

The nature of the conditioned mind according to Krishnamurti: A study

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Abstract

Jiddu Krishnamurti is one of the modern Indian thinkers who has given a clear and comprehensive picture of mind. The issue of mind constitutes the central theme of his philosophy. His insights into the issue of mind are incisive and instructive.

Krishnamurti distinguishes between two kinds of mind – the conditioned and the unconditioned. He calls the conditioned mind consciousness. The conditioned mind or consciousness is the reality which is put together by thought. Consciousness is reality since reality is “anything that thought operates on”. The term “reality” comes from “res” which means thing; and the root meaning of the term “thing” is “to condition”. Accordingly, mind is anything that thought thinks about, reasonably or unreasonably. Mind is “thing” in the sense that it is conditioned by thought which is always conditioned. According to Krishnamurti the unconditioned mind is that which transcends thought. It is neither dependent upon nor conditioned by thought. Thought can never be free since thought is ‘thing’. Thought is always “conditioned or dependent on things”. Krishnamurti calls the free mind Intelligence, truth or freedom. The unconditioned mind has a dimension different from that of the conditioned mind.

Basically, the conditioned mind, according to Krishnamurti, has evolved psychologically through time. It has evolved by accumulating the past psychologically. It has grown by gathering memory for security at the physical and psychological levels. And the gathering of memory takes place through the activity of challenge and response. So the brain is the product of its own sensory process through which it accumulates the past. The conditioned mind is precisely the brain evolved through the perceptual process. Krishnamurti says “My mind, is my brain cells, is the result of my sensory perceptions”.

The conditioned mind is the perceptual activity of the brain conditioned by the past. The activity of the brain is not only to gather the past but also to respond to the challenge on the background of the past. So, as a product, the mind is precisely the brain conditioned by memory; and as an activity, the mind is the response of the brain conditioned by the past. Consciousness thus is the brain, the biological organism and its memory as its foundation. There can be no mind as we know it to be which is not of the activity of the brain.

Keywords: Jiddu Krishnamurti, reality

1. Introduction

Jiddu Krishnamurti is a philosopher of great repute who gave importance to universal religious values and personal insight. His philosophy is a synthesis of both Indian and western philosophical and psychological principles. He was born on 11 May, 1895 at Madanapalli, Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh, South India. Krishnamurti was the eighth child of a lower middle class Brahmin couple, Sanjeevama and Narayanaiah. His mother died when Krishnamurti was a child. She felt that her child was destined for a remarkable career and insisted on delivering him in her prayer room. Since he was the eighth child, he was named after Srikrishna the eighth avatar.

Although Krishnamurti equates the mind with the brain, he at the same time says that the mind is not the whole of the brain; he observes that the mind is confined to a part of the brain; only a little portion of the brain functions as the mind; the remaining part of the brain is dormant or inactive; the mind is the movement of the past, the activity of thought through a little part of the brain.

To Krishnamurti the conditioned mind is the same as experience. It is experience since the brain is the result of the past which is also experience. Krishnamurti says that the mind “is the sum total of human experience, plus my

particular contact with the present”. The mind is not only the totality of human experience but also the process of experience; the mind is the activity of the challenge and response on the background of the past.

Krishnamurti maintains that the conditioned mind is made up of content. The mind is not without the content. The past, the experience, the knowledge or the thought which the brain has gathered through time constitutes the content of the mind. The mind as we know it to be is not independent of its content. The mind and its content are not different. The mind is not a container of its content; the content itself is the mind. Just as there is no valley without the hills, the trees, there is no mind without content. Bereft of the content, the mind as we know ceases to be.

According to Krishnamurti, the mind is not different from thought. The mind is the activity of thought. Just as the mind, thought is experience or the past; thought is the same as knowledge gathered by the brain through time. Thought is the memory stored up in the brain cells. Both the mind and thought are (the product of) the past. And as an activity, thought is nothing but the response of the brain from the background of the memory. Thought is the reaction of past to the present; thought is the movement of the past which is the same as experience. Both are the

products of knowledge and experience. To be mindful is to think. Krishnamurti says, "So long as the mind is not thinking consciously or unconsciously, there is no consciousness".

According to Krishnamurti, the psychological content is the self or the psyche of the individual. The individual "ego" is the same as the psychological content of the mind. The whole content of the mind is the 'me'. "That 'me' is not different from our mind". At the same time Krishnamurti holds that the mind is not individualistic but common to human race. Our mind is not ours but what we have inherited from humankind. The mind is shared by all human beings. Besides the biological, and the professional differences, psychologically human beings are the same all over the world; the psychological content of humanity has been the same all through the ages. It is self-centred, divisive, conflicting, lonely, confused, unhappy and so on. Psychologically, human mind is the story of humankind. Krishnamurti says, "The brain is not my brain. It is the brain of humanity in which the hereditary principle is involved".

According to Krishnamurti, the mind is not what it appears to be. But it has several layers to it. It has "an enormous length, depth and volume". It has a heritage of its own. It has evolved through time. The mind has many levels and operates at different levels. But basically the state of the mind may be compared with an iceberg; a major part of it is 'hidden' as the unconscious and only a little part of it appears as being conscious and active. The parts of the mind are inter-connected, mutually dependent and interacting. The so-called unconscious remains inactive so long as the conscious part is busy; but it becomes active the moment the conscious part remains inactive; it sends its intimations to the conscious part when the latter is silent or goes to sleep. So the parts of the mind are not watertight compartments without communication. The division between them is illusory. So Krishnamurti says that the mind is one whole and a unitary process constituting "the totality of our being". Moreover there can be no two different states of the mind, since the content of the mind whether conscious or unconscious, is the same, namely, the past.

Krishnamurti compares the mind to the computer which is also a material process and operates on mechanical energy. The computer is made of silicon molecules and works on the electrical circuits of chips. Like the mind or the brain the computer works according to its accumulated memory; its responses, however spectacular they may be, are determined by the memory; they are the reactions of its memory. Like the computer the mind is programmed in different ways. Just as different computers are programmed differently to produce different results, the mind has been programmed according to a particular religion, nation, race and soon. "For centuries he has been programmed to believe, to have faith, to follow certain rituals, certain dogmas; programmed to be nationalistic and to go to war".

The mind, according to Krishnamurti, is temporal in character. It is the same as the brain put together through time which is the past. It is the brain which is old or traditional in character; it is the memory accumulated in the brain – cells; it has evolved through millions of years

of human experience, knowledge or thought. "The mind is the result of time, evolution, growth. It is expandable and contractable"²². It is temporal also because it is a 'manifested' energy which is the same as matter, and all manifested energy or matter is time. Krishnamurti says, 'Time is matter. Time is manifested' energy. The very manifestation is a process of time".

2. References

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