

The Heidegger-Sartre Black Hole

by: Douglas Lockhart

Heidegger and Sartre bring out an important aspect of engaged experience: it is consciousness of an object (idea, event, etc) that is not at the same time consciousness of a subject that is aware of the object. However, it is not clear why the absence of a self-conscious subject in engaged experience should count as evidence of the absence of a subject altogether. Why should the ego need to keep an eye on itself while attending to other things? Kant thought that it need do no such thing, saying that the ego, rather than needing always to attach the cogito or "I think" to its experiences, need only be able to do so. Kant's view seems the more plausible: the ego need not always be aware of experiences as "its" experiences; it need only be capable of such awareness, whether by means of concurrent reflection or subsequent recollection.

Michael Washburn

'Rethinking the Notion of the Ego' (p. 204)

[W]itness-consciousness has prima facie reality in the conscious mind; it is, we might say, a real appearance. That is, it seems to be a genuine feature of the conscious landscape, rather than something that turns out, upon careful analysis, to be the mere background flow of unattended objects, or just the feeling of for-me-ness that belongs to the flow of experience ... I argue that witness-consciousness has not only prima facie reality, but actual reality. It is not illusory, in other words. As a real feature of the mind, central to phenomenal consciousness, it must be faced up to in the "hard problem" of consciousness.

Miri Albahari

'Witness-Consciousness' (p. 63)

Consciousness *of* and Consciousness *as*

In Martin Heidegger's and John Paul Sartre's scheme the ego-self is absent during mental engagement; it arises only when one steps back from such engagement and reflects on it. This is to paraphrase and contract a statement in Michael Washburn's paper 'Rethinking the Notion of the Ego', a survey of ego and its role in consciousness from the beginning of the modern period to that of the mid-twentieth century.¹ Beginning with Descartes, Washburn takes in the views of Hume, Kant, Freud, (Heinz) Hartmann, Heidegger, Sartre, Lacan, the postmodernists and materialists (or physicalists), and with many an insightful comment evaluates their views on whether the human ego exists, or does not exist. And what it may mean if this much debated factor in our psychology proves to be illusory.² Or, as Hume saw it, not cognisable for reason of it being no more than a *bundle of perceptions*.

For Immanuel Kant, the ego did exist, but it was inherently unable to cognise itself.³ Whereas for Sigmund Freud it was part of a psychological trinity, psyche being composed of id, ego and superego with ego as a basic self-defense mechanism.⁴ Outdoing Freud, Heinz Hartmann perceived the ego as having become a stimulus discriminating capacity,⁵ whereas Jacques Lacan perceived it as an imaginary-symbolic self in relation to the body.⁶ In turn, the postmodernists fashioned ego out of language, culture, economics, gender, class and history,⁷ materialists of "physicalist" persuasion as possessing no mental status separate from body, brain and behaviour.⁸ It is however Heidegger's and Sartre's approach that has stirred most philosophical interest, Sartre having identified consciousness and ego as a "hole in being" out of which contents spontaneously arise,⁹ Heidegger as an unavoidable effect of

our being *inherently-in-the-world*.¹⁰ Edmund Husserl, thought now to have been an "idealist" by his peers, does not rank a mention, his "disappearing ego" claim requiring that his "ego-self" consciously trick itself out of the self-picture in arrangement with itself - undoubtedly the major reasons for his being sidelined.

As we've already considered Heidegger's views, I'll now concentrate on Sartre's seemingly bizarre claim that consciousness and ego constitute not only a "hole in being", but also a *nothingness* from out of which "contents" spontaneously arise.¹¹ So not just "nothingness"; also a conduit for unconsciously produced phenomena. Washburn describes this curious state thus: "At the very centre of consciousness, precisely where we thought we find our true self, the ego, there is instead a gap through which thoughts, images, and impulses burst into consciousness spontaneously and, therefore, Sartre concluded, without ownership or control."¹² There is, it seems, some kind of "opening" in psyche, and this opening constitutes both the nature of consciousness and the nature of the self *as* ego.

Michael Washburn's problem with this scenario is that it overlooks what it is that experiences this hole or void if there is no unified, experiencing point of view in psyche. And so he postulate, I think cleverly, that the ego is a form of camera "aperture", the width of which constantly undergoes adjustment.¹³ Narrow the aperture and you have a strongly organised ego, widen the aperture and you have a less strongly organised ego. This suggests the possibility of a maximum, laser-like focus, and an equally possible maximum opening of the aperture resulting in a complete loss of ego.¹⁴ This is of course to metaphorically physicalise what is going on in psyche, but it's a workable hypothesis if

we keep in mind that consciousness is as much *not* a camera as the brain is *not* a computer. Even the arch portmodernist Stephen Pinker admits that the brain is not a computer, and that artificial intelligence will never duplicate the human mind in terms of first-person subjective experience. Yet, like many another, he assumes first-person subjective experience to be the result of computer-type computational operations. It is, apparently, deep-structure computations in the brain that sustain human consciousness on all levels of conceptual/perceptual expression, this discovery finally exorcising the notion of a ghostly self residing in the biological machine.¹⁵ But can we link Sartre's "nothingness" to Pinker's "invisible" computations and Martin Heidegger's equally invisible "language as the house of Being" without falling into conceptual error? Are they all one and the same thing?

