

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 inspired 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. So to speak, the mind is the eyes 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 at the primary substance in existence. While some thinkers posit the sole reality of matter, some posit the primary 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 the 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 mined 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.*

INTRODUCTION

The discourse on the nature of the 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 matter, they did not dwell on the nature of the mind. Throughout 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 syntheses of these schools of thoughts. The human person is traditionally said to be a duality of mind and matter. But the intractable epistemological question remains: how can the material and the nonmaterial 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 abound 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 fractions 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 had said that "everything is full of gods" (Diogenes, c.60BC).

The ancients associated the mind with the 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 the mind were to be removed, nothing would be left to be called the soul. Ancient and medieval thinkers often spoke of the soul as the divine element in man (Giversen, Petersen & Sorensen, 2002).

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 material terms. Aristotle couldn't have viewed mind beyond the normal operations of nature.

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 to be a nonmaterial entity.

However, dualism creates a bigger problem, 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. 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 modern and contemporary philosophers have generally pandered 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 remained 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, functionalist theory would rather not delve into any question of the nature and origin of the mind. Functionalism focuses on how the mind operates. The theory is basically an analogy on the functionality of the mind. Whether the mind is material or nonmaterial is not so important to 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 in 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. 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 about whether the mind can be localized on a particular portion of the brain or whether it is distributed beyond the brain. The preponderance of the argument is that mind functions consist of the entire nervous system. It is not an activity of a single unit.

Nature of the Mind

The biggest 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 of the body. Religious thinkers and dualists generally believe that the mind/soul survives death (Russell, 1936). 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 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 (Nkrumah, 1964). 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 mind, it hits the body as well.

Origins of the Mind

The origin of the mind is no less controversial than the nature of the mind itself. Dualists and physicalists do a duel of ideas on the possible origins of the mind. Even within their 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. For Thales however, everything is full of minds. Anaxagoras recognized mind as a cosmic principle that is at the formation of all things (Curd, 2015). To the naturalist dualists, mind is an independent cosmic variable which exists naturally without recourse to any god or God.

Some physicalists however, see mind as a component of matter which has manifested in the highest degree of complexity in the human mind (Nkrumah, 1964). They see the attributes of mind in matter in various degrees, culminating in its most complex manifestation in man. They do not see the mind as an exclusive preserve of man. They see the mind in varying degrees of complexity in animal, plant and even in inanimate things (Nkrumah. 1964; Ebo, 2019).

This set of physicalists 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 includes spontaneity, self-motion, intelligence and purpose as attributes of matter (Nkrumah, 1964).

Intentionality in the Mind

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

Physicalists however see intentionality as a thoroughly material activity. They suppose 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 human mind is the most complex manifestation of matter (Nkrumah, 1964).

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 (Locke, 1690). But beyond the perception of the world, the mind also perceives some internal states of the body like hunger, thirst and good functioning 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 a 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. The mind was viewed as the essence of the human person. Since like God, the mind is invisible, it

was seen as the divine spark in man. The mind became interchangeable with the soul and was said to survive death.

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. The care of the mind and the 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 man and animals – two phenomena that are part and parcel of the cosmos. As opined by Thales, the cosmos is full of minds/gods (Diogenes, c.60BC).

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 (Plato, c.369BC). The ideas constituted the 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.

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.

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. 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. Animals, especially man being the highest manifestation of mind.

But the possibility of a universal mind cannot be entirely dismissed. It is generally held that the cosmos is *a* system. It is a network of interconnected phenomena. In the words of Parmenides, "being is one" (Wilson, 2006; Smith, 1870). Science does not propose multiple cosmoses but a single cosmos with multiple planetary systems.

The zillions of phenomena in manifestation notwithstanding, the cosmos is deemed to be one and basically interconnected. Could it be that like in animals, components minds in the cosmos coalesced to form a single consciousness? Just like the body cells have mind, and are perhaps units of human consciousness, are the minds that manifest (no matter the degrees) in all phenomena, units that constitute the universal mind? Are the manifestations of consciousness in the cosmos, units of the cosmic consciousness?

If the cosmos as an entity were 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. Humans are conscious of the world because the world is external in relation to the human being. 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 a certain extent. 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 experiences. No person asleep can know the experiences mentioned above.

But if self-consciousness were possible in the cosmos, the cosmos could only be conscious of the operations of itself for externality is 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 were 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. It could but contemplate the operations of itself if it were conscious.

Universal Mind?

The mind is found in the cosmos. Like any other thing found in the cosmos, it is part and parcel of the cosmos. Since mind is in the cosmos, it is safe to assume that the mind originated in the cosmos. In that case, it is possible that the substances that constitute the mind may not have existed in man alone. More so, if the mind is said to be material, the components of mind will definitely be found in matter. If they are material, not only will they have their origin in the cosmos, the cosmos will possess the same attributes mind has.

