

Radical KNOWING

Understanding Consciousness
through Relationship



“... opens the way for a new kind of science that honors wisdom as much as truth.”

—MICHAEL TOMS, cofounder of New Dimensions
World Broadcasting Network

Christian de Quincey

A Companion Study Guide

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— a study guide —

‘We Are the World’

by Christian de Quincey

Q: Why did you write this book?

In these confused and troubled times, we need a deeper felt sense of relationship—not just with other humans, but with all sentient beings.

AS A PHILOSOPHER AND PROFESSOR of consciousness studies, I’m fascinated by three major questions:

Where did we come from?

Who are we?

Where are we going?

I explore each of these questions in my “Radical Consciousness” trilogy.

Where did we come from?

My first book, *Radical Nature*, explored the nature of reality—specifically, the relationship between mind and matter, between body and soul. In it I ask: “Where in the great unfolding of evolution did consciousness first appear?”

My answer: “consciousness goes all the way down”—all matter tingles with the spark of spirit to its deepest roots. For those interested in philosophy

of mind, the central theme of *Radical Nature* is the worldview called *panpsychism*—the idea that all of nature possesses consciousness, that “nature has a mind of its own” and, therefore, that “humans are not so special.”

‘Radical Consciousness’ Trilogy

1. *Radical Nature*: Where did we come from?
2. *Radical Knowing*: Who are we?
3. *Radical Science*: Where are we going?

Who are we?

My new book *Radical Knowing* explores the nature of consciousness itself and what it means to be in relationship — with people, planet, and cosmos.

I show why relationships often go wrong, and how we can heal them by cultivating different ways of knowing.

Radical Knowing reveals that we are not who we think we are, and invites us to trust our feelings more than our thoughts by engaging in *experience beyond belief*.

The central philosophical theme of this book is *intersubjectivity*. I'll explain in a minute what I mean by that.

Where are we going?

But first, for the sake of completeness, let me just mention the third book in my “Radical Consciousness” trilogy. **Radical Science** will explore the future of knowledge, focusing on consciousness as the “final frontier” for science. It will show how research will need to radically change if we are ever to have a true science of consciousness. This book should be ready for publication in a couple of years.

Now let's look more closely at some of the key questions raised in my new book, *Radical Knowing*.

Q: What is most important in your life?

I begin by asking: *What is most important in your life?* If we put this question to a wide range of people we'll get a wide range of answers ... everything from “money,” “sex,” “career,” to “good health,” “family,” “love.”

And if we ask deeper questions about why such things are so important I think we'll find that, underneath, all the answers share something in common: *What we really want most of all are meaningful, satisfying relationships.*

Everybody has relationships. We can't avoid them. Even if you decided to live alone in a log cabin on a remote island, you'd still be in relationship—at the very least with your memories of other people, and with the animals and insects and plants that surround you, and on which you rely for companionship and nourishment. Yes, we are always embedded in relationships, and the mark of a good life is the quality of our interconnectedness.

This may come as a surprise to some people: You cannot *not* be in relationship. It is a fact of life. Yet so many of us spend a lot of precious time and money trying to find relationships, or *the* perfect one. But if

you think about this for a while, and let yourself *feel* what's going on, I think you will come to recognize a basic, simple fact: *We are always in relationship . . . of some kind.*

It's part of the welcome package we all get on arrival into this world. Every one of us—no exceptions—gets the basic package: a *body*, a *mind*, and *relationships*.

Quite simply: To exist is to be in relationship; to be in relationship is to exist.

Q: So, you're saying we are all interconnected in some way?

Yes. But I'm saying more than that: “The fact that everyone and everything is interconnected is interesting, but it's not really news. It's kind of ho-hum.”

I don't know about you, but I often get my “ah-ha”s in the shower or driving in my car. Well a few years ago I had an “ah-ha” about the idea that everything is interconnected. I saw: Of course everything is interconnected because there really is no other option. It is *impossible* for things or people to be separate—despite what we may be taught to believe.

