

OPEN INDIVIDUALISM / NEOMONOPSYCHISM

Iacopo Vettori

This paper summarizes my personal experience in discovering the Open Individualism. Because I found it by my own way, occasionally in the paper I refer to it as “my proposal”, but it would be intended as “the Open Individualism proposal”. By the way, because some issues represent only my personal opinion, and can be evaluated differently from other authors, I left the references as they were.

This text can be considered a summary of what I wrote in my personal website dedicated to this subject, that I completed before knowing the book "I Am You" by Daniel Kolak and the other persons who collaborate in this research. The original content of the site was collected in a file in PDF format that can be downloaded at

<http://www.iacopovettori.it/latenzaipotesi/eng/TheThirdHypothesisSite.pdf>

I hope that my considerations may be useful when compared with those of people that had the same inspiration, or anyway share our persuasion, to reinforce or develop some aspects of our new vision of the life.

INTRODUCTION

The problem that has been the occasion to the considerations that I suggest, is expressed by the question "Why I do exist?" or rather, from its more disturbing version: "could I not exist?". As long as you continue to think about our lives in terms of individual minds or souls, you cannot find very compelling reasons that lead to a not elusive answer, that does not resort to subterfuges such as "there is a superior will that wanted me to exist" or the equivalent "I was the recipient of a case quite extraordinary", or the resigned "there are mysteries that are inevitably outside our possibilities of understanding."

Despite the apparent futility of continuing to thinking about these themes as old as humanity, I continued to try, keeping a few guidelines that I have taken as essential:

- The belief (or the bet) that the mystery of individual existence can be understood by human reason
- The refusal to admit to being the beneficiary of an exclusive privilege, whether by chance or by a superior will

- The belief in the actual lives of others, which involves the rejection of solipsism
- The waiver of any conditions that modern science would deem unacceptable

Continuing doggedly to consider every possibility that do not conflict with these principles, I got perhaps more by accident than by necessity at a solution that appeared to have some fresh aspects, that has required me a review of the concept of "individual mind" or "individual soul "in favor of a more abstract concept of "ownership of knowledge" or as I preferred to call it, "myself-ness", or that "feeling of be myself" that we each experience individually, thinking that we each are holding an individual mind.

It should be clarified once the fundamental difference with other similar metaphysics: according to this new proposal, each must consider every other living being as a different experience experienced from the same "I" that he "feels to be", despite all our differences of character, despite the fact that our lives are conducted in the same physical time, and without any discrimination based on any merits or demerits of each of us. Meeting every other living being is like meeting yourself as you were yesterday or as you will be tomorrow. Thus, there is no need to introduce a concept of "higher self" to which all our individual "I" might converge if we behave correctly, but that everyone should however achieve individually. This is in a nutshell, the conceptual revolution that we need to take to get the only definitive answer to the initial question "could I not exist?". In the next posts I will try to expose the thread of reasoning that led me to this conclusion.

I initially called this idea "the third hypothesis", referring to the number of lives that our "I" has the opportunity to experience: according to the "orthodox" atheists and believers of the three major Western religions, each of us can experience only one life (first hypothesis); according to Eastern religions contemplating reincarnation, each of us can experience more life, but all within its own "set of lives", separated by the "sets of lives" of other people (second hypothesis). According to the third hypothesis, the lives experienced by our "I" are not only infinite, but are just "all the lives", and therefore I must consider the life of every living creature I meet as a different experience of my own "I", just as my current life. After finding that Leibniz called "monopsychism" the doctrine of Averrois which proposed the existence of a unique, shared intellect, but bearing in mind the innovative features that distinguish the new formulation that I was proposing, it seemed appropriate to name this new metaphysics "neomonopsychism", before I was aware of the designation of "Open Individualism" introduced by Daniel Kolak.

