

Q: Hi Robert! I'm reading *Depending On No-Thing*. On page 182 you talk about not choosing. I resonate with this idea since in my experience I came to the same conclusion, that I am a byproduct of my brain activity, and when I get to experience something, that something was decided already.

Still, I also recognize the potential for change in the face of insight or common sense. I don't make that decision, but from this perspective, it seems that sometimes, something drops one idea for a better one, as it learns or experiments with things. I understand that at the lever I can make sense of, I can arrive at one decision, but probably millions of decisions or reactions were taken so that one action is preferred instead of another. How do you see this? How do you see what is learning or applying common sense?

A: Hi. I'm happy to hear that you are enjoying *DONT*. I will put a link below for people who would like to read the introduction and first few chapters.

I don't see a borderline between thoughts and feelings on the one hand and some "entity" on the other, a possessor of common sense who then behaves sensibly. In my world, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors constitute one indivisible arising. It may feel as if some entity can control that—at least the behaviors if not the thoughts and feelings—but I don't think so. That perspective is lost to me. I can remember it, but I can't inhabit it. To me, "I" the decider and controller feels like an illusion taught to us culturally, accepted early in life, and usually not questioned.

What I call "awake" is the dissolution of that illusion. The "myself at the center" illusion is suddenly seen through the way a mirage is suddenly seen to be a mirage. No one can figure that out though or approach it logically. It just happens.

Someone can be told that the mirage is a mirage and more or less believe it, but that's entirely insufficient. This is not a question of hearing and believing. You have to see it for yourself. It's a bit like humor. If someone has to explain a joke to you, you didn't get it.

When one sees this for oneself, it seems obvious. Duh! How could I have missed this? But that illusion was heavily ingrained in infancy, and then supported and reinforced by laws, social arrangements, being held "accountable," being subjected to blame and guilt, etcetera, so a lot is working against seeing it.

That is why I question the value of so-called "spirituality" of the kind that offers paths and techniques for awakening. That point of view only strengthens the illusion of a "myself" who makes good or bad decisions, follows the path or goes astray. I don't think it works that way.

Observing from the outside, I notice people acting with seeming intention and common sense at one juncture and foolishness and confusion at another. I assume that's what you would see if you

observed "Robert" from your point of view. Whether called wise or called foolish, we are all human after all.

But regarding my own behaviors, in the event, I can never tell the difference between wise and foolish. In retrospect, I may see distinctions between the levelheadedness of one action and the indiscretion of another. I may even feel regret for apparent "mistakes," but I don't think there are any mistakes. There is just what happens. If I apologize for my "mistake," that's a social nicety. If there is a sense of regret, there is. But in my heart and best understanding, I feel deeply that I had no choice.

That does not mean that learning cannot take place. Previous experiences do seem to exert influences, but upon what "substance" that force is exerted seems entirely unknowable.

If I won't touch a hot stove twice, it's not because I have "chosen" not to be burned again. Pulling my hand back was a reflex at the time I got burned, and now the entire organism--not just the conscious, self-aware cognitive sectors--has associated that reflex with an object in the real ("material") world. That linking of a feeling with an object was not intentional. Perceptions arise far too quickly for intention to intervene.

In my experience, live and learn does not seem to require a learner separate from the lessons. I don't actually *try* to learn anything. What is, is. What is just happens. It's all of a piece, non-dissectable.

Some people see that view as "irresponsible," but that is a gross misunderstanding of the kind called a category error. I may feel a sense of responsibility and act on it, but "I" (whoever or whatever that seems to be) cannot choose what to feel or think. Feelings and thoughts just arise as they do. And from those feelings and the thoughts linked to them, behaviors arise.

Once one sees that automaticity, one might still *feel* responsible--one might *feel* anything at all--but, in my view, except perhaps on a limited scale within a role we are playing, we are powerless to be responsible in the way many of us believe we are.

You asked earlier if life was "just a dance of action-reaction?" I am not saying that. I don't know anything about that. I have no idea what any of this "really" is. From my perspective, awareness is like looking into an active volcano. The lava we call "experience" or "life" issues forth organically, relentlessly, unchosen and unbidden from who knows where and will not be moderated or detained.

Depending On No-Thing, Foreword, Introduction, and beginning chapters:  
<http://www.thetenthousandthings.net/DONT%20sample.pdf>

<https://www.amazon.com/Depending-No-Thing-Robert-Saltzman/dp/1999353595/>

