

Response to Commentary

Response to the Commentary of Marty Monteiro (The Question of “God”)

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I enjoyed reading Marty Monteiro’s commentary, but in his first sentence, he interprets me as saying, “Consciousness is not only an interactive process exclusively for human beings but pertains to all beings in the universe (pan-experientialism).” However, panexperientialism means only that experience permeates the universe, and experience is most often non-conscious (in my view). *Conscious* experience – experience reflected back upon itself through communally understood language symbols – is the sole province of humanity, at least on this planet (or so it appears). On the other hand, right after this, Monteiro correctly notes the finer details of my distinctions.

I see experience as universal thus it is the fount for our conscious form of experiencing. I am not quite clear what he asking for when he wonders about “consciousness” without experience. He develops his own terminology but seems to equate experience with *witnessing*, a distinction I reserve for conscious experience only. So, in this sense, a newborn does indeed experience its birth (otherwise why all its fuss and bother?), but it does not witness (or remember) it from some outside vantage point, such as that provided when self and world are severed after crossing the symbolic threshold, and “one” becomes conscious of the experienced world and one’s own experiencing.

Monteiro grasps the outlines of “Hollows of Experience” quite well. He even uses my text to answer his own question with regard to how experience-mind-consciousness could arise from matter or from a brain. However, Monteiro often attempts to squeeze my ideas into the framework of his own, and he sometimes loses me in the process. He tends to assert his interpretations as facts, leaving me uncertain how he came to this knowledge.

Monteiro insists that the concept of God “as a creative-unifying force (CUF) holds.” Even with the friendly acronym *CUF* as a stand-in, I still see the concept of “God” as dis-unifying, at least here on Earth since the word is historically loaded and most often means something quite distinct from one speaker to another according to their culture or religion. I quite agree that there must be a “creative-unifying” principle that precedes and permeates existence, but I have no idea if this universal potential is indeed a physical *force*, as Monteiro states, or if it warrants being called *God* when it is thoroughly unconscious in itself, as I hold, and perhaps only existent as potential. However, I do use the phrases *void consciousness* and *awareness-in-itself* to indicate this ultimate source, but note that *aware but aware of nothing* is not really anything we (with the possible exception of the most advanced mystics) can really begin to grasp. It

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is only the potential for awareness *of* something *by* something else. It is “void and without form”. Only through its random and anomalous fluctuations are experienced sensations and form created, and so the process of *being* (or existence) unfolds. As experience is internalized in matter-energy fields, form becomes objective entities and the external world we witness today begins to appear (see Whitehead, 1978).

Can we use the term “God” and not imagine a personality or even a being? The only way I can accept a term like *God* is by divorcing it from all human-created contexts or connotations that resemble personhood and bringing it right back home to human experience. Since we ultimately arose from this non-conscious awareness-in-itself, our symbolic conscious form of awareness is also consciousness for this unnamable source. (*Quantum vacuum* or *quantum flux* has no more an imaginable referent than does *God*.) In other words, the experience of sensations and emotions in all of creation is the original source experiencing itself, and *we ourselves are the conscious experience of the source*; we ourselves are the conscious sense organs of “God” and therefore directly participate in “God’s” creative unfolding. “*God*” *exists, feels, and thinks only insofar as we do*. I don’t think the term “God” is justified by this conception of the inconceivable, but if it communicates the mystery of a creative source, I could live with it.

I’ll close with a potent quotation from Nikos Kazantzakis (1958), who, through the character of Odysseus, expressed this thought more beautifully than ever I could manage:

*Thrust these few words deep in your minds and lash them tight:
the more our journey widens and new roads unwind,
the more God widens and unwinds on this vast earth.
It’s we who feed him, friends; all that we see, he eats
all that we hear or touch, all that thrusts through our minds,
he takes for his adornments and his strutting wings.
Soon as we see these savage thorn trees on the sands
he too sprouts thorns and strings us with ferocious rage,
and when we hear the wild beasts prowl, he too grows wild,
growls savagely and scares poor man out of his wits.
(p. 384)*

References

- Kazantzakis, N. (1958). *The Odyssey: A modern sequel* (trans., intro., synopsis, notes: K. Friar). New York: Simon & Schuster.
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- Whitehead, A. N. (1978). *Process and reality: An essay in cosmology*, corrected edition, D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne (eds.). New York: Free Press. Original 1929.