



Schizophrenic Idealism

By Bernardo Kastrup

The philosophy of idealism, defended through the ages by great minds like those of George Berkeley, Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, Gottfried Leibniz, and John McTaggart, entails that all reality is ultimately just a conscious experience. In other words, unlike realism – which postulates an external, objective world 'out there' triggering our perceptions – idealism postulates the existence of nothing but our conscious perceptions themselves. As such, idealism is a much more parsimonious and cautious worldview. Yet, somehow, realism has come to completely dominate the worldview of our culture. Most of us hardly question the assumption that there is a reality 'out there' independent of our minds; that is, that nature would still go merrily on even if nobody were looking. Leaving aside the scientific evidence to the contrary, one wonders why realism has come to be synonymous with our culture's collective intuition of reality.

The problem is that most people, when considering the hypothesis of idealism, hardly think it through consequently. And in pondering just a half-baked, 'schizophrenic' version of idealism, contradictions arise that seem to render it untenable. This is not a sign of lazy thinking or stupidity on the part of any one of us; it's a side-effect of the cultural fog we live immersed in. You see, in meditating about idealism most of us still unconsciously retain some key assumptions of realism. It is these hidden, unconscious assumptions that give rise to the contradictions, not idealism itself. For instance, we tend to retain the assumption that minds are inside brains. And then, given that brains are clearly separate from one another, a contradiction arises. After all, if reality is only in the 'mind' (meaning, only in the brain), how come we all share the same reality? That doesn't seem possible; reality must be external to minds so we can all look at the same reality from the perspective of different brains. There seems to be no other possible explanation for the fact that we all seem to share the experience of a common reality. Therefore, idealism must be a fallacy.

The argument above is malformed and wrong. It judges idealism while assuming key

features of realism. Namely, it assumes that minds are inside objective structures of an external reality: brains. But according to idealism there are no such things as objective structures in a reality external to mind; instead, it's all in the mind. *So the mind is not in the brain; it's the brain that is in the mind.* The dream is not in the body; it's the body that is in the dream. As such, bodies and brains can be seen as space-time anchors for a certain point-of-view taken by mind within a kind of palpable, continuous dream. The fact that brains are separate from each other in the canvas of such dream says absolutely nothing about the limitations of mind as far as coordinating a dream shared by its many points-of-view in a very consistent manner. When an idealist says that 'it's all in here,' pointing at this head, he is at best expressing himself metaphorically and, at worst, being unconsciously inconsistent with his own position. To a true idealist, reality is not in the head; it's the head that is in the mind.

Ultimately, the dichotomy idealism-versus-realism may be no dualism at all. To say that everything is a construct within a mind is not to deny any of the qualities of experience: the concreteness, solidity, or continuity of things. This form of monistic idealism does not deny physics insofar as the latter entails models for predicting how things behave empirically; it only denies some of our ontological assumptions about how our experience of such behaviors comes into being. In other words, monistic idealism questions only our myths and stories, not our empirical observations. Such non-dualistic view entails merely that the spectrum of qualities normally associated to constructs of the imagination extends further beyond our ordinary intuition – as far as their potential concreteness, solidity, and continuity – than we ever dared think.

I wanted to write this article today to mark the release of my second book, *Dreamed up Reality*. I wanted to give you a taste of the key idea I dwell upon in it; the idea that, ultimately, all data about reality – about what may or may not be going on – resides in the mind. From a strict epistemic perspective, the 'external' world is a story we tell ourselves; a non-provable myth, reasonable and self-consistent as it may appear. As such, if one wants to set out on a path of exploration unhindered by the cultural fog we live in, one must go back to basics and start from within the mind: What does one *really* know from experience and what is, instead, myth and story-telling? This was my attempt many years ago and I now decided, through my new book, to share that story.