Here's why: If we are interconnected then that means there is *something between us*, something connecting us. Right? But if we are *not* interconnected then that means there is *nothing between us*. But if there is nothing in between us, then there is nothing *separating* us. And if there is truly nothing separating us, then we are connected. Right?

It's a paradox: *Whatever separates us connects us*. If *nothing* separates us, then we are connected. And if *something* is separating us, then *that's* what connects us. Either way, we are interconnected.

So, the notion “everything is interconnected” doesn't tell us very much. Being interconnected is a given. To exist is to be connected. As I said, there is no other option. After all, we live in a single *uni*-verse.

Key Questions

- What does it mean to be in relationship?
- Why do relationships go wrong?
- How can we heal our relationships?

That's why the idea of "interconnectedness" is not all that interesting to me. But what *is* deeply interesting to me is the question *how* are we connected? What is the nature or *quality* of our relationships? That's what *Radical Knowing* is about.

Our current scientific paradigm tells us that people and things are related only through *physical* connections. For example, we may be connected through direct body-to-body contact. Or we may be connected through communications technologies such as telephones, radios, TVs, or the Internet. In every case, we are connected through fields of energy.

Physical connections.

In other words, we are connected through some kind of *mechanism*.

While all of that is true, science completely overlooks a whole other kind of connection—probably much more important to us: We are also connected through *feelings*, through *consciousness*. We *feel* our relationships. We share meanings, stories and dreams, visions and values.

In my life and work, I'm far more interested in how we are connected through our *feelings* for each other, and for the world around us. Being in relationship means we *are connected through meaning*, not just through mechanisms.

So, I encourage people to pay attention to the *quality* of their relationships. And we do this by paying attention to our *feelings*.

Q: Why do relationships go wrong?

Well, the simplest answer is that paying attention to our feelings is not something we are taught to do in our society. Consequently, we become unaware of our connectedness, no longer feel our relationships.

But there is also a more detailed answer: Not only are we connected in two ways, physical and experiential. We also have *two major modes of consciousness*—reason and feeling, or intellect and intuition.

A few years ago, I came across an obscure essay by an anthropologist from Stanford University, Richard Sorenson. He described these two modes of consciousness in a dramatic story of an encounter between Western tourists and an indigenous tribe on a remote island in New Guinea.

The dominant Western mode of consciousness was—and is—the rational intellect. We are educated to be analytical, to figure things out logically, to search for "truth" using probing questions. Reason is essentially *dialectical*—that is, it confronts one idea with an opposing idea, and hopes that the result will be some advance in knowledge that blends the best of both. This has been a very successful way to use the mind. It has contributed enormously to so many aspects of modern civilization.

By contrast, the dominant mode of consciousness of indigenous people tends to be rooted in *feeling*, rather than analytical reasoning. For them, "truth" is what feels good for the collective.

Everyone is Interconnected.
There's no other possibility.
So, the really important question is: "How are we connected?"

The conquest of consciousness. Sorenson called the Western reason-based consciousness “postconquest,” and the indigenous feeling-based consciousness “preconquest.” “Conquest” refers to what happened when Europeans discovered the “New World.”

Now, what struck me about Sorenson’s essay was his idea that these two kinds of consciousness just do not mix very well. In fact, whenever “postconquest” rational consciousness meets “preconquest” feeling consciousness, the result is always disastrous for those who rely more on feeling than on reason. In the clash between feeling and reason, feeling comes off worst.

He described in moving and graphic detail what happened to the indigenous New Guinea tribe when tourists arrived on their island. Within a week, their way of life, which had lasted for centuries, collapsed. It simply could not withstand the probing questions of the tourists. Based on similar observations and experiences with other indigenous people, Sorenson concluded that reason-based consciousness *always* “conquers” or dominates feeling-based consciousness *even if it doesn’t intend to*.

This hit home for me. I began to recognize the “conquest” dynamic in my own relationships. For example, my partner is a highly intuitive woman who frequently has spiritual experiences beyond what’s considered “normal” or “ordinary” in our culture. In the early days of our relationship, I would often try to understand her experiences by asking probing questions in an attempt to satisfy my philosopher’s rational mind.

