What Is Aware Is the Ground

Free Will, from the First Person

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Abstract

The second paper in this series ends with a corollary and a fork. The body, the brain, memory and character all have properties, so they sit inside existence, and nothing inside existence starts anything. So either there is no free will, or the choosing is the ground's own. This paper takes the first person to the fork. Whatever has properties can in principle enter someone's view. The observer enters no view, neither its own nor another's. So what is aware has no properties, and what has no properties cannot be two. Whatever is aware in me is the ground. The confidence here is lower than in the earlier two papers. The premises are argued from the first person and cannot be proved from inside existence. The conclusions that follow from them have been verified.

1 Where this starts

The second paper ends its framework section with a corollary [2]:

> The body, the brain, memory and character all carry properties, so they sit inside existence. Since existence is what the ground actualises, nothing inside it starts anything. Free will seated in the brain is out. What remains is clear: either there is no free will, or the choosing is the ground of existence.

The corollary leaves two options, and settles neither. This paper asks which one, and argues the second: the choosing is the ground of existence.

Both earlier papers work by exclusion from outside. This paper adds the first-person view, and its confidence in its arguments is lower.

2 The premise of this paper

Whatever has properties could, in principle, show up for someone. Call this the premise of observation.

A property is any feature that marks one thing off from another. "Show up" means to enter someone's view, directly or indirectly, by any means. A galaxy too far for any telescope still qualifies: its light could arrive. Indirectly counts only when what arrives shows a feature of its source. The light shows the galaxy's colour, and kind acts show what someone's empathy is like. The ground causes everything. Yet nothing it causes shows a feature of it, since it has none. The premise says nothing about being observed by us, or now. It says a feature that nothing could ever pick up would make no difference anywhere.

Verificationism said that a sentence no observation could test has no meaning [1]. That is a rule about sentences. The premise of observation is about properties.

It follows from the second paper [2]. There each moment is caused anew, and caused to fit what was made before. This is what is meant by "kept". Every moment has a next. Nothing is stored and no rule does the fitting, so what was made must reach the causing, with its features. What was made shows up for the ground. Like *aware* and *causes*, this names a role and adds no feature to the ground.

The premise asks only that a property could show up, somewhere, for someone.

3 The observer is never observed

Look at anything: a stone, a word, an ache. What you observe is one more thing you are aware of. It is never the awareness. A physical illustration would be the eye seeing every thing in the room except itself; a mirror shows it an image, and the image is one more thing seen.

Introspection seems to break the rule. It finds a thought, a feeling, an image, a sense of self. But each of these marks itself off from another: this thought, not that one; this mood, not the one before. Each has properties, and each sits inside existence. Introspection finds content, and content is more of what awareness is aware *of*. The awareness itself stays out of the view.

Nor does the awareness itself enter anyone else's view. Look at another person and everything that reaches you is content: a face, words, movements, a smile. What is aware behind them shows up for you no more than it does for the one who has it.

A better method would not help, since whatever is added to a view becomes content of that view, never the awareness that has it. The observer enters no view at all.

You know that there is awareness, by being it. You never find out what it is like, since finding out what something is like is finding its properties. Hume looked inward and found only perceptions, never a self that has them [6]. Kant set the subject apart from everything it can know, since knowing turns a thing into an object [7]. Wittgenstein drew the same limit: the subject does not belong to the world but is a limit of the world [12].

4 So what is aware has no properties

Put the two together. The premise of observation: whatever has properties could in principle enter a view. Section 3: the awareness itself enters no view at all. So the awareness has no properties.

The argument runs the other way from the usual one. It does not conclude that there is no observer, as Dennett and Metzinger do when introspection finds nothing [3, 9]. It concludes that the observer is there, and that being there is exactly why it shows up nowhere: a view shows what has properties, and the observer is not a thing with any properties in the view.

5 Not two

Could what is aware in me and what is aware in you be two? Then something would tell them apart, and whatever tells two things apart is a property. Neither has any. This is conclusion 2 of the first paper applied to the observer [5]. What is aware is not two.

Say "not two", never "one". One is a count, and counting begins where things can be told apart. The awareness is not one item among items. It is uncountable. When the first paper calls the cause one, it means "not two".

