

THUS WE ALWAYS GO BACK TO THE ONE

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If there is one obvious truth then it must be the simple fact that everything we experience is an experience within our consciousness. Without consciousness there would be no experience at all. Even doubting this statement can only be done with a doubting consciousness. One may question the reality of everything one sees, feels or thinks, but one can never question the reality of one's own conscious being. This much we know, even though we know nothing else: 'consciousness is'.

A true understanding of life has therefore to begin with the reality, even the primacy, of consciousness. Any convincing system of knowledge is obliged to teach some kind of idealism; in the sense that consciousness, and not matter, is the most reasonable basis for explaining the mysteries of life. As the German philosopher Schopenhauer reminds us in a most convincing way:

"[T]rue philosophy must at all costs be idealistic; indeed, it must be so merely to be honest. For nothing is more certain than that no one ever came out of himself in order to identify himself immediately with things different from him; but everything of which he has certain, sure, and therefore immediate knowledge, lies within his consciousness. Beyond this consciousness, therefore, there can be no immediate certainty [...] There can never be an existence that is objective absolutely and in itself; such an existence, indeed, is positively inconceivable. For the objective, as such, always and essentially has its existence in the consciousness of a subject; it is therefore the subject's representation, and consequently is conditioned by the subject, and moreover by the subject's forms of representation, which belong to the subject and not to the object." (*The World as Will and Representation, Vol. II, Ch. 1*)

Let's illustrate this by investigating the nature of what we call matter. We ordinarily understand matter to mean something that extends in space, something hard and solid that is corporeal. But we immediately forget that these so-called characteristics of matter are derived from our sensations and are therefore only our representation. There are no such things as solidity, extension and hardness per se, outside of our sensations, outside of our consciousness. Spatial extension is only a combination of visual and muscular sensations, and hardness is nothing more than a tactile sensation. It is, therefore, incorrect to say that the hardness of a stone, for example, already exists outside of you waiting to be discovered by you. Physical solidity is only a phenomenon, which has no existence without beings feeling it. We literally feel the hardness of a stone into existence. H. P. Blavatsky gives us the following explanation in *The Secret Doctrine*:

"Matter existing apart from perception is a mere abstraction [...] 'Matter' ought to be applied to the aggregate of objects of possible perception, and 'Substance' to noumena; for inasmuch as the phenomena of our plane are the creation of the perceiving Ego – the modifications of its own subjectivity – all the 'states of matter representing the aggregate of perceived objects' can have but a relative and purely phenomenal existence for the children of our plane [...] The pure object apart from consciousness is unknown to us, while living on the plane of our three dimensional World; as we know only the mental states it excites in the perceiving Ego." (*SD I, 329*)

Since the world we know is nothing but our representation, other beings experience of course their representation. A dolphin or an ant experiences a completely different world. However, this does not imply that our representation is arbitrary or subjective, that nothing can possibly be unless we perceive it. The magazine you have in your hands may be nothing more than a phenomenon appearing in your consciousness, but this does not mean that it has no real being outside of you feeling it. So, to predicate that consciousness is primary to anything we may cognize does not imply that being is dependent upon being known. We humans cannot create or destroy the material world at will, and to be sure, neither can dolphins or ants.

The material world with all its phenomena is imposed upon us, so to speak. Its sensible properties – i.e., how the world tastes, smells, looks, feels and sounds – are indeed defined by our senses and they depend upon us in this regard, but its reality, its very being, does not depend upon us. It is given to us. One of the greatest myths about idealism is that it would regard the manifested world as a figment of anyone's imagination. Any sensible idealist accepts the existence of the observable world, just like everyone else does. In the words of Kant:

“In the true sense of the word, therefore, I can never perceive external things, but I can only infer their existence from my own internal perception, regarding the perception as an effect of something external that must be the proximate cause [...] It must not be supposed, therefore, that an idealist is someone who denies the existence of external objects of the senses; all he does is to deny that they are known by immediate and direct perception.” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A367)

What makes idealism different from materialism is its understanding of the exact nature of this observable world. Idealists do not agree with the materialistic stance that matter is the source of the world we experience, or that its real nature is something physical. But the world is certainly not something that people dream up. Claiming that the world originates from and depends upon consciousness, isn't the same as claiming that the world isn't really there or that it depends solely upon my consciousness. The illusory character of matter does not obliterate the objectivity of the world. Theosophy teaches therefore an objective idealism, not a subjective idealism:

“Esoteric philosophy, teaching an objective Idealism — though it regards the objective Universe and all in it as Maya, temporary illusion — draws a practical distinction between collective illusion, Mahamaya, from the purely metaphysical stand-point, and the objective relations in it between various conscious Egos so long as this illusion lasts.” (*Blavatsky, Secret Doctrine I*, 631)

In other words: the universe may be called, with everything in it, Maya, because all is temporary therein, from the ephemeral life of a fire-fly to that of the Sun. Yet, the universe is real enough to the conscious beings in it, which are ultimately as unreal as it is itself (SD I, 274). Or as H.P.B. mentions in one of her letters: “We are a Maya in one sense all of us; but we are realities in our own sight, in space and time and so long as it lasts on our plane.” (*The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, p. 253)

