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Cary L. Siress

The Itinerant I

Eternally chained to only one single little fragment of the whole, Man himself grew to be only a fragment... Instead of imprinting humanity upon his nature, he becomes merely the imprint of his occupation.

Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man

I require just a little order to be protected from chaos. Nothing is more distressing than a thought that escapes itself, than ideas that fly off, that disappear hardly formed, already eroded by forgetfulness or precipitated into others that I will never master. These are infinite variabilities, the appearing and disappearing of which coincide¹. This article presents two seemingly discrete *personae*, a famous philosopher and a relatively unknown scientist, and their struggle with identity. The readers are invited to give up the tranquil familiarity which occasionally reassures us in our illusion that they are two.

The great enterprise of Rationalism, initiated in the seventeenth century, maintains that the human mind has the capacity to establish truths about the nature of reality including truths about ourselves. Indeed, if knowledge of the fundamental structure of the world is possible, then it must be derived from reason, which alone has access to the required certain, necessary, universally valid, timeless truths. Enter French philosopher René Descartes and his efforts to establish both an epistemological (an enquiry into the nature and grounds of knowledge) and an ontological (a concern for what exists) basis for a rationalized identity. Descartes attempts to free explanations of the nature of the world from confusions and conflicts, and set them on a path that would lead to a unified explanation of things that are true. He employs an extraordinary procedure of answering the most extreme scepticism (i.e. how can we

know anything about anything?) about knowledge and existence by utilizing that very scepticism to show that something remains that cannot conceivably be doubted, even after scepticism has been applied in its most stringent form – Descartes' *aporia*, an expression of doubt that secures the foundations for knowledge in the stasis of the *durable I*.

Descartes' particular contribution to the revolution of how humans view their place in the universe is the *egocentricity* of his approach: the foundation of truth and knowledge begins from what is most evident to the mind of the individual. It is this particular egocentricity, by (re)introducing the gap between how things appear to us in perception, and how they really are in themselves, that eventually allows Descartes (hereafter referred to as I) to formulate the (in)famous rationalist equation *cogito ergo sum*. In attempting to exorcise the evil demon of deception from the rationalist mandate, I establish one belief that cannot be doubted: that whenever I think, I exist. I turn out to be a foundational awareness of the essential nature of the object of awareness, meaning that the object of awareness (me as thinking subject) cannot be confused with anything else – identity assured in the grammatical category of first person (I) erected as an epistemological certainty resulting in an ontological given. Having now secured a firm foundation in that I am a thing that thinks, a substance of which the whole nature or essence consists in thinking, and which needs no place or material thing for its existence, I have brought to completion, or near to completion, the dualism of mind and matter – two parallel but independent worlds so dissimilar that an interaction seems inconceivable, and thus, a dualistic conception of reality.

What about origins – where am I from? When the question is asked, "Are there precursors of the cogito, is

there an I before an I,” what is meant is, are there original concepts signed by previous philosophers that have similar, or almost identical components to the cogito from which something is lacking, or to which something has been added, so that the cogito does not crystallize since the components do not yet coincide in a self?² Perhaps the earlier problems concerning certainty and identity referred to different problems altogether from that of the cogito, a difference in problem being a necessity for the Cartesian cogito to appear on the scene so to speak. If earlier philosophers were able to prepare a concept but not constitute it (i.e. in the 5th century A.D., St. Augustine advanced an argument similar to the cogito, however, he did not give it prominence, and the problem which it is intended to solve occupied only a small part of his thoughts – City of God), it is because their problem was still trapped within a thinking in which I was not possible.

What about the aftermath – what have I done? The epistemological and ontological certitudes that I advanced were likewise to become a trap for subsequent thinking not only in philosophy, but also in science, namely, in classical physics. Scientifically speaking, the fundamental principle in classical physics is that any physical system is an aggregate which can be decomposed into a collection of simple independent local elements each of which reacts only with its immediate neighbors (Schiller’s fragments). Philosophically speaking, the identity of classical physics is based on a doctrine known as *local realism*. *Locality* means that nothing can affect anything else by any method which travels faster than the speed of light (3×10^8 meters per second). The essence of a local interaction is direct contact – a slap in the face. Implied in this understanding is that no action can occur at a distance. We cannot interact with something except by touching it or sending some kind of signal (at or below light speed) to it. *Realism* is the idea that things have objective existence; they exist in reality and have real physical properties even when nobody is looking at them.