THE "TICKET HOLDER" PROBLEM

The presumed multiplicity of "individual self" makes unavoidable the consideration that, as long as I think that everybody has a different "I" from mine, I must admit that even the person that was generated after the whole physical facts from which I was born, could well be associated with an additional "I" different from mine, and my "I" could remain "unused" forever. In this view, I actually depict the "opportunity to be born" as a lottery where the lucky holder of the extracted ticket has his "chance to live". Talking to atheists, I realized that most of them rely the explanation for his or her birth on the consideration that, according to this model, given a sufficiently high number of ticket extractions, "sooner or later" will come for each one the time to be born.

This reasoning is insufficient. First, from a mathematical point of view, anything can happen once, can happen again two, three, infinite times, and this forces us to consider the existence of innumerable our "perfect clones". There is nothing to conceptually prevent two "I" to share a number of a even infinite number of individual equal characteristics, but then it becomes impossible to imagine an enumeration procedure that will result exhaustive. No algorithm can guarantee to steadily approaching the unique clone representing my life. This prevents to attribute to the set of all possible "I" the same cardinality of natural numbers, and also prevents us from having reasonable expectations that our only "original clone" may born after an infinite number of "ticket extractions". One could imagine a mathematical loophole postulating that even the set of the all possible universes can have the same cardinality as the set of all possible "I", but there is a deeper problem that prevents any case to consider it as a satisfactory answer.

In fact, this type of reasoning implicitly assumes as given the privilege that my "I" is "by definition" the holder of an opportunity to be born, or, according with the metaphor of the lottery, "the owner of a ticket that can be extracted". This privilege precedes that of the "actual birth", is indeed its necessary condition, but even if the possibility to be extracted in order to live is judged "very low, but not impossible", there is no hope of being able to even imagine the conditions to be a "holder of a ticket" (either extracted or not). The problem is that the existence of a transfinite number of other "I", forces us to recognize the "no need" of our individual existence, while the evidence of our actual existence forces us to recognize that the set of all the "I" would not have been exhaustive without our humble presence.

I don't know if the strength of this argument is obvious. Sometimes I think that the intuition of its inescapability can strike us as a sort of mystical enlightenment after a long meditation over this issue, imagining to turn over in our hands the "lottery of life" ticket, wondering why we hold it, and how great should be the privilege, even before of being a winner of the lottery, to be a mere ticket holder. Only by accepting the presumption that the "I" is always the same "I" for all the living beings, the ticket becomes useless and vanishes in your hands. Each alternative theory requires us to believe that, stirring long enough in an empty bag, we could, "sooner or later", come up with our humble soul.

FROM "I" TO THE REAL WORLD

A good example to easily explain the basic idea of this hypothesis is to compare our world to a movie in which, thanks to a special effect, all roles are played by the same actor, so able to immerse itself in every character without revealing any personal trait. This means that I preclude the existence of any embedded information in this "shared I": it's not something that can exist outside one of our common "earthly lives", it's just a "property of being percipient" that the matter expresses in some structures sufficiently complex, such as in humans, but also in animals, and perhaps it could be up to a single cell.

Considering the mind as a property that emerges from the matter is an already existing thesis and is widely shared: the only statement that I want to add is that its interpretation, from the subjective point of view, must be reflected in the acknowledgment that the subject experiencing the perception is always the same "I" that everyone experiences as individual "I". Therefore, instead of referring to a shared "I", it's more appropriate to refer to a "myself-ness" property, which manifests the same in each "perceiver subject". In this paper I use the word "I" for convenience of exposition, but put in mind that I consider conceptually wrong to figure it as an entity independent from the lives that express it.

My attitude is deliberately "minimalist", so I avoid taking positions on issues that, even if connected to questions of conscience, are not essential to my hypothesis, as the limit of complexity required to define "living" a physical structure, or about the existence of the "free will", even if the example of the movie with a single actor may suggest that it is impossible. The difficulty to conceive how a single actor can not only act, but also to improvise during a performance in which he plays all the characters are tied to our need to imagine his interpretations as done "one after the other". We have no problem

imagining that with a skillful editing we can make a movie with only one actor, but we cannot conceive how the same could also be realized as a show of improvisational theater.

