Complexities and Challenges of Nonduality

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Abstract
States of consciousness referred to as nonduality, awakening, enlightenment, moksha, peak experience, unitive states, or void states, among other terms, have garnered increasing secular attention and have become a topic of psychological and neuroscientific research. A review of the literature revealed many challenges to studying this set of states, such as inconsistent conceptualizations, a variety of models and theories, and conflicting descriptions indicating that the actual experience may not live up to the superlative descriptions found in historical texts or the expectations put forth by nondual teachers. A great deal more empirical research on this topic is needed, and researchers should bear in mind the complexities and challenges that have surfaced on the related topics of mindfulness and meditation.

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In spirituality, nondualism, also called non-duality, means “not two” or “one undivided without a second”. Nondualism primarily refers to a mature state of consciousness, in which the dichotomy of I-other is “transcended”, and awareness is described as “centerless” and “without dichotomies”. Although this state of consciousness may seem to appear spontaneous, it usually follows prolonged preparation through ascetic or meditative/contemplative practice, which may include ethical injunctions.

While the Insight Journal: Nonduality is one of my favorite topics, and there are so many different ways of looking at it. I really loved your book on the subject: Awareness Bound and Unbound. Can you explain to me if there is a difference between nonduality, non-self, or emptiness? But that’s not the only type of nonduality. There are many other examples, such as the nonduality of samsara and nirvana in some Mahayana traditions. In early Buddhism, this world is samsara – a realm of suffering, craving and delusion – and the goal is to escape by achieving nibbana and not being reborn here. Then the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna comes along and says “the place [koti] that is samsara is the same place that is nirvana, they are not different.”