Consider the Irish theoretical physicist John Stewart Bell (currently working in Geneva) with his critiques of previous epistemological and ontological foundations for a rationalized identity. Bell wondered whether a proof could be constructed which rejects all models of reality dependent on the classical model of locality – Bell’s *apostasy*, an abandonment of belief disheveling the foundations for knowledge with the transience of an *itinerant I*. What the resulting *Interconnectedness Theorem* essentially says is that both quantum mechanics and local realism cannot mutually exist because the former is predicated on *nonlocality* whereas the latter is grounded in *locality* – a dualistic conception of reality as identity crisis. Bell (hereafter referred to as I) formulates a mathematical verification of nonlocality that proves if two photons (quantum of electromagnetic radiation, i.e. light) are polarized (light waves restricted to one direction) and sent off in opposite directions, and then the polarization of one photon is measured, the measurement made will effect the other photon instantaneously (even if the other photon is on the other side of the universe) – unmediated action at a distance.

In the language of quantum physics, what accounts for this unmediated action at a distance is *phase entanglement*. Whenever quantum system D meets quantum system B, their phases get mixed up (entangled). Part of D’s wave goes off with B’s wave and vice versa thus inscribing a *threshold of indiscernibility* (there is an area DB that belongs to both D and B, where D and B become indiscernable).³ The mechanism for this instant connectedness, or nonlocality, is not some invisible field that stretches from one part to the next, but the fact that a bit of each part’s quantal “being” is lodged in the other. Phase entanglement thereafter instantly connects any quantum systems which have once interacted. Since there is nothing that is not ultimately a quantum system, then all systems that have once interacted at some time in the past, or are interacting, or will interact, are linked into a single waveform whose remotest parts are joined inextricably, unmitigated, immediately.

Naturally, I was not met with enthusiasm for challenging one of physicist's most cherished beliefs that the world is fundamentally local any more than I was met with credibility for challenging the omnipotence of God propagated by medieval theology. I provided a proof that lies outside the fashionable formula for success in science and therefore, it is generally dismissed by scientists as mere "philosophy".⁴ But the sceptism of *these* physicists (including earlier doubts by Einstein himself) is evidence of a massive identity crisis. The identity crisis faced by these physicists in trying to understand the structure of reality is fueled in part by a certain *luminocentricity* that insists on confining an indeterminate reality to a limit-speed of light at 3×10^8 meters per second. This flattened and technicized thinking acts primarily as a restriction that constitutes a primordial *slowing down* of the infinite speeds and exchanges of the whole-scale of the universe. Here, philosophy and science (like architecture) are haunted by their plane of references constituted by all the limits or borders with which they confront reality - the limits of understanding and representing reality confronted with the limits which the real imposes on all symbolization.

Nonlocal reality is *superluminal*. It surpasses abscissas and ordinates (the x and y calibrations of Cartesian locality) and no longer refers to spatiotemporal coordinates that define successive positions of a moving body and the fixed reference points against which these positions vary - the body of a fall rather than a falling body. Identity reduced to an object and subject (or an x and y) provide poor approximations of thought. There is no longer an objective reference point for a static object that experiences itself as subject. Infinite movement takes in everything and there is no place for an object or a subject. The endlessly traversing substance of reality that manifests order at a distance, immediately copresent to all matter or its variations, propels the movement from objectivity to subjectivity to *trajectivity* (Virilio) - a being of movement where the I reverberates, thus eliminating any simplistic distinction of identity.

It is the horizon itself that is in movement, an immediate coming and going, a perpetual instantaneous exchange that outpaces any destination of locality, a massive woven shuttle that by immediately turning back on itself and pleating itself gives rise to retroactions, connections, and proliferations in the fractalization of infinity. Here chaos is characterized less by absences of determination than by the infinite speed with which they take shape and vanish.⁵

This infinite speed of birth and disappearances is why we want to hang on to fixed opinions so much. We ask only that our ideas are linked together according to a minimum of protective rules which enable us to put some order into ideas, preventing our thought from crossing the universe in an instant.⁶

We might learn from Heraclitus' statement, "The atom will traverse space and time with the speed of thought".

All in favor, say

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1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, Verso, London, 1994, p. 201.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

4 Nick Herbert, *Quantum Reality: Beyond the New Physics*, Doubleday, New York, 1985, p. 225.

5 *Op. cit.*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, p. 236.

6 *Op. cit.*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, p. 201.

7 author's note: the I here and there should be understood as always already approaching the third person.