The first paper calls the property-free cause Pure Potential, and the second names it by what it does: decide. What is aware meets the same description: outside existence, no properties. Telling two things apart takes a property, and neither has one, so they are not two. The conclusion of this paper: what is aware in anyone is the ground itself, free will.

The seer that cannot be seen is old. The Upanishads ask who sees the seer, and answer that it cannot be seen [11]. Shankara makes the witness the one thing that is never an object [10]. The word *aware* here does the same work as *causes* in the first paper: it names a role, not a feature. A word for a role does not add properties to what it names.

6 The individual

The choosing is the ground of existence, is free will, and is not two. But there are evidently many individuals. How come?

The many come from kept choices. The second paper: every act of actualisation makes something definite, what is made is kept, and kept commitments are properties. They sit inside existence. You and I are two lines of such kept commitments, and the lines differ. An individual is one such line, with the ground aware of it. And thus we are two. The choosing behind the lines (the ground) has no properties, so it is not two.

Being aware of my line, and of yours, adds no feature to what is aware. The lines differ. What is aware of them does not.

The many live inside existence; the choosing does not.

This answers two basic questions. Why do I not feel what you feel? A feeling is content. That content sits on one line of commitments, and no line contains another's feelings.

Why can I not change the laws of physics? The laws are kept commitments too, wider than any individual. One line of them does not command the rest, as a chess player cannot rewrite the rules of the game and impose them on other players without their agreement.

So the individual is real, as a structure inside existence. What is aware of the structure is not part of it. The nearest neighbour here is Kastrup's analytic idealism, where one mind at large splits into many by dissociation [8]. Two differences. His mind at large has properties, instincts and states, which put it back inside existence. And his many come from dissociation, a process; here they come from kept commitments, which are properties from the start.

Meditators with long practice report awareness resting with no content at all [4]. The picture fits, and I take these as reports, not as evidence.

7 Objections

There is no observer, only the brain's model of one. Dennett and Metzinger say the self is a model, a story the brain tells [3, 9]. Everything introspection finds, the sense of self included, is content, and the model will then explain all of it. The argument here starts where the model ends. Dennett denies that there is anyone the model appears to. For him there is no inner audience. Our views part at one line of Section 3: you know that there is awareness, by being it. No argument from outside can show that to someone who denies it, which is one reason the confidence here is lower.

Brain scans observe awareness. They observe blood flow and electrical activity, properties of the brain. Everything a scan can show is content of some view, namely the scientist's. The argument never denied that content is observable.

Anaesthesia switches the observer off. The observer carries no content of its own, so there is nothing in it for the drug to remove. What stops is the stream: no memories form, no report

follows. On this framework the observer is not a process that runs and stops but what the stream appears to, and a break in the stream is no break in what it appeared to. And the report can settle nothing either way, since a report needs a memory.

"Aware" is itself a property. The first paper answers this for "causes" [5]. The word names a role, what the ground does from the first person. Read it as a feature and the paper's own definitions put it inside existence, and then it is not the awareness this paper is pointing to. The argument uses no features of the observer, only the absence of them.

Then there is only one of us. The choosing is not many; the individuals are. Section 6 has the full answer. We differ because our kept commitments differ, and those are properties. The choosing has none, so nothing marks one choosing off from another. The objection pictures the choosing as a bigger person that swallows the rest of us. It is no person at all.

Split-brain and multiple personality: which observer? The surgeries and the dissociations divide content: two fields of report, two sets of memories. On this framework the divided streams are content, and content is what is observed, not the observer. The choosing was never one per body to begin with, so no number of observers has to be reassigned.

A newborn, an animal, a machine: who is aware? In none of them does a brain or a circuit choose. The second paper rules that out for anything with properties. A procedure and its odds are both properties [2]. If anything is aware in any of them, it is the ground. Which lines of commitments the ground is aware of cannot be settled from outside, since awareness enters no view (Section 3). That is as true of a newborn as of a machine. The output of an AI may be as good as any person's. Output is content, and content shows nothing about what is aware.