Washburn tells us that Heidegger and Sartre conceived *engaged* consciousness as consciousness *of*, that is, "unself-conscious thought or action wholly invested in an object or event."¹⁶ There is no subject that is aware of itself; a re-emerging of the self to the self is only possible when ego-engagement weakens, or ceases. For Heidegger, this was to live "ecstatically" *outside* of ourselves; which is to say "absorbed in the projects and shared activities of 'everydayness'."¹⁷ Self-awareness was a quite different experience: it only took place when one *stepped back* from engaged experience.¹⁸ That makes perfect sense except that the words and *reflects upon it* complete this piece of reasoning. How can that be? How can any emergence of the ego-self from mental engagement take place if the result of that emergence is yet another act of reflection? Is that not consciousness *of* back in operation? In what seems to be confirmation of this point, Washburn adds: "For Heidegger and Sartre, such reflective self-awareness is nothing more than ecstatic

or ego-less experience bending back on itself."¹⁹ There is then no actual "stepping back" at all, just the *illusion* that one has done so.

Having postulated the ego-self to be a "dilating aperture" in psyche in accordance with this kind of reasoning, Washburn nevertheless feels the need to question both Heidegger and Sartre on our being *wholly* stranded in acts of cognitive engagement, which causes him to say: "However, it is not clear why the absence of a self-conscious subject in engaged experience should count as evidence of the absence of a subject altogether."²⁰ I agree with that contention. Both Heidegger and Sartre dismiss the notion of there being an *actual* ego-self in any level of operation ("stepping back" was for them only a further act of submerged mental engagement}, whereas Kant did allow for an ego-self, but simultaneously disallowed it experiential immediacy by similarly relegating its level of awareness to that of "reflection" or "recollection".

To be "concurrently" aware of one's awareness (see opening quote this chapter) had nothing whatsoever to do with being experientially aware *as* a person; it was no more than a rapid swapping of engagement modes during engagement itself. There was only awareness *of*, there was no such thing as awareness *as*. Which in general psychological terms tells us that Heidegger and Sartre and Kant were correct in their assessments, for as Gadamer observed, "self" is not a cognisable "thing", it is a state of non-temporal immediacy that forever escapes conscious detection because we are predominantly *locked* in conscious engagement. Or, if you care, *locked in physis*.

Not for Professor of cognitive psychology Benny Shanon, however, he argues for "cognitive-mentations" (our sense of being in existence) as something that can displace "meta-mentations" (thinking and talking), so allowing us to experience ourselves *as* a living organism. There is, for

Shanon, an intrinsic difference between the feeling of *being* a particular kind of organism or agent, and the feeling of *having* sensory experiences. To confuse such feelings is for him to confuse the quality of being with the quality of sensory experiences had by beings. Self-awareness is then not just another form of conscious engagement, a reflection on, or recollection of, what one is or has experienced; it is a disengagement from engaged mental awareness where sense of self *thickens* to the extent that mental engagement with thoughts or objects is brought to a momentary halt. It is of short duration, but it is *there*, and in being *there* it heralds *thereness* for the individual *as* an experience. For a brief moment, there are no conceptual hooks; sense of self *gathers* alongside world and engaged consciousness gutters out like a candle. I also agree with this contention.

Such acts, I would contend, are an experience of Fredrich Schleiermacher's *consummate* self-consciousness in an embryonic stage of expression, perhaps even an experience of Edmund Husserl's "egoless" state at a rudimentary level. If so, then immediacy of apprehension opens up the territory of the ego-self and its capacities to such an extent that Sartre's "hole in Being" - that out of which contents spontaneously arise - becomes the natural, inbuilt "transparency" of consciousness functioning as a creative state of awareness in its own right.

Strong and Weak Subjectivity

We may not actually live through words as so many now claim, but actually inhabit the naturally occurring space (Sartre's psychomental abyss?) between words. Not metaphorically inhabit this space; *actually* exist *as* the space itself - that is, *as* psyche in its fundamental wholeness

beyond differentiation, a wholeness within which ego as appropriating element, agent, or lens, oscillates between apparently contradictory poles: the subjective and the objective which, in essence, only appear to be contradictory because they have been objectively conceived. And this state should not be confused with the undifferentiated mental state of the infant; this is a state *beyond* differentiation, not an undifferentiated state lacking subjective integrity. As argued elsewhere:

Hence our ubiquitous sense of self-wholeness and the possibility of "pure perception" as claimed by Schleiermacher, Husserl, and others. We have at our disposal the unrecognised capacity to consciously slip out of conscious gear and enter a neutral perceptual zone at will. Enter Jean Curthoys with Gottlob Frege's notion of thoughts being "independent of the minds that grasp them", a conception of thought and its arising "corseted by grammar into meaningful shapes" which suggests, in turn, that language is not the primary generator of meaning. Thoughts and ideas are then not one and the same thing: ideas certainly belong to the conscious mind, thoughts to an ambiguously situated dimension of being in relation to psyche and body. Which tells us that we are unaware of the transition points, or gaps [holes?] in our thinking about anything, unaware that we are continually dipping down into the greater matrix [Hole or Whole?] of psyche. And how, when one comes to think about' it, could it be otherwise? How could we think anything coherent if there was no subjective sense of self in operation, no affective sense of our backgrounding wholeness confirming that a meaningful thought had formed? You simply can't have "meaning" without a meaningful context within which meaning can register.

