

## **BERNARD KASTRUPA**

### **"REALITY IS ESSENTIALLY PSYCHIC"**



**If this quantum scientist, philosopher, and computer engineer is right, materialism becomes irrelevant. His work is nothing less than a philosophical revolution: called "objective idealism," this approach radically changes the way we think about ourselves and the universe. It takes time to absorb Bernard Kastrup's philosophy, as presented in his books *The Idea of the World*, *More Than Allegory: On Religious Myth, Truth, and Faith*, *Why Materialism Is a Nonsense*, and other works, but it is worth the effort. As an analytical idealist, Kastrup argues that consciousness is the ontological foundation, the ground of reality. The entire universe is a projection of an indivisible, instinctive consciousness, just as dreams are projections of our sleeping minds. Kastrup defends philosophical idealism more fully and logically than anyone before him.**

As a scientist who worked at CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research), he is well-equipped to demonstrate how quantum physics fits in with the idealist model. Taking the debate between materialism and idealism to a new level, he argues, based on evidence, that "the seemingly objective world we live in is like a transpersonal dream: the tables, chairs, stars and galaxies we perceive in it have no existence independent of our minds." If Kastrup is right, then the materialist hypothesis has lost its value. His work offers nothing less than a Copernican revolution - a complete revolution in the way we think about ourselves and our world.

**Daniel Pinchbeck: Let's take a quick look at your journey.**

**Bernard Kastrup:**I basically grew up in the world of science. I went to university when I was 17. I graduated at 22 and got my first job at CERN in Switzerland, on the ATLAS experiment, which has been around for 10 years, but we were the ones who built it. From there I moved up into the high-tech world, working on artificial intelligence and reconfigurable processors. I have a degree in computer engineering.

I have a PhD, but working in artificial intelligence raises the question of what intelligence is. After all, you're building a system that's as intelligent as a physicist to evaluate the products produced by a nuclear explosion or a particle collision with a detector. So if it's intelligent, what's missing for it to become conscious, for its mind to gain experience? I've been thinking about this for a few years. I hit a wall because it soon became clear that whatever you do, you can only change function and structure, and neither of those functions has anything to do with experience. Then I realized that I had made a mistake in my reasoning. I had to retrace my steps and find the point where I made an unwarranted assumption.

**DP: What was this incorrect assumption?**

**BC:**The unfounded assumption was, of course, that consciousness was something that had to be created, rather than a field where everything was actually created, where everything actually happened. Once I came to this conclusion, I spent several years trying to reshape my worldview so that it was coherent, internally consistent, and aligned with empirical data, so that a different narrative would be born in my head that would connect me to the world and to other people. The result was a philosophy that I have been promoting for almost 15 years.

**JP: I'm curious about the AI controversy, where a Googler claimed that his AI had become intelligent. You said that if everything is an expression of a unified field of consciousness, then AI is also an expression of that unified field. But I think the question is whether part of that structure can become conscious and realize that it has free will and almost a soul or spirit. Is something like that possible with AI?**

**BC:**No. I think that saying that everything is conscious doesn't mean that everything is conscious from its own personal perspective. [He holds up the bottle] I don't think this water bottle is conscious. In fact, I don't think we can single out the water bottle as part of the Universe at all. It's a nominal slice of the inanimate Universe that we call "the bottle" for convenience, but where does the bottle end and the atmosphere begin? Where does the river end and the ocean begin? I don't think a silicon computer is conscious in the sense that it has its own private, conscious perspective, but a computer exists in a field of subjectivity that is fundamental to its own nature. It is an aspect of that field of subjectivity, but it doesn't have its own personal, subjective perspective. I think only living things have it. I think living things are dissociated aspects of this vast field of subjectivity, and because of this dissociation we have private, conscious perspectives.

