

The False Elephant and the False Ego

Bhakti Madhava Puri, Ph.D.

Princeton Bhakti Vedanta Institute

December 14, 2016

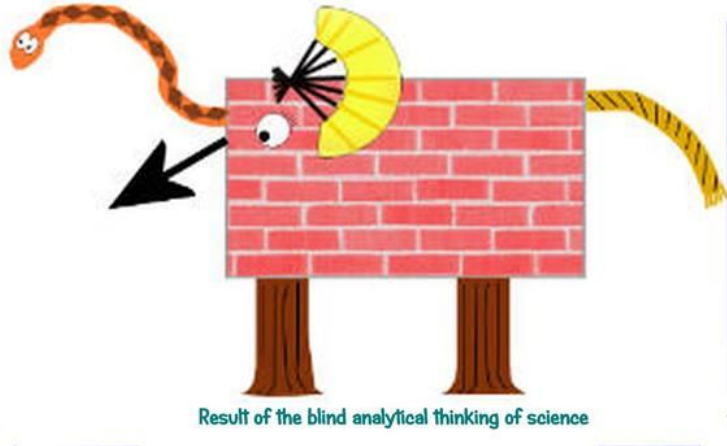
When we look at the world through a microscope we see only cells and their internal moieties - we never see people, clouds, trees or elephants. Even the macromolecular vision of such separated entities does not show us the purpose or whole of that-for-which-each-exists. Such is the nature of the analytic thinking of finite cognition that we call modern science.

The blind men who could only feel the different limbs of an elephant they were blind to (ignorant of) concluded the legs were tree stumps, the side was a wall, the tusks were spears, the trunk a serpent, the ears a fan, and the tail a rope. Not knowing the unity of the whole they could not know the relation of each part to it. Without that knowledge they could not have a proper understanding of the parts in isolation from the whole. Even simple understanding of the function of each part in isolation could not reveal the relation of the functions to each other what to speak of their relation to the unity of the whole of which they had no clue.

Aristotle said there are four factors that had to be comprehended in explaining things: material, efficient, formal, and final (end or purpose). These four represent what a thing is made of (material), what modifies it (efficient), what plan/design guides its progressive modification (formal), the goal - what end the plan of action or modification aims for in order to cease when it is in conformity with the finished product (final end or purpose).

In reality it is the final end that determines and guides all the other factors. When the unity of the whole is sentient or self-conscious even a systems approach will not be sufficient to explain its existence. Systems are not self-conscious.

Without knowing the purpose for an individual's own self-conscious existence one has only a false conception of self, or false ego. One's true identity is established only when it is comprehended in relation to a proper concept of the Complete Whole as the all accommodating, all pervading, all unifying/attracting self-conscious, self-knowing Absolute Truth Who is known by many Names.



On Consciousness and the Individual

It is reasonable to say that individuals may have different interpretations of reality, but in itself Reality is not simply a matter of being a human construct or there would be no meaning to 'error,' 'mistake,' 'illusion,' and so on. Indeed there would be no meaning to 'truth' as opposed to untruth.

Human consciousness is limited to its body. An individual is conscious only to the limits of its skin or surface. One may see a tree, or a star, or a bat - but that same individual cannot know or be conscious of what it is like to be a bat, as one recent American philosopher, Thomas Nagel, famously announced in *The Philosophical Review* in October 1974.

A human being has direct consciousness of its body and of its thoughts, but beyond that it has only representations (signs), images, or reflections (on the mind's mirror) of the world outside its body. Human consciousness is therefore NOT the consciousness of trees, stars, bats, or anything else. It is conscious of other things beyond its body, but not the consciousness of those things.

However, there is a consciousness of both individual human consciousness and the other things/persons of which an individual may be conscious. That universal consciousness is not only the consciousness of all Reality but also the consciousness of itself, i.e. it is self-consciousness in and for Itself. This universal self-consciousness is identical with itself as Reality, since Reality is the manifestation or expression of itself as real (being-for-other, or Otherness), while not losing its being-for-itself or self-consciousness as its ideality or Self-Concept. Here we find the true dynamic meaning of *Advaita* (non-duality), or the negation of *dvaita* (duality). Reality as the Otherness of Universal Self-consciousness is simultaneously Other (different from) yet identical (same as) universal Self-consciousness being the manifest determinateness of what Self-consciousness is.

To strip Universal Self-consciousness of its Reality is to abstract consciousness from its concrete Truth as Self-consciousness of Itself. In other words, it is to end up with a one-sided mental abstraction from the concrete or whole truth. There are two mistakes here: 1. not only is Universal Self-consciousness abstracted from Its own Reality, but 2. Self-

consciousness is naively reduced to consciousness which lacks the integral unity essential to it (the Self or true Ego) - what Kant called the unity of apperception.