That seem to anticipate Sartre's suggestion of consciousness being a transparent medium, a "hole" in Being' through which thoughts, images and impulses unrestricted by time pour spontaneously into the consciously aware mind. This then is, or at least seems to be, the

backgrounding hubble-bubble of mental activity sensed, and necessarily censored, by the differentiating ego-mind as it wends its way through its awake hours in accordance with society's needs and conformists attitudes. As with the brain's reticular censorship of incoming stimuli, so also the necessary censorship, social and cultural, of unimaginably complex combinations of memory-general/genetic-specific information arising in the conscious mind while awake or asleep. Or in a state of reverie such as Kekule's when he *saw* the structure of organic molecules; or the mathematically inadequate Faraday when he *saw* his lines of cosmic force; or Van Gogh when he *saw*-painted his sky vortices. Strong subjectivity is then a very different experience from that of weak subjectivity, the latter belonging to the differentiating ego-self, the former to a quite different ego-self that continually *reflects*, but does not *reflect on*, either memory's general content (learned or experiential), or on the genetic remembering of the organism in relation to its evolutionary past and inherent cosmological status. There is, it seems, an alternative ego-self, a kind of "witness" unphased by its own non-temporal immediacy, and it constitutes a "presence" beyond any possibility of objective description.

Sometimes referred to as the "not-self", this alternative ego-self sports an ego without ego, hence the "not", but it is nevertheless "aware", and in being aware should not be equated with a neuronally-driven computational system, or solely with language languaging itself into a state (lather?) of meaning. The much misunderstood Carl Jung puts it best when he says that the unconscious "seems to be able to draw conclusions from facts, much as consciousness does. It can even use certain facts, and anticipate their possible results, just because we are not conscious of them."²¹ This is another way of saying that conscious representations are sometimes "patterned" before we become

conscious of them. It is as if the two systems are working in unison, that is, as *depth*, depth being "depth of Being", or, as *Hades*, the ancient Greek god of depth to which no temple or altar was ever raised. Hades hides from us; he remains invisible, but is ever present in psyche as depth (*bathum*). It is however Hades, in Christian terms *hell*, from which Christianity tries to shield us, the god of depth having been theologically transformed into the Devil who instructed Dr Faustus in *all* knowledge. As we are now in the grip of "knowledge" as never before, that is an irony! Left to develop in a different way we may have discovered, such as the creative among us endlessly discover, that knowledge of our own depths is in fact that which *saves* us from ourselves.

Suffice it to say that strong subjectivity is the "aperture" of consciousness opened wide, weak subjectivity the same aperture narrowed to a logic-driven pin-prick where emotion, or, conversely, emotionlessness (negative emotion compacted into nullity), can guide procedures. There is still a "hole", but it is a creatively restricted aperture through which the contents of general memory have to be dredged up into conscious awareness through *acts of will*. We all know what *trying to think or remember* feels like. Yet within this hole, or constituting this hole, as Michael Washburn seems to suggest, is a form of awareness that defies conscious description, a form of awareness that informs the conscious, differentiating ego-self in moments of relaxed scrutiny. The aperture widens and a different quality of seeing occurs, a seeing *into* that surprises the ego-self into being a *seer* capable of an instinctive, intuitive form of understanding. Memory is in there too, but it is memory in the service of a more complex, panoramic form of thinking, a sometimes kaleidoscopic form of thinking that easily outpaces the fluctuating ego's digestive capacity. In cliché terms this is the much-

lauded "creative" self; in more precise terms it is the "transparent" self, the "hole" (whole) self in action.

Paradoxical Attention

For pastor turned philosopher Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1884), the everyday ego-self was a form of awareness generated out of our ability to clearly distinguish between self and world. This is to say that he equated our capacity for self-witnessing with the self's ability to be self-consciously aware of its own objective existence. He later changed his mind on this and came to view "self-conscious", objective witnessing of the self as a pale reflection of what was actually going on: he termed his discovery *consummate* self-consciousness. Consummate self-consciousness, as a state of mind was not the self-objectifying self; it was simultaneously the *ground* of theoretical and practical reasoning and the *unitary ground* of the self experienced in its immediacy.²² That sounds like Sartre's "hole" from out of which thoughts, images and impulses *unrestricted by time* pour spontaneously into the consciously aware mind. There were two distinct levels to the self for Schleiermacher, and they formed two separate selves in combination, the greater of these self's constituting *immediacy* of perception in its own right. Exactly how he had arrived at this conclusion is not made clear, but that he had arrived at it is pretty certain given the tenor of his mature texts.