**DP: So you see clear differences between living and inorganic beings?**

**BC:**It's a clear distinction. It's precisely because we live in a mechanistic culture, trying to explain everything in mechanistic metaphors, that we don't see a clear, obvious distinction between inorganic beings and living organisms that have metabolism. Metabolism is a very specific, unique process in nature. Protein reactions, transcription, ATP synthesis and breakdown, mitosis - these are all unique phenomena of life. And a silicon computer is something else entirely. It doesn't have metabolism. It's really a glorified calculator. All this hysteria about artificial intelligence becoming conscious and uploading its thoughts so that you can live forever, like in "Westworld" or "Ex Machina" or "Black Mirror" - these artificially exalted products of the media create a sense of plausibility for something that is fundamentally absurd. I can simulate a kidney on this Apple iMac that's in front of me down to the molecular level. But the imitation is not the same as the one being imitated. When it comes to consciousness, people think that if we just model the patterns of information transfer in the human brain, we'll somehow get a conscious being. That's like thinking that your computer will pee on your desk because you simulated your kidneys.

**DP:** Many people think that AI is constantly expanding into areas that we thought were purely human. I spoke to Garry Kasparov many years ago when he was the world chess champion. At that time, he was still better than any computer, but he kept looking at an 80-move endgame that the computer was solving, and I think he suddenly realized that his time was running out. Now, thanks to Midjourney and OpenAI, you see that even journalism is going to be easily created, perhaps with the help of AI. All kinds of creative activities, music and so on... It seems like the shadow of AI is hanging over the world.

**BC:**I think we're creating a fundamental confusion. There are two things here. The first is artificial consciousness, the second is artificial intelligence. Intelligence is a property that can be measured externally. Intelligence is the ability to process data intelligently and make intelligent decisions about what actions to take, a way to respond intelligently to environmental conditions and challenges. It has nothing to do with consciousness. In our case, consciousness and intelligence go hand in hand. If you look at the actual definitions of what we mean when we talk about intelligence, you can have a strong artificial intelligence that is much smarter than a human.

I think it's inevitable. It's already happening, but that doesn't mean that such an intelligent computer will also be a conscious computer in the sense that it has its own private, subjective inner life. There will be strong artificial intelligence. What you won't have - in silicon computers - is artificially created private subjectivity. Consciousness is not something that can be measured from the outside. Consciousness is a type of existing subjectivity that I think is the basis of all nature, animate or inanimate. But private, conscious, inner life, we have reason to think, correlates

with metabolism. And there is nothing else - just metabolism, certainly not electronic microswitches that open and close depending on the flow of electrons.

**DP: I liked your book "The Idea of the World" where you talk about allegory, a certain view of consciousness as an essential reality, where reality is understood as a kind of collective shared dream, similar to how poets and mystics understood it.**

**BC:**Our naive view is that the world as we perceive it is the world as it really is. In other words, we think of perception as a transparent window into the world. We have good reason to believe that this is not the case. If our internal cognitive or perceptual state reflected the state of the world, our internal entropy would remain without upper limits, and we would simply dissolve in a hot soup. Evolution does not provide the prerequisites for seeing the world as it is, seeing the truth. Evolution promotes survival, so we see the world only in a coded version that helps us survive and preserve our internal structure. Metaphorically speaking, we are the pilots of an airplane without a transparent windshield. We only have an instrument panel: we fly according to the readings of the instruments. What we call the physical world is what is displayed on the instrument panel. We, like the airplane, have sensors that measure the real world. In the case of an airplane, this is an air pressure sensor, an air speed sensor, and so on. We have the retina, the eardrums, the skin surface, the tongue, and the nasal mucosa. The results of these measurements of the world are presented as they really are, just as the airplane presents an internal dashboard that allows us to successfully navigate the world, but it is not seen as it really is. Just as the dashboard is not the external world, so the perceived physical world is not the world as it is, it is only a representation of it. And if you accept that, then every aspect of the physical world is a symbol of the dashboard. Everything tells us about what is behind and beyond. The physical world now signifies and signifies something that goes beyond the physical world itself, in the sense that the sky outside the window goes beyond the dashboard.