Almost invariably, these sessions ended in tears. She felt “invaded,” “invalidated,” or “dominated” by my probing questions. I have a deep respect for her in-

telligence and integrity, so I never intended to “dominate” or “invalidate” her. I just wanted to understand her better—and to see if I could make sense of her experiences within my own worldview. But from her perspective, she felt violated—she felt that her intuitive, feeling-based knowledge was being subjected to a rational inquisition.

At first, I didn’t understand what was going on. But Sorenson’s distinction between the two modes of consciousness (reason and feeling) explained a lot.

He showed why this happens: On the one hand, feeling-based consciousness wants everyone to feel good (it aims to maximize the well being of the collective). On the other hand, reason-based consciousness is not concerned with feelings, and just wants to “get at the truth.” This often involves

searching for and challenging what appear to be logical inconsistencies—and if this process is uncomfortable, well . . . “no pain, no gain.”

Put these two modes of consciousness together then, and it is no surprise that one dominates the other. Feeling-consciousness wants the other to feel good, so it allows the reasoning mind to do what it does naturally: probe and challenge and dispute and question, always looking for rational precision. If the reports of intuitive or spiritual experiences don’t meet these strict logical standards, then the feeling-based person experiences invalidation. Result: Dialectical reason naturally dominates dialogic feeling.

I have given many talks about this over the years, and afterwards women often came up to me to thank me for clarifying a dynamic that was straining their relationships—whether with a husband, boyfriend, boss, teacher, or colleague. They felt they now had a better understanding of what was going on. They

Two Modes of Consciousness

- Preconquest (feeling) consciousness (indigenous)
- Postconquest (rational) consciousness (Western)

were grateful for the insight that the painful dynamic is rooted in different styles of consciousness, and that the conquest of consciousness is not intentional.

I want to be careful not to stereotype or unduly generalize genders here. Nevertheless, it does seem to be a fact that *in general* women tend to be more intuitive and men tend to be more rational. This is not to say that women are not also rational, or that men don't also have feelings. But there may well be a genetic disposition for women to rely more on feelings for nurturing relationships and for men to rely more on logic and reason for analyzing and figuring things out. Certainly, for centuries our social and educational systems have reinforced this difference and have set up this expectation.

The problem can be difficult to deal with because it is invisible. It is not something we can see or touch. But we can identify it if we know where to look: *Consciousness*. Our minds. It all comes down to how we think and feel—and believe.

By the way, this conflict between reason and feeling is not confined to relationships between men and women. As we've seen, it underlies encounters between industrial civilizations and indigenous peoples. It is also at work in relationships between adults and children; between humans and other animals; and between science and spirituality.

Indigenous people,

Why Relationships Go Wrong

If one person in a relationship prefers to rely on feelings or intuition to guide their knowledge, and the other person prefers to rely on reason and logic, then the feeling-person will inevitably feel dominated and suppressed.

women, children, other animals, and mystics, in different ways, rely on and trust feeling

or intuition as their predominant guide for knowing and orienting themselves in the world. On the other side, Westerners, men, adults, humans in general, and scientists rely more on reason, analysis and logic.

Of course, both sides also have a capacity for and access to other ways of knowing.

Q: How can we heal our relationships?

I think Sorenson made very a perceptive and useful observation when he identified feeling and reason as two major modes of consciousness. It certainly helped open my eyes to what was going on in my own relationships. But I also think his conclusion that reason *inevitably* dominates feeling is based on a faulty assumption—that reason is the growing tip in the evolution of human consciousness.

Based on this, he believed that the trend in evolution is for more and more people to develop their rational faculties at the expense of feeling. In that case, the future for indigenous people looks very bleak.

However, it is clear that reason is not the end of the line in the evolution of consciousness. We have reports of

mystics and sages throughout millennia, and in every culture, that consciousness can evolve beyond the

No Blame

If you have ever wondered why relationships often seem dominated by one side—or if you feel your voice, even your soul, has been suppressed by someone you love—then this feeling vs. reason dynamic could be working itself out in your relationships.

