fog is a little thicker and the darkness a little darker than we may have previously thought. Symbolically speaking, realization of these facts may help us to lift our lamps of illumination a little higher and to let them burn a bit more brightly. Therefore, the goal of this essay is to help us all to perceive our own perceptions in such a way as to find more peace, less confusion, and less conflict in our view of the world.

The limitations of our common perceptions have been well illustrated for us by Edwin Abott in his wonderful novella “Flatland a Romance of Many Dimensions” first published in 1884. Abbot’s work is a classic which shows us all how deeply our perceptions are limited by the dimensionality of our world in space, time, and culture. The reader is well advised to gain some familiarity with this work at the start of any explorations of the limits of human perception and understanding. Another text that has been helpful in composing this essay is the recently published Introductory Commentary to the Tibetan Book of

the Dead written by His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama. (Penguin Books USA 2005).

Each of us has a picture or an impression of the way we think things are. This picture is composed of a matrix of thoughts, memories, information, and impressions gained from our observations of the world. This is the way we think things are. In reality, what we possess is only a thin little slice, a perceptual cross section of a larger multidimensional whole which is the fabulously complex thing we call Ultimate Reality.

The matrix of thoughts, memories, and perceptions which composes our mind is a very limited, one dimensional, or “Flatlander” slice of the larger, more complex multidimensional construct that is larger reality. To illustrate this, we may represent larger reality as a cone represented in three dimensions, with our whole set of perceptions being a one-dimensional slice, or cross section of the whole. If a one-dimensional plane intersects a three dimensional cone, the resulting representation of the intersection would be an ellipse. We will use this ellipse to represent our personal perceptions, and the three-dimensional cone to represent the larger whole of reality. This is our own personal little slice of reality in which we live and move and have our being. (This concept of interdimensional vs dimensional reality was presented by HP Lovecraft in his short story entitled “The Key to the Silver Gate” first published in “Weird Tales” in 1934.)

We have difficulty understanding and accepting the world around us because we view our little slice, this proportionally insignificant representation we have constructed for ourselves as if it was absolute and total reality. Our knowledge regarding our little slice of reality is deeply limited in comparison with the whole. Seen this way, our minds, or our consciousness will perceive that things don't quite make sense.

They don't add up. Our normal solution to this perception of misperception is to supplement our picture of reality with illusions and delusions. We don't see things with full accuracy, and we know that our perceptions are inaccurate to some extent, and so we fill in the blanks with imagination as best we can.

Here we are using the word "illusions" to describe our basic mistakes in perception, like seeing the number 5, "five", instead of the letter "S". As an example, a person may be scanning their normal habitual slice of reality using the internet when they come to perceive some significant social phenomenon, or group of events and commentary on those events. Our viewer of reality then decides that this perceived set of events represents a true and present threat to their health and welfare. For the purposes of our illustration, let us assume that this is a mistake, and in reality, the phenomenon observed represents no risk at all. The idea that the thing observed is a true and present threat is an error. It is an illusion. It's not either real or present. The sources of information our viewer is using may not have accurately or fully described the events that took place. Also, the phenomenon under consideration may have occurred at some great distance in time and space away from the viewer. Thus, the concept of "true and present threat" is an illusion.

The problem compounds though because, not realizing this, our viewer proceeds to get angry and upset over what they have perceived. They construct a series of interconnections between the initial phenomena perceived and all sorts of other observations closer to home. The initial illusion sprouts and grows into a delusion. Then, "that woman who looked at me so strangely at the drugstore on Tuesday" becomes an example of our newly conceived narrative about the true and present threat. Now an illusion has grown into full blown delusion.

Then the whole picture evolves further and becomes fabulously complicated as different players in different media construct and enhance narratives regarding the phenomena in question. Thus, the illusion/delusion complex multiplies and grows exponentially. It is entirely possible that it could spawn a whole activist/political movement.

As mindful, conscious participants in the social drama of our day, our task is to continuously let go of the illusions and delusions, and to try to hold only to the center of the basic human truths as they have become manifest to us.

There are two areas where illusions and delusions are likely to present the greatest power and influence in our personal lives. These are the areas of our own desires and our aversions.

When our narrow-perceived slice of reality presents us with the object of our desire, illusion will immediately begin to take hold. In most cases, the stronger our desire, the greater our delusion. The addict burning with desire for the toxin that is killing him or her provides us with a sad but commonplace example. Our dynamics of desire and attraction have always been and will always be subject to this illusionary Component. In any of a thousand situations, this is evident in the difference between what we wanted and what we got.