Jacqueline Marina captures the contradictory nature of this problem when she says: "This awareness [ordinary self-consciousness] is *immediate* insofar as it cannot become a thematized object *for* awareness; paradoxically, however, it [higher self-consciousness] can only make its appearance once the self is clearly aware of the distinction

between self and world and is therefore self-conscious."²³ Which tells us that ordinary self-consciousness allows the self to objectively conjecture its own underlying immediacy, whereas consummate self-consciousness allows it to transcend its inbuilt, self-conscious limitations and apprehend itself *beyond* objectification. Consummate self-consciousness is then a higher form of consciousness that does not *forget* itself due to mental engagement; it is a form of consciousness that progressively *re-members itself into actuality*, and in re-membering becomes experientially aware of its cosmic nature. But only when the self comes to realise how perception of self and world are cognitively hooked into one another in relation to each passing moment, and how those moments are connected by and through our *sense of time*.²⁴ How the moments are connected constitutes the key to unravelling the problem that ordinary perception generates for the self, objectification of self, other and world that which holds us in perceptual sway, language, in spite of its cognitive advantages, that which has come to control consciousness so thoroughly part of the problem we have to solve. This is the multi-tumbled lock into which the key marked "time" and "non-time" fits, the greater, more puzzling problem Schleiermacher tried to solve the self's ability to paradoxically use a heightened form of self-consciousness to transcend these difficulties.

Schleiermacher's language, in relation to all of this, is of its time, its convolutions and religious usages often difficult to make sense of. But it is also, in its own way, precise and laden with helpful clues as to its range of meanings. There is talk of "self-consciousness", "consummate self-consciousness", "God-consciousness" and "God-forgetting". There are references to "evil" and "redemption" and "sin" and much else besides.

But when all is said and done everything said is about *wayward awareness levels* and how to correct them.

Schleiermacher is a philosophical psychologist whose religious language amounts to a radical rewriting of Christianity's redemptive premise, his conception of self, mind and consciousness a complex system of liberal religious ideas embedded in an experiential and experimental transcendentalism. There is a theology, of sorts, but when the language of religion is stripped away, what one is left with is an attempt to reset the thinking of his age in terms of a "waking up" process. He himself is awake, he knows that he is awake, and he thinks he knows how he came to be awake. Waking up out of constant mental engagement and into a new form of awareness is his idea of "redemption", failing to wake up a submerged (sinful) state of mind from which we have to rescue ourselves. When awake we have to further prod ourselves awake, find out how to stay awake, then find out how to sustain our awakened state. There are no saviours in the bushes. Having managed to jettison all of his earlier Christian conceptions and definitions of self, other and world, Schleiermacher used the term "God-consciousness" to differentiate higher consciousness states from ordinary consciousness states. And not just in the sense of different idea systems, but in the sense of perception itself undergoing radical change in relation to a state of *consummate* self-awareness. Therein lies a major clue as to what Schleiermacher had in mind as he tackled the Christianity of his day and tried to straighten out its supernaturalists premise, for what he refers to as "God-consciousness" has little to do with the Christian conception of God; it has more to do with a state of mind conducive to the experiences *consummate* self-consciousness, or awareness, can produce. Too great a dependence on ordinary, everyday consciousness had initiated a *forgetting* of the self by the self, a state of self-

insensibility that had amputated the self from its *holeness*. In contrast to this, *consummate* self-consciousness is a *re-membering* (rewiring?) of the self, a literal *reassembly* of the self to itself in moments of *evoked* transparency. And again Jacqueline Marina comes to our aid: "The "evil" condition from which humans need redemption is precisely ... an "obstruction or arrest of the vitality of the higher-consciousness, so that there comes to be little or no union of it with the various determinations of the sensible self-consciousness."²⁵ We are, in other words, out of sync with ourselves, and have to wake up to that fact as best we can.

Is the Hard Question in Philosophy Actually so Hard?

There is in fact nothing terribly profound about any of this; it is, or ought to be, obvious to any thinking person that they spend most of their time in a submerged, mentally-engaged state from which they only occasionally emerge, or seem to emerge. As we saw earlier, however, although Heidegger and Sartre agree with our being almost perpetually mentally engaged and submerged, and therefore intrinsically *absent* from ourselves, they at the same time deny us the capacity to emerge from this submerged state in any real sense; they see this act of emerging, or surfacing, as no more than the "reflecting" self reflexively bending back on itself. We are forever out of step with ourselves and cannot escape except through the illusion of emerging, an illusion we generate out of self-reflection. Self-reflection is a conjectured sense of our own existence built out of what we remember of ourselves in any given moment of time. It is "immediacy" immediately annulled because cognised and stored. As with the postmodern philosopher Don Cupitt, everything "known" is secondary; it is an act of memory. What we see and hear and sense is predicated on our "recognising" what it is we see,

hear or sense. Self, other and world are a series of *recognised* objects with names, the names of which do not even have to register on us because the act of recognising them presupposes an unconscious, tacit registration of their identity. We are locked in Plato's cave and have only life-like shadows of the real to deal with. And as if this were not enough, alongside this perfectly sensible philosophical logic rests the rather depressing fact that consciousness, never mind self-consciousness, is itself an illusion generated out of the self's ingrown interaction with itself, other and world. *And* out of "information" as it turns out.