It can happen to the best of us—and often no one is to blame.

reasoning mind. Yes, it is true that in the evolution of species feeling came before reason, and therefore reason may be “more highly evolved” than feeling. But it is also true that mystical experiences of “enlightenment” transcend the limits of reason and logic. Mystical experience is “higher” than reason.

And while reason may dominate feeling, mystical consciousness does not dominate reason—it goes beyond and *includes* reason and feeling.

Two kinds of reason. But there is another factor at play. Not only do we have two modes of consciousness—we also have *two kinds of reason*. I call them “abstract” and “embodied” (or “grounded”) reason.

We know that in evolution feeling came before reason (animals felt their way through the world long before creatures with brains capable of thought and reason came on the scene). So, *feeling comes before reason*. This is true both in the evolution of species and in individual development. We feel before we think.

Every thought that has ever existed began as a feeling in someone’s body. This is important to remember. We began by *feeling our thinking*. But somewhere along the way, we disconnected our thoughts from their roots in feeling. That’s what *abstraction* means: thoughts abstracted from their source in the body’s feelings.

The most extreme case of this is found in modern Western philosophy where knowledge is focused on hooking abstractions together. If the abstract ideas seem to connect well (i.e., without internal contradictions) then philosophers say we have meaningful, coherent knowledge. But such abstractions have lost

their vitality because they are no longer informed by the feelings and experiences that gave rise to them in the first place. We say this kind of thinking is “in the head,” and it seems to have very little relevance to what concerns us in our day-to-day lives. No wonder, then, why philosophers often seem out of touch with “real” life, lost in clouds of abstraction.

But reason doesn’t have to be abstract. We can also have *embodied* reason that either remains connected, or reconnects, with its roots in the body’s feelings. This kind of reason has a very different quality or “feel” to it. We can easily tell when someone is speaking from their “head” or from their “heart.” Embodied reason literally gives voice to our feelings.

Reason and feeling don’t have to be at odds. It is only *abstract* reason that is alienated from the feeling-based mind. When reason is embodied, when

we feel our thinking, then the two modes of consciousness come together in mutually supportive ways. We

actually feel and think more clearly and compassionately.

So, when the reason-feeling conflict arises in relationships we can begin the healing process by learning to “feel our thinking.” It helps unite head and heart, and reveals the reality of our deep interconnectedness. We see more clearly that, literally, we are always engaged in a dance of mutual co-creation. As the song goes: “I am you, and you are me, and we are all together.” We realize a profound truth: “We are the world.”

Two Kinds of Reason

- ***Abstract* reason—disconnected from its roots in the body’s feelings.**
- ***Embodied* reason—connected to its source in the body.**

Q: If we're not who we think we are, then who or what are we?

My answer to that has two parts—one focuses on our sense of being an *individual* self, the other focuses on what we think or *believe* about ourselves. First, let's look at the common sense view that we are individuals. This notion is reinforced by our educational system and by society in general. But I think it is “backward knowledge”—i.e., the opposite is true.

Here's what I mean: Our current paradigm—the belief system that dominates our culture—tells us we are first and foremost *individuals*. We are born into this world as separate people, and later on in life we come together to form relationships.

It's an “atomistic” view—we see ourselves as social “atoms.” Then, through chance or design, we hook up with others to form relationships.

(We even talk of the “chemistry” of relationships.)

Of course, a moment's reflection reveals this is not so: We are not born as isolated individuals. Without exception, we are born into a family—even if it's just a single mom and her infant. As I said earlier, our “welcome package” at birth has three components: we have a *body*, a *mind*, and *relationships*.

But I'm saying more than that. I'm proposing not merely that we *have* relationships, but that we *are* our relationships. I mean this literally. Without relationships we simply would not exist. I'm saying that *relationships come first* and then we develop our

sense of individual identity. First relationships, then individuality.

This view completely reverses the “common sense” understanding of who we are. In *Radical Knowing* I discuss this in great detail—and we don't have time to go into that discussion here. But I will try to briefly summarize the essence of this radical idea.

