

Reflexivity: The Brain and the World

You might think that the world exists independently of how we understand it. You would be mistaken.

Our understanding of the world is part of the world—a physical part of the world. Our conceptual framings exist in physical neural circuitry in our brains, largely below the level of conscious awareness, and they define and limit how we understand the world, and so they affect our actions in the world. The world is thus, in many ways, a reflection of how we frame it and act on those frames, creating a world in significant part framed by our actions. Accordingly, the frame-inherent world, structured by our framed actions, reinforces those frames and recreates those frames in others as they are born, grow, and mature in such a world.

This phenomenon is called reflexivity. The world reflects our understandings through our actions, and our understandings reflect the world shaped by the frame-informed actions of ourselves and others.

To function effectively in the world it helps to be aware of reflexivity. It helps to be aware of what frames have shaped and are still shaping reality if you are going to intervene to make the world a better place.

Reflexivity just is. In itself, it is neither a good nor bad thing. It can be either.

Framing 102 is about how reflexivity can be used for the good, at least for the good of most people, most living things, and for the beauty and bounty of the physical world that supports all life.

In all too many cases, new frames—new forms of understanding—are required to comprehend the world so as to take advantage of reflexivity and make it a better place. This is especially true when the issues confronting us, and needing framing, are complex and systemic—like global warming, the wealth gap, and many other issues that have risen to great importance over