

Random Thoughts on the Concept of Mind in a Material Cosmos

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ABSTRACT: *The concept of mind has dominated the philosophical discourse from the earliest times. Perhaps, it was the inspiration of the philosophical enquiry. The mind has always been at the center of man's quest for meaning. It is the principal questioner of existence. It is the chief interpreter of reality. The mind is the eye of the self. It is in the mind that we become conscious of our selfhood as entities different from the rest of the world. The mind is often thought to be a category other than matter. It is said to be apart from matter but somehow acts on matter. It is often seen as the primary substance in existence. While some thinkers posit the sole reality of matter, some posit the primary of reality of mind. Some still, posit the primary but not sole reality of matter. Still, some posit a duality of mind and matter. But the critical question subsists. How do we explain the reality of mind in a material cosmos? This question warrants reexamining the traditional assumptions on the nature of mind, the qualities of matter, and perhaps, reexamining the language used in defining the concepts of mind and matter. If mind meant the opposite of matter, there could neither be any mind in a material cosmos nor matter in a spiritual cosmos. But the cosmos is the way it is. We are merely trying to comprehend it. The cosmos does not necessarily have to conform to the constructs we make about it. Mind and matter are linguistic constructs formulated to explain the realities we witness in the cosmos. To that end, this work looks at the possibility of a mind in a cosmos that is material. The work aims at resolving the linguistic, scientific and philosophical dichotomies encountered in discussing the concept of mind. The research relies on philosophical analyses and library research.*

KEYWORDS: random, thoughts, concept, mind, material cosmos

INTRODUCTION

The discourse on the nature of mind blossomed fully in the late middle ages but became the center stage of philosophy in the early modern era. Although philosophers of antiquity distinguished mind from body, they did not dwell on the nature of mind. Through much of the medieval era, the religiously suggested spiritual nature of the mind was taken for granted. But concerns on the true nature and source of knowledge led to the study of the faculty that knows – the mind. If knowledge resides in the mind, what is mind? What is its true nature: is it material or spiritual?

The discourse on the nature of the mind produced two fundamental schools of thought and numerous variants or synthesis of these schools of thoughts. The human person is traditionally said to be a duality of mind and matter. But the intractable epistemological challenge remains how the material and the nonmaterial can interact. What is the point of interaction? This is the question at the crux of the epistemological crisis in the conceptualization of the mind. Thinkers have responded in so many ways to this crisis of definition. However, the problem of mind is two dimensional. On the one hand is the problem of individual minds that abide in human beings. On the other hand, is the problem of the cosmic or universal mind. Is the cosmos a product of a mind? Certainly, evidence of order abounds in the cosmos. Is the cosmos a manifestation of intelligent activities of a mind? Perhaps there is a mind which ultimately coordinates all events in the cosmos. If the cosmos can act in some obviously intelligent ways, perhaps there is a mind which directs its operations. Even if there is, we may not be able to comprehensively study it as we cannot possibly get outside the cosmos. We are part and parcel of the cosmos. Perhaps, the consciousness we share might be a fraction of the cosmic consciousness. Suffice it to say that the cosmos might as well have a mind. Whether such a mind is material or nonmaterial might be a matter of limitations of language or contingency of perception.

Conceptions of Mind

From the earliest periods of philosophy, the existence of the mind has been taken for granted. The mind has always been too obvious a phenomenon to be denied. Ancient philosophers readily admitted the metaphysical component in the cosmos but not all upheld the possibility of a cosmic mind. However, they generally acknowledged the element of intelligence in the manifestation of the cosmos. The concept of the cosmic mind was most prominently featured in the philosophy of Anaxagoras. However, before Anaxagoras, Thales has said that “everything is full of gods” [1].

The ancients associated mind with soul which they considered to be the eternal principle in man. The line between the soul and the mind is often blurred. It could be said that the soul is reducible without any residues to the mind. If the attributes of what we call mind were to be removed, nothing would be left to be called soul [2,3]. Ancient and medieval thinkers often spoke of the soul as the divine element in man. Socrates devoted his philosophy to the care of the soul/mind. Although Plato in his dualism recognized a world of cosmic mind that held the ideas, Aristotle shunned such dualism and interpreted all cosmic operations in materialistic terms. Aristotle couldn't have viewed mind beyond the normal operations of nature [4].

Two schools of thought dominate the discourse on the nature of the mind: dualism and physicalism. Dualism posits a nonmaterial mind which co-exists with but is categorically different from the body. While the body is deemed as a material entity, the mind is deemed a nonmaterial entity. However, dualism creates a bigger problem of dichotomizing the human entity. It does not explain how a nonmaterial entity can function in a material entity. How does the nonmaterial act on or interact with the material? This is an intractable problem confronting the dualist explanation of the mind. Idealism, a modification of dualism was introduced in an attempt to eliminate this contradiction. Idealism states that mind alone exists [5,6]. It denies

completely, the existence of the physical world. The argument of idealism is that all we know as reality are but mental constructs.

But contemporary philosophers have generally tended to a physicalist conception of the mind. To them, the mind is reducible to the nervous system. While they admit their inability to comprehensively account for the operations of the mind, they are unanimous in the view that the complexity of the mind notwithstanding, it is still a physical phenomenon. They are confident that mind is part of brain functions. Physicalism does not entertain the supposed dichotomy between mind and body as they clearly reduce the mind to a material activity in a material body.

However, the functionalist theory would rather not delve into any question of the nature and origin of the mind. Functionalism focuses on how the mind operates [7]. The theory is basically an analogy of the functionality of the mind. Whether the mind is material or nonmaterial is not important in functionalism. What it focuses on are the mental states that constitute the mind. The major flaw of functionalism remains its inability to state clearly what the mind is; what stuff it is made of. No matter how relevant the analogies of functionalism are to understanding the operations of the mind, its inability to state what the mind is, is a serious dent on the theory. Identity theorists identify the mind with the brain [8]. But mental activities transcend the brain. The entire nervous system, not just the brain is involved in the constitution of the mind.

Components of the Mind

What constitutes the mind? How does the mind manifest? Generally speaking, the mind consists of memory, imagination, imaging, thinking, feelings and reasoning or judgment, perception, consciousness and language. It is in the exercise of these faculties that the mind manifests. The mind is more of a system than a unit. There are arguments on whether the mind can be localized in a particular portion of the brain or whether it is more distributed than the brain. The preponderance of the argument is that the mind's functions consist of the entire nervous system. It is not an activity of a single unit.

Nature of the Mind

The most contentious argument in the philosophy of mind is whether the mind is material or spiritual. This has been a perennial problem in the history of thought. The dualist tradition holds strongly that the mind is of a different nature from the body. The mind is said to be the essence of the human person, and is completely different from the body. Religious thinkers have associated the mind with the soul which they say is the divine principle in man. Another point is the fate of the mind at the death. Religious thinkers and dualists generally believe that the mind/soul survives death. This thinking has created a dichotomy between mind and body. How can a material body interact with a nonmaterial mind?

Physicalists on the other hand hold that the mind is thoroughly material. They see the mind as a part of the physical activities of the body. Although the mind is mental in nature, it is nonetheless, physical. It is an operation of matter. Physicalists believe that the mind does not

survive the body. The mind is part of the body. Therefore, when the finality of death hits the body, it hits the mind as well [9]

Origins of the Mind

The origin of the mind is no less controversial than the nature of the mind itself. Dualists and physicalists are locked in a perpetual duel of ideas on the possible origins of the mind. Even within the respective camps, there are discordant tunes. Theistic dualists trace the origin of the mind to God. To them, the mind/soul is a divine principle which was infused into man at creation by God. It is immortal and has no origin in the mortal body. Naturalist dualists like Socrates, Plato and Spinoza recognize the immortality of the mind/soul but do not attribute it to any God or gods. They recognize the mind/soul more or less as an immortal natural principle. Anaxagoras recognized mind as a cosmic principle that is at the formation of all things. He described mind as self-powered, infinite in possibilities, pure and unmixed with anything [10] For him as well as other naturalist dualists, mind is an independent cosmic factor which exists naturally without recourse to any god or God.

Some physicalists however, see mind as a component of matter which manifests in the highest degree of complexity in the human mind [11]. They see the attributes of mind in matter in various degrees, culminating in its most complex manifestation in man. They do not see mind as an exclusive preserve of man. They see mind in varying degrees of complexity in animals, plants and even in inanimate things. Physicalists see the human person as a material organism. The human mind like other parts of the human person is material. In his characterization of matter, Nkrumah, a physicalist includes spontaneity, self-motion, intelligence and purpose as attributes of matter [12].

Intentionality in Mind

One of the most intriguing attributes of mind is intentionality. Intentionality more than any other attribute makes the mind a subject. The ability to choose purpose and actions makes the mind to transcend any other phenomenon. Intentionality sets mind apart from the rest of nature. It gives man the power of choice, the power to act as an individual, the power to become an end unto himself, not just a gear in the wheels of existence. Intentionality confers responsibility on man. It is more or less the most defining human characteristic of man. It is at the root of the claim to the assumed divine origin of the mind.

Physicalists however see intentionality as a thoroughly material activity. They propose that since matter is self-moved, spontaneous and purposeful, it is necessarily capable of intentionality. The power of intentionality climaxed in the human mind because the human mind is the most complex manifestation of matter [13,14]. Intentionality manifests in other organisms/matter in varying but lesser degrees.

Awareness

Awareness simply put, is the power of the mind to know itself and know other things. Awareness in the mind makes it possible to have the knowledge that it exists, that the world exists, that the body exists and that the mind itself carries out other operations. As Locke put

it, it is the continuity of perceptions [15,16]. But beyond the perception of the world, the mind also perceives some internal states of the body like hunger, thirst, good functioning of the body systems and malfunctioning of the body systems. Awareness enables the mind to actually know that it does its functions.

The Self

The self is the collective identity of the mind and the body. It is the awareness and operation of the mind and body as a coordinated system. The ability of the mind to retain the memory of its operations is critical to the concept of the self. The self can neither be localized in the body nor in the mind per se. The self is the *coordination* and *awareness of the coordination* of the operations of the mind and body. The knowledge of the self would have been impossible without the mind. In the same vein, the existence of the self would have been impossible without the body. The mind does not operate in vacuum. It operates in the body. Whether the self could possibly survive the body is a controversial argument with religious colorations.

Spiritualization of the Mind

The mind is at the center of religion and the quest for immortality. Without any doubt, the mind is the most complex known system in the cosmos. The power of intentionality and consciousness of the self, made the mind an object of significant importance to religion. Most religions view the mind as the essence of the human person. Since like God, the mind is invisible, it is considered to be the divine spark in man. The mind is often used interchangeably with the soul and is said to survive death [17]. Ancient Egyptian philosophers were the first to declare the immortality of the soul/mind. The mind was so important in the Egyptian Mystery system that the prospective philosopher had to undergo stringent religious initiations to acquire the right frame of mind for the philosophic enterprise [18,19]. The care of the mind and expected immortality were the central themes of Egyptian Mysteries. Socrates, a true initiate of the Egyptian Mysteries, anchored his entire philosophy on the care of the soul/mind. Pythagoras who was also an initiate of the Egyptian Mysteries as well as his followers devoted even their study of music and numbers to the care of the soul/mind, and of course, the expected immortality of the mind. Hinduism placed so much premium on the care of the mind that the enlightenment of the mind more or less became its ultimate goal. Christianity was not left out in the spiritualization of the mind. Early Christianity placed so much premium on the care of the mind/soul that the body was often regarded as an expendable encumbrance.

The Possibility of Cosmic Consciousness

The facticity of consciousness in the cosmos is sacrosanct. At the very least, it is not in contention that there is consciousness in human beings and animals – two phenomena that are part and parcel of the cosmos. As opined by Thales, the cosmos is full of minds/gods. By this assertion he meant minds/souls. Anaxagoras thought that a cosmic mind was responsible for the organization of primordial matter into the multitude of things we witness in the universe. Plato's creation story presupposed a cosmic mind. The Demiurge was said to have looked upon the ideas to form the multitude of things from formless matter. The ideas constituted cosmic mind. They were so to speak, the mind in which the form of the multitude of things were

conceived. The aforementioned philosophers were all dualists. Nkrumah's philosophy of mind presented the physicalist case aggressively.

For Nkrumah, mind is an offshoot of matter; a critical organization of matter. It is just a manifestation of matter in a phenomenally complex form. It is nonetheless material – fundamentally derived from matter. The building blocks of mind are in the attributes of matter. Matter, according to Nkrumah, is self-moved, spontaneous, intelligent and as such conscious albeit, in varying degrees and manifestations. These attributes are ontological to matter. The cosmos is material, therefore the building blocks of mind, necessarily pervade the cosmos. Mind so to speak, is a characteristic of matter, and ipso facto, present in everything material. Consequently, there is no phenomenon in the cosmos that is devoid of mind. But that is not to say that every object in the cosmos has the same level of mind. Mind manifests in phenomena in varying degrees of complexity and development. It is possible that indeed, the only highly complex manifestations of consciousness in the cosmos are seen in animals, man being the highest manifestation of such. But consciousness is indubitably manifested in plants when they respond to stimuli in the environment in sheer demonstration of irritability. Typically, is when a plant bends in response to the direction of sunlight. It is certainly a spontaneous response and sheer demonstration of consciousness of at least some stimuli in the environment. This brings to the fore, the possibility of the human mind not having the capacity to respond to some stimuli in the environment due to lack of capacity to perceive such phenomena.

Conversely, the possibility of a universal mind and consciousness cannot be entirely dismissed. It is generally held that the cosmos is a system. In the words of Parmenides, “being is one” [20]. Science does not propose multiple cosmoses but a single cosmos with multiple galaxies and planetary systems. The zillions of phenomena in manifestation notwithstanding, the cosmos is deemed to be one and basically interconnected. Could it be that components of mind or minds in the cosmos coalesce to form a single cosmic consciousness? Just like the body cells have mind, and are perhaps units of consciousness; are the minds that manifest (no matter the degree) in all phenomena, units that constitute the universal mind? Are the manifestations of consciousness in the cosmos units of the cosmic consciousness?

Is the cosmos conscious of itself? Based on the information available to science today, we cannot answer these questions either in the affirmative or in the negative. The individual cells in the human body though each possesses a sort of mind, cannot know that the human person is self-conscious. Yet, self-consciousness is impossible in the human person without the mind activities of the individual cells that constitute the human person. Even the individual cells in the human brain cannot know that the human person is self-conscious. Yet, their collective activities make self-consciousness possible. When the analogy above is applied to the cosmos, the possibilities are enormous.

If the cosmos as an entity is conscious, what could possibly be the nature of its consciousness? Certainly, if such consciousness did exist, it would be radically different from human consciousness. Unlike the experience of humans, to the cosmos, externality is not possible [21]. Humans are conscious of the world because the world is external to them. By that ontological

condition, humans can see themselves as being in the world and separate from the world. When a human person is conscious, he gains knowledge of other human persons and other things in the world external to himself. He also gains knowledge of the operations of his own body to the extent that consciousness awareness can reach. Humans know pain, hunger, thirst, pleasure, and infirmities in themselves only when they are conscious. When they are not conscious, all these cease to exist in their experience. No person asleep can know the experiences mentioned above.

But if self-consciousness was to be possible to the cosmos, the cosmos could only be aware of the operations of itself. Externality would be impossible to it. Simply put, nothing is external to the cosmos. There is neither a phenomenon nor a being external to the cosmos for if such a phenomenon or being did exist, it would be part of the cosmos. If it is not part of the cosmos, it would be inconsequential, incapable of interacting with the cosmos, incapable of being, therefore, non-existent. Invariably, the cosmos could not possibly be conscious of something other than itself. The cosmos could but contemplate the operations of itself if it is conscious.

The Possibility of a God in a Possibly Conscious Cosmos

The possibility of cosmic consciousness ushers in the possibility of a God. If the consciousness in the cosmos coalesced into a universal self-consciousness, that self-consciousness could be called a God. However, whether it deserves worship or not would be a different question. In principle, the possibility of a cosmic consciousness cannot logically be dismissed. The possibility of a universal consciousness implies the possibility of a God. A universal consciousness definitely would be more advanced than the human consciousness. But unlike the human consciousness, it cannot gain consciousness of other things because there is nothing other than the cosmos [22].

The idea that the cosmos is a product of chance is absurd for the very philosophically, scientifically and logically well-established reason that absolutely nothing can come out of nothing. The cosmos couldn't have begun. No. It couldn't have. It was always in existence. Existence is a characteristic of the cosmos. The cosmos could not possibly not be. It was always there. It is neither bounded nor finite. If the cosmos were bounded, beyond the boundary would still be a continuation of the cosmos. If it is finite, then it is bounded. For it cannot be finite without definite boundaries. Infinity is its basic characteristic. It doesn't mean that it is expanding. There is no space for it to expand into, space being part and parcel of the cosmos. Galaxies and solar systems might expand. They are just parts of the cosmos. Their expansions take place within the cosmos; not out of it towards any entity other than the cosmos.

Infinitude is a characteristic of a God. It is safe to assume with Spinoza that the cosmos is the God [23]. Of course, a God other than the cosmos is not logically possible. Nothing could possibly exist except it is part of the cosmos. A cosmic God would be nothing other than the consciousness of the cosmos. It can't possibly be apart from the cosmos. Even when heaven is imagined, it is imagined in cosmic terms. There can't be anything outside the cosmos. The cosmos has no possibility of an outside.

If the cosmos had a universal mind, would it be controlling events in the cosmos? Certainly, if such a mind did exist, it would have the ability of the mind to be spontaneous and intelligent. To that extent, the cosmic mind by default would be able to control some events in the cosmos while not being in control of greater percentage of events in the cosmos because the cosmos is full of minds.