We know from sciences such as quantum physics and systems theory that everything is connected. In fact, we know this by simply paying attention to the nature of reality in our everyday experience and giving it some thought. Nothing exists isolated from the rest of the world. That's actually impossible.

Physics shows that all subatomic particles come into being in a dance of mutual co-creation. Each particle is created by a family of other particles. The philosophy I develop in *Radical Knowing* applies this same kind of insight to human beings

(in fact to all beings)—the philosophy of *intersubjectivity*.

Who I am is partly created by my relationships with you and everyone else I'm connected with. This bumper-sticker says it all: “*We are the world.*” That's not just a nice image, it's the most fundamental fact of life and existence.

It's what “intersubjectivity” means: Each individual self (or subject) arises out of, or is co-created by, the relationships *between* us. We are “*intersubjects*” mutually creating each other. Who I am is partially created by my relationship with you, and vice versa, you are partly created by me. Ultimately, this is not something to figure out or believe. It is a fact to *experience*.

Healing Our Relationships

- Two kinds of connection—*physical* and consciousness.
- Two modes of consciousness—*feeling* and reason.
- Two kinds of reason—*abstract* and embodied.
- Healing comes from embodied reason—by feeling our thinking.
- When we *feel our thinking*, we unite head and heart, and experience the true nature of our deep interconnectedness.

Q: What do you mean by “experience beyond belief?”

This takes us to the second part of what I mean by “we are not who we think we are.” Not only are we not the individuals we think we are, but we are not *anything* we think or believe about ourselves.

I often begin my classes in consciousness studies by telling students: “Don’t believe a word I’m about to say.” After the initial surprise, I explain that beliefs are “left-

overs” from experience. They belong to the past. Experience always happens *now*. Beliefs can be right or wrong, but experience is always exactly what it is—and can never be in-

validated. Belief is rooted in external authority, while experience is the source of *inner* authority, and the antidote to dogma.

Experience is an on-going *process*, but beliefs are end *products*. The process goes like this: First we *experi-*

ence. Then we *interpret* the experience. Then we solidify the interpretation as a *belief*. Then

(sometimes) we further weigh down the belief by turning it into *dogma*. And then we use our beliefs (or dogma) to trigger us into *action*. When actions are governed by beliefs, rather than guided by experience, that’s when we get into trouble.

When relationships go wrong, very often the root of the problem is our *beliefs*. It’s not just *what* we believe that’s the problem—but the very fact that we *believe* our beliefs!

In *Radical Knowing*, I show how and why our beliefs get us into trouble, and what we can do about them.

Again, our educational system has got it “backward.” We are trained to focus attention on our thoughts, ideas, and beliefs. But, every thought, idea, and belief

begins in our felt experience. First we experience something, then we wrap it in a thought or belief.

The problem is that beliefs are habits of mind, frozen frag-

ments of consciousness—static snapshots of reality. Even if we change them, beliefs cannot embrace the ever-changing nature of reality. In short, our beliefs (*all* our beliefs—yours, mine, everyone’s) inevitably and automatically *distort* reality. That’s why spiritual teachers tell us to let them go.

I’m not saying we shouldn’t have beliefs—in fact, we can’t help having them (it’s what our

minds are evolved to do, and they do that job very well). But we can choose whether or not to be attached to them, whether or not to *believe* our beliefs. I’m advocating instead of *believing* our beliefs, we learn to notice and *experience* them, then release them.

Intersubjectivity

Picture a vast network or web of relationships, with fibers of connection flowing into each other at multiple points. Each node is an “individual” co-created by all the relationships meeting at that point.

If the fibers of relationship did not meet at that point, no individual would exist there. In other words, the relationships come first.

We are literally created and constituted by our relationships. Each one of us is formed by or grows out of our network of relationships. We are mutual co-creations. In technical jargon: *intersubjectivity gives rise to individual subjects*.

Experience → Interpretation → Belief → Action

Instead of believing our beliefs, I suggest we cultivate and practice *experience beyond belief*. Wisdom resides

in our moment-to-moment experience, not in our beliefs. As habits of mind, beliefs are conditioned by the past. Experience, on the other hand, *always* occurs in the present moment—*now*.