The philosopher David Chalmers, author of the term "hard question of consciousness", allows for the possibility of *information* having a phenomenal aspect, a dimension of its own equivalent to the subjective, experiential dimension we believe ourselves to have. That is a remarkable notion in that it postulates an undetectable phenomenal dimension to the written word in relation to the meanings that it carries, and suggests that our own sensed phenomenal dimension of mind is actually an interception of this phenomenal dimension of language as it is stored in the brain and made available through memory. And as "meaning" is an adjunct of information, our sense of meaning comes from the same source. For logically, or so it seems, we can't have meaningful meaning outside of language. We are, whether we like it or not, language-talking, language-thinking, language-loving and language-dying beings. We do not *have* language, language *has* us, as Heidegger so confidently declared. The only problem with all of this is that we still don't know what "experience" is, and as "meaning" is an experience of *meaningfulness*, there is an existential blank spot in the middle of the Chalmers' argument. Chalmers is well aware of this blank spot, for as far back as 1995 he talks of there being "an explanatory gap between the functions and experience, and [of needing] an explanatory bridge to

cross it."²⁶ It is interesting to note that Chalmers has not deviated from his original description of the Hard Problem. Nothing has changed; the problem remains unanswered. We still can't adequately explain phenomenal consciousness from a physicalist perspective, and it is in the minds of not a few professionals that we never will.

What struck me immediately about Chalmers' phenomenal information claim was that it presumed the experience of phenomenal, subjective consciousness, to be the direct result of a hidden, halo-like phenomenal dimension resident in information itself, but overlooked the rather obvious fact that such a dimension was, if it existed at all, the result of humans having intentionally *imbued* such information with that dimension in the first place! So also with "meaning", meaning being the essence of coherent reasoning reasoned into existence *by* human beings. Why had the argument run only in one direction? Why only from text to mind; why not from mind to text? The question of whether a text carries a phenomenal aspect is more a matter of metaphysics than outlandish physics, the fact that it conceivably can exist a matter of meaning itself having, by association, a phenomenal dimension. Problem is, at what point does the phenomenal aspect of information become the phenomenal aspect of consciousness, and to what extent does it become such in any given moment? Is memory a "saving up" of information's phenomenal aspect? If so, what makes it hang together as a useful phenomenal realm? Is "knowledge" communicating with "knowledge" and creating the state of meaningful "knowing" suggested by Hegel? Written texts, we should remind ourselves, do not materialise out of thin air; they materialise out of people, and in doing so reflect, to one degree or another, the quality and intensity of "absence" or "presence" *at work* in those people. Why, one has to ask, should a text question a text? What would prompt such a action? Association? Knowledge doubling

back on itself as query? We are *all* necessarily absent during deep mental engagement, *all* submerged or *disappeared* within ourselves as we pursue meaning to its lair, but that does not, as Kant realised, automatically signify an empty existential site; it signifies no more than a momentary emptying of that site of self-aware awareness. If we take this state to be the most appropriate state in which to exist, and from which to conduct our lives, then we run the risk of turning into the automated creatures we so frequently compare ourselves to. And anyway, why should squiggles on a page be more easily awarded a phenomenal aspect than the mind that produced those squiggles? If we can imagine the written word as carrying a phenomenal aspect, why not the human mind?

And again we have to retrace our steps, for as noted elsewhere, the cognitive psychologist Benny Shanon argues for "cognitive-mentations" (our sense of being in existence) as something that can displace "meta-mentations" (thinking and talking), so allowing us to experience ourselves *as* a living organism. There is an intrinsic difference between the feeling of *being* a particular kind of organism or agent, and the feeling of *having* sensory experiences. To confuse such feelings is for him to confuse the quality of being with the quality of sensory experiences had by beings. Self-awareness is then not just another form of conscious engagement, a reflection on, or recollection of, what one is or has experienced; it is a disengagement from engaged mental awareness where sense of self thickens to such an extent that mental engagement with thoughts or objects is brought to a momentary halt: it is rudimentary, disruptive self-consciousness burgeoning towards what it is generally denied - a *consummate* (consummated?) state. This is not Gadamer's unconsciously registered immediacy of the non-temporal self approached from a different angle, it is our phenomenal, subjective

sense of existence experienced and known in a manner thought to be impossible in standard, and non-standard, forms of philosophy such as Heidegger's.

