

“My” Mind: Individual Universal Mind
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SUBJECT: Mentalism

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CONTENTS:

Paper examines the meaning and implications of what is meant by “my mind”; aims to explore how a Sage can justifiably say “the world is my idea”

Assumes reader’s basic understanding of mentalism

PB’s mentalist position: does not distinguish between individual and cosmic mentalism

Key assertions: 1) cannot prove existence of world separate from consciousness; 2) mind cannot speak of anything beyond its frontiers; 3) universe is an immense idea in one’s own mind; 4) world’s form relates to individual ego’s limitations

World is never found apart from our minds; deeper, unconscious part of mind must be cosmic in nature; connection confirmed through mystical meditation

Dreams from individual mind alone; waking world from cosmic mind presented to individual mind; ultimate realization: both minds are one

Questions whether two separate minds (individual and cosmic) exist; suggests there is only one mind - our mind - both individual and universal

Challenge of properly introducing universal mind into one-mind mentalism

Two dilemmas to avoid: 1) reducing universal mind to objective pole; 2) reducing it to subjective pole

Proposed solutions: 1) careful terminology: “Mind as individual” vs. “Mind as universal”; 2) limit “subjective” and “objective” to individual mind context; 3) recognize that subject-object relationship doesn’t apply to universal mind

No “the world,” only “my world”; no “the mind,” only “my mind”; these recognitions necessary to understand how “the world is my idea” could be true

BOOKS QUOTED FROM OR REFERENCED:

- Paul Brunton, *Notebooks*
- Plotinus, *The Enneads* (MacKenna translation, 4th ed.)

PLOTINUS QUOTES REFERENCED: II.3.9, V.3.3, VI.9.8

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NOTES:

- **STUDENT PAPER presented in class (V09P).**
- This is **1983 03/09b, PB Paras; Mentalism Paper, and the second entry associated with this date. 1983 03/09a = PB Paras; Mentalism Class.**
- This paper is read and discussed in WG Class 1983 0309a, and discussed at the beginning of WG Class 1983 0316.
- Pre-publication notation is used to reference PB quotes throughout the paper.

“MY” MIND: INDIVIDUAL UNIVERSAL MIND

This paper was sketched out in a burst of excitement. It contains only one idea, but that idea is a very exciting one: so exciting to me that a dramatic form seems called for to bring it the attention it deserves. Taking care not to appear inflated, I write this in full cognizance of the excitement properly due its content. No doubt there are arguable points, as no intellectual position taken by anyone at any time is either ultimate or unarguable. But sympathy to the basic spirit behind these thoughts is unlikely to go without rewards in terms of one’s understanding of some basic presuppositions we work with all the time.

I want to talk about what is meant—and what is always implied—when each of us says “my mind.” Most importantly, I want to see how the term “my mind” would have to be understood in order for the following statement by PB to be true: “When I say that I am my own mental existence, then I imply that I am also the whole universe. Nature exists within me, for Nature is but my idea. The world is my creation. This is no empty vagary but the veritable truth, the grandest which ever entered the half-taught mind of men.” So the purpose of this enquiry is to explore how it might possibly be true that the sage is justified in saying “the world is my idea.”

The discussion to be entered upon presupposes an elementary acquaintance with mentalism. It is assumed that the student has by now come to realize that anything which appears as objective to consciousness must be nothing more than an idea held within that consciousness and fabricated by mental powers. It is assumed that the student recognizes, at least intellectually, that both the ego (“I”) and its objects (“world”) are mental in nature, that they arise and set together, and that neither exists in its presently known form without the co-presence of the other. With that background assumed, we are ready to enquire into the so-called relationship between individual mind and universal mind.

When we deal with PB’s thoughts on this issue, we must realize that we are dealing with a hard-core mentalist. In trying to understand his position, I would like to be so provocative as to say that he does not distinguish “individual” mentalism and “cosmic” mentalism in the way that I have heard it discussed by anyone else in the past. Instead, he maintains simply one doctrine: mentalism—without a hard distinction of individual and cosmic.