The same problem also arises when we try to consider the "sequence of our lives". If my own "I" will also experience all the other lives, what are the lives that I have lived yet? What is my next life? In the metaphor of the actor, the scene is the entire space-time where our lives take place, and we are not permitted to presume the existence of "absolute time" in which them can be ordered. In the movie example, the order in which the actor plays the individual parts of the movie superimposed during editing, is irrelevant, and cannot be deduced simply by watching the movie. So also the "sequence of our lives" cannot be inferred from any information traceable in our physical world. We must consider the problem as an expression of our need to imagine the events in a temporal order. I think there is an appropriate analogy with the famous "double slit experiment", whose description is available on Wikipedia at web address

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Double-slit_experiment

In this experiment is not allowed to ask what exact path each electron follows from its emission to its detection on the final screen, we can only note that it is influenced by the presence of both slits.

Finally, I want to make a clear distinction from solipsism, for which the existence of others cannot be proved, and therefore considers the other individual life as an illusion without a true reality, as if all other living beings were robots without a true awareness. I consider this point of view naive and harmful. I would simply note that just recognizing the difficulties that we face every day, makes it impossible to deny the existence of a "will" as opposed to ours. In our proposal, every other "will" is identified with a different expression of my same "I", but because every physical and mental characteristics is defined entirely by the physical structure in which it occurs, it is inevitable that the same "I" each time expresses a different will, if only for the instinct of personal survival.

If we concede to acknowledge an "equivalence principle", for which our "present life" did not have any "special" feature when compared to any other life, we must also exclude the possibility that the "I" can somehow "choose" to live only a few lives, or has the opportunity to repeat "ad lib" the experience of a particular life, as we are not allowed to assume any awareness possible outside of a physical "normal" life. But from this principle of equivalence can be deduced also that all the lives that interact in the same space-time must be considered as part of a "unity of experimentation" that the

"I" must experience as a whole set, without any exception. This is experience that distinguishes the "reality" from a dream or hallucination: the fact that the "I" must experience the same event from the different points of view of all the living beings who participate.

HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL REFERENCES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The existing similar philosophic proposals are almost always related to the idea of unity achieved through a divine or cosmic "ONE" to which we all converge, but this weakens the true power of the idea of an unique and shared "I", because it authorizes each to consider himself an individual detached from the ONE, considering any other living being as a separate experience of a different part of the ONE, which therefore does not concern him directly. If, however, it is assumed that my "I" is exactly the same as any other, and can occur only by living a normal "earthling life", the ONE remains an abstract and unnecessary concept, while it becomes natural a generalized solidarity with all the living beings.

A question that must be overcome is that from this idea might emerge a political totalitarian ideal that obsessively requires all to share everything with others. That would be a shortsighted policy: the wealth of each individual resides in its own particular skills, and so the wealth of society is to give everyone a chance to cultivate their talents and to meet their own interests. Like the wise parents love their children equally, but provide for the needs of each in a different way, considering their age and their attitudes, so the ideal government should guarantee equal opportunities to all the people, but should divide the available resources considering both the needs and the capabilities of each. Such society could not accept unwarranted disparities, and especially could show that the power to govern must be justified by the actual capacity demonstrated. Perhaps that is why the idea of the third hypothesis has never known a real success in the human history.

The sharing of at least one part of the human intellect is already suggested by Aristotle, and then was picked up by Averroes and Siger of Brabant (XIII cent.), who thinks that a part of the human soul is tied to the body and then is mortal, and another part is immortal, unique and shared between all men. Leibniz called "monopsychism" this doctrine, and since the Open Individualism can be interpreted as its evolution, it may adequately be called "neomonopsychism".

Explicit analogies are also found with the Eastern and Western pantheistic doctrines. Adi Shankara (VII cent.), the most representative of the monist Hinduism current "Advaita Vedanta", compares the air in a jug, which is not different from the air outside, with the individual soul, the "Atman", which in his view coincides with the universal soul, the "Brahman". Buddhism also acknowledges the unity of all the living beings, even if it denies the concept of soul, it binds the individualities to their karma, understood as the sum of the consequences of his voluntary actions. I am not able to judge whether there is any "New Age" current that can be considered more or less close to the third hypothesis, but my impression is that they are generally directed toward the model of "participation in the ONE". I should point out that my proposal has no mystical properties, do not introduces rituals, not envisages any ultimate finality, not promises redemption or salvation other than that we can build ourselves with our daily commitment.