Yet clearly identifiable in Schleiermacher's claims for a state of mind within which awareness topples over into a form of immediate knowing that philosophy, whatever its form, either pulls back into objective parlance, or disallow on the basis that it seems to breach levels of intellectual decorum. We are, in other words, hemmed in by self-justifying objective criteria, corralled within a gateless linguistic compound of our own making, and we are inordinately proud of having accomplished such a feat. Experiential immediacy looms before us as a wall too high for the mind to scale, the problem of what experience is in itself a question we can't even properly evaluate.

George Steiner addresses this question poignantly:

Has beingness passed totally from human reach, or are there processes and embodiments of experience in which the primal sense of essence remains vital and, therefore, recapturable? Is there anything left on which late-twentieth century man can build if he is to seek a homecoming to the house of being?²⁷

Steiner points out that the Greeks referred to "being" as *ousia* or, more fully as *parousia*, the term used in the New Testament's Greek text to denote Christ's return at the "end of time". We tend to forget that the New Testament was first written in Greek, not in the language in which we, in our different language-cultures, first encountered it. In this vein the terms "ousie" and "parousia" carry particular significance in relation to the question of Being, and beings. And so Steiner asks the fundamental question: Is sense of Being recapturable? Are there discoverable processes of embodiment that would allow us access to

Being beyond reflexive, reflective intellectual deduction? Is there anything at all on which we can build a *homecoming* to the "house of Being" that is not bound up with language?

Our dictionaries translate both *ousia* and *parousia* as "substance", and that, Steiner tells us, is a translation with which Heidegger disagreed. For him these words denoted a thing's integral *presentness* or *thereness*, a primal "ground of Being" beyond any notion of the physical. Yet obviously related to the physical in that things physically "exist", a combination of factors that allowed Christianity to theologically perceive Christ's End of Time return *in* physical terms. With the help of Husserl's phenomenological method, Heidegger took up the question of Being, and beings, and with an etymological twist turned this question of meanings in on itself to such an extent that Being became a tantalisingly unattainable experience, the self's essential *immediacy* forever beyond the bounds of knowing. Conceivable, yes, but not experientially capturable. We were stranded in the foyer of ourselves with no hope of re-entry, our sensed "presentness" and "thereness" beyond reach, our primal sense of Being reduced to a Chalmers'-like textual mysticism. An angel with a flaming sword was said to have denied our first parents re-entry to the Garden where the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil stood, and in similar fashion, and for similar reasons, we were now debarred from re-entering the House of Being. Yet Steiner feels compelled to ask "Has beingness passed totally from human reach, or are there processes and embodiments of experience in which the primal sense of essence remains vital and, therefore, capturable?" What, one has to ask, caused this question to surface in Steiner's philosophically sophisticated mind?

End Time, and the End of Time

Christ's expected return at the End of Time, or, more accurately, in the End Time, is the result of that moment being conceived as the end of history. Given that his return in the flesh was a piece of mistaken theological reasoning, however, the "end of history" argument is as fallacious as his "coming back in the flesh" argument. Christ's triumphant return from heaven was an imminently expected event for the early Christian church, the End Time not some distant point in the future, but the end of an extremely present, and unpleasant, Roman Empire. But alas, Christ's return in a blaze of glory did not take place when expected, and as it continued to not take place century after century, the whole idea of an End Time for history transformed itself, stage by stage, into an "end of time" experience for those contemplating Christ's historical and religious significance. This is to say that an expected eschatological event became internalised for those carrying what was left of the original Jewish-sectarian vision, its connection with Christ's return *in the flesh* exchanged for an experience *in the mind*. There again, it may have been the other way round; the end of time as an "experience" may have come first, or run parallel with theology's more literal developments. In fact it could be argued that the former is the more probable.

Christian mysticism, as an offshoot of Judaism, had its roots in Jewish prophetism, and through close association with Jewish thinking carried elements of the Greek mysteries plus overtones of the Platonic and Neoplatonic mystery schools. Christian monks and hermits of the early centuries had retreated to the desert to get away from the restrictions of ecclesiastical Catholicism, their abhorrence of the world reminiscent of the Manichee heretics at their most intense. Influenced by the monastic practices of the Quietist Jews who had fled into the hills during the Maccabean wars, by the Covenanters of Qumran, and by the

Egyptian Therapeutae, they went about their contemplative business with a seriousness that sometimes verged on the manic.²⁸ Looking back to Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist as prototypes, they imbibed elements of Pythagorean, Neoplatonist and Stoic philosophy, their aim being to pursue solitude and soar above the contents of their minds.²⁹ By the year 200, Clement of Alexandria was talking of Christians advancing by progressive elevation of the soul towards the divine, this move towards asceticism being a replacement for martyrdom as an accepted ambition. The contemplative mind could rise towards God using free will to subdue the body and its passions, so avoiding a martyr's death. In this sense, contemplation was martyrdom spiritualised; it was "death" elevated to a new level of comprehension: the death of the ego. New? Again, perhaps not. Death of the ego is more likely to have come first, death of the body *on behalf of* a grocery list of beliefs about Jesus an exercise in futility as Gnostically-inclined Christians realised.

