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### Being with beings, being being and Being

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#### Abstract

A phenomenological account of the contents of consciousness and the flow of consciousness points to an experience of reality that is difficult to define, understand and grasp. One feels immersed within an experience that is said to occur in time-space. Yet, precisely what it means to be “in” space or “in” time is not at all clear. In addition, one occupies this space-time with other beings, each having a level of conscious being from the inanimate, “dumb” stuff of the world to more sentient plant life; even more aware animal life and thence one’s fellow human beings, to whom

one imputes a similar occasion of conscious awareness. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which one cannot quite articulate what it means to be so placed – is it an alien world, a solipsistic world, a relational world? Is there a higher consciousness or being that supervenes or underlies all such relationships? It is such questions that I will grapple with in the hope of somewhat understanding philosophically what it means to be a being and more precisely a being within world, within Being itself.

**Keywords:** Being, Philosophical, Determinism

#### 1. Being being

Self consists of many levels. There is the biological self, for example the need to defecate or eat or simply breathe. There is the psychological self in which one experiences self as compounded of a history that informs one’s choices, feelings, and intuitions. There is a social self, defining the ways one interacts with others and in relation to societies systems of organization. There is an intellectual dimension through which can calculate rationally and “catch” ideas. The idea of a “spiritual” dimension is not at all clear, but one can perhaps define it as the combination of each such level in a self-aware manner especially where the intellectual dimension leads to more subtle thought-processes and a higher dimensional sense of being in the world. By that I mean, a sense in which a unitary consciousness is formed both as projection within self and in the external world proper.

To be a human being then consists of various levels of awareness. The medium by which this is made possible are the senses or more precisely, how the brain perceives and interprets sense data that give one a “picture” of the external world, thence leading to thought-acts, speech-acts and possibly taking actual action itself. Such remarks may seem obvious, yet it is not at all that obvious since it is not necessarily the case that a human being is aware of so being or of what such experiences are.

Moreover, if one reverts to first principles, it is highly curious walking through space as time ebbs forward. And what of an enduring identity, the sense that the person of yesterday is the same in fundamental ways to the self of today or tomorrow – change itself being cosmetic and not altering self-identity as such. Yet again such a foundation if you like cannot be taken for granted. What am I moving through and where is this time factor? Moreover, in what sense is the me through this flow of time-space: what makes myself as a 3-year-old or 10 year or youth or adult the self-same individual?

Had I different parents; being born in a different country; subject to different education and so on, then in what sense would the I know of myself now have been the very same “I”? If you retort and say one’s “I” is necessarily given such parameters in the first place is through sheer necessity. then the sense of self must have provided such influence to form the me, I think I know. If that is the case, there is a sense of unavoidable determinism, and this implies a certain lack of free will and volition to form and change self. If determinism is admitted, it is not at all clear in what sense I have formed myself and indeed, in what sense I can consciously change it as such. If there is an indeterminism at play, then is self the work of chance?

Eliding such philosophical questions which may be impossible to resolve, my experience of self, my conscious awareness, and the sense that “I can do otherwise” seems to suggest that I am the center of my universe, and I can enact change and form or sculpt the self. While such apparent freedom may result in an Existential abyss, it may also grant self-acting on self as the crucial constituent in forming an enduring and healthy identity.

Yet the very experience of self is not in a vacuum and includes other selves; material things and societal relationship in which

one plays some kind of “role”. In this sense, there is no actual experience of self within self itself as such, but only in some kind of relationship. On a very rudimentary level, I am dependent on the very air I breathe, on the functioning of my body and on the harmonious relationship I have in different spheres of life, such as family and work.

What then is the essence of self-minus all such relationships one cannot know for self is embroiled in a symbiotic relationship on all levels of being: the inanimate; the animal; other humans and the realm of ideas or metaphysical notions, often simply followed blindly as in the case of traditional religious systems and the like, without a critical stance or philosophical speculation.

Moreover, self is embodied which means that access to other beings is via a certain medium which itself only “knows” other through another medium or body. The light or energy within one’s body and within other bodies which may now be termed “vessels” may be difficult to access and hence Buber made a distinction between I -it; I – It and I – T/thou relationships. In any event, light perse is unknowable but through the non-transparent guise of the mediating vessel.

## 2. Being with beings

The kabbalist mystics divide the world into various levels of being, similar to Aristotle and other mystical traditions. According to this hierarchy, the base consists of inanimate matter, then plant life, followed by animal life and at the apex, we have human beings. A simple materialist, scientific ordering suggests the same ascending order of being and coheres with an evolutionary picture of reality.