**DP: "The Idea of the World" is striking in that you seem to offer a philosophically and scientifically grounded way of re-exploring poetic, symbolic, shamanic imagination.**

**BC:**Yes. There are many theories that can be classified as idealism. They have one thing in common: they all claim that reality is essentially mental. One variant that was popular a couple of hundred years ago was Berkeley's subjective idealism, which can be summarized as: "To be is to be perceived." And this, as it were, elevates the content of perception to the thing itself and violates Kant's dichotomy between phenomena and noumena, in effect claiming that phenomena are noumena. That the world exists only insofar as it is the content of perception. That perception does not reflect a natural objective world outside, that perception is a thing in itself. In other words, reality is

a kind of dream, and somehow our dreams are synchronized and coordinated, but there is nothing beyond the images of our dreams.

I don't think that's likely, because if you were sitting next to me, you would describe my research exactly as it would fit my own descriptions. It seems inevitable that there is a world beyond our individual minds. The question is, isn't this world inherently mental? There are mental processes going on out there. The hypothesis of objective idealism is that there is something objective beyond our point of view. Just as your thoughts are objective from my point of view, so there are "thoughts of nature" that appear to us as the physical world of things, fields, particles, and so on. But from our point of view, the inanimate world is essentially subjective. In other words, there is a world that doesn't care what you think about it. There is a world that will still exist even if no one is looking at it, but it is not physical. Physicality only arises through measurement, through the interaction of a detached private mind with these transpersonal mental processes. Sensors measure these transpersonal mental processes and display them to the individual mind on a dashboard in the form we call the physical world. We maintain the idea of an independent objective world that would still be there even if there were no private mind to observe it.

**DP: What do you mean when you say that reality doesn't exist and that everything is psyche?**

**BC:**We know that our mental processes, which can be objectively measured, related to conscious experience, are not happening in one place, in the brain, they are happening everywhere. In the same sense, the mental inner life of the entire Universe, the inanimate Universe, is like a body, a display on the dashboard, which we call the perceptual screen. These are the galaxies, the clusters of galaxies, the dark matter and the dark energy in the Universe, which, interestingly from a topology point of view, are very similar to the mammalian brain when we do computer simulations of the structure of the Universe on the largest scales. And no one can explain it. When you look up at the sky and you see stars and clusters of galaxies and things that you can't see, like the distribution of dark matter, you are looking **at into the brain of nature's mind**. What I mean is this: up to the horizon of my personal experience, all I can experience directly is mind. Up to the horizon of our individual mind, everything is psyche, and beyond that, more psyche. And these psyches, when observed from the outside, look like matter, just as my personal psyches look like matter when observed from the outside, they are the neuronal correlates of my consciousness.



Photo: Pavel Tchelishchev. Eye – Sun

**DP: Can you give an example of an act of perception?**

**BC:**I'll give you a general example: if I'm sad and I'm crying, and I look in the mirror and see material tears streaming down my face and the distorted physical configurations of my facial muscles, that's how my sadness looks from the outside. The material of my tears, the muscles of my distorted face, is the manifestation of my consciousness through the dissociative boundary of other people in their lives. In other words, it's the image of my consciousness in their lives, on someone else's dashboard, or on my own dashboard if I have a mirror that reflects it.

**DP: Is it the same with the perception of the Universe?**

**BC:**Likewise, the physical Universe, galaxies, galaxy clusters, quasars, black holes, the distribution of dark matter, that's what the mental processes of our minds look like in essence, when they're reflected on our dashboards when we measure them. So matter is always, under all circumstances, processes of consciousness, as they look beyond the dissociative threshold. And then you make sense of it all by postulating the only given of nature, which is mental stuff, and that's all we have before we start theorizing. So if you can explain our observations based solely on mental stuff, then you have the simplest, most intuitive, most understandable account of what's going on.

