

This is an extract of a dialogue on 'uncertainty' and 'certainty'. It is from the 26.9.21 Satsang 'The World is a University'

*Question:* I have a question about uncertainty. Many people see uncertainty as danger, something that brings anxiety. But I also heard that we should live accepting the uncertain, to welcome uncertainty. How do you reconcile the two positions?

*Francis:* Whether or not we accept the uncertainty of life is a fact. So whether or not we like it is not going to change anything: life is uncertain. But - other than death and taxes - there are higher certainty in life, and I can see two things we can be absolutely certain of. The first one is that there is something rather than nothing: it is our experience right now, beyond any doubt. The other thing we can be absolutely certain of is that there is consciousness, that my words right now are being heard. The question is, is it possible to live our life only from these two certainties, all the rest being less than certain? And does that change our life in terms of happiness? Because what most people believe - as shown by your question - is that our problem is that we are not certain of some things. But it could be just the opposite: that our problem do not emanate from that which we are not certain of, but rather from that which we believe to be certain of, which in fact is less than certain. I could try to rephrase that.

Most people believe that the reason for psychological misery is the fact that life is generally full of uncertainty. In fact it could be that the root of psychological misery has its origin in our beliefs. Let me give you an example. The fear of death. Are we really afraid of the death of the body or of the disappearance of consciousness? If you were offered the choice [...] between (1) losing your body and keeping your consciousness and (2) keeping your body and losing your consciousness what say you? Of course

the smart choice would be to lose your body, because what's the use of the body without consciousness?

The common assumption is that consciousness is dependent upon the body, so most people would say 'yes but if I lose the body I also lose consciousness.' But that is just a belief, that is not a fact of experience. How do we know that consciousness is dependent upon the body? What is the evidence? [We can say that] whatever we perceive is dependent upon the body. Whatever we see is dependent upon the eyes and the nervous system apparatus behind the eyes. In the same way everything we feel in the body as bodily sensations is also dependent on the nervous system. Our thoughts, the ability to process data that we acquire through the senses, is dependent also on the nervous system, as it has been shown independently by neuroscience. So that the end of the body implies the end of the nervous system is not in contention here, I accept that. Some people wouldn't because they would argue that there is another possibility: that our experience is solely comprised of perceptions and that perceptions are mind-stuff, and that therefore everything that is physical, the entire physical universe, exists only in our mind. So they would deny the existence of the body itself, saying that we only know perceptions. But that is not the position I am taking here for the sake of the argument. It does not matter if the world exist independently from mind or not. The question is: is consciousness dependent upon the body or not and, if we think it is, what is the evidence.

We could define consciousness as the reality that is hearing these words right now. Because the fact that these words are heard is beyond any doubt. We can doubt of many things - we can have a doubt about the existence of New York City or Paris, because right now we are not perceiving them. But the fact that these words are being perceived, that fact is real.

So, because the fact that these words are being perceived is real, there is an element of reality that attaches to perceptions, and that allows me to define

consciousness as precisely this element of reality which is inherent in perceptions. So that is the definition I am going to use: consciousness is the reality that perceives, the reality that is using these words right now.

Now, the moment that we have used the word 'reality', what does this word mean? It means that which the existence of which cannot be denied. It means - if we use Spinoza's definition of 'substance' - that which exists essentially, that the essence of which implies existence, that which cannot not exist, that which exists in itself and by itself, that the existence of which does not depend on anything else, that which exists in an autonomous fashion. That is the definition of 'reality'.

The question then arises: are there more than one reality? Because obviously consciousness is the reality of our human experience, but remember we have now moved from mind to reality. We have kind of separated mind (perceptions) from the reality that perceives, consciousness. So the next question is: are there a multiplicity of realities? In other words, is my reality different from your reality?

My contention is that it is not, that we share the same reality, if only for the fact that we can communicate, so we have two options: either I deny the fact that we are truly communicating in this moment - that is the position of the solipsist: only I exist, you are the figment of my imagination [...] - or I grant your consciousness the same reality as I grant my consciousness.

So if I don't deny the fact that we communicate, this communication requires the understanding that we share the same reality. For instance, in a materialist model, we say that we share the same universe, we share the laws of physics, and as I speak I set the air between you and me in motion, there are variations of pressure in sound waves, they hit your ear drums and

your nervous system... We share the same reality, so it is ultimately this reality which we share that is our reality.

And therefore we come to the conclusion that no matter whether we think that there is only mind or only one physical reality. [...]

I cannot prove to you phenomenally [that there is only one reality] the way we prove in physics something through phenomenal experiments, I cannot prove what I am saying to you, but I can point to it, so that you can see the truth of what I am saying within you, through your own understanding.

I cannot prove to you that you are conscious, it is for you to decide. I cannot prove to you that consciousness is real, it is for you to decide. And I cannot prove to you that we are communicating in this moment and that this imply that there is only one reality, or at least that we share the same reality. But if you accept, as I speak to you, these three elements, you will come to the conclusion that yes, no matter how far fetched what Francis says seems to be [...] no matter how improbable it seems to be, at least what I am saying deserves a second look.