In similar vein did the "End Time" become *the end of time* in contemplative experience, the ego's so-called death actually a form of awareness within which the incessantly chattering conscious mind ceased in its engagement with internal and external reality. In this *non-engaged* state "time" stood still, and in standing still the barrier between self and self, self and other, self and world fell away into a profound silence. A whole new kind of reality was on offer, a state of mind within which cognitive-mentations displaced meta-mentations to such an extent that associative thinking and the mind's internal squabbings stuttered to a halt. Language's manic need to generate language out of itself could be silenced, the mind's state of incessant *babel* exchanged for experiences of egoless cognition which, contradictorily, could

nevertheless be re-membered. Return to the ordinary world of interaction was inevitable, but the occurrence and, more importantly, the *reoccurrence* of such states among disparate individuals showed that an alternative state of mind was not only available to mind, but that such states were a natural part of the mind's economy. Religions came and religions went, but our capacity for *consummate* self-consciousness remained a constant possibility.

Experience Versus thingness

In contemplative, meditative terms, the act of "remembering" has nothing whatever to do with remembering as it is generally understood. In this special sense remembering the self is an *out-of-time* experience that does not involve mentations that take other mentations as objects of observation. So says Shanon, and in saying so he throws down a gauntlet to many of his professional colleagues. What this professor of cognitive psychology seems to be saying is that cognitive-mentations regularly and naturally displace meta-mentations throughout the course of a day. We don't realise that this is taking place, but it is those moments of *emerging back into the self as the self* that constitute our sense of personal existence and identity. Without such moments our *sense of identity* would collapse in on itself. We can dismiss and deny the existence of such moments, but when they gather and intensify during sickness, trauma or bereavement, there is no ignoring them. Caught up in the interstices of our own natures, and in the natures of others, we sense what is generally missing in our dealings with self, other and world: namely, ourselves *as* "living" beings.

Due to ingrained notions about emotion and run-away subjectivity, however, we are soon back in "normal" mode, any sense of our looming

depths skillfully brushed aside. When, alternatively, sense of self is allowed to gather through acts of disciplined attention in normal, trauma-free, circumstances (meditative practice, or during creative acts), the result is altogether different. The ego-self's natural, surface-bound need and desire to cognitively capture and examine everything it perceives through objective mind (weak subjectivity) is replaced by glimmers of strong subjectivity (weak objectivity) where transparency of perception renders the surface self cognitively mute. Not all in one go, of course; it takes time to train the ego towards this kind of transference. We have to consciously work with this naturally occurring state, get to know it, develop it, appreciate its quirky demands and obey its laws. Strong subjectivity has its own laws; it is not anarchic, and can only be invoked when the ego-self reaches a certain level of maturity. It is then an immediately detectable state if you have the key to its arising in your possession, the key Husserl and Schleiermacher seem to have possessed.

What has to be understood here is that Shanon's cognitive-mentations are by nature "experiences", they are *not* "things" to be cognitively examined. Self is not a "thing"; it cannot be "objectified", and in being beyond objectification it is necessarily beyond *i*-identification. But not beyond "knowing" *in its own terms*. What we have to do is find out what its own terms for knowing are. Which means, in practice, that we have to find out what "practice" means in terms of process. There is a process to be followed, a process that arises and perfects itself naturally within the mind as the mind turns its attention towards the self. This *turning* is a reversal of Heidegger's "turn" towards a redemptive poetry of language; it is essentially a turning away from language and its range of meanings on behalf of (not in search of) a sense of meaning that transcends meanings. It is a wordless stepping into the *void of the self* by degree that renders the mind silent, and in being silent, receptive.

Basically, it is a *shutting up* rather than a *shutting down* of the mind. On returning to their normal, everyday senses, such individuals are as interested in ideas as they always were, in fact generally more so. They have something to report, and what they report is often curiously philosophical in nature.

In experiential terms this is a confronting introduction to psyche that only a stable ego can bear. Practitioners of this kind of awareness, this kind of self-knowing are on the cusp of experiencing the self in its transparency, its nothingness, its "holeness" or, to be more exact, its "formlessness", and in knowing such find themselves approached, *literally* "approached" by what the physicist-philosopher Bernard d'Espagnat's describes as the "nonseparable Big Whole" as a developing *presence*. For as suggested elsewhere, if reality really is an interconnected whole beyond any conception of wholeness (Plotinian "Oneness" beyond number), then by definition we too are part of that Oneness and integral to its capacity for self-scrutiny. That is a dizzyingly difficult concept to take on board, but is it any more difficult than Heidegger's realisation that we are, all of us, an expression of "world" in the deepest of contractual terms? All d'Espagnat has done is broaden Heidegger's conceptual base to include "cosmos", and that is not in any way special in terms of logic as Thomas Nagel has realised. If this conception of our natures is taken to its logical conclusion, however, then the reason we believe mathematics to be our own creation is because we ourselves are composed of the "mathematics of matter" *in this integrated sense*. One and one may make two in our normal world; but in this other world the mathematics of the One do not even make one. We have entered a dimension of experience beyond *thingness* where reality expresses itself more in alignment with the cutting-edge theories of quantum physics than with the comfortable one-plus-one-

equals-two-logic of the physicalist-driven sciences. This tells us, and tells us plainly, that "physicalism" has to be seen through for what it is: an *attitude of mind* that uses scientific facts to bolster its own dour, flat and lifeless notion of what it means to be a human being.

