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# Review of "How to Think Impossibly: About Souls, UFOs, Time, Belief, and Everything Else" by Jeffrey J. Kripal, 2024

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**Abstract:** *This article summarizes Jeffrey J. Kripal's book "How to Think Impossibility". Following this summary, an overview of Carl G. Jung's work, which serves as Kripal's starting point, will be presented. Subsequently, certain differences in terminology (like: monism, dualism, pluralism, etc) will be clarified. The article will conclude with several examples from authors trained as psychologists, mathematicians, or physicists, who have written in the spirit of dual aspect monism.*

**Keywords:** *dual-aspect monism; Carl Gustav Jung; Jeffrey J. Kripal; Ego; Self; God, Mind; Matter.*

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The book written by Jeffrey J. Kripal (Kripal, 2024) has a simple structure. In the "Introduction", the phenomenon of "impossibility" is defined. Then, in the first three chapters, this phenomenon is described with the help of examples: NDE (near-death experiences) – in chapter 1, UFOs (unidentified flying objects) & UAP (unidentified aerial phenomena) – in chapter 2, and the perspective of Kevin (an autistic IT-st whose vision Kripal presents at length). The last three chapters attempt to explain the phenomenon of impossibility from the perspective of dual-aspect monism (chapters 4, 5, and 6). The "Conclusion", starting from the perspective of dual-aspect monism, offers more details regarding the statement "the human is two, and the world is one"; while the "Epilogue" presents the metaphor of "the three bars", or another way to restate the statement in the conclusion section.

Therefore, Jeffrey J. Kripal is a dual-aspect monist. In his words, the world is one, and the human is two:

- "*Our perceptual apparatus splits a single reality into two domains: a mental and a material domain*" (Kripal, 2024)
- "*I am articulating a form of dual-aspect monism – that is, the position that reality is ontologically One, but epistemologically Two*" (Kripal, 2024)
- "*To think in a more granular (and diplomatic) fashion, I like to imagine three bars that we can attempt to jump over in cases like this. I am thinking of my high school days on the track team. I was quite bad at it, but I remember the high jump pit. Mostly it was lanky teenagers trying to leap backward over a bar, until they couldn't, which was usually very soon. The bar clanked (it was still metal) and flew a lot. Bodies leaped and fell."* (Kripal, 2024). And Kripal goes on, *"In any case, this is precisely the general direction I would hope we might move now: the employment of altered states of consciousness (first bar) as generators of a philosophy of mind (second bar) toward the scientific modeling of the physical cosmos (third bar). I want us to try to jump over all three bars. Maybe we cannot. But we can try, and it seems good and useful to know where, when, and why the bar falls.*" (Kripal, 2024)
- "*I am not a quantum physicist and will not pretend to be one. But neither am I a loose cannon. Moreover, and most importantly, I have spent large chunks of the last quarter of a century sitting with, speaking to, and carefully reading colleagues who are professional quantum physicists and historians of science who want to talk to philosophers and historians of religions like me. Foremost among these colleagues is the Swiss-German quantum theorist Harlad Atmanspacher, whose dual-aspect monism I adopted some time ago as my own working ontology and whose recent writings on the "deep structure of meaning" (meaning is real and an "objective" feature of the physical world) with the historian and philosopher of physics Dean Rickles are very close to where I want to go in these pages. Indeed, this book is organized around this dual-aspect monism and this deep structure of meaning and begins to end with a penultimate chapter that expands on an essay I originally wrote for Harald*" (Kripal, 2024)

