

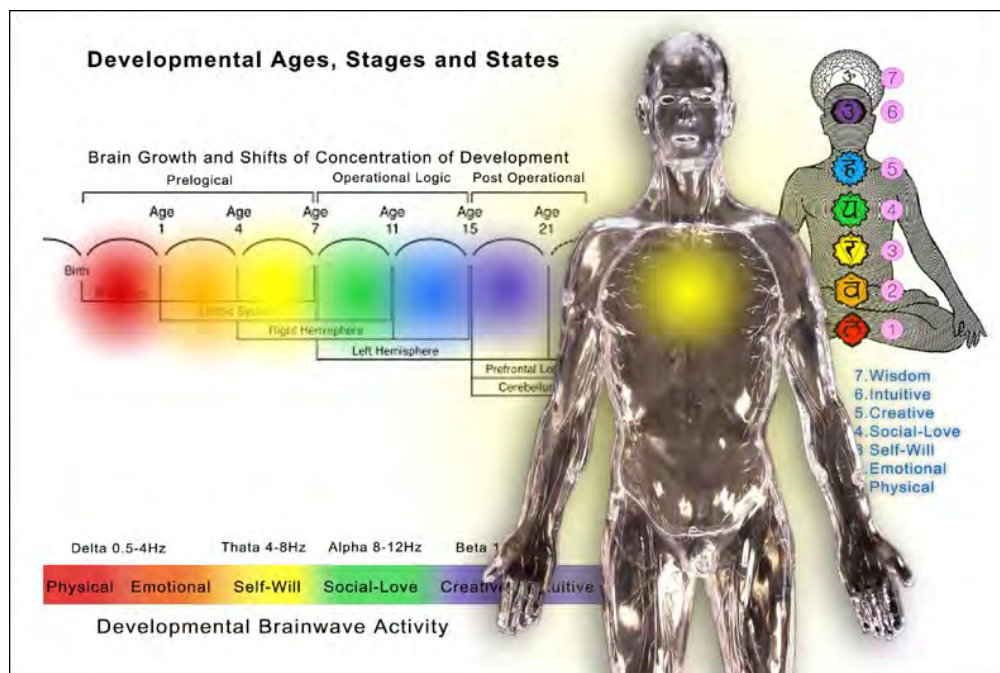


The Meaning of Life
Michael Mendizza

The founders of Esalen Institute, Michael Murphy and George Leonard, shared; “the meaning of life is what we make of it.” To which I add, “a moment by moment creative adventure.”

With this in mind, Joseph Chilton Pearce described the driving force we call evolution, not as the cultivation of knowledge, rather the forever opening and development of new capacity or fields of intelligence. In the 90s Joe, inspired by Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist who was the first to make a systematic study of the acquisition of understanding in children, drafted the Brain Growth and Shifts of Concentration of Development graph in the illustration below. This summarized major brain growth shifts with corresponding openings and development of capacity throughout childhood.

Around that time, it was discovered that these developmental shifts activate corresponding changes in brain wave frequency, noted at the bottom of the illustration. This sequential, periodic activating and opening of new states and capacity seemed to resonate with the ancient chakra system consisting of seven energy centers located along the spine. The first texts to mention chakras date back approximately 2700 years. The Tantras mapped out the system in detail, which flourished from 600-1300 CE and is still practiced today.



The opening of each new capacity, physical, emotional, imaginative-cognitive, intuitive, and more, involve their own sequential, open-ended and expansive developmental process. Learning to walk is just the beginning of a long road to mastery for the Olympic athlete or prima ballerina. Mozart may have begun by singing ‘row-row-row your boat,’ but did not stop there. Like all of us, reading and writing ‘Jack and Jill went up the hill,’ might have been where Rainer Maria Rilke began. Daniel Goldman popularized the field called Emotional Intelligence. Marshall Rosenberg refined that further with Nonviolent Communication. Krishnamurti, David Bohm and the Dalai Lama go deeper.

We might envision developing human consciousness and capacity as a three-dimensional pyramid chess board. Each layer represents different evolutionary brain-body centered capacities, and each set of chess pieces on each layer representing various qualities of that layer or field of intelligence to be developed. The opening and development of each higher, compact, more powerful or evolved layer, feeds back down, altering and transforming the lower capacities, lifting those powers into the nature or service of the higher, which fundamentally changes the game; perceived reality, core values, identity and behavior.

