# Part II
# The Framing Problem

## Introduction to Part II

Part II addresses the problem of human consciousness's exceptional ability at framing our experience. The frames are a good thing, giving us a tremendous advantage; we are an exceptionally efficient species.

The paradigmatic framing described in Part I creates theories about the world that we use constantly in real time as we live and experience the flow of the world around us. Because of these theories, we can immediately hone in on what is important in what we are seeing and experiencing, and ignore the rest of the world outside of the frame.

And with enough technology, and if we really wanted to, we could limit our behavior so that all our experience in the world fits into our frames—or someone else's frames if we admired them enough. We would then be able to anticipate everything that happens to us so that we can lead a perfectly safe life. Our frames give us this potential ability. Science fiction is rife with such scenarios of life.

But there is a greater problem than this George Orwell (1961) vision of the future.

In purely practical terms, if we create a social world that fits perfectly into our frames, we shut down access to new information, essential for the production of new knowledge. In effect, our exceptional frames can close down the open information loop that is necessary between us and the world. The resulting stasis would eventually lead to atrophy, the end of our species' ability to recognize and seek out new information in the environment, necessary so that we can adapt to change and survive as a species.

We have to really know the framing problem before we can prevent it. Part II takes a serious look at it.

Chapter 9 starts off by defining the problem with Marvin Minsky's (1975) frame theory, which forms the conceptual center of this book. Minsky summarizes the theme of this book: humans are an exceptional species because of the way we can frame our episode intersections with the world, store them in memory and then recall them later to anticipate or rehearse our experience in the world in real time. In effect,
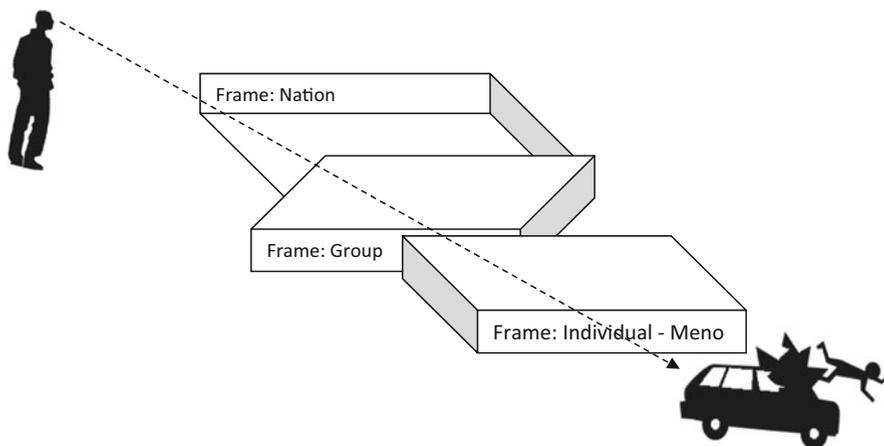
**Fig. 1** Human framing levels: the Nation, the Group, and the Individual leading to Meno's Paradox

through our frames we pre-experience most if not all of our experience. Minsky's iconic theory is one of the fundaments of artificial intelligence and its goal to capture what and how humans think in an AI machine. In our book, we divide frames into levels of frames, shown in Fig. 1.

Figure 1 shows a man "viewing" the episode of a real-life traffic accident through levels of frames recalled from memory: through a nation-level frame, a group-level frame, and then through an individual-level frame. These frame levels are based on our own past experiences and our own conceptualization of ourselves, who we are, and our place in the world. The frames shape what we see in our experience. We spend the rest of Part II giving examples in full chapters of the negative side of these levels of framing.

Chapter 10 sets out the individual-level consequences of Minsky's frame theory. This negative consequence is famously encapsulated in a very old paradox of Plato, called the Meno's Paradox.

> How can you come to know that which you don't already know? You can't know what it is you don't know. So you won't recognize it even if you happen to come across it.

If this paradox is true, How then do we come to know new information, new things? The Meno's Paradox has intrigued thinkers over the last 2500 years, including our century's cognitive psychologists, starting in 1932 with Bartlett (1932).

In Chap. 11, we investigate the group-level frame. Comparing the group they belong to with outside groups enables individual members to categorize features of their inside group. We are x because the other group is not x. These comparisons are according to the same feature, so most frequently the comparisons are our group is "bigger," "better," "smarter," etc., than the other group. We give as an example Elfreda Chatman's (2000) research into dirt-eaters in the southern USA who avoid

outsider information that contradicts the core values and beliefs of their dirt-eating group.

In Chap. 12, we investigate the nation-level frame with the example of the Nazi ideological frame and its hold over German citizens from 1933 to 1945. The nation-level frame is distinguished from the group-level frame by the efficiency and resources at its disposal, legitimized by bureaucratic structures that systematize the organization of national activity. The most notable historical example is the inhuman act of the Final Solution perpetrated by the Nazis in 1933–1945. We emphasize the hold of the nation frame over the German population, and their avoidance of information outside the Nazi frame.

In the Conclusion to Part II, we relate the problem of frames, which disconnect the searcher from finding new information in the outside world, to the information search situation. We humans can become imprisoned in the closed information loops of our frames. Information that contradicts the frame is either not seen or is avoided.