Questions on Brain, Mind and Matter

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Abstract – Without any pretension of originality, the author discusses some opinions regarding the relationships between brain, mind and matter.

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1. Overture, Scherzo and Finale

It may be relevant to begin this unpretentious effort under the aegis of the first words of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus [1]. My aim is to discuss some relationships between brain, mind and matter as I presently understand them, giving all the credit for any aesthetically pleasant / useful conclusion to the works of a number of philosophers that have somehow influenced me.

In the subsystem of our current natural and scientific languages, we may define the nervous system (sometimes referred to simply as brain with no intention of giving rise to biological imprecision) as being composed of a material substrate akin to that of the remainder of nature (“…quia pulvis es…”). The brain, however, is assumed here to engender a sort of formal system over which, for instance, the most elevated as well as the quotidian logical reasoning take place. We also consider the brain to be able to propitiate other forms of experience, which are, for instance, unconscious and mystical. Naturally, I kindly invite the reader to disagree with me in this as in other respects.

The emergence of these varieties leads, I believe, to the concept of mind, and, sometimes, to the concept of soul. The point I would like to stress is that, from an epistemological standpoint, we know the world by means of the world itself. Nature revolves upon itself, so to say. This leads me to conclude that the fabric of the universe is the fabric of our thoughts, feelings, theories and mystical revelations. Putting aside any sort of dualism, one ponders that “all things are full of gods” (Thales) [2]. We are also led to a clear caveat with respect to the application of logical-mathematical and scientific reasoning to nature as “a thing in itself”, a risk in which we incur in an era where an academic is not necessarily a scholar nor a humanist. In a more luminous mood, we are faced with a sea of reflections as to which extent the fabric of the universe does open itself to the contemplation of our (primitive?) mind in its fullest sense. I confess that thinking about this leads me to neoplatonic feelings and also brings to my mind Hofstadter’s discussions about “strange loops” [3].

To conclude, maybe this perception can strengthen in us a feeling of oneness with all (not only the “living”) beings, something our society is desperately in need of. It also raises interesting questions concerning the problem of strong artificial intelligence (different types of intelligence, natural computing, computing as a purely human concept etc.).

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References