

Perception and the Nature of Objects

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Is the Tree There If I Don't See It?

Seeker: I hope you are in good health and that you can help me with this question.

I have been studying Advaita for some time now and I can understand that objects are made of the stuff of consciousness. However, the solidity of an automobile when it hits me cannot be denied and there is obviously more to it than the stuff of my consciousness. How can I resolve this, please?

I suppose if I regard the auto and the damage to my body from the point of view of a separate self, then there is solidity, but from awareness's point of view, there is only consciousness. Am I on the way to answering my question?

Sundari: Yes, you are on the way to answering your own question, but clearly you are not quite sure exactly what this means. Consciousness is not "stuff," it is what gives rise to the appearance of "stuff."

Here Is the Teaching on the Nature of Objects

Are objects there because I see them or do I see them because they are there? Are they created out of consciousness or does consciousness arise out of them? How can every object actually be made out of thought?

If your means of knowledge for anything is based on sensory perception, you are stuck in duality with no way of escaping it.

Understanding the relationship between pure awareness, pure awareness in its role as *Isvara*, and the *jiva* will clear up your confusion. First, you need to understand that there are two options or "levels" of understanding available at all times. The first is to see things from the point of view of the *jiva*, or duality, that which is apparently real, or always changing. The second and most important is to see things from the point of view of *Isvara*/awareness, non-duality, that which is real or always present and unchanging. Both viewpoints are necessary, even when Self-knowledge is firm because the *jiva* never leaves the apparent reality, even once Self-knowledge has negated it. In fact *moksa* is the ability to see/discriminate objects from the point of view of both the *jiva* and *Isvara*/awareness, at all times.

We always start from the fact that everything is awareness/consciousness. Therefore everything associated with *Isvara* and *jiva* is consciousness. *Isvara* creates in such a way that to *jiva* everything seems as if it is not consciousness. *Isvara* does not see the Creation the same way *jiva* sees it. *Isvara* sees its Creation as itself in the form of knowledge only. Owing to the power of *Maya*, this knowledge, the programs that create gross and subtle matter that make individual living beings possible, evolves from the subtle (ideas) to the gross (physical matter) which to *jiva*, under the spell of *Maya*, appears to be solid and substantial and "out there" standing on its own, i.e. it

takes duality to be reality.

But the world of objects is not “out there” and does not stand alone. *Jiva*, which is awareness ignorant of its nature as awareness/consciousness, identifies with the body, and when this happens, the material world seems to be “out there” standing alone, solid and real. If you assume that you are the body, then the objects are out there and solid, for you. If you are not identified with the body-mind, then you have non-dual vision and see only yourself, consciousness. The world is known to be a reflection of you, but you are not it.

However, this teaching does not negate the existence of the apparently solid objects, which are *Isvara*'s creation, it simply analyses the true nature of objects to reveal that they are only apparently, not actually, real.

When you analyze perception, i.e. experience, you see that the material objects and the sensations invoked by them are actually made up of thoughts, i.e. knowledge of the objects. For instance, you see a car or tree, and you know a car or a tree. You never jump out of your body and experience the tree, even if you collide with the seeming solidity of the car or tree. The car/tree appear in you. You never jump out of yourself, consciousness, and experience your body either. It appears as an object, like a tree, in your mind because it is in the same order of reality as the car/tree, i.e. duality, *mithya*. So what is the experience/knowledge actually made of? Does it float in from some outside source, some parallel universe and present itself to you? It does not. It arises in you in the form of thoughts. *Isvara/Maya* creates it out of you, consciousness, yourself. Leave the individual *jiva* out of it. There is just you, awareness, and the objects appearing in you.

This is the subjective approach, what is called idealism or solipsism in the West. You can also arrive at the same conclusion by an analysis of the objects themselves. It should be easy to see that thoughts are made of awareness. It is not so easy to see the physical objects are made of awareness, but if we investigate matter scientifically, it breaks down into particles and space and the knower of particles and space, i.e. you, awareness. Material science cannot make the obvious connection of matter and awareness, because it relies on perception and inference as a means of knowledge. It does not realize that perception is an object known to consciousness in the form of the scientist and that perception is consciousness. *Maya* makes it seem as if consciousness is an object, when it is actually the subject.

Maya also makes the individual *jiva* think that it is a unique entity, separate from all other entities and objects. But *jiva* is not what it seems either. *Jiva* is awareness, as is matter, but awareness is neither. Therefore the relationship between the three seemingly separate factors, *jiva*, *Isvara/Maya* (which creates the material world out of awareness) and pure consciousness – you – needs to be understood.

If you look at the Creation, where does it exist? Have you ever actually seen a Creation? No. You have only experienced the objects that appear to you at any moment, and these objects are not separate from the thoughts that make them up. It's not that the world around you isn't there. It's there, but you've never lived there. You've never even been there for a visit. The only place you've ever been is inside your mind. Creation is only an idea, a thought. When that thought appears in you, the mind imagines the totality of objects by inference, but those objects are never directly experienced. All that is directly experienced is you, awareness, and objects.