Inanimate matter consists of atoms and chemicals that form the basis of the “stuff” of the universe and thence give rise to plant life that while rooted in the earth yet move and grow. Animal life develops further: it can move, communicate in more obvious ways, are said to have some kind of conscious experience as feelings and possibly rudimentary thoughts, even a degree of rationality. A human being may be defined by an ability to reason, talk and have a higher level of conscious awareness and act on the universe to great effect, changing its very landscape in the process, possibly even reengineering it.

In this regard, one might consider industry – the transformation of raw materials into usable products and services – as a mode of relationship to other beings in order to grant greater benefit to a society. In such terms, food, transport, clothing, security, energy, housing, and human capital (education) and health are all aspects of dealing with matter for optimal effect. Of course, how such elements are to be coordinated, the control of business and the overall political dispensation and philosophical paradigm that entails the use of all such dimensions is something that has long been grappled with. Dialectical materialism suggests the constant transitoriness of matter without a Hegelian synthesis or Absolute and posits that in changing the mode of production – the economic base – best results can be achieved. Philosophy is thus an outcome of economics, rather than the other way around and the point of philosophy then is not just to interpret the world, but to change it through such material constraints.

The control of other beings through systems of “organization” creates the great factories of modern life; the open-endedness of the transfer of information digitally; class structure and political control. This has often been the root

of struggle, even war. It is not necessarily the case that developed countries enhance the self through touting individualism as the central tenant of freedom. Media, popular opinion, a materialistic outlook, and the extreme challenge to conservative “family values” often create its own kind of individual, no freer than the citizen of societies of the past where uniformity and adherence to the system is a given.

Integral to such organization is the written word, the number system and models or idealizations of phenomenon. The word enables things to be abstracted as separate objects. Thus, language is necessarily dualistic, and the sounds uttered or written down are conventional meanings within a symbolic notation that enable the transference of ideas, concepts, feelings, and various meanings. The alphabet is thus a tool of civilization, taming nature so that it can be understood and manipulated. Numbers function similarly. Beyond simply counting – a skill not to be underestimated – is a level of abstraction that can help predict and solve real-life scenarios as well as comprehend the inner processes of nature itself. Quantifiable data turns the stuff of the world into specific number-patterns. These patterns can in turn describe underlying processes. Finally, models and idealizations enable one to extract from the data a possible way of collecting it together via an image that prunes the phenomenon in question of the extraneous, so that only the kernel or essence or the essential aspects are focused on. This in turn may lead to a theoretical structure, again a useful tool in comprehending the world, without the “messiness” of an excessive amount of information where no pattern is discernable. For a theory, while entailing idealization is not itself an idealization. That is to say, a theory presupposes a correspondence between itself and the external world. Albeit mediated by a symbolic, formal language.

The problem lies in that language, numbers and models intercede between us and the world and it is not clear whether one has become lost in these structures – Derrida’s “web-of-language” – or yet refers to the external world itself.

The problem of separating self from world is that world is processed through the self: one inhales, and exhales air commonly known as breathing; one ingests and defecates food commonly known as eating and exited waste products and one even acquires knowledge, commonly known as learning and may also teach which is a process of giving akin to exhalation and digestive parity. In view of this the inanimate, plant, animal, and human (even if one is vegetarian, there may be a residual animal content) interact so that the self-separate from the world is a non-existent notion; it simply does not exist. We are still the babe cooing and ogling and gesticulating and pointing only now inarticulate unconsciousness becomes articulate consciousness.

And what of procreation and the sexual act as the ultimate paradigm of forces uniting and pleasure given and gained. This too includes the lower appetites (inanimate and plant) as well as the higher faculties (animal and human) and hints at the inseparability of self with another. The kind of vision I am outlining is one which overcomes dualism.

In other words, rather than say the biological is just the biological, is it also not a dance of the aesthetic play of what is called “self” or “being” and “world” or “other beings”? I would argue in the affirmative considering consciousness is

precisely the awareness of such play. That is why the simple act of being conscious of one's breathe is called meditation. Does the rational necessarily lead to the mystical? And is this not so out of vogue today? No matter. In any event, access to "other" is via the mediation of a vessel, and while the vessel promises energy (money represents wealth, power and prestige; a relationship reflects on ego, pleasure and a potential nuclear family; education implies work, prestige and the so-called power of knowledge and so on...), perhaps the light is encumbered and the vessel or image or medium is deceptive, that attachment to things, however subtle is a movement away from soul which is precisely the negation of the body, vessel, medium itself in favor of the intangible. Yet, what is this intangibility since self and world by definition are packaged in discrete bits of stuff as is the very nature of light itself even as a physical concept.