This is the old teaching in new words. Accepted, with one qualification. The Upanishads and Shankara reach the not-two by practice and report. This paper reaches it from two premises and an exclusion, and it inherits the standing of those premises. Where the old teaching asks to be verified in meditation, this one asks for its premises to be attacked. That is a different origin, though the destination is familiar.

8 What this does not establish

Nothing here decides whether an individual's line of commitments survives the death of its body or the end of its universe. That question belongs to a separate paper. Nor does the paper say which matter is open to fresh choosing, nor how commitments are kept, nor whether awareness comes in degrees. Nor does it argue that new laws could become actual if every individual agreed. These questions are for future papers to tackle.

The first paper proves its requirement given its premise, and the second argues its identification. This paper argues from the first person. Whoever denies the premise of observation can reject the conclusion. Whoever finds a view in which the observer shows up has refuted it.

9 Where to push

Three places. Attack the premise of observation, by producing a property that could not in principle enter any view. Attack the step from never-observed to property-free, by finding the observer in a view without turning it into content. Or accept both and attack the not-two, by telling two awarenesses apart without introducing properties.

Barring one of those, the fork of the second paper closes. The choosing that grounds existence is not a stranger to the first person. It is what the first person never sees, and is.

A The argument in logic

The premises and conclusions of this paper in notation.[1] Here x, y, a, b are things, p are properties, t are instants, and L, M are lines of kept commitments. $\mathrm{H}(x,p)$: x has property p. $\mathrm{E}(x) :\equiv \exists p\, \mathrm{H}(x,p)$: x has properties, so it is in existence. g: the ground, Pure Potential. $\mathrm{A}(a,L)$: a is aware of line L. $\mathrm{S}(x,y)$: x shows up for y. $\mathrm{V}(x) :\equiv \exists y\, \mathrm{S}(x,y)$: x could show up for someone. $\mathrm{M}(x,t)$: x is made at t. $\mathrm{F}(y,x,t)$: at t, the causing of y fits x.

The quantifiers range over anything, in existence or not. So $\exists a$ says that there is such a thing. Whether it is in existence is a further claim, written $\mathrm{E}(a)$.

Premises

From the first paper	$\neg \mathrm{E}(g)$
From the first paper	$\forall x\, \forall y\, \big[\forall p\, (\mathrm{H}(x,p) \leftrightarrow \mathrm{H}(y,p)) \rightarrow x = y\big]$
Observation	$\forall x\, \big[\mathrm{E}(x) \rightarrow \mathrm{V}(x)\big]$
The observer unseen	$\forall a\, \forall L\, \big[\mathrm{A}(a,L) \rightarrow \neg \mathrm{V}(a)\big]$
There is awareness	$\exists a\, \exists L\ \mathrm{A}(a,L)$

Conclusions

No properties	$\forall a\, \forall L\, \big[\mathrm{A}(a,L) \rightarrow \neg \mathrm{E}(a)\big]$
Not two	$\forall a\, \forall b\, \forall L\, \forall M\, \big[\mathrm{A}(a,L) \wedge \mathrm{A}(b,M) \rightarrow a = b\big]$
The ground	$\forall a\, \forall L\, \big[\mathrm{A}(a,L) \rightarrow a = g\big]$
Awareness is no property	$\neg \forall a\, \forall L\, \big[\mathrm{A}(a,L) \rightarrow \mathrm{E}(a)\big]$

The premise of observation, from keeping

From the first paper	$\forall x\, \big[\mathrm{E}(x) \rightarrow \exists t\, \mathrm{M}(x,t)\big]$
No last instant	$\forall t\, \exists t'\ t < t'$
From the second paper	$\forall x\, \forall t\, \forall t'\, \big[\mathrm{M}(x,t) \wedge t < t' \rightarrow \mathrm{F}(g,x,t')\big]$
The link	$\forall y\, \forall x\, \forall t\, \big[\mathrm{F}(y,x,t) \rightarrow \mathrm{S}(x,y)\big]$
So	$\forall x\, \big[\mathrm{E}(x) \rightarrow \mathrm{S}(x,g)\big]$

References

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[1] Each conclusion has been checked from the premises with the Lean 4 proof assistant, with no added axioms. The file is at https://isene.com/freewill/Aware.lean.

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