

What is Mind?

Francis gives two ways of looking at mind: the first is as a flow of thoughts, sensations and perceptions; the second is as a bio-computer. In a recent satsang, we discussed both viewpoints. Francis started by explaining that in this teaching, the first viewpoint is the most important:

FL: The distinction which is essential to what we are talking about here is between perception and reality; the distinction between that which is perceived and the reality of both that which perceives and that which is perceived. So that's the distinction which is essential. As a result, my definition of the mind is an experiential one. I define 'mind' as whatever is perceived. In other words, mind is experientially phenomenal perception – meaning bodily sensations, external sense perceptions and thoughts. These three categories are constitutive of what mind is experientially. And that's the type of mind I talk about.

[Francis Lucille, 19th December 2020: *Devotion Should Be Towards The Truth*]

That definition does not imply that mind has any kind of real existence. It exists only as a concept. Here is some further clarification:

FL: Mind is that which allegedly is made out of all the perceptions. It's the place where all the perceptions get unified. And it is that which has a special form of perception called 'recollections' – a selective memory that creates the impression of a separate entity called mind. Consciousness¹ is that which perceives the perceptions.

Now mind is made of perceptions. So mind doesn't really exist as such. Nobody has ever seen a mind. What we have perceived are perceptions. But mind exists as a concept. We have never experienced a mind. Consciousness directly experiences perceptions. So our experience is made of perceptions being perceived by consciousness. Since these perceptions appear, exist and disappear in the consciousness or to the consciousness that perceives them, in our experience, they are made of consciousness. So in fact at every moment, we only perceive consciousness and consciousness alone, in our experience.

[Francis Lucille: [*On Perception, Brain, Mind and Consciousness*](#)]

In many non-dual teachings, awareness and mind, or that which perceives and that which is perceived, are considered to be the same, or at least very similar. But as Francis says, it is important to distinguish the two. One way to look at it is that awareness is continuous and never-changing, whereas mind is discontinuous and ever-changing. Mind is ephemeral, it comes and goes, whereas awareness is eternal, solid, dependable. It is in the absence of mind, in the gap between thoughts and perceptions that awareness shines. Awareness is the reality of all that is. If we see awareness as being mind-like or thought-like, then we give it a flavour of insubstantiality rather than reality.

To overcome the habit of seeing awareness or consciousness as mind-like, Francis suggests that we try to see awareness as granite-like, or reality-like:

FL: You have to understand that awareness is not mind-like – that's very important. You have to understand that awareness is reality-like. If we asked many people in Advaita, 'in your opinion, is awareness more thought-like or granite-like?', most of them would say, I'm afraid, 'awareness is more thought-like than granite-like'.

¹ In this teaching, the words 'consciousness' and 'awareness' are used synonymously.

That is utterly wrong. It is absolutely wrong. Because that points at the left-over of identification of awareness with mind. Then for those, they have to convince themselves that awareness is more granite-like than thought-like, to counter-act their belief system. They have to see the world as real, at every possible moment, to counter-act their belief that mind is more real than the world. The belief that mind is more real than the world is a mistake, because it is tantamount to saying that awareness, reality, is more mind-like than world-like.

[Francis Lucille: 21/01/2021 *Only God Is*]

Francis uses the concept of mind being a bio-computer to show that understanding is not a function of mind – it belongs to a different realm. In an interview with Jeanric Meller at the recent online SAND conference, he shows how we can use a thought-experiment to see that the mind has no access to meaning:

FL: The mind doesn't understand – the mind as a bio-computer. You know, in Artificial Intelligence, they have this Chinese Room thought-experiment. Let's take an example. You have a Chinese guy who doesn't speak either English or French. He is in a room. In this room he has all the French-English dictionaries at his disposal, a lot of bilingual books. And he's given a set of instructions which are similar to the set of commands in a computer translation program. So now he's in this room and he's given a text to translate from French [*into English*]. He doesn't speak French or English. He's Chinese. He starts by translating using the commands of the program, one by one. The text is relatively simple and so it comes up from a French text into an English text, just as a computer program would do. And an English reader, or a bilingual reader would say 'yes, this translation is good'. And this translation conveyed perfectly the meaning from French to English. However, the Chinese guy who did the translation had no access to the meaning, since he didn't understand it. So that brings the question of meaning, because a computer has no access to the meaning. Artificial Intelligence doesn't somehow have access to the meaning.

JM: *And where does the meaning live? The meaning is not in the text itself, either.*

FL: Yes, so in this example, what this gedanken experiment really illustrates is that a computer and a human brain that is envisioned in a materialistic perspective, as a bio-computer, doesn't have access to meaning. The common religion in academia right now is that there is no difference between mind and brain. That there is a one-to-one correspondence between mind and brain. Now brain is a bio-computer. Brain is matter, made of quarks and gluons. So brain therefore, with the example of the Chinese room, brain has no access to meaning. Therefore, if mind is brain, mind has no access to meaning. And I'd agree with that. So I agree: [*according to this model*] mind is brain, and in this case, we, as consciousness, have access to meaning. Therefore we, as consciousness are *more* than mind and brain.

JM: *So all the mind can really do is get inspired from that realm which is bigger than itself, see its own limitation, because if you really look hard the mind can show itself its own limitation, and be open to receive reality.*

FL: Yes. But what is beautiful is that this experience of understanding is one that we all share. It's not something foreign to us. But all we need is to be open to the possibility that that part of us which is open to meaning – in other words, the part of us that understands, the part of us that perceives – is not physical, mechanical, dependent upon and subjected to the limitations of the body-mind. So that opens the possibility that this part of us, awareness that perceives, instead of

being confined and contingent, is in fact universal.