### 3. Being

Bishop Berkely postulated a transcendent Being that in so perceiving the universe causes it to continue to be, to exist. Plato hypothesized a metaphysical substrate more true and real than the world as ordinarily perceived, suggesting a higher dimension of Being. Religious thought which has influenced mankind throughout the ages argues that the ground of all being is divine (though disagree as to what this may entail or what this divine is) and is the only ultimate, self-sufficient power, eternal and unchanging even as the phenomenal world is transient. Scientific endeavor works with the axiom that an ultimate abstraction, namely a concept we call "universe" exists as that which contains all that is, implying a kind of ultimate Being (the universe itself), though it may have a merely material quantifiable reality open to measurement.

If one sees the universe as "pieces" of the original form, as it were, then all beings in all its levels of manifestation as hitherto argued, emanate from this unitary source. Cosmology in its sense of the initial point contains such an idea. In fact, the very idea of science is that complexity resolves itself into simplicity, just as say the hustle and bustle of life on earth photographed from space reveals an almost spherical unity and simplicity or the patterns of stars form a galaxy which has a distinguishable form. In biology, the intricate complexity of the DNA wind themselves into single form: a cell. In physics, the movement of particles at light speed resolves itself into an atom, perhaps not the ultimate building block, but nevertheless a theory that supports the idea of basic components of all matter. And of course, chemistry, the foundation of life itself for all its complexity deals with a limited framework of elements with specific properties as defined in the periodic table and it is this that gives rise to the movement of things, inanimate and living or conscious.

Even in the realm of the cultural and the humanities, one might say every story has a beginning, a middle and an end. Movements in art, literature, music and so on reveals specific phases and styles so that the plethora of creative expression is simplified into specific periods, methods, and forms. The same kind of "simplification" occurs when focusing on a single artist.

Now insofar as such a process applies to our understanding, one might postulate an overarching, single form or energy that includes "all things". Since this concept itself is unwavering or unchanging, otherwise it would itself require further simplification, it is thus eternal, infinite, self-

sufficient and the like, and this one might so label simply *Being*.

Yet the problem arises when one considers how metaphysical notions become themselves sacrosanct and modes of controlling others, thus rather than *Being* functioning as a transcendent idea, it becomes a way of mobilizing others, control and often even precludes a robust understanding of nature. This is clear when one considers the slow rise of science and how it had to fight prevailing orthodoxy in its inception; how art itself took centuries to extricate itself from religious iconography and political power-structures (although these probably still lurk, concealed and hidden). Thus, talk of Being becomes talk of power relations, rather than a spiritual oasis in an ever-changing universe.

One might hold the viewpoint that intellectual research of the natural world or of thought itself – such as mathematics or philosophy (the former perhaps self-referential in its pure form and the latter perhaps reduced to logic as well) – that such pursuits will result in a peeling away of layers and a grasping of the conceptual stratum of the world In Itself. A less grandiose picture sees such analysis simply conform to a game which gives one truth of the external world or just relative truth (physics will have different laws on another planet, for example) and may simply be an epiphenomenon of other processes of the researcher or researchers themselves – psychological, biological, and so on – rather than thought itself untainted by the vicissitudes of life.

Moreover, the very basis of logic and mathematics has been explained by Gödel as incomplete and the fundamental theory of sets beset by contradiction before it even begins and less theoretically, in experimental conditions nature does not conform to either being one thing or another but changes as per experimental set-up, resulting in the uncertainty principle of quantum mechanics.

Is there really such a thing as Being itself or The Being or the Being in being? If all things are being, then it shares properties with Being as it does with other beings. Yet since Being is the set of all sets, then it must contain itself. But if it contains itself then it is not a set of all sets – there is always a larger set of all sets. But this is contradictory. So, one cannot begin with Being nor argue that Being includes all beings. Does this impasse not stem from the natural process of thought, namely that it divides for in order to see there needs to be darkness too. In order for there to be sense, there must be differentiation. Nature then is the process of the transmutation of form including time-space itself, evolving in observable phases.

Such intellectualization prioritizes sight, where in fact other modalities – such as touch – are means by which being "reaches out" to the other. In consuming products and services forms change, grow or retard as the case may be and draw energy or get sick. Organism and environment: it is just that humans use also the organ of reason, and not just instinct or some sort of preprogramming that appears to characterize other levels of being. However, a proposition of this kind is highly contentious as humans can be reduced to the inanimate and instinctual in probably most cases and in view of the tumult of history. Such is the nature of embodiment so that the mystical dimension would conceivably also contain such a limitation in form and medium and a partial apprehension of the subtleties of any notion of infinity.