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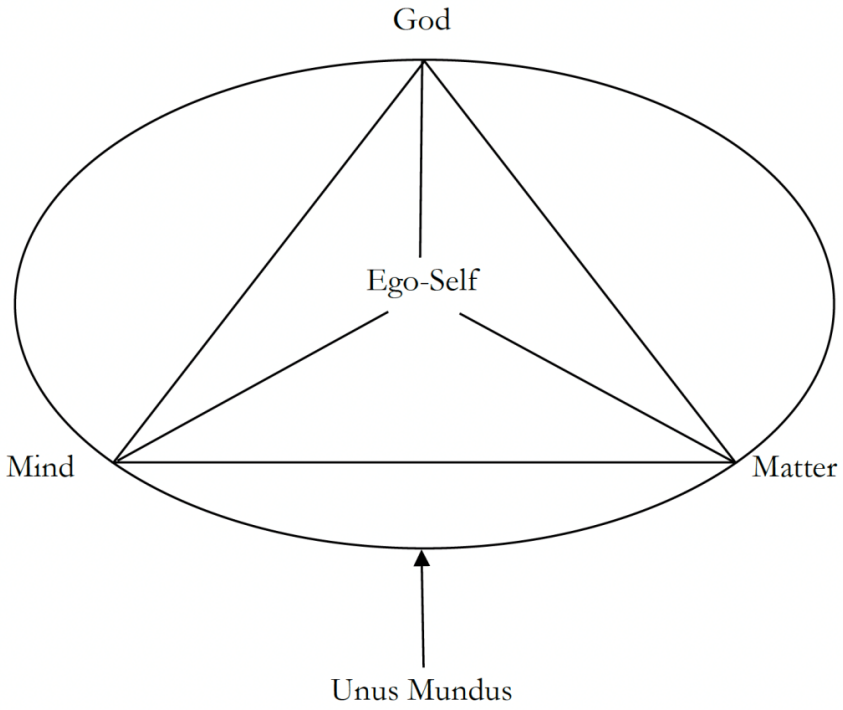
To understand these statements, I will try to answer the following questions:

- What does Carl Gustav Jung say about this perspective?
- What is the difference between monism, dualism, and pluralism?
- Within monism, what is the difference between neutral monism and dual-aspect monism?
- Who are the thinkers that wrote in the dual-aspect monism perspective?

First, this perspective is based on three horizons: mind, matter and God (Kripal, 2024). The Ego is somewhere between these horizons, mediating between them; and the Self is a central point like the Ego, and much greater than It. Sometimes the Ego is differentiated from the Self, other times it is integrated into the Self, so that we can speak of the Ego-Self axis (Edinger, 1992; Neumann, 1964).

In his writings on Eastern religious tradition, Jung refers to the distinction between extraversion and introversion. Extraversion, characteristic of Western man, is the Ego's focus solely on matter; while introversion, characterisitic of Eastern man, is the Ego's focus solelyl on the mind (Jung, 1969, 1971, 1989). Furthermore, in his works on Gnosticism, Jung discusses the concepts of the demiurge, Anthropos, the creatura, the pleroma, the pneuma, and the hyle. The Ego-Self axis is represented by the demiurge, the ignorant Ego that believes Itself to be the most powerful deity; and by Anthropos, the Self, as the sum of conscious and unconscious processes (Jung, 1975). The creatura is another name for the demiurge. It stands in opposition to the pneuma, hyle, and pleroma. The pneuma (or mind) is attracted to the beauty of the hyle (or matter) through the mechanism of projection during introjection. These two processes are integrated during individuation thanks to the pleroma (or God) (Jung, 1969). Similarly, in writings on alchemy, Jungian texts refer to the process of coniunctio. Referring to several opposing symbols – such as the Sun and the Moon, the King and the Queen, Salt and Sulfur, or Adam and Eve – Jung understands coniunctio as the unity of opposites (Jung, 1970) which has a transcendent function that unites the conscious with the unconscious, the Ego with the Self (Jung, 1972). Later interpreters also mention God's influence on the mind or matter, but also a reverse influence of one of the two on God. This influence make sens, the meaning (i.e. the comprehension) being opposite to causality (Lachman, 2010; Wilson, 1988)

**Figure 1.** Carl Gustav Jung and dual-aspect monism perspective




Source: author's own representation

Having clarified the Jung's vision of the world, the Kripal's discourse starts from some basic distinctions: monism is saying that there is a single principle (see Spinoza), dualism that there are two distinct principles (see Descartes), and pluralism that we can speak of more than three principles (for instance, