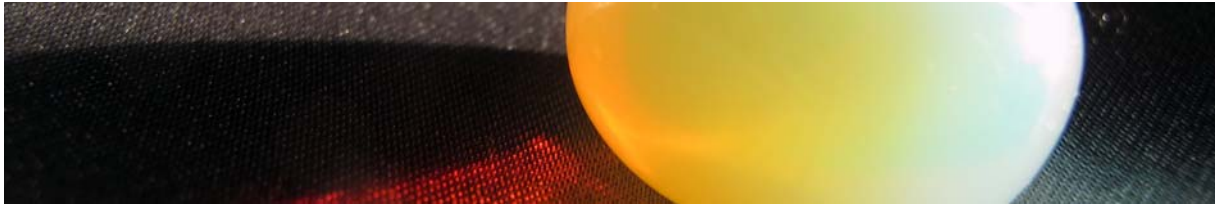


## *From the Kitchen*

13 July 2011



Who do *you* think you are?

Who is the *you* able to contemplate and respond to these questions? Is it separate from your mind? Does it dwell in your mind? If your mind is you, how do you relate to your feelings and emotions?

If you are *in* your mind, who is the *you* that dwells there? What does it mean to be ‘out of your mind’? If *you* are in your mind, then you are separate from your mind. Who is the *you* that thinks about who you are? As you navigate through your day, you will relate to different people in different ways. Is there anyone who knows you as you really are? If so, are you being yourself when you are with others?

There is an interesting situation with parents of deaf children. Many such parents do not see their children (or themselves, if they are also deaf) as in any way handicapped. These children have often learned sign language and, although their communication may seem to be in English (if they live, say, in Australia), it is actually a separate language, with its own grammar, syntax, nuances, etc. If they also read and, maybe, speak English, they are truly bilingual. The important point is, that *we* may regard them as handicapped, because they cannot hear. There is a discrepancy between who we may think they are (handicapped) and who they may think they are (non-hearing).

You may ask yourself to what extent you are defined by how much you are like others, or not like others. There is the shade of your skin, the shape of your nose, how high or wide you are or the shape and size of your primary and secondary sexual characteristics.

This is all heady stuff, but important if you are to navigate your way through ideas like these, because I suggest that your wellbeing, your health, your happiness and your sense of fulfilment, are all dependent on how you see yourself and on your view of the world.

How reliable are your impressions of that world, through your eyes, ears, tongue, fingers, nose? You will probably have seen pictures meant to create optical illusions. What goes on in your brain that you cannot rely on what you see? I invite you to read the following paragraph without thinking while you read:

Wehn lterets isndie wrods are mxeid up, you are sliti albe to mkae snese of teh, as  
lnog as the frsit and lsat lteetr are in tiehr crorect palecs. Waht deos tihs maen aoubt  
raletiy?

What does this mean about reality indeed? If it made no sense to you, have another look at it. A whole book could be written this way and many people would be able to read it without any difficulty. What does it mean about the process that goes on between seeing and perceiving?

If your definition of who you are depends to some extent on how you *see* the world, who do you think you are?

There is a story told of Christopher Columbus’ ships anchored off the South American coast. As the story would have it, none of the indigenous people onshore saw the sailing

ships, presumably because they were not of their world, did not fit into their experience and they had no language for them. Eventually, someone did see something, perhaps because they could think outside the consensus reality. This led to a slowly evolving recognition and acceptance that there was something there. Once one person was able to see the ships, others could. Did Columbus' ships exist before the indigenous people could see them? Presumably they did for the crew.

There are also the accounts of the reactions of Australia Aborigines on first seeing Europeans: many Aborigines believed the pale Europeans to be the Ancestors come back.

Next time you are in an art gallery or museum exhibiting paintings by British artists of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, observe how they saw Australian native animals and trees which were different from anything they had previously seen. Do you recognise the representations as true depictions of animals you know well? How many times did artists have to see those things in order to depict them accurately? When a (dead) specimen of the Australian platypus was taken back to England, it was at first treated as a hoax – no-one would believe that such a mixed-up creature could exist in nature. A bit like the natives and Columbus' ship?

How deeply were these people immersed in their consensus reality? The botanists and zoologists were able to depict the strange new animals and plants of Australia more accurately in their drawings. Presumably they were trained to have more open and inquiring minds.

[to be continued in the next post]