The only issue left to resolve is whether or not awareness/consciousness or matter is

primary. Which came first? When we use the word “first,” we mean which stands alone? Does matter exist prior to consciousness so that we can still have matter without consciousness? No. You cannot separate an object from the consciousness of the object. In other words, objects are not conscious. They do not know themselves or other objects. Consciousness is conscious when *Isvara* is operating and it knows objects. Consciousness is “prior” to matter in the sense that matter depends on consciousness. Consciousness stands alone. It is the first “principle” out of which everything arises.

Finally, you cannot get something out of nothing. So if matter depends on consciousness, it must come from consciousness. The effect (matter) is just an apparent transformation of the cause, awareness. It is not an actual transformation, because if it were, consciousness would have lost its limitless nature when it transformed into matter. It would have become limited, bound by time and space. That matter (subtle and gross objects) arise in you, awareness, is in fact your unexamined experience. This is where Direct Path teachers like Greg Goode and Rupert Spira come from. They are right, but they do not have a complete means of knowledge at their disposal that takes *Isvara* (*Maya*) into account and delivers the big picture, the vision of non-duality.

At best, the *jiva* will have some kind of idea that it is awareness, but it will still be in the dark about the nature of objects, i.e. *Isvara* and how *Maya* creates. Thus, to understand what they are saying, you must have an epiphany and understand what the epiphany means. They try to induce non-dual epiphanies with their methods, which is not bad, but it's not good either. Without a complete means of knowledge, the *jiva* will have to keep on seeking because experience does not guarantee knowledge. And even if knowledge does happen during an epiphany, ignorance about the nature of reality will return because ignorance is hardwired. It is persistent. It will sweep away the knowledge. So you need a means of Self-knowledge that takes experience into account but is not based on experience. And you need to employ said means of knowledge, i.e. Vedanta, until the relationship between all the factors in reality are clear. *Moksa* is the freedom that comes from complete knowledge. It is total dispassion and limitless satisfaction.

Moksa is understanding the big picture. It is more than the knowledge that I, the individual, am consciousness. What does that mean for the *jiva*? How that individual, knowing it is consciousness, relates to *Isvara*, the objects, gross and subtle, needs to be known. If it isn't, you end up with a person who has enlightenment sickness, an “enlightened” individual whose ego has co-opted the knowledge and who is prone to violating *dharma* because he or she does not understand what freedom means. Enlightened or not, all individuals exist in the context of the Total (*Isvara*) and are subject to *Isvara's* rules. This is not a problem for someone who understands what it means to be the Self in the context of his or her environment; he or she completely respects *dharma*. But it is a problem for someone whose enlightenment happens outside the tradition, because they don't understand *Isvara* as *dharma* and feel that as individuals they are not subject to *dharma*.

The question, is there a world without someone to see it?, has an answer; yes, the “world” exists regardless of whether there is “sensory perception” of it. Gross objects like a car or a tree, etc. are created by *Isvara/Maya* through a process of splitting and combining the five subtle elements, which are also created by the power of *Maya*. It is a totally counter-intuitive process because consciousness cannot be changed in any way. But *Maya* makes the impossible possible and generates the appearance of seemingly solid stand-alone objects, and also the senses which make

objects seem to be real and to stand alone “out there.”

Some of the Direct Path teachers, like Dennis Waite and Greg Goode, imply that an “object” only exists if there is “sensory perception” of it, and when there is no perception/sensory input, there is no object.

Vedanta asks: Doesn't exist for whom? These teachings are wrong if they claim that the individual's perception creates an object like a tree “out there.” If that was true, then when an individual went to sleep in a tree, he would fall down because the tree disappeared when he went into deep sleep. But trees, like all gross objects, are created by *Ishvara/Maya*. They have an empirical reality apart from individual's subjective perception of them. If this was not true, science would not exist. All the objects are created by *Ishvara, Maya*.

The only “creation” that individuals are responsible for is their subjective reality, which is to interpret the objects that appear based on their conditioning, to own the projections and to think they are real. From this viewpoint, the popular belief bandied about in the spiritual world, that you “create your own reality,” is true. You do, and it will either be conditioned by ignorance, your likes and dislikes, or by knowledge. If Self-knowledge is firm, interpretation no longer happens, because you see life from the viewpoint of the Self, first and foremost.

To conclude, the car/tree doesn't exist for awareness, except on that “portion” of awareness on which *Maya* is operating. *Ishvara* is awareness plus *Maya*. On that portion, awareness sees a car or tree, but it knows that the solid object is only an appearance. It no longer believes the information the senses give the mind, because it has negated the reality of objects.

~ *Om*, Sundari