In 1904, the American philosopher William James proposed to overcome the division between subject and object of knowledge, identifying the consciousness as a "non-being" , corresponding to the very function of knowing, of "being aware" (which is what I have called before "myself-ness", even if James does not say explicitly that this may lead to the identity of all our "I"). His concept is called "neutral monism" because it overcomes the distinction between material world and mental world considering them as aspects of a single primal substance. Knowledge is not but the relationship between these two parties, but each party from time to time may assume the role of "who knows" or "known". From the information technology perspective, the distinction is analogous to that between executable code and processing data: they are always mere bits, and a program can manipulate data to produce another executable program, which, once running, could consider as mere data the bits of the program that generated it.

Following the conceptual revolution imposed by quantum mechanics, it was necessary to reconsider the universe by adopting an "holistic" vision approach, where all the parts affect each other, from a scientific perspective too. This led some physicists to adhere to pantheistic philosophies. Nobel laureate Erwin Schrödinger thought that conscience was "a singular of which plural is unknown", and that diversity was an illusion, in tune with Hinduism. His point of view is in line with what Aldous Huxley describes in his book "The Perennial Philosophy" which states that all religions converge in regard all the men as part of one universal soul.

In the book "The End of Time" by the physicist Julian Barbour, is described how to consistently interpret the physical world without considering the time. Although the

author was not aware of, his physical theory seems to be the ideal completion of Open Individualism.

My research has come to completion when I found a reference to the book "I am You" by professor Daniel Kolak, where, as the title makes clear, he comes at precisely the same conclusions of the metaphysics I was proposing. Thanks to the Internet I contacted him and other scholars, forming a small community of people independently come to the same idea, showing that it meets a need, perhaps raised by the current scientific knowledge and the urgency of the conditions of our current world issues. Our Facebook group is named "I Am You – Discussions on Open Individualism" and you can find it at the web address

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=299406397622&ref=mf>

What ideas coincide exactly with the Open Individualism? Discrimination can be done considering the consequences on our behavior towards other people: If I think that the same "I" who now I feel like "my individual" is exactly what every other living being feels like "his" or "her", then I am driven to have a generalized solidarity that does not exclude anyone. "I" am all the starving children, "I" am also every animal, every beaten dog in every corner of the earth, without any chance to escape any fate. The only option I have is to do my part to make the world becomes a bit better. I certainly have the right to enjoy too the comforts and pleasures that I have the opportunity to have, but as much as it will allow me the knowledge to do every day something useful for the less fortunate people.

However, for the same reasons, even in difficulties I can avoid wearing out in despair or in an exasperated competitiveness: I will have countless opportunities, and if I know I have done my best, I can feel satisfied with what I was able to get. Our life conditions here on earth, are the result of what we have done so far. Our progress has exciting aspects, but today we have so many problems to be solved urgently, and some of them require a global change of thinking that is not easy to imagine. Is our human species evolved enough to survive without a disaster? We don't know even if we're still in time to avoid it. My commitment in writing these pages, is my personal contribution to continue to nurture that hope.

FURTHER READINGS

The book preview of "I am You" of Daniel Kolak:

I am You - The Metaphysical Foundation for Global Ethics

http://books.google.it/books?id=-_JD9NIWBVgC&printsec=frontcover&source=gs_navlinks_s#v=onepage&q=&f=false

A paper of Daniel Kolak with critics to the personal identity:
Room for a view: on the metaphysical subject of personal identity

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/4g8u17512337062g/>

A radical critique of the reductionist view of mind:

A “Creative Writing” shared document: A casual analysis of Personal Identity

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/26828344/A-casual-analysis-of-Personal-Identity>

Our Facebook group:

I Am You – Discussions on Open Individualism

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=299406397622&ref=mf>

My personal web site part dedicated to Open Individualism:

The third hypothesis

<http://www.iacopovettori.it/latezaipotese/eng/Default.aspx>