References and Notes:

- 1) Washburn, Michael, 'Rethinking the Notion of the Ego', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* Vol. 19, No. 3-4, (date?) p.194.
- 2) Ibid, p.195.
- 3) Ibid, p.197.
- 4) Ibid, p.201.
- 5) Ibid, p.202..
- 6) Ibid, p.211.
- 7) Ibid, p.212.
- 8) Ibid, p.215.
- 9) Ibid, p.204.
- 10) Ibid, pp.203-208
- 11) Ibid, p.204.
- 12) Ibid.
- 13) Ibid, p.205.
- 14) Ibid.
- 15) Pinker, Stephen, *The Blank Slate*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2002. pp.34-35.
- 16) Washburn, Michael, 'Rethinking the Notion of the Ego', (see above) p. 203.
- 17) Ibid.
- 18) Ibid.
- 19) Ibid, pp.203-4.
- 20) Ibid, p.204.
- 21) Jung, Carl, *Man and His Symbols*, Doubleday, 1969. p.66.
- 22) Marina, Jacqueline, 'Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto', *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, Oxford, 2008. p.6.
- 23) Ibid, p.7.
- 24) Ibid, p.8.
- 25) Ibid, p.7.
- 26) Chalmers, David, 'Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3,1995. pp. 200-219.
- 27) Steiner, George, *Heidegger*, Fontana, UK, 1978. pp. 39, 46. See also Miri Albahari's paper 'Witness-Consciousness, it's Definition, Appearance and Reality', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2009, where he argues for a mode-neutral form of awareness with intrinsic phenomenal character over and above for-me-ness as a mental state. When introspected in the normal fashion, consciousness may seem to be a mere emptiness, but it can in fact be distinguished as a mode-neutral mental state if approached not as an "object" to be detected, but as a "condition" to be *sensed* over and above objective awareness. There is a phenomenal *feel* to consciousness not reducible to the distinguishable threads of colour, taste or emotion which, although unable to directly observe itself, is nevertheless aware of itself as something immediately present in experience.
- 28) Frend, W.H.C., *The Early Church*, Fortress Pressp.188.

29) Ibid.

30) Davies, Paul, *The Mind of God*, Simon & Schuster, 1992, p.226. As with Bernard d'Espagnat, Davies is aware of rational inquiry's limitations. In this vein he first warns us that "the axiomatic method of making logical deductions from given assumptions cannot in general provide a system which is both provably complete and consistent" (p.225), then directs us to John Wheeler's "participatory universe" where the observer and the observed world are closely interwoven: hence Wheeler's notion of "observer-participancy". Which produces a curious type of "double-looking" in which "it is only through acts of observation that the physical reality of the world becomes actualized; yet this same physical world generates the observers that are responsible for concretizing its existence." (Shades of Plotinian Oneness?) Davies adds: "Furthermore, this concretizing extends even to the laws of physics themselves." (p.224) There are then no "eternal" laws; the laws of physics must have come into existence with the big bang." Then comes the suggesting that in spite of existence having no apparent explanation that we can rationally pinpoint, the whole edifice, including ourselves, may not be absurd or meaningless; an understanding of its "existence and properties lie outside the usual categories of rational human thought." Philosophers will bridle at such a suggestion. But if the refined language of mathematics is itself riddled with paradox and uncertainty, what are the chances of philosophical language doing any better? Heidegger attempts the impossible, but he fails. Davies' answer to this problem is startling: "Is there a route to knowledge - even "ultimate knowledge" - that lies outside the road of rational scientific inquiry and logical reasoning. Many people claim there is. It is called mysticism." (p.226)

Iris Murdoch makes much the same point as Davies in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (Vintage, UK, 2003) where (p.175), dealing with the problem of "immediate" knowledge, she says "The rejection of Descartes by Wittgenstein, later by structuralists, rests on the connection of knowledge with concepts. The Platonic 'true knowledge' must ... be understood in a moral-religious sense which pictures salvation or enlightenment as wisdom or true vision, brought about by a refinement of desire in daily living, and involving a clearer perception, including literal perception, of the world. Education is moral education ... Both the savant and the saint know more and see more than the ordinary man. The Theory of Forms is suspended, sometimes awkwardly, between the logical and mystical."

31) Ibid, pp. 227-228

32) Ibid, p.232.

33) Ibid, p.196.

34) Ibid, p.231.

35) Ibid, p.226.

36) Ibid, p.232.

37) Ibid, p.141.

38) Ibid.

39) Ibid, p.142.

40) Ibid, p.151.

41) Ibid.

42) Ibid, p.141.