These mistakes are the result of relying on contingent irrational intuitions (instincts) without proper philosophical study or knowledge of the logical necessity that governs the internal rationality of all thought sequences or movement. Philosophers of Spirit have studied and reached rational conclusions on the nature of consciousness and its ground in Spirit. Those who ignore that body of knowledge are illiterate and can only be victimized by their own conditioned instincts. That is not how human knowledge or science advances.

When an image is reflected in a mirror, the image is not considered to be the result of glass and silver of the mirror somehow acting to create the image. The image has its origin outside of the mirror and is made of completely different stuff. A tree reflected in a lake is not made of water. A radio playing back a broadcast it has received is not producing the broadcast from itself. Each of these examples provide metaphors for how to understand the difference between a reality outside of human consciousness can be reflected within an individual's consciousness without being the product of that consciousness.

At the same time Reality is not fixed in stone; it is not an inert slab or impersonal substance. It does not exist only as a reflection within human consciousness, nor as a product of human consciousness. Such ideas do not pass the examination of rational thought. The idea that Reality is Self-conscious Thinking Being in and for itself [Spirit/God] does not suffer that defect. An individual is a finite moment or instantiation of Living Reality that reflects that Reality immanently within its infinitesimal self and can interpret or misinterpret it according to the extent of its knowledge and wisdom.

The Piercian nomenclature of firstness, etc. has always seemed to me an infantile way of approaching philosophical science. A diachronic sequence has no real conceptual value, and we might add epistemologically or logically. As it has already been recognized irreducible triplicity is synchronically intrinsic to the idea of reality. After thinking this over it seems to me that what Pierce was attempting to indicate by such chronological terms was to express the necessary implicitly that accompanies such terms, where firstness, for instance, signifies that there is something to come next, namely, secondness. And secondness explicitly indicates that there necessarily is something before itself. Thirdness shows its implicit dependence on firstness and secondness. In this way the implicit and explicit nature of the terms is indicated by such chronology, not only an order of thinking or ontology.

Philosophy in the West since Plato has always addressed the intrinsic triplicity of all concepts, not only reality, in the terms of Universal, Particular, Singular (or individual). This is a more natural and rational way of explaining the intrinsic triplicity by which reason comprehends or conceives everything including itself.

We use triplicity every time we conceive, for example, fruit as a Universal or genus, cherries, as a Particular kind or species of fruit, and the instantiation of the species or Individual specimen that is popped into the mouth when eaten.

Everything implicitly bears this triplicity of Universal, Particular and Individual (UPI). A tree is a Universal concept that has its corresponding Particularities of kinds of trees, such

as Oak, Poplar, Fir, and so on. The Individual trees that you encounter in the forest are instantiations of the unity of Universal and Particular in a Singular instance. Even the "I" or ego is a Universal (everyone calls themselves "I") a Particular (unique or peculiar identity) and Singular (an instantiated individual body).

Dr. Chopra's conception of consciousness seems to be lacking in firm philosophical reasoning, based more upon instinct, and influenced strongly by the entrenched dogmatics of a particular ancient school of thought in India. It does not compare with a more rigorous (one might say 'scientific') philosophical study of the subject of consciousness and self-consciousness that has been developed in the West, especially in light of the modern period starting with Descartes, Kant and the German Idealists, especially Hegel, and those who have followed them to the present day. Extant knowledge on the subject of consciousness does not support what would be considered to be a naively abstract and indeterminate universality that fails to consider the particularity and individuality that accompanies the concept of consciousness.

The Bhakti Vedanta conception follows along the lines of the Hegelian philosophy of the Absolute or Spirit, which accords with the teachings of *acintya bedha bedha tattva* of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (the identity of identity and difference). If one tries to understand this one will fail (*acintya*) because it involves contradiction that stymies the fixity of thought that characterizes understanding. The only way to comprehend it is through a fluidized thinking that grasps the dynamic movement of thought that characterizes living self-conscious reality.

The difference between Dr Chopra's and the Bhakti Vedanta conception of consciousness, is that Dr. Chopra limits his conception to consciousness, into which the representation or sign of an object is reflected. But the interpreter is self-consciousness beyond the mere consciousness or passive reflection/awareness of objects. The Bhakti Vedanta conception is concerned with the triplicity of self-conscious Reality in its Universal objectivity as its own self-manifestation to Itself as Otherness, Particular subjectivity as finite consciousness in its many forms, and Individuality as the unitive return from Itself as Otherness to itself as Self-consciousness or Personality/God. This totality as a living whole including its self-movement and self-development is what is being called Reality in/by and for Itself.