[Francis Lucille 22/12/2020, SAND: [Truth Seeking, Science and Pandemic](#)]

Although it's not Francis's preferred definition, conceptualising the human mind as a bio-machine can be helpful in eradicating the feeling of being a separate entity with a separate consciousness. We have a deep intuition that we are more than just a machine. Here is the part of my dialogue with Francis in which he explains the bio-machine model in more detail:

FL: Now mind can be understood, and is commonly understood as a machine, as a function, and we can venture into this area of conversation, and I do sometimes, and I'm more than willing to do this, but then we have to remember that in this case we are not talking about the mind as we experientially know it, which was my first definition of mind. But now we are talking about something different. We are talking about models of perception. Just as in physics the experience of bumping into objects is very different from a model that tells us that the resistance we feel is due to electromagnetic forces in the vicinity of the atoms, the molecules, that the objects we are bumping into are comprised of. So that is a model. This model about atoms, particles etc. is an evolutionary model. As physics progresses, you get a better model and a better model, but you never get the right model.

So regarding the mind, when I venture into these considerations, as a machine, we usually have two schools of thought. We usually have the purely materialistic school of thought. And this school of thought according to which the subtle world doesn't exist, awareness doesn't exist – it's simply an emergent property of complex mechanical systems – that's a religion. The current religion. And what I am trying to do when I discuss these models is to give a good intuition that machines don't understand. And to that end I use, for instance the Chinese room, a gedanken experiment which drives the nail into the coffin of the theory according to which machines understand. So there's a distinction between understanding and simply processing data. A machine processes data in a blind fashion without understanding the meaning of what it processes.

So somehow meaning and understanding which are very related to one another are not demonstrably a property of machines, of mechanical or material devices. So then the human body is a machine of sorts. The atoms it is comprised of, the particles it is comprised of are subjected to the laws of physics and therefore it can be construed effectively as a machine. But then, having understood that machines don't think, that machines don't understand – it depends what thinking means. If thinking means to process information, to memorise information etc., then yes, machines can think. But understanding meaning – no. So what this incursion into mind, models of mind, function of mind enables us to more clearly see, is that no matter how sophisticated machines and the human body may be, the human body is a machine. And as long as it is a machine it cannot have access to meaning, cannot understand and cannot perceive. So I use this incursion into the realm of mind and function only to give a hint to the fact that understanding belongs to a different realm than the realm of physical objects. That's all. ...

JB: OK, so the creative aspect, the intuitive aspect, does this belong more to this flow of experience, flow of thoughts, flow of ideas maybe?

FL: The thoughts in and by themselves don't understand. Creativity belongs to the realm of understanding and to the realm of perceiving. That which perceives is that which understands. It is this part which is not inherent in the machine. Spiritual people usually say 'yes, a machine will never be intelligent, like a human'. They are both right and wrong. When they say 'a machine

can never be intelligent', they are right. But when they say 'a machine can never be intelligent as a human being', they are wrong, because human beings are not more intelligent than machines. Because human beings don't perceive. Human bodies don't perceive. Only awareness is intelligent. Only awareness perceives. And awareness is not prisoner of any machine, be it mechanical, or be it this human computer, bio-computer. You see it makes so much sense.

You know, humanism is somehow a mistake. Because humanism is very limiting. It limits intelligence. And it limits love. It reduces intelligence, it reduces love, it reduces understanding to a piece of matter. So we have to liberate ourselves from these preconceived ideas that objects are intelligent, that objects in and by themselves perceive etc. We have to liberate awareness, intelligence, love, understanding from the prison of objects – animate or inanimate. We have to give it back to God. Give back to God what belongs to God; give back to Caesar, to the objects, to the world, what belongs to the world.

[Francis Lucille, 19th December 2020: *Devotion Should Be Towards The Truth*]

Towards the end of our discussion, I asked Francis about the idea of reincarnation through the energies of mind surviving death.

JB: There's a belief that seems to be quite common in the non-dual community, that mind survives the death of the body, and there can be some kind of reincarnation with the mind, or the energies of the mind living on in a different body— a whirlpool analogy is usually used, that I think comes from Bernardo Kastrup. That the mind is like a whirlpool and when the body dies, the whirlpool disperses and then it forms another whirlpool. I feel quite uncomfortable with that analogy. It's possible, but it doesn't seem very likely to me. It seems to be more a panacea for people who are scared of death. What would you say about that?

FL: Yes. It doesn't feel uncomfortable, but I kind of agree with you – apart from the discomfort. We have to understand something: it's part of the religion of Hinduism. It's found in other religions, of course – it's found all over, actually. It's found in some Gnostic religions – so Christian religion. It's found in some Muslim traditions even. So that's a common thing. However, it is totally independent from Advaita and non-duality, because all of that is phenomenal. So from the vantage point of Advaita, everything which is phenomenal is a dream. So you may have many theories about the dream, but no matter what, reincarnation would be part of the dream. So if you talk about our dreams, the sky is the limit. You can have whatever dream you want. So everything's possible. It depends what you choose, as awareness. If you choose the dream of reincarnation, that's fine. The bad dream to choose would be the dream of hell, I guess. That would be choosing the nightmare.

So what we have to understand is that sages that were in India such as Ramana Maharshi, they were talking to people who came from this religion, from this belief. They had to kind of admit to their belief in order to speak to them on their level, and take them to the higher level. It doesn't mean they ultimately believed that reincarnation was so.

[Francis Lucille, 19th December 2020: *Devotion Should Be Towards The Truth*]

Contemplation

Understanding takes place when a thought comes to an end. Understanding has no object. It understands itself. Understanding is one of the ways in which consciousness reveals itself to itself.

[Francis Lucille: *The Perfume of Silence*]