**DP: I flipped through one of your recent books, "The Reality of Reality," in which you argue that religious myth is a useful way to think about the world from an anthropocentric perspective.**

**BC:**It's no wonder that throughout our history, different peoples and different cultures in different geographical regions have encountered the same intuitions. They only look different because of different metaphors, but if you can read through this outer layer of metaphors, value structures, and cultural references and get to the heart of the matter, they are remarkably similar. Like the mythology of the Australian Aborigines is similar to the mythology of the Huitoto tribe in the Amazon jungle. Cultures separated not only by half a planet, but by thousands of years. I don't think this is a coincidence. We've been intelligent for about 30,000 years, maybe 50,000 years [cave paintings, sculptures, tools]. At that time, people were developing symbolic thinking, which, strangely enough, existed already 200,000 years ago [e.g., in burial practices], so it remains a great mystery how symbolic thinking suddenly appeared in our species. Intelligence is very young - it was born yesterday. And other mental abilities that are not designed for conceptual thinking, humans have been characterized by at least two, and possibly even three million years ago, depending on the latest discoveries of paleoanthropology. Because we are natural beings, rooted in nature through **intuitive root**, which existed perhaps a couple of million years before intelligence. One might argue that these intuitions are unreliable. But they are reliable in the sense that they reflect our connection to nature at a root level, which is closer to the warm, moist facts of life than to the spacious conceptual clouds that are often detached from reality, detached from our basic intuitive faculties. And I don't think it should be surprising that we are rooted in nature through intuitive roots that are millions of years old, that we understood things much earlier than we are comfortable acknowledging with our modern minds. We simply didn't have the language for it.

**DP: What can we learn from myths and religions about your hypothesis about reality as a mental perception?**

**BC:**There are many different myths in Aboriginal cultures, but one of them says that a deity dreams the world and suddenly wakes up in a dream when animals come out of her armpit. And after she wakes up in her dream, she obeys the rules of that dream, so she has to kill and eat animals in order to survive. If you travel to Huitoto on the other side of the world, in the Amazon jungle, their deity has a very ephemeral dream. It just slips through her fingers. The deity thinks of tying the dream with a rope so it doesn't escape, and throwing this fragile dream on the ground, and then securing it with her foot. And when she steps on it - boom! - she enters the dream, and from inside the dream, spitting on the ground, she creates a jungle. It's impossible not to notice the striking similarity between these two dreams. Does this also apply to Christianity? Look at the Gospel of John. The word is the translation of the Greek word "logos," which also means thinking. So, the Word creates the world. Thinking creates the world. And the word "logos" is God. And here Christ is born into the world as the son of God, who is also God, and obeys the rules of this world, even to the point of being crucified,

he bleeds out and dies. In the early myths of Hinduism, God dreams of the primordial waters, then casts his seed into the primordial waters that he dreamed of and gives birth to himself in those waters, within what he dreamed of. The realization that everything is consciousness, which began as an impersonal dream, is then that the dreamer enters his dream and becomes subject to the rules of sleep, the localized expression of consciousness within himself, and we find that just about everywhere.

**DP: I wonder if this way of thinking led you to any religious practice.**

**BC:**Not really, not in a structured religious practice. But I, as an adult, take religion seriously. I pray. I try to pray differently than other people prayed when I was a child. I don't tell God what to do. My form of prayer is a kind of rejection of my personal plans. I'm a monkey swinging on a rock and traveling through the universe. What hope do I have of understanding what's going on? My belief is, "I put myself in the hands of nature and try to be the best version of it, accepting that I can't understand it all."