Beliefs are born from experience (how else could they arise? Even imagination and fantasy must be *experienced* to be known). But pay attention, and you'll notice that every experience lasts only a mere moment—*now*—before being replaced by the next moment of experience in the next “now.”

Ideas, concepts, beliefs are “records” of experiences—they are rooted in the past. They are *abstractions*—literally abstracted fragments “taken from” the wholeness of the moment. Experience, on the other hand, is always *now*, and is *grounded* in our bodies.

Rather than attending to our in-the-moment experience, our minds direct attention to beliefs formed from fragments of *prior* experiences. In other words we spend most of our time living in the past (even anxieties and dreams for the future are rooted in past experiences and beliefs about those experiences).

Realizing this, then, where should we focus attention in the pursuit of knowledge, truth, and wisdom—on our beliefs or on our in-the-moment experience? Since beliefs always belong to the past, and since consciousness, our experience of reality, is always *now*, I encourage us to focus attention on our live experience in the moment, as it is occurring. Two effective ways of facilitating this are through the practice of meditation and simply learning to pay attention to the *feelings* in our bodies.

Experience Beyond Belief

- Beliefs have immense power. But their potency is *habit*.
- Experience is *creative*. Its potency is the creativity of consciousness itself.

Beliefs may well be left-over abstractions and distortions of reality, but we

still need to realize they have power. In fact, they have immense power in our lives because they shape and limit the range of experiences we are open to, and they often determine our actions. When we focus attention on beliefs we tend to live our lives in ways that confirm those beliefs (until reality smacks us in the face, and we undergo a “paradigm shift”). That’s why the force of beliefs can be such a problem. But the potency of beliefs is *habit*. Belief and habit are the “nuts and bolts” of our *mechanical* nature.

By contrast, the potency of experience is *creativity*. That’s the crucial difference. True wisdom, true knowledge, and real power come not from our beliefs or habits of mind but from the creative power of consciousness itself. If we want our lives to be rich with *meaning*, and not dominated by the clockwork mechanisms of habitual beliefs, then, I say, let’s cultivate *experience beyond belief*.

We are not who we *think* we are because every idea, thought, or belief is inevitably a distortion of reality. Instead, we need to develop other ways of knowing if we want to understand who we are as embodied conscious beings.

Q: What are the “The Four Gifts of Knowing”?

Not only do we come into the world with our “welcome package” of body, mind, and relationships, we also come with four native abilities for knowing the world around us.

In *Radical Knowing*, I call these “The Four Gifts”: The Scientist’s Gift of the *senses* for perceiving the world. The Philosopher’s Gift of *reason* for thinking about the world and for organizing the data gained through our senses. These two ways of knowing dominate our educational system and social paradigm.

But we also have The Shaman's Gift of *feeling* our deep interconnectedness, enhanced in *altered states of consciousness*. Finally, we have The Mystic's Gift of *sacred silence* for accessing direct experience. It integrates the other three ways of knowing

The Four Gifts of Knowing

1. The Scientist's Gift — senses.
2. The Philosopher's Gift — reason.
3. The Shaman's Gift — feeling.
4. The Mystic's Gift — intuition.

Q: What final messages would you like people to get?

Personal transformation comes from cultivating different ways of knowing, allowing us to tap into collective wisdom.

Healing our relationships (personal, social, and spiritual) comes from practicing experience beyond belief, by feeling our deep interconnectedness, and by realizing the profound truth that "we are the world."

Deeper understanding of consciousness comes from focusing on "we beyond me," "communion beyond union," "community beyond unity."

Essence of Radical Knowing

- **Personal transformation:** *Radical Knowing* reveals a new understanding of consciousness through experience beyond belief.
- **Ways of knowing:** It offers a new blueprint for cultivating consciousness through integrating our "Four Gifts of Knowing."
- **Collective wisdom:** It reveals a new understanding of what it means to be human and how we fit in—focusing on "we" beyond "me"; communion beyond union; community beyond unity.

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