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Wolfgang Bernard

Original Belief

1 "I" – Presuppositions

When you say "I", who are you referring to? You may respond: "me" or "I am the one who sees, hears, feels, etc." We could call that "I" our identity,* that is, who we think we are: the grand total of all our beliefs, ideas, behaviors, habits, feelings, and so on.

We are born with the potential to feel, to think, to believe and many other mental and emotional faculties, and we know that during our lifetime our beliefs, opinions, and inner states change, just as our feelings about other people and things do too.

Yet, through all of this, we still feel that something within us never changes. That feeling of "I am, I exist" gives us the impression that we have been there ever since we started thinking. So, if all that we call our feelings, our beliefs, our thoughts are liable to change, are they that unchangeable "me"? Can I really define myself by all of this? The answer is, No. None of those could possibly produce a continuity congruent enough to give us the impression of possessing a permanent, never changing "I".

To know who I am, it may be helpful to think of who I am not:

Since I am able to observe my thoughts, I must be something other than my thoughts. ("Who is it that thinks?")

I can experience my feelings, so I must be something other than my feelings. ("Who is it that feels?")

I can forget memories and yet continue to exist, so I cannot be my memory. ("Who remembers?")

So, how did it happen that this person I call "me" came to be me? How were we tricked into thinking that we possess a genuine, authentic "I"? And if we aren't what we think, feel, believe, who are we?

2 *Beliefs**

If we start from the presupposition that beliefs are not innate but

* Asterisked words are discussed in a Glossary on p.64.