Objective idealism differs from subjective idealism in its picture of the 'mind' or consciousness that underlies matter. According to subjective idealism, matter is only a construct based on the mental contents of individual observers, like you and me. According to objective idealism, there is however a single underlying Universal Mind, whose activity and content underlies objectively the existence of the entire observable world. Manifestation is nothing else than the continuous ideation of the world by the Universal Mind, and it is this

ideation which is being presented to each individual mind. The observable world is not a subjective representation of my own private mind, but a superimposition by the Universal Mind upon all individual minds. That is why we share a common world, and we have a similarity of experience, and this not outside, but inside our consciousness. In the words of the Laghu-Yoga Vasishta:

“O Brahman, this earth and other things of the universe have for their substratum the mind, and do not exist at any period apart from the mind. Almost all persons in this world, walking in the path of this universe of dreams, delusion and egoism, look upon it as real and enjoy it. It is only in Chitta (the flitting mind) that the universe rests. Thus do diverse persons view the one dream (of the universe) in various ways.” (*Laghu-Yoga-Vasishtha*, V, 5)”

Objective idealism is a deathblow to materialism, but also to idealistic philosophies that reject the manifested world by degrading it to a mere illusion or fantasy of our ignorant minds. If we mistake the doctrine of illusion or maya for a teaching that advocates the absolute non-existence of the world, we forget that our differentiated universe was already in existence before there were any ignorant humans in the first place. The noble and intriguing idea of maya, of a metacosmic creative veil that hides the One Be-ness because IT is too sacred, but also unfolds IT by expressing an infinite number of beings, was never meant to explain the complexity of life away. No one can decode the mystery of differentiation by reducing it to our confused perceptions. Differentiation has its roots in the Deity itself. In the words of Krishna, the eternal logos:

“Even though myself unborn, of changeless essence, and the lord of all existence, yet in presiding over nature – which is mine – I am born but through my own maya, the mystic power of self-ideation, the eternal thought in the eternal mind.” (*Bhagavad Gita*, IV, 6)

Although the world of multiplicity, in its sensuous forms, is our representation, it must have a certain noumenal cause or essence independent of us. In other words: although what we see as a differentiated world is only a representation, it does not follow that this representation does not have differentiated causes independent of us. Well, these differentiated noumenal causes constitute the ultimate bases or monads (units) out of which all phenomena, all real beings are composed. The involuntary character of our representation of the world makes it necessary to admit the existence of such causes. And since the relative reality of the phenomena we see, which are multiple and differentiated, presupposes a more absolute reality of noumena we don't see, these noumenal causes must also be multiple and differentiated.

If matter is our representation, the real indivisible atoms of nature, as the basis of reality, cannot be particles of matter. They must be incorporeal, metaphysical units. They must be monads. Separateness may be an illusion of the mind, but differentiation certainly is not. The uniqueness of each being is therefore not the result of us misinterpreting the world of phenomena. Maybe in our rush to see the Absolute One behind and above all that exists – a kind of metaphysical escapism – we are too quick in denying the one of each and every being. But how to reconcile the absoluteness of the One with the relativity of the Many? This reconciliation lies in the Absolute character of the Absolute itself. To say Absolute is to say Infinite and Unique – there are no two Absolutes in an infinite universe. Infinity and Uniqueness are an intrinsic aspect of the Absolute, otherwise it would not be Absolute, and it is from this dimension of Infinity that an Infinite amount of unique beings necessarily springs forth; the manifold world of relativity exists because the Absolute, being such, implies Infinitude and Uniqueness.

Reality is a Unity. But in order for Reality to be One, IT has to be all inclusive. This can only mean that IT has to be simultaneously a transcendental or absolute Unity (the One above all beings), a universal and immanent Unity (the One within all beings), and an individual and unique Unity (the One within each being). It would indeed be a misconception to misread the uniqueness of each living being as non-existent. The One of each being is a necessary expression of the transcendental One, while at the same time that being exists as part of all other beings. But its oneness, its pure being, is not found in the All, neither in the One above the All, but in the One that is fully present in both Each and All. In the words of Plotinus:

“Imagine a spring that has no source outside itself; it gives itself to all the rivers, yet is never exhausted by what they take, but remains always integrally as it was; the tides that proceed from it are at one within it before they run their several ways, yet all, in some sense, know beforehand down what channels they will pour their streams. Or: think of the Life coursing throughout some mighty tree while yet it is the stationary Principle of the whole, in no sense scattered over all that extent but, as it were, vested in the root: it is the giver of the entire and manifold life of the tree, but remains unmoved itself, not manifold but the Principle of that manifold life. And this surprises no one: though it is in fact astonishing how all that varied vitality springs from the unvarying, and how that very manifoldness could not be unless before the multiplicity there were something all singleness; for, the Principle is not broken into parts to make the total; on the contrary, such partition would destroy both; nothing would come into being if its cause, thus broken up, changed character. Thus we are always brought back to The One. Every particular thing has a One of its own to which it may be traced; the All has its One, its Prior but not yet the Absolute One; through this we reach that Absolute One, where all such reference comes to an end. Now when we reach a One – the stationary Principle – in the tree, in the animal, in Soul, in the All – we have in every case the most powerful, the precious element.” (*Enneads, III.8.10*)