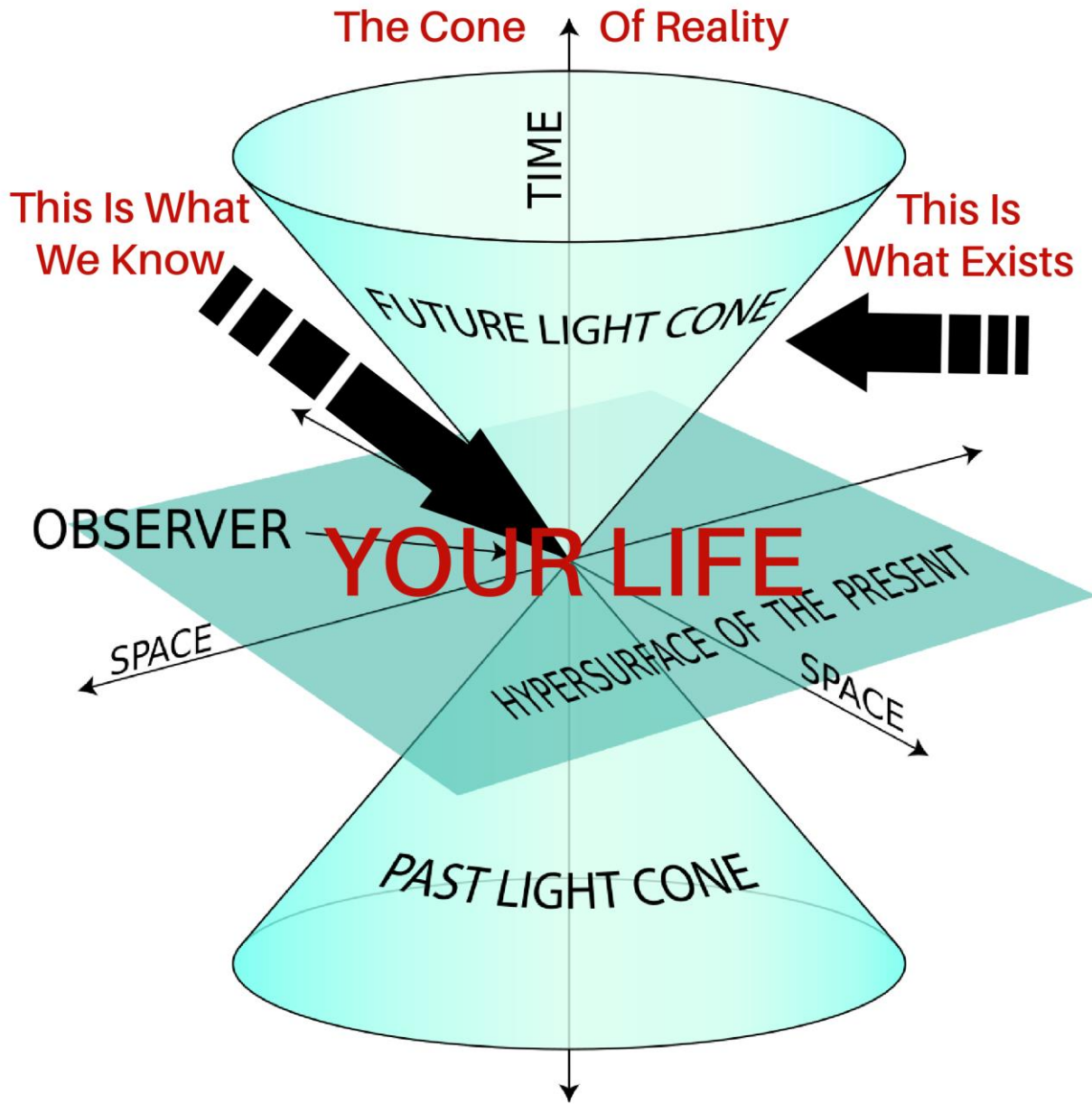
The vital lesson here is for us to understand that the more we desire something, the more likely it is that our desires will lead us into a matrix of illusions and delusions which will evolve until we find ourselves striving for something with all our strength, yet not knowing either what it is we really want so badly, or why we wanted it in the first place.

The other great feeding ground for our illusions and delusions grows from our habits of aversion. Aversion is little more than the opposite of desire, as hate is the opposite of love. Those things which we wish to avoid can assume great power and direction in our lives. While we often spend tremendous time and energy running away from whatever our aversions may be, we seldom pause to ask ourselves if “IT” is really as bad as our fears have made “IT” seem to be. In other words, the web of our aversions can easily be overwritten by a mixture of illusions and delusions.

Being mindful requires us to admit the truth of the extent to which we have bought into the popular lies and misrepresentations surrounding our fears. Our goal should not be to convince ourselves of the truthfulness of our perceptions. This will only suffice to place a nice, shiny finish coat on whatever delusional construct we have already purchased. It is trivially easy for us to convince ourselves that we are right. Instead, the path of mindfulness guides us to let go of the ego attachments that push and pull us toward aversion and desire.

The maypole of delusion revolves upon the axis of desire and aversion. We can dance around it for as long as we wish, but in the end we only succeed in wrapping ourselves up in the same bright ribbons of what we want and what we want to avoid. Mindfulness requires us to undertake the difficult task of simply existing, or just being in the center of the wild storms created by the push and pull of our likes and dislikes. Finding this peace of mind begins with the acknowledgement of our own inability to properly conceive of either the full truth or the full falsehood of any of our desires or our aversions. If we do not really know ourselves, how can we think we understand what is truly good or bad for us? This allows us to see desire as it is, without attachments and apart from its delusional magnetic pull. It allows us to see aversion in the same way, according to its true nature but without following its

push in any given direction. Once we are free from the push and pull of aversions and desires, we can freely and peacefully appreciate the awesome complexity of reality as it is. Such a peaceful platform of perception will enable us to move forward so as to participate constructively in constructive and compassionate action without our ego being on the line. Centered, peaceful, accepting mindfulness will lead us to become reliable and balanced witnesses of all that transpires around us.



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