

**6 - An entity inside me**

Q: Hello, Robert.

I loved *The Ten Thousand Things*.

Do you no longer feel that there is an entity inside that has a will or makes decisions? Is it a constant experience for you that this aliveness is just a “bubbling up” of feelings, thoughts, and sensations, without an “I” inside here that makes this happen?

A: I have no sensation at all of anything “inside” me. Everything experienced—mental, physical, or emotional—feels part and parcel of the same entirely mysterious happening.

Are you really aware experientially, phenomenologically, of such an entity, or is the “entity inside you” more like an idea you have been trained to believe in, but cannot actually locate or feel if you try?

Q: So that means there isn’t even an inside—just a whole, unbroken experience that is completely transitory. Is that right?

A: Well, “*completely*” transitory might be going too far. For me, there is a kind of ongoing sense of being which, as I have detailed elsewhere, is confected of various separate elements, both mental and physiological, but that sense is not under anyone’s control. It just *is*. As I said, what I experience is a mystery to me and I have no basis for explaining it to myself, much less to anyone else.

Q2: So the experience of “deciding” when to finally get my butt out of bed on a Sunday morning is also just part of that same mysterious happening. Right?

A: Yes. Countless factors, most of them entirely unconscious, bear upon each moment of apparent decision. Ego-myself gets the news and constructs a story *after the fact* about itself being the decider who “made” a decision. The conscious mental dithering over a “decision” to move a part of the body—keeping to your example, your butt—actually takes place *after* the brain has already prepared to carry out the movement. So, what is experienced as a conscious decision was never a *choice* at all in the ordinary meaning of that word, but a *report* of the resultant—the outcome—of countless negotiations among different parts of the brain and other parts of the body, all connected up on the neuronal level.

This means that while ego-you is still bargaining with itself, carrying out cost/benefit calculations, and thinking about pulling up the covers, your poor old tired butt is already halfway out of bed, all the prep work for that move having taken place already in the brain, unbeknownst to ego-you. There is robust evidence for this in neurology.

The kicker is that these kinds of bargainings, ditherings, and other negotiations with oneself can serve a valuable function in the psychic economy, which is to provide a sense of self-unity and coherence. We *call* that imagined unitary bargainer, ditherer, and negotiator “me” or “myself.” But that is only *conscious-myself*, *conditioned-myself*, or *ego-myself*. And, although functioning smoothly in ordinary life may require at least a smidgeon of “ego-myselfness,” and, although the human being may require at least *some* illusion of unitary coherence to avoid feeling psychotic, that is not the *real* myself. Awakening, I am saying, involves less dependence on illusion, and more on seeing things as they are.

No one knows ultimately what “the *real* myself” is, but we do understand—*some* of us at least—that most thoughts are never fully conscious; that most sensations are only faintly felt; and that even further in the background, and usually not felt consciously or known at all, are the sensory reports to the brain from every area of the internal organs, bones, and other structures of the body. Unless there is unusual pain or discomfort, those unceasing reports, present even in sleep, go unnoticed by ego-myself, but are a large part of what provides the feeling of “me-ness”—the feeling of the ongoing sense of being that I mentioned before. The apparently coherent “me,” supported by the persistence of those reports along with countless other sensory data, both conscious and unconscious, has no *control* over anything. It just *is*, as a part of one’s biological constitution.

So, as usual, these questions boil down to what one imagines constitutes “myself.” If, like me, you do not fear psychosis and don’t worry about cohering psychologically, then you may understand that I feel not like one particular self at all, but more like a sometimes raucous, sometimes tranquil dinner party where the views and opinions flow freely along with the wine. Because in this gathering of “selves,” ego-Robert has a pretty good seat at the table, he feels high on the wine of being at all—which emanates from whence he knows not, cannot be explained in the least, but keeps flowing, and never dries up.

Q2: Is there a difference between “I am *be-ing*” and “I am experiencing?”

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A: It’s best not to get lost in words. Each of us is aware of various objects, feelings, thoughts, emotions, etcetera. As I said, much of that awareness consists of bodily sensations of which we are only barely aware, and those unnamed, under-the-radar sensations give rise to the sense of a human body in space.

The little-known sense of *interoception*—a background awareness of internal organs—is highly influential in creating this sense of being. Normally, one does not consider that facet of “myselfness.” If, however, one’s attention is captured by a sense that something is amiss—an abnormality in my heartbeat becomes apparent, or a sharp pain in the abdomen—then one notices what was always there, but running in the background.

We call that flow of sensations “I.” For example, when certain sensations arising in the gut become pressing enough to come to conscious awareness, one might say, “I’m hungry. Let’s have lunch.” So it is the *sensations*, previously unnoticed, that are being called “I,” but it might be more accurate to call the faculty of conscious awareness “I,” and the bodily sensations a *feature* of that awareness, or the *material* of that awareness. This is difficult ground because the body is both an object in awareness and also the living system that gives rise to awareness. If you contemplate that deeply enough, you may find yourself without any more questions. [how the gut influences the brain](#)

Q3: Robert, would you say that, due to your having no sensation of anything or anybody inside you, any sense of lack has fallen apart?

A: One might feel a sense of lack in the material world. For example, if I feel thirsty and lack clean water to drink, that would be felt as lacking a vital necessity.

But if you mean a sense of lack on the psychological level, yes, I feel no sense of lack in *be*-ing. I understand that, regardless of social arrangements, friendships, love affairs, etcetera, each of us is essentially alone, living in a vastness of perceptions, feelings, and thoughts that cannot be explained even to oneself, much less to a friend or lover.

If I see that “myself” cannot be explained to anyone, even to myself, that is a turning point. I notice that perceptions, thoughts, and feelings just keep arising as part of this aliveness, and that I am not making them. I become aware that I had been trapped in a self-referential process not of my design, constantly weighing and measuring, continually monitoring my own thoughts and evaluating them as if they were my moral responsibility and a measure of self-worth. When *that* sinks in, the weighing and measuring stops, and things just are *what* they are *when* they are.

This is the freedom of freefall, even if that seems difficult, lonely, or painful at times.

robert saltzman

depending on no-thing

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