**DP: Do you believe in some form of consciousness or soul after death?**

**BC:**I don't think there's enough empirical evidence to postulate that consciousness continues to exist in a personal form after the death of the body. I think the body is a kind of dissociation in the field of consciousness that represents what all of nature is. The body is what a person looks like. So if the body is gone, that's an empirical clue to me that there's no more localized consciousness. Do I care? Not at all. You don't cry over the death of your personal avatar from your dream when you wake up in the morning. When you wake up in the morning, your dream avatar is dead. It was a personification of your mind inside your mind. I'm not ignoring the idea that some kind of personality structure survives physical death. The question is, do we have a strong enough empirical basis to develop this hypothesis? I don't think we have any at this stage. Now my prejudices lean towards these things. I hope my consciousness does not survive death in human form, because personality is a state of consciousness that is obviously very prone to suffering. It is no secret that I have used psychedelics in large doses in the past. I have decided that it is my intellectual duty as a writer on consciousness to examine it from a first-person perspective...

**DP: What are psychedelics?**

**BC:**Mostly psilocybin. /.../

**DP: Reductive materialism is still the main paradigm of belief, and there is a sense that idealism is a more logical paradigm, more in line with the reality of the world we experience. In addition, we see a world increasingly threatened by an ecological megacrisis. Do you think this shift towards idealism could have any positive impact on the world?**

**BC:**I think the shift to idealism is inevitable because arguments and evidence are not something that can be distorted forever. At some point, everyone will face facts, and facts speak very clearly in the laws of physics, analytical philosophy, and the neurobiology of consciousness. Idealism is the only story we have today that is still viable.

**DP: What might be the impact of the idealistic hypothesis on our inner mental life?**

**BC:**We will stop thinking that our traumas, our emotions, our depressions are just useless products of the mechanistic functioning of the brain, so you can suppress your traumas, suppress your bad feelings, because, you know, it's all in vain anyway. You don't have to take any action to integrate and grow: just take a pill to feel better, and live as tools for the power structures that currently hold the levers of society in their hands. This will change. Now our mental inner life is a thing in itself. It is not a by-product - it is what is really important. And if so, then life is not about collecting shoes, cars, houses or clothes. Life is about collecting insights. Suffering has meaning. Your suffering will become the carrier of a new perspective, a new understanding, a new relationship with yourself, with the rest of nature, with other people. And when you die, you will transfer those insights into a broader cognitive context. It is not for nothing that death is depicted as a symbol of a sickle or scythe - a harvesting tool. If we are dissociated from the processes of the natural mind and develop metacognitive insights throughout our lives, if life is what dissociation is, then death is the end of dissociation and the rendering of those insights into a broader context in the field of subjectivity that is the basis of nature. It is simply harvesting in the most positive sense imaginable. And if life becomes a gathering of insights, then everything changes.

**DP: Does this also have political and economic consequences?**

**BC:**Capitalism as it exists today will lose its fuel. You will no longer need to pack your belongings. You will no longer need to buy things to suppress unpleasant feelings, traumas, or unresolved problems. Maybe you will look them in the face and we will finally become adults. Today we are eight-year-olds running countries. That will change.

**DP: Are you an optimist?**

**BC:**I'm not an optimist! I'm not sure we'll survive as a civilization. As a species — yes. There are still Australian Aborigines, African Bushmen, Northern Inuit who have survival skills without civilization. But you and I will not survive.

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\* This is abbreviated *Daniel Pinchbeck* An interview with the famous physicist and philosopher Bernard Kastrup was published in Purple magazine in 2023, and I translated it, slightly abridged, from Russian, based on the magazine's *eroskosmos.org* permission.

About the Author: [//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernardo\\_Kastrup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernardo_Kastrup)

B.Kastrup and his colleagues founded **Essential Foundation** [essentiafoundation.org/analytic-idealism-course/](https://essentiafoundation.org/analytic-idealism-course/)

## **ANALYTICAL IDEALISM COURSE**

This is a carefully crafted, yet free, online, video-based course on Analytic Idealism with over 6 hours of content, led by Bernard Kastrup, Executive Director of the Essentia Foundation. While the course is designed to be accessible to a non-specialist audience, it makes very few concessions regarding the content and depth of the material covered. Thus, the discussions are not breezy, but require the focused attention and engagement of the audience.