

Progress Report

Something knows that it exists because it thinks (Descartes). Changes in that 'something' have happened in two discernible phases. We can trace those changes by the development of concepts and words. There was a time before humans thought of themselves as 'selves', 'thinkers' and 'deciders'. Prior to that time, people acted according commands from the 'gods'. Circa 1200BC people began to appear who could not hear the voices of the gods. The newcomers had their own thoughts, made their own decisions and words were coined for new concepts like: mind, decide, think and self (Jaynes).

Is that 'something' a physical structure—such as a system of gears and levers or computer switches—located in the brain? According to James that 'something' is a stream of thoughts, memories and perceptions that is flowing constantly. As Edelman sees it the stream is a pattern of electrical traces on a brain scanner—unique in location, dispersion and magnitude from one brain to the next. (You and I have different brain scan patterns when we think about ducks. LVP)

Words represent or stand for objects and concepts. Words are not the things the label. However, we come to treat the words as if they were they things. This is a habit that changes our overall relationship with reality. We come to think of ourselves as separate and apart from reality. To our detriment, we no longer participate. To remedy this 'idolatry' we must find another way to participate properly again (Barfield). (We are gradually making matters worse. Perhaps the environmentalists are prototypes of this new form of participation. LVP)

Civilizations have evolved according to the perspectives or stages of the majority at the time. This is an on-going process with three stages in the past (archaic, magic, mythic), the present stage (mental) and an emerging stage (integral). The process is one of accumulation or consolidation (Gebser). (We are like jigsaw puzzles with for pieces in place as we hunt for the fifth. LVP)

The universe has a built-in principle or feature that underlies all its elaborations and complexities. It constantly creates more and more order (Kauffman). (I take this to imply that all the contents of the universe share its drive towards order. LVP)

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It must take a while for creatures to learn how to use their brains. As complex as modern human brains are, there must have been hundreds or thousands of generations of learning before the birth of René Descartes who could think and then claim the label: existence.

Minds wonder about how they work, where they are located and if they are physical or not.

Returning to the diamond metaphor, we have developed multiple ways of looking into the mind. Looking through different facets we see predictably different interiors. However we seem to have a few features (stages, language use/misuse, etc.) to agree on. Not bad so far.

I think this ordering business is key. I also think that mind-use is a skill-set—some of which gets transmitted across generations. Something as ephemeral as a concept could explain the transitions that interested people like Gebser and Barfield.