How the chess pieces on each layer are practiced and developed, think Einstein, Georgia O'Keeffe, or Michael Jordan, redefine the meaning and power of that level and its influence on all other layers. Fundamental to this model of expanding-evolving capacity is the higher levels, and their more powerful potentials, are invisible to the lower until the lower is lifted up and transformed by the higher. Thus, the classic statement; 'When a pickpocket sees a saint, he or she only sees pockets.' The lower remaining colorblind to immanence, the sacred, until the capacity to see and experience the sacred in and for one's self is opened and developed in each individual.

During our conversation, Ashley Montagu, anthropologist, writer and humanist noted: "Most generally stop growing in their late teens, shortly after high school, and more or less rely on fixed habits the rest of their lives." Estimates range from 6,000 to 70,000 thoughts per day and nearly all are not new. Bohm described thought as a system of reflexes. He followed by saying; "there is no real intelligence in a reflex." The majority of our thoughts and behaviors, from tying our shoes to driving the freeways are mechanical habits. Active intelligence implies a quality of attention that rises out of and above the reflex system. Only then are we able to alter or override the reflex. With low levels of attention, which is our collective norm, the reflex system drives the bus.

Back to Joseph Chilton Pearce. We have an open-ended and expansive range of potentials to discover and develop, and each level, capacity or intelligence is also open-ended and expansive. Each contributing to and changing what we call reality and simultaneously our place and identity in that reality.

The Higher Transforming the Lower or the Reverse

Central to evolution's continual unfolding is the way each new capacity and its development, including one's perception of 'self,' transforms the data or images emerging from the primal brain centers below into the service of the higher or more evolved reality. Implicit is a constant lifting or transformation of the whole field of perception, ideation of self, relationship and action. That is nature's design. That is, until very recently, say 50,000 years or so.

The great challenge, tragedy, or fall, occurs when the most recent and evolved regions of our multi-brain-complex, the prefrontal areas, for example, fail to open and develop due intellectual interference causing a failure of sustained nested-nurturing brought about by so called civilization and technology. See the attached; 'What Happened to Species-Typical Human Nature?' Darcia Narvaez, University of Notre Dame. With this failure the higher capacities that are developed are drawn back down into the service of the more primitive self-world-view-reality. Think, clever sociopath or abusive narcissist. When normalized, this 'sophisticated-primitive' becomes the new epigenetic norm. And upon this nurtured-upward evolutionary movement, or downward devolutionary nurture-deprived fall, the future of humanity rests.

A quick survey, inspired by Dr. Keith Buzzel, of the collective evolution of the human brain mirrors this expansive evolutionary thrust. Over 600 million years ago, with the appearance of the cold-blooded vertebrates, there appeared sensory systems which could construct a resonant representation, or images, of some portion of the external world. Implicit is proprioception, or self-perception, a three-dimensional awareness of being separate from the external environment. When limited to the first brain, this representation of self is defined by the body surface.

200 million years ago, elements of what Paul MacLean refers to as the Limbic Brain, the Second, or Mammalian began to appear. With the limbic system we see an incredible diversification of internal defenses via the immune system. A perceived sense or feeling of relating internally as we encounter the

outer. We subjectively experience our inner world in a totally different way than we do external sensations. There is a blending between these two in perception or consciousness. From this emerges a new quality or dimension of 'self.' Here we see the centers for nurturing, audio vocal communication between parent and child, and play. MacLean calls this great triad of functions the Family Triad.

With the evolution of the second brain special chemicals called neuro peptides, report to the brain the inner state of the body. Candice Pert, formerly of the National Institute of Health, calls them the "chemicals of emotion". The important differentiation is that the world of the second brain is a world of both neural and chemical formation and function. It isn't just the nervous system alone. Now there's an inter play of inner and outer images.

As we move up the evolutionary ladder over the last 200 million years we see increasingly dense neural structures, which begin to open capacities and functions that look like the third brain. Cleverness, a monkey digging with a stick for food. We see the emergence of curiosity, not for food, not for survival, but curiosity for its own sake. All this requires the neural matrix of a third brain. As this third brain develops we naturally see, in the life of many mammalian forms, aspects, which appear surprisingly similar to those that emerge with the full human brain. But the third brain isn't complete.

