

**Week 1** Answer to Question 3  
Step 2.3 Ask Mark

**Question 3:** When you read some of the psychoanalytic texts (especially Freud), it seems that our unconscious is somehow working for itself. I think some of our unconscious actions are so much separated from us the unconscious somehow thinks for itself, has feelings for itself. All the things that exist in our unconscious have come from our conscious feelings and thoughts, but when they're in the unconscious they don't seem to be yours anymore, at least not exclusively belonging to us. So the questions are: is our mind the only mind that exists in our brain? And is our unconscious a part of our mind, or is it another mind?

Ok, so that's a great question! Is the unconscious part of our minds a separate mind from the mind that we're conscious of? I can see where this question is coming from, as the questioner says, he or she begins with Freud. And I think that Freud not only tends to write as if the unconscious was a second mental agent alongside our conscious ones that we we're aware of, but he actually explicitly said so in one place. He wrote, with reference to the difficulty that people have in believing that they possess an unconscious mind, he said we should use as the model, for how we think about our unconscious mind, we should use the model of “the problem of other minds”, which I refer to in our course “What is a mind?” He says that just as we can never actually perceive the mind of any other person - we can only ever empirically, directly know our own minds - so, too, we can't perceive or know our own unconscious minds. So just as we are willing to bestow upon other presences, other beings in the world, we're willing to infer that they have minds, just like we do, he says we should do the same with our unconscious. We should infer that our unconscious has a mind, that is to say that there is an unconscious mind within us, just as we are willing to accept that there is a mind within other people that we are not conscious of.

I think that this way that Freud writes leads to the type of puzzlement that the questioner is referring to. But I don't think that the unconscious mind works in that way. I don't think - and Freud goes even further when he starts speaking about primal fantasies that we've inherited from the past, experiences of previous generations, that there is, for example, a primal father who's got some primal pair of scissors that wants to cut off your primal penis...he seems to really believe that we have these little figurines running around in our unconscious minds, with minds of their

own! I think if you look at the accumulating evidence as to how the mind - the unconscious part of the mind - comes into being, it suggests a rather different state of affairs.

The unconscious mind is - as the questioner correctly points out - derived from our conscious minds. So first we experience something consciously, and then we render it unconscious later. Please note, it is you who's experienced it consciously in the first instance, and then you render unconscious your experiences. So what is being automatised - what is being rendered unconscious and no longer has your conscious presence - is something that you experienced. In other words, the mind - the agent of the mind - that has shaped that unconscious mode of operating, is you. It's not some separate presence within you. It's an automatised way of behaving, derived from a previously volitional conscious way of behaving or experiencing. So the intentionality, the mental agent, the volitional intent, etc. - however you want to put it - the core of the mind that is now unconscious, is yours.

I think that where the difficulty arises - which is what I think the questioner is talking about, where they're coming from - is that once you've automatised something, by automatising, by rendering unconscious, what we literally mean is withdrawal of you, that is to say, withdrawal of your consciousness, withdrawal of your awareness. And so, you know, it feels as if it's no longer you, although it's derived from you. But remember this: that the you that originally had the conscious experiences that become - or the conscious modes of operating - that become unconscious, that you isn't the you - the present instance of you, the present edition, the mature version of you. It can be a much younger, much less rational and reasonable and learned you.

So much of what we automatise are ways of being, ways of dealing with the world that were laid down when we were 2, 3, 4 years old, and the kinds of intentionality, the kinds of volitions, the kinds of decisions that you made then, may feel very alien to you now. And so it feels as if there's some foreign body, some alien presence governing your actions, whereas really it's just a more infantile, more primitive, more ignorant version of yourself. Which is why it's always a good thing to use whatever means you can to regain consciousness, to reclaim awareness of these automatised decisions, especially the ones that feel 'egodistonic', as they say, especially the ones that seem to be working against your own best interests. It's best to bring those back to consciousness, to bring those back to yourself, your present aware, learned, clever, rational self, and to come to new decisions, and not to rely upon old bad decisions that you made when you were little, and were in no position to decide. So that's how I would answer that question. No, there's no "second mind" - the unconscious mind is derived from your conscious mind, but it might be a little out-of-date, and therefore not behaving in the way that you want it to.



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