The cosmic mind-God bears striking resemblance to God in organized religions. The Judaic God is essentially a mind which exists in an exclusive part of the cosmos called heaven. From heaven, the Judaic God is portrayed as directing history by controlling, the minds of men, the geological operations of the earth, biological experiences like diseases and childbirths, and even agricultural experiences to mention but a few. In Christianity which is an offshoot of Judaism, God is viewed essentially as it is viewed in Judaism. However, the concept of God in modern Christianity has altered significantly. God is conceived as an active mind that caused the cosmos, directs history by essentially acting on the minds of men. Heaven is not seen as cosmic location but the gathering of pure minds in the presence of the ultimate mind known as God. Hinduism celebrates the universal mind as the divinity. In Hinduism, the ultimate expectation of man is to merge with the universal consciousness after death.

These religions in their respective ways addressed the problem of consciousness in the cosmos. They all agree that man has individual consciousness which they call soul. These religions believe that consciousness in the form of the soul survives death. They believe in a cosmic consciousness generally called God. They believe that the individual consciousness upon fulfilling certain moral conditions returns to God, the cosmic consciousness at death. While some of the major religions believe that God is extra-cosmic, some believe that God is at one with the cosmos. The entire religious hypotheses lie on the assumption that there is a cosmic consciousness which the individual consciousness would aspire to at death. Without this assumption, there would be no religion. It is at this point that philosophy gives rise to religion. It appears that early religionists were able to philosophically arrive at a cosmic consciousness other than the individual consciousness. They apparently concluded that since consciousness is neither visible nor tangible, individual consciousness must necessarily survive death and merge with the cosmic consciousness. That is pure philosophy. But religion birthed in when they personalized the cosmic consciousness and offered it up for worship. There lies the origin of Gods.

However, in a material world, consciousness is a characteristic of the cosmos. It cannot be personalized because the cosmos is infinite. What cannot be defined, what is boundless, what has no borders, what is without an “other”, cannot be personalized. Would it not be better to conceive the cosmic God as a principle rather than a person? There is no “other” to be contemplated by the cosmos. The consciousness of the cosmos is the consciousness of its operations (Just the way the human person is conscious that he is hungry; that his heart beats; that he has a headache, etc.). Like everything material, the cosmos is spontaneous, intelligent, purposeful and conscious. The problem however, is that the cosmos cannot act outside of itself. It is not contained in anything. It simply is. The cosmos has no “outside”. All the activities of the cosmos are the activities of itself in itself. That is, nature as it unfolds. In the light of the

above hypothesis, the idea of a personalized God though not denied is not possible in a material cosmos. God could be termed the conscious, intelligent and purposeful principle in the cosmos in its infinity and activity.

The Impossibility of Nothingness

The cosmos is the only existent. It is the nature of the cosmos to be. It cannot not possibly be. Matter is said to be indestructible but convertible. If matter is indestructible, it necessarily follows that it is uncreatable. Its convertibility implies that it can change form but can't be eliminated. In the light of this, the cosmos couldn't have been possibly created. It is not possible for the cosmos to have a beginning neither is possible for it to have an end. Like all matter, it can neither be created nor destroyed. It would always experience conversions but it couldn't have possibly had a beginning.

In the light of this, the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe would be fallacious. It couldn't possibly be the origin of the universe but a change in the already existing universe. If at all there was a bang, it took place within the cosmos; not in a vacuum. It was nothing more than a conversion of matter: neither a creation nor the beginning of the cosmos.

CONCLUSION

Key problems always encountered in discourses on mind are the limitations of language and the bias of traditional beliefs. The classical definition of matter does not encompass all the characteristics of matter. The term could therefore be reasonably adjudged inadequate. The traditionally held beliefs on the subject matter tend to psychologically inhibit any radical re-conception of mind. It could as well ultimately turn out that the dichotomies between mind and matter are merely linguistic. Reality could as well be fundamentally one in form, after all there is only one cosmos within which all phenomena are interwoven. The spiritualization of the cosmos discourages meaningful discussions on it due to the often-volatile religious sentiments such discussions evoke. However, it is safe to conclude that the cosmos is fundamentally material as the preponderance of evidence heavily supports this assertion. Mind being part of the human experience of the cosmos cannot be fundamentally different from the basic form of the cosmos which is matter. Mind is an aspect of matter but definitely not the traditionally defined matter. Nkrumah's rendition of matter as a plenum of forces in tension is very much more like it. This redefinition of matter accounts for the existence of mind in a material universe, not as a nonmaterial category but as a characteristic of matter.

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