

The Universal Oneness and Individual Multiplicity of the Absolute
Recent philosophical conversations on the Absolute

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Perceptions and minds are innumerable

Awareness is the common ground of all of them

Hence awareness is one

You cannot multiply or divide awareness

It differentiates into all knowers, all modes of knowing and all objects known-all sentient beings

--in the same way a zygote differentiates into all the different cells and organs of a body

REPLY by BMP

Awareness or consciousness is not merely what is common to all perceptions and minds, it is what is universal essence for them. The difference between commonality and universal essence is a vitally important distinction.

The color white may be common to picket fences, clouds, and snowflakes, but it is not essential to those things. In other words fences can be any color, clouds can be gray as well as white, and snowflakes don't really depend on their being white as far as their essence as water is concerned.

On the other hand, universal essence such as the fact that each and every cow cannot be what it is if we take away its 'cowness' which is shared by every cow. This kind of universality is essential to the innumerable different specimens under its species.

The fact that the universal is one does not mean that the many individuals under it are eliminated. That does not follow as a rational conclusion from the fact that many individual specimens exists quite happily within a single species.

To claim that awareness is one is also not justified by the evidence that the offspring of conscious living entities each have their own awareness quite different from one another. Experience tells us that when the mother feels hungry, for example, her offspring do not necessarily feel the same thing. So awareness is not the same for all.

Another example can be given. The flame of a candle can be used to light many other candles without losing its own luminescence. Thus many independent flames can be produced from one. IF this is true for fire, then how can an absolute of ultimate consciousness be restricted from producing many independent conscious entities from itself? How can the Absolute be restricted in this way?

The *Sri Isopanishad* explains that the Complete Whole can produce complete wholes from itself without losing its completeness. Even Shankaracharya recognizes this in his commentary on

the *Isopanisad*, "The whole (*Hiranyagarbha*) was horn out of the whole (*Brahman*)." Thus the Absolute has no restriction as to how many wholes it can produce out of itself. The only restriction comes from the finite awareness and thinking of a finite intellect that tries to determine what the Absolute can or cannot do. The Absolute must always be the result of pure reason based on logic and evidence of an unbiased nature that is not influenced by one-sided beliefs and prejudices.

Sincerely,

B Madhava Puri, Ph.D.

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Addition

Descartes is considered a revolutionary thinker because he introduced what is called the philosophy of modernity in its clearest form. Before Descartes Aristotle's philosophy of the absolute nature of thought was the standard. With the advent of Descartes the domain of thought was brought down from the absolute to the finite individual, which is the chief characteristic of modernity: everyone can think for themselves. This is also the principle of Protestantism introduced by Martin Luther in the period called the Reformation as opposed to the Catholic Church doctrines.

It marks an important development in thinking spirit when subjectivity became an essential moment of thought and brought down to the subjective individual from the heaven of the absolute. The Truth which is the universal absolute, however, is not to be abandoned, but the moment of subjective certainty of that Truth must also be acknowledged otherwise Truth becomes an abstract identity, somewhat like the abstract monists of today believe. Absolute Truth which is universal must be confirmed in one's own individual reasoning in order to become concrete Reality. Reality and individuality is not eliminated but confirmed and actualized in the complete absolute truth properly conceived. In other words, neither the absolute nor the individual are to be comprehended abstractly or in isolation from one another. There is an indivisible relation in what is otherwise distinguished. The very meaning of relationship requires distinctions that are united without losing their distinctions.

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