When it is complete it will have the capacity to create various types of abstract images - of letters, words, numbers; of comparisons, analogies, similarities; of spatial, and sound forms. It will 'image' logical sequences, and 'play' with symbols, word, colors, sounds, and forms. This is the world of the third brain. This third brain, being a far later evolutionary structure, might be considered immature. We described how the core and mid brains have developed feedback systems which create images of what is happening outside and inside (proprioception).

David Bohm suggested that the new brain, the neocortex, has not evolved such a feedback system to keep track of what it is doing. This promotes a major and compounding source of confusion and conflict. We lose track of what the third brain is doing. This is a recurring theme in Mac Lean's monumental work, 'The Triune Brain in Evolution.' There are far fewer paths connecting the second brain to the third brain than those that connect the first brain to the third brain. *This makes the new brain much more vulnerable to data from the outside than information coming from the sensors of the second brain which monitor inside states. We have a strong neural prejudice from the outside world and fail to give equal attention to what is going on inside.*

The dominance of proprioception to induce strong feelings of separateness predisposes cognitive images such as egotism, narcissism, tribalism, nationalism, racism, and all the violence and prejudgments these imply. It takes the uplifting nature of the higher more evolved heart-brain centers to transform selfishness into egalitarianism, empathy, altruism and compassion, all manifestations of entanglement or, as Buddhists say, 'interdependent originations.' Selfishness dominates when these higher transforming centers remain dormant. Thus, we discover that morality is developmental, embodied, not an act of will or intellectual force. Once opened and developed, the third brain, intellect or abstract reasoning can reinforce the higher transforming the lower.

There also seems to be a clear difference between generic males and females in this regard. Males tend to emphasize the outside world. Women, because they are the source of life and continuity, are more aware of the inner world. The connections between the second brain and the third brain of females, especially the right side of the third brain, are much more pronounced than males. As a result, they can be more attentive to the reality of their second brains inner world, emotions and relationships.

More important, so far as the emergence of the third brain, is what it does in terms of perspective. Lizards live in a one-dimensional world. They have very poor memories. They have fixed habit patterns that react and respond only to the present. Two brain creatures develop an enormous tail into the past. Memory develops and becomes longer and longer and immensely dense. But the second brain has little capacity to reach into the future. With the appearance of the third brain there is a sudden extension into the future, built upon the second brain's past and the first brain's present. With that extension life

takes on a three-dimensional perspective. Now we get a three-dimensional perspective which gives rise to the inner representation, or the subjective experience, of an independent “I”.

The Gap Between Habit and Infinite Potential

“We are second hand human beings,” J. Krishnamurti often described. A vast bundle of conditioned reflexes. And, as David Bohm noted, “there is no real intelligence in a reflex.” There is, of course, a quality of attention that is not conditioned. Simple presence. Complete attention without a motive. Expanding, embracing, entangled attention where subject and object merge. Wonder. Mystery. Attentive, but not knowing.

I could feel the wind passing through the trees, and the little ant on the blade of grass. I could feel the birds, the dust, and every noise was a part of me. I was in everything, or rather everything was in me. I was supremely happy for I had seen. Nothing could ever be the same...

J. Krishnamurti 1922, Under the Peppertree.

In another paper, ‘The Missing Mind,’ Darcia describes how this shape-shifting merging of self and other was the norm for most of humanity’s small-band hunter-gather evolution, 95% to 99%. Approximately 10,000 years ago farming, the domestication of animals, and private ownership, thus systems of hierarchy, introduced a new mental image or concept; ‘mine,’ and that fundamentally, epigenetically, changed the brain, human perception, identity and the subsequent unfolding of civilization.

There is a gap between habit and David Bohm’s Infinite Potential, where the quality of one’s energy and attention are lifted up and out of mechanical reflexes; habits of body, feelings, mind and imagination. Buddhists refer to this gap as Mindfulness. It is only in this gap that our authentic nature, real intelligence and infinite potential invite and lead with insight. All so-called spiritual practices begin by cultivating this gap. The ending of the known, silence, emptiness, active listening, complete attention, expanding sensitive attention and playful, childlike wonder combine. In this gap between what is known and what could be, there is space. Space that Joseph Chilton Pearce referred to as a Crack in Our Cosmic Egg, our stubborn and rigid concepts of self, of other, and of reality.

