

## Mind as Hallucination

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What is the human mind? There is a hint of a new answer in today's hot technology: Large Language Model Generative Artificial Intelligence (LLM-GAI). LLM-GAI can produce text (CHAT-GPT4) and images (DALL-E, Stable Diffusion) that at times seem quite mind-like. It is game changing for many things that had considered purely the domain of human production (writing essays and papers, poetry, stories, visual art), as well as certain practical mind-like achievements that seem to surpass human ones (to mention just a few recent success stories: playing chess and go, diagnosing diseases, figuring out how proteins fold, developing new drugs, recognizing chemical compounds, writing computer programs, recognizing human faces, classifying galaxies and other technical images, detecting disinformation).

But is an LLM-GAI *really* a mind, or just a simulacrum? True, the results often fall short of quite passing the Turing test (of being indistinguishable from human productions). But it is interesting to turn the question the other way round and ask: is mind as we know it itself a simulacrum? The results of LLM-GAI are sometimes called *hallucinations*. What if the human mind works, at a certain level, much like an LLM-GAI, if somehow an intricate miscegenation between word and sensory-motor experience and instinctive drives creates a hallucination that is taken for more than it really is; seems to be, for example, the experience of a *soul*—a word that was after all for a long time used as nearly a synonym for human thinking?

This is not an entirely new idea. For example, the early Buddhist ideas of Mahamudra, which go back to the great 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE Indian thinker Nagarjuna, sometimes called “the second Buddha”—see *Mahamudra: The Moonlight—The Quintessence of Mind and Meditation*, a 16<sup>th</sup> century text by eminent scholar-lama Dakpo Tashi Namgyal translated by Lobsang Lhalungpa and published in 1986. Mahamudra adumbrates a Way toward achieving a permanent power of *co-arising awareness* such that simultaneously with any perception or conception there arises the awareness of the illusory nature of that perception, an awareness that rather than what is perceived being *the thing* itself, as it is usually taken to be, it is merely a process taking place mechanically within a mind. The analogy is used in a Buddhist parable that it is like the reflection of moonlight in water—it is taken for the moon but in reality it is only a reflection.

Is such awareness truly a possible human achievement, at least for an adept who devotes perhaps a whole life to inner work such as described in the book? But again we are invited to turn the question around: can a *mechanical process* similar in some ways to an LLM-GAI produce such a compelling illusion of mind that for practical purposes, if not also for metaphysical understanding, it actually *constitutes* mind? What did, for example, Gurdjieff mean by saying that mind is mechanical—is it this kind of machine?