Beyond man, other phenomena in the cosmos show evidence of possession minds of sorts. While animals possess a mind that is centered in the head, plants in their responses to stimuli show evidence of the awareness of their environments, therefore have minds of a sort, though not centralized in any portion of the plant. The cosmos may or may not have a centralized mind. Like in plants, mind in the cosmos might be distributed in the component units of the cosmos with no concentration on any particular portion. But if the cosmos like animals had a concentrated mind, such concentration of mind would necessarily acquire a special status like the human mind.

The Possibility of a God in a Possibly Conscious Cosmos

The possibility of cosmic consciousness ushers in the possibility of God. If the consciousness in the cosmos coalesced into a universal self-consciousness, that consciousness could be called a God. However, whether it deserves worship or not would be a different question. In principle, we cannot logically dismiss the possibility of a universal consciousness. 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 that can know things external to the human person, cosmic consciousness cannot gain consciousness of things outside the cosmos because outside the cosmos, there is nothing. The cosmos has no outside; there is nothing other than the cosmos. Whatever is known to exist is known to exist within the cosmos. Whatever that is imagined to exist is imagined to exist by a mind within the cosmos, in reference to the cosmos. It is not possible to imagine a reality that is capable of interacting with the cosmos; outside the cosmos.

The idea that the cosmos is a product of chance is funny for the very reason that absolutely nothing can come out of nothing. The cosmos couldn't have begun. It was always in existence. Existence is a core 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 to be 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. The cosmos cannot be encompassed because, an "outside" to the cosmos is not possible.

Infinitude is one of the characteristics attributed to a God. It is safe to assume with Spinoza that the cosmos is the God (1670). Of course, a God that is not part of the cosmos is not possible as the cosmos has no boundaries, and could not be double, ipso facto. 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 (John, 14:2). It couldn't have been an alternate cosmos. If heaven is not spatial, then, it would just be a piece of imagination in the human mind, which is in itself, a material phenomenon in the cosmos; part of the cosmos.

If the cosmos has a universal mind, would that mind 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 cosmos is the primary being. If it had such a mind, it could account for the traces of order in the cosmos. Just like the entire human body is not mind, the entire cosmos is not the cosmic mind, ipso facto, the cosmic mind would necessarily be limited. Hence, the traces of disorder in the cosmos.

The cosmic mind-God bears striking resemblance to Gods of the 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 experience to mention but a few (Proverbs, 21:1).

In Christianity which is an offshoot of Judaism, God is viewed essentially much as it is viewed in Judaism. However, the concept of God in modern Christianity has altered significantly. God is conceived essentially 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.

Heaven is seen as state but it is not clear whether it is a psychological state or some sort of pan psychic state. Perhaps, it is the meeting of the individual mind with the cosmic mind. 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 address 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 universal consciousness generally called God. They believe that the individual consciousness upon fulfilling certain moral conditions returns to God 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 was at that point that philosophy gave 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 was pure philosophy. But religion birthed in when they personalized the cosmic consciousness and offered it worship. Therein perhaps, lies the origin of Gods.

However, cosmic consciousness 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. Self-consciousness at the cosmic level is not possible. There is no “other” to be contemplated by the cosmos. There is no “other” to reference the possible cosmic self. 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 has all the attributes of matter. It 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, and 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 is possibly the conscious, intelligent and purposeful cosmic mind in its infinity and activity.

The Impossibility of Nothingness

The cosmos is the only existent. It is the only reality. 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. It indeed confirms the dynamism of matter. 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 it 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 the foregoing, 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.

The Christian creation out of nothing equally suffers logical absurdities. It presupposes the existence of God and angels. Where were they? If nothing but Gods existed, the cosmos would necessarily come out from God, therefore, would be God. But the Christian creation account presupposes a universe of a sort: the spatial relation comprising God, angels and primordial waters (Genesis, 1). What the creation story reveals in a logical analysis is but a story of conversion of matter. Nothingness is an impossibility.

The idea of a mind creating or calling the cosmos into existence is a logical absurdity. There is no plane of nothingness in which or from which such cosmic mind or God could have acted. In relation to the cosmos, zero is not possible. The cosmos has never experienced point zero and will never experience point zero. Therefore, there is no possibility of zero-to-creation either by a mind or a God other than the cosmos. Mind couldn't have preexisted. Matter

always was. Mind is a function of matter. Mind can neither exist in a vacuum or nothingness nor can it exist outside of matter.

There can't be mined without matter neither can mind yield matter. It is an activity of matter. Creation out of nothingness presupposes a mind calling matter into existence. It assumes that somehow by the instrumentality of some bodiless mind, nothingness can yield something. But that is not possible. Nothingness simply means what it is – nothing; zero.

CONCLUSION

A painstaking analysis of the facticity of mind in a material cosmos has come to the conclusion that mind is an activity of matter. Therefore, it must necessarily be material. The debate on the mind-body dichotomy notwithstanding, mind is found only in matter. Therefore, must be part of matter. The presupposition of the existence of a realm of nothingness gives the impression that the mind could have a nature other than material. But the cosmos occupies everywhere without let. There is no room for nothing to operate as the cosmos alone exists without boundaries. Thus, we have only one cosmos. It is material. It yields mind. The cosmos couldn't have yielded what it had not, ab initio. The cosmos is material; mind is material.

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