His first point is to make clear (10v:45/70) that “it is not possible for sincere, scrupulous thinking to admit, and never possible to prove, the existence of a world outside of and separate from its consciousness. The faith by which we conventionally grant such existence is mere superstition.” He says also (10v:64/13) that “the mind . . . cannot speak and has no right to speak of any world which possibly lies beyond its frontiers.” And he says (10v:49/43) that “to follow this line of reflection to its inevitable end demands courage and candour of the highest kind, for it demands as ultimate conclusion the principle that knowledge being but ideas in the mind, the whole universe is nothing but an immense idea in one’s own mind. For the very nature of knowledge is thus INTERNAL [PB’s caps], and hence individual mind cannot know any reality external to itself.” He also indicates that the form of the world is directly related to the specific limitations imposed on the individual ego, and that any change in the limitations that produce the ego would mean that the world which the ego knows here “would vanish and another would take its place” (10v:58/211). All this is presented in the constant context that (10v:49/43) “the individual mind . . . believes that it observes a world without when it only observes its own mental pictures of that world.”

Even more startlingly, he says (10v:34/3) “Since the world is never found to be apart from our own minds we are forced to relate it to them. And since it is equally obvious that the surface part of them does not deliberately bring it into existence we are further forced to deduce, first, that the deeper and unconscious part must do so and, second, that this second part must be cosmic in nature and hold all other individual minds rooted in its depths. This deduction, arrived at by reason, is confirmed by experience—but not by ordinary experience. It is confirmed by sinking a shaft down through the mind in mystical meditation and arriving at our secondary cosmic self.” He asks (10v:34/4) “What does the individual mind itself point to?” And he answers, “We can find the answer by plunging deep into its core, deeper and ever deeper in the practice of contemplation until we come to its ultimate source. There, where the world vanishes and the ego is stilled, we become one with the infinite and eternal Mind behind the universe.” He goes on (10v:55/163) to admit that “We do *not* dream the waking world as we dream during sleep. For the latter is spun out of the individual mind alone, whereas the former is spun out of the cosmic mind and presented to the individual mind.” But the same passage continues to say, “However, ultimately, and on realization, both minds are found to be one and the same, just as the sun ray is found to be the same as the sun ultimately. The difference which exists is fleeting and really illusory, but so long as there is bodily experience it is observable. It is correct to note that the present birth-dream is caused by past tendencies; we are hypnotized by the past and our work is to de-hypnotize ourselves, i.e., to create new thought habits until the flash comes of itself. But the flash itself comes during a kind of trance state, which may last for a moment or longer. It comes during the higher meditation of supramysticism.”

What is to be made of all this? Are we still to try to fumble around with the awkward and possibly untenable conception of two minds—one individual and one cosmic? Or are we to understand that there is only one mind—*our* mind, and that that one mind (the only mind we know) is both individual *and* cosmic? We read before (14v:39/19) that “It would be wrong to believe that there are two separate minds, two independent consciousness within . . . there is but one independent illuminating mind, and everything else is only a limited and reflected image within it.”

Obviously, if we follow the first part of the doctrine, we have no right to speak of any mind apart from that one mind that we are certain *is*, and which each of us calls “my mind.” Is it possible that this “my mind” each of us speaks of is at once individual and universal? Is it possible that one does not for a moment go outside one’s own mind to know universal mind? Is it possible that the so-called relation between individual and universal in this “my mind” is not one of subject-object at all, but rather an internal one of self-knowing, self-thinking thought, self-aware intelligence—the truth of our “I?”

Some definitely will say that universal mind is not our mind, but we know of at least one philosopher who says that it *is* ours “when we use it.” [Note: See Plotinus, II.3.9 (fifth para), V.3.3 (eleventh para).] That same philosopher says that “we are not cut off; we cut ourselves off.” [Note: See Plotinus, VI.9.8 (last para), etc.] And now can we perhaps see that it is our own muddled thinking—our thinking of universal mind as somehow apart from our own selves—that has done and continues to do the cutting? Is it possible that a correct understanding of how a sage can say “the world is my idea” may allow us to re-include ourselves, *consciously*, in the kingdom of heaven upon which we ourselves deliberately and habitually turn our backs by assuming universal mind to be apart—whether as “out there” or as “yonder?”

