

Free Sample Chapters



Considering Non-Duality

Arguments for the Worldview
Impossible to Prove

Richard van der Linde

Free Sample Chapters

Contents

Introducing Non-Duality4

Topic 1 Neuroscience12

Delineation problem **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Rubber Hand Experiment **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

**Topic 2 The Scientific Method and Logic
.....Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Principle 1: The Burden of Proof..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Principle 2: Falsifiability **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Principle 3: Ockham's Razor **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Two Modes of Data Collection **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Question of Consciousness..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Potential Bias for the Self When
Confirming its Own Existence..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Immeasurability of Autonomy **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Quantum Physics and Consciousness ... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Your Interpretation**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Topic 3 Freud's Psychology and Beyond
.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Ego of Sigmund Freud**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Ego of Carl Jung**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Ego of Modern-Day Psychologists..**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Your Interpretation**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Topic 4 Etymological Clues**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Language for Referring to Oneself.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Verbs and Nouns**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Matter.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Thinking and Feeling**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Your Interpretation**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Topic 5 Experimenting with Making Clouds Disappear**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

How-To Instructions**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

After the experience **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Making Up Your Mind **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

A Brief Recap **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
How Much Research is Enough? **Error!**
Bookmark not defined.

Resources **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Books about Ego Awakening **Error!**
Bookmark not defined.

Online videos **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Non-Duality Bootcamp **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Introducing Non-Duality

“If the moon, in its eternal orbit around the Earth, were self-aware, it would be fully convinced that it moved on its own accord based on a decision made once and for all. Thus, a being, possessing stronger insight and higher intelligence, observing humans and their actions, would laugh at the illusion of humans acting out of free will.”

~ Einstein

What is Non-Duality?

Non-duality is a philosophical idea about the nature of reality and consciousness. It implies that any kind of suffering – psychological issues ranging from anxiety to lack of purpose – is the result of experiencing our life events from a worldview in which all conscious beings are essentially separate, autonomous individuals.

From a non-dualist perspective, trying to resolve these issues without changing our lens never works in the long run. Therefore, the first step is to update the lens.¹ This in itself weakens or resolves many of the issues and allows for anything that remains to be examined from a new, more effective angle.

If you're looking into non-duality, you are likely struggling with resolving something that impedes your quality of life. Either nothing else works or nothing else resonates before someone looks into something as abstract as non-duality, because non-duality won't make sense until you fully grasp its core concepts.

Non-dual philosophy entails that there isn't a *self* – not really, at least. Yet, how can you and I both experience selfhood while we are respectively reading or writing this? This shouldn't make sense and will be enough for some to disregard non-duality entirely. But what if it would be possible to experience without the sensation of selfhood? And what to think of the structure from which it follows

¹ Except for people who are mentally so unstable that this update is even too disconcerting.

that the sensation of selfhood is an illusion, which happens to be the central idea of about any Eastern wisdom tradition?

The non-dualist idea about the nature of reality is that the entire universe, with all its fascinating laws and patterns, is essentially dreamlike. It exists just as much as the people and places in your dreams at night exist. It perceives itself from the inside through the many conscious beings, like how your left and right hand sense different things but belong to the same body. The whole point of life is merely: experience. Each conscious being, whether they know it or not, is on a quest to figure out this true nature of reality, to update the lens through which they perceive this game from the inside and simply surrender to its natural urges and let life unfold.

The word “non-duality” comes from the Sanskrit “advaita”, which literally means “not two”. A lazy interpretation that is often made, is that non-duality means “all is one”, but that is not entirely correct. After all, why go through the trouble of calling something *not two* if you can just call it *one*? That’s because

non-duality also means “all is none”. Which definition applies, depends on the perspective you choose to take – that of the person or that of your supposed impersonal, universal essence.

Although it seems trivial to be concerned with such philosophical matters, a whole range of Eastern Wisdom traditions – Zen, Taoism, Dzogchen and various Buddhist and Hindu sects – consider the ability to shift between these two perspectives the greatest of all liberations. They are basically different protocols to obtain that ability.

There is undeniably your personal perception going on, which is different from my perception and that of the other billions of people. That won't be different when looking from a non-dual lens, but what would change is the idea of absolute selfhood. With a non-dual lens, sometimes referred to as a “bi-focal perspective” it would rather feel as if the same universe is perceiving itself through your eyes and ears as much as through any other eye or ear, the brain included. And when you perceive yourself, the sensation

would be as if one set of eyes and ears of the universe would perceive a tiny aspect of itself.