Silence grew and became intense, wider and deeper. The brain which had listened to the silence of the hills, fields and groves was itself now silent. It had become quiet, naturally, without any enforcement. It was still, deep within itself; like a bird that folds its wings, it had folded upon itself; it had entered into depths which were beyond itself. It was a dimension which the brain could not capture or understand. And there was no observer, witnessing this depth. Every part of one’s whole being was alert, sensitive but intensely still. This new, this depth was expanding, exploding, going away, developing in its own explosions; out of time and beyond space.

Krishnamurti’s Notebook

Our theme is simple. Our core identity, what it means to be a human being, is a composite image, or resonate representation, a blending of the various brain centers, each contributing their unique interpretation to the mix, sensory, feeling-relationship, concepts, and if allowed and nurtured entanglement. Recall, “I am in everything, or rather everything is in me,” was young Krishnamurti’s insight. This direct, lived experience of intimate interconnectedness cannot come from embodied proprioception, feeling separate from everything. It grows in the bonded nest, expanding relationship, connection and feeling safe with mother, immediate and extended family, with all other human beings, with our animal cousins, with the forces of nature, trees, flowers, mountains, the sky, and the heavens with its vast unknown spirit. The meaning of our life is transformed with the opening and development of new capacities, new levels of intelligence, a steady movement from selfish to entangled.

Are we ‘safe enough to play,’ with the opening and development of each new layer or capacity on nature’s timeline, or are we isolate, a castle that must defend against everything outside? Is our image and feeling of ‘self’ made of conditioned bricks, data, the known, fixed, rigid and defensive, or is that image and feeling of ‘self’ moving, connecting, embracing, always awakening and expanding, like the wind?

From the above two core developmental challenges emerge. First and most primary, we need to ensure that all of the capacities inherent in the human brain are activated, opened and developed, which demands living models that demonstrate the usefulness and importance of each intelligence and its open-ended capacities. This implies a radical rethink of the environment and experiences we call childhood. Pearce called this ‘the model imperative,’ predating epigenetics by fifty years.

Contrary to our dehumanizing momentum, nature with its infinite potentials and diversity, not data, knowledge or technology, is the optimum model for expanding human development. Use it or lose it is the law. Monkey see, monkey do, or more to the point, not do, not experience or develop. That is the model imperative.

Second, is to recognize what Darcia Narvaez has termed our ‘Species-Typical Human Nature.’ To reimagine what it means to be human based of our primal and authentic needs and values, not the mental images called culture and technology. For more on this, see The Evolved Nest.

<https://ttfuture.org/content/evolved-nest-2/>

Michael Mendizza

The Evolved Nest, Nature’s Way of Raising Children and Creating Connected Communities

Foreword by Gabor Maté, MD abridged.

In the arrogance of what we like to call our civilized culture, we tend to see ourselves as superior in intelligence and accomplishment to our evolutionary cousins, the other Animals with whom we share the Earth. We even look down with pride on brother and sister humans whom we are pleased to dismiss as “primitive,” such as Indigenous people and, more especially, the few, small remaining hunter-gatherer groupings that still cling to a tenuous existence in the face of the relentless march of “progress.” This is what the anthropologist and author Wade Davis calls “cultural myopia...”

To put it bluntly, we have lost the plot in the pursuit of economic and technological advancement. This has been a traumatic development in the history of our species, one whose ramifications we are experiencing all too keenly in the epidemic of ill health, mental disturbances, aggression, social divisions, and other plagues that beset present-day societies. It is no slur on human ingenuity nor a denigration of modernity’s truly miraculous inventions and achievements to argue, as our authors do, that we have much to learn from our hominin forebears and from the animals whose evolved nesting practices they document so eloquently.

Having lost its evolutionary niche, our species is inflicting its distress upon our fellow creatures, as Dr. Gay Bradshaw already documented in her remarkable work on posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Elephants. This book, too, abounds in lamentable examples of Animal cultures—such as Wolves in Yellowstone National Park or even in the Alaskan Denali wilderness—being traumatized at the hands of humans who, unlike Indigenous people, have no concept of being part of Nature, having become severed from their own nature by the traumatic demise of the evolved nest.

Our authors leave us on a positive note: they have written here not a dirge, after all, but a paean to Existence, to the possibilities inherent in us, despite our losses, and a call for a future informed and reinvigorated by what the past and everlasting Nature can teach us.