

DAVID BOHM

Nov 29, 1962

Dear Maria

A few words to supplement my previous letter, answering yours  
of Nov. 7.

To come back to the idea that perception is also an intellectual  
function, let me begin with sensory perception. As I approach a  
distinct object, I first perceive that something new has entered  
the field of vision, but <sup>do not</sup> see it ~~yet~~. Then I discern  
clearly that it is different to its background, then I discriminate  
between it and nearby objects (seeing space as other objects between them).  
Then I begin to perceive its many qualities, and then I ~~see~~ see  
these qualities as special cases of more general qualities, which  
enable me to specify the object abstractly, as being similar  
in certain ways to others (thus generalizing the qualities) and  
different in <sup>certain</sup> ~~other~~ ways (thus particularizing the qualities).  
This is ~~not~~ an unbroken process leading from <sup>sensory</sup> perception  
to abstract thought.

But then, I can go on. I can subject my general concepts  
to an internal mental scrutiny, perceiving them  
rather than in sensory perception. First, I must discern that  
some new concept is appearing or forming in my mind, then  
I discriminate it from others by sensing something in between <sup>it and others</sup>.

I suggest that this takes place at a pre-verbal level, much as happens at first in seeing shapes, colors, etc. This is at present an unclear subject, but well worth further study. I think that one can sense a discrimination between concepts, much as one can do between objects, tones in music, or colors in a spectrum. The sense of discernment and discrimination is a very broad one, and can be generalized from sense perception to a perception of distinctness between ideas and concepts (as well as feelings).

Once we get this far, we can go further, and perceive the (conceptual) qualities of our concepts. These can then be generalized and particularized, thus leading to second order abstractions, concepts of concepts. This is the level at which science usually works.

But one can go stage or stage beyond in the degree of abstraction, reaching, for example, the general qualities of generality and particularity themselves. But at each stage, a perceptual step of discernment, discrimination, and formation of appropriate qualities, must be carried out, which is then followed by an abstracting step to the next conceptual level.

Because there are many steps, and much possibility for confusion in all the steps, the process may be fairly slow, under many conditions.

~~Call of the~~

You are quite right that there are many symptoms of truth and falsity. But no matter how many there are, they must finally appear a still higher generalization of our capacity to discriminate. For we must be able to discern the symptoms and discriminate them, finally discern these discriminatory truth and falsity themselves. I suggest that all ~~discrimination~~ is discrimination is a generalization of perceptual discrimination, so that eventually, perceptual discrimination becomes a special case of the process of discrimination → a whole. In other words, as we evolve, new intellectual discriminations, then feed back in our perceptions, so that we see the world differently. (I think there are many cases of when we see something differently after we know more about it.)

In all of this, I think the essence of ~~truth~~ <sup>the</sup> discernment and discrimination of truth is non-contradiction in the totality of an experiencing. ~~It~~ This includes every kind of experience, practical and theoretical, as well as emotional. Thus, a man may be putting out a generally sound idea, but as a cover for emotions, motives, etc that he wishes to hide from others, or perhaps even for himself. In time, if he is doing this, he will in time come to a contradiction, in some phase

of his experiences, and sense the contradictions as an inherent conflict

When, at each moment, the whole of a man is oriented to discerning all the contradictions and conflicts in all of his experiencing, being ready to develop new ideas, as motives, goals, actions, and practices to resolve these contradictions, then he is in what I would call a state of truth.

To remain in such a state, he must be ready to alter ~~to give up~~ any idea, emotion, or habit, however much he believes in it, if it ~~is necessary~~ should be contributing to a contradiction and conflict of this kind. So, I think that the effort to separate intellectual truths from emotional truths (sometimes called honesty, integrity, etc) will eventually fail, though it may have meaning in limited domains.

And here, note that one can discern one's emotional conflicts, discernmentary the emotions, elaborating their (emotional) qualities, and going on to abstract thinking about them.

So I want to stress that thinking has a perceptual aspect,

In the act of thinking, one is discerning, discernmentary, finding qualities, generalizing and particularizing. When this act is over, the results of the act are spoken or written down or remembered

as thought. Then, the results of past thought can be subjected to an internal scrutiny, to discern new aspects, discernmentary new concepts, new qualities, leading on to new generalizations and particularizations. So, thinking is a movement, a dynamic ~~that~~

process, which "precipitates" thought as its result. But thought (plus fresh perception) is the basis for new thinking.

We tend to confuse the act of thinking with its result as thought. Up to a point, this is o. k. But in time, it is bound to lead to contradictions, especially as we get to the "fundamentals" of a subject. For now, past thought is just what we are questioning, trying either to justify it or to ~~disprove~~ alter it or to alter it so as to remove difficulties. But in such a case, intellectual activity as perception is very significant (discernment of concepts, discernment, discernment and discernment of contradictions, etc.) The creative new step comes first when ~~the~~ contradictions in the old are discerned, discernmented, studied abstractly, etc, ~~and then~~. In this way, the perceptive faculty is freed to create new concepts, to be ~~discerned, discernmented, etc.~~ developed by further ~~the~~ discernment, discernment, etc. So I think that creativity and fresh sensorial perception have basically the same roots.

I should appreciate very much hearing what you think about all this

Yours  
Dave