While all of this perception is going on, just like when you dream at night during your sleep, this entire universe is considered to be dreamlike despite there being no dreamer except for the dream characters with unique biological inclinations who together shape this dream. At least, according to non-dual philosophy.

Now, suppose this is true, how could you prove it? You can't. There are interesting arguments that can help you form an opinion about the probability, which you'll find summarized in the following chapters of this book. But if you need proof, the best you could achieve is that you disprove any claim that anything really exists at all or that there is any plan, set of rules, or meaning at the most fundamental level of existence, until nothing of the sort remains. But why would you? Well, it might be your inclination, but otherwise, there is no reason.

All that matters with regard to the quality of life, from a non-dual point of view, is that

you figure out a way to let go of the habitual thought process of creating an individual self, often referred to as “waking up from ego identification” – terminology that will also be used throughout this book. All your other thought processes would carry on, although many change at least slightly, fade out or no longer captivate your conscious attention.

You may still act like an individual with selfhood and have preferences and emotions like one, just like how an actor might surrender to playing a character in a stage play. But having a knowing, deep down, that it’s essentially a witnessing of a dream unfolding removes a lot of questions, stress, desires, and suffering. There is then a simultaneous sensation of oneness with billions of unique individuals and the nothingness of the dream without a dreamer. Hence the name “not two”.

This is a fundamentally different worldview from, for example, the idea of having a god as your maker or the materialist idea about the universe and the nature of consciousness, thus implying a fundamentally

different approach to improving your quality of life. You can't choose what you believe and therefore can't just throw a lot of non-duality at your issues to make them disappear. It *only* requires acceptance of the idea, which usually requires some investigation into the arguments, such as those presented in the following chapters. So if this introduction didn't spook you yet, let's get into the nuances and complexities of non-duality to see if it is right for you.

Topic 1

Neuroscience

"Who makes my decisions if I am not even conscious of them yet at the moment they are made?"

~ Me

The neuroscientist Benjamin Libet was the first to come up with an experiment that would show that decisions can be measured in the brain before one is conscious of them. In the experiment, a participant is asked to flex their wrist at a random moment while looking at a screen on which random letters appear. Their task is to remember the letter that appeared at the moment they flexed their wrist.

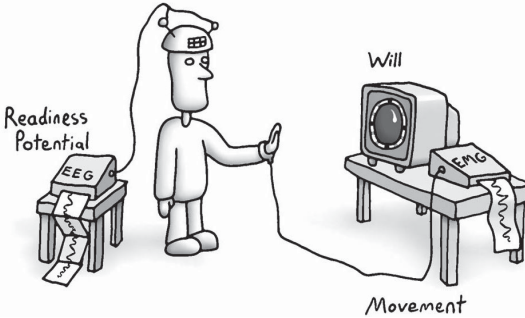
Libet's team measured the activity in participants' brains and compared the timing of the wrist flexes – based on the letter that was on the

screen – with the moments of decision-making as indicated by the brain scan. It turned out that Libet's instrument – a brain scanner – was identifying the decision 200–500 milliseconds before the participant was conscious of the decision.

Consequently, there has been much debate about the matter of free will: Who's making those decisions, supposing they are made before we are conscious of them? The case for the absence of free will has been further strengthened by the finding that after a participant has executed a task, activity is observed in the area of the brain where experiences are usually turned into consistent stories. Could it be that we're making up the story of our choosing afterward?

There have been many variations of Libet's experiment. In a particularly interesting one, researchers at the University of Sussex observed the differences among average people, frequent meditators, and people who were easily hypnotized. Compared to the control group, frequent meditators displayed a smaller gap between the moment of their decision-making and the moment of their awareness of that decision,

whereas people who were easily hypnotized had a larger gap than the average person.²



One way to interpret this awareness gap is that we just take more time to become conscious of our decisions than we do to execute them. But this begs an explanation of who or what decides if it's not consciousness, that is, the self. Perhaps consciousness is split into parts? Another way to interpret this is that the brain creates a narrative after the event of a decision made by a chooser, which is the result of a feedback loop – the egoic thought pattern in non-duality.

===== END OF SAMPLE=====

² <https://bit.ly/WUYM02>

Sample chapters of the book “Considering Non-Duality”

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The content in this file is a sample of the book “Considering Non-Duality”.

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