

# Like Binocular Rivalry



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**T**his too shall pass. If you are pessimistic and depressed, you will get over it. If you are optimistic and joyful, you will get over that too. If you are deciding whether to marry or divorce, retire or find a new line of work, go to Brazil to become a bongo drum player or endure what you have come to regard as a pointless existence; you will probably flip back and forth repeatedly before making a decision. You may even flip back and forth indefinitely without ever making a decision. The facts in the world that we are considering are generally not flipping back and forth

like this, so it must be something about us and the way we think.

Flip-flopping is built deeply into the structure of our brains, as illustrated by the phenomenon of binocular rivalry. Normally the images presented to each of our eyes are almost identical and our brain integrates them to give us a single image with depth. However, if you are fitted with goggles that present entirely different images to each eye, say a house on the left and a face on the right, then you don't see a face superimposed on a house as you might expect, but rather you see first one image and then the other; alternating back and forth every few seconds. This involuntary alternation is nature's way of making sure we consider various interpretations of our situation. If humans didn't do this our ancestors would have been eaten and some other species would be living in Santa Fe.

Difficult personal decisions often entail this sort of involuntary flip-flopping, which can be experienced as either confusion or illuminating deliberation. Flip-flopping can be productive for a while. This insight is instructive for the resolution of dilemmas, the reduction of anxiety and depression, and the enhancement of serenity. Trust me. Call me.

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