We have read that (10v:19/124) “Whoever continues to regard the world as a material thing, continues to obstruct his own efforts to attain the higher mystical experience. This obstruction is only reduced but not removed if he believes the Universal Mind to be behind the material world. Only when he resolutely discards all materialistic and semi-materialistic standpoints, only when the world ceases to be something outside the mind and becomes directly present to it as a thought, can he end this groping in the dark and begin to move successfully forward.” We have also read that there is (10v:88/7) “another and vaster Mind behind our personal minds which imposes the same world-image upon them all, so that we all see it and live in it. Moreover, they are of necessity themselves projected by this Mind so that this image is not less real for them than their own selves. The mind [note lowercase] makes for itself this world of illusion, this stage of space and time and form. But it does not make it independently of all prompting. For the image that it constructs is imposed upon it—or projected into it—by the Mind behind it.”

So we arrive at the issue of how to properly introduce the notion of universal mind into the doctrine of one-mind mentalism. Where are we to “place” it with respect to ourselves? To approach an understanding of this point, I suggest the following.

We must, first of all, very carefully analyze what we mean when we say “my mind.” We must see that all we can know are ideas in this “my mind.” The point is true not only of any object, but also of any other “mind” that we might conceive. Have we really got so far?

If so, then we must see that it is also true that if the terms “universal” and “individual” are ever to be more than *words* for us, then their true meaning must be realizable in this same “my mind.” That is, this “my mind” must be capable of being in identity with the truth of *both* perspectives—especially if the world is ever to be seen as “my idea.” In short, we must build upon the understanding that we have already made and not lose all our hard-earned ground by falling back into a conception of universal mind that allows to continue merrily and psychologically unaltered in our untransformed level of materialistic experience. We must drive the wedge *all* the way in, until the resistance is utterly split and ready for the divine fire.

But there are two dilemmas to avoid when we introduce universal mind into our understanding. We must avoid, on one hand, reducing it to the objective pole of our ordinary experience: We must at all costs avoid the tendency to put it—like all else—“out there” as something existing wholly separate from and/or independently of what we call “my mind.” That is, we must not extend it apart from us as the substrate of an outer world that exists independently of the mental reality of our own beings (the *only* being we really know). Such an attitude would not close the “gap” but would only yield a subtler materialism, not a meaningful mentalism. But we must equally avoid, on the other hand, reducing it to the subjective pole of our ordinary experience—which would give us only a magnified egotism and an irritating perversion of philosophy.

How are we to avoid these dilemmas? One thing that will help is to be *very* careful with our use of terms. Instead of speaking of “individual mind” and “universal mind” as though we had two different things, for example, we can use the terms “Mind as individual” and “Mind as universal.” Then we are more conscious of the fact that it is one mind that we speak of in both contexts. Further, we can agree to limit the use of the terms “subjective” and “objective” to the context in which they really do apply: that is,

within the context of “Mind as individual” and only in that context. They have no meaning in the realm of “Mind as universal.”

We can admit candidly that both the subject and its object arise within the productive activity of “Mind as individual.” We can admit, as PB tells us, that both the ego and its world are but ideas within that framework and that, apart from egos that have worlds, there are no worlds that appear as anything other than the ideation of living, self-identical mind.

We can further insist that the “relation” between “Mind as individual” and “Mind as universal” is *not* one of subject to object. We can for the time being admit the poverty of such language and wait for the soul to explain that so-called relation in language more suited to the sacred: in a silence that instills the awe of the utterly speechless. Then, perhaps, when we speak our philosophy after that, we can underscore all our talk with the warmth and goodwill of the poet who admitted frankly:

I must confess: i falsify
by speech:
i meant only
to announce Love;

To fathom in language
the first caught breath
by which I knew.

I spoke of man as if
i were only man
of nature as if
i were only nature,
of the stars as if
i were only the stars.

and in my speech,
i falsified.

We must see that the word “individual” does not mean “glorified subject” and we must also see that the word “universal” does not mean “glorified object.” But first we must see both of two things: We must see that there is no “the world” apart from our “my world” —the only world that any of us knows. And we must see that there can be no “the mind” apart from the “my mind” —the only mind that any I can know. But these, of course are necessary steps only if we care to approach an understanding of how a sage might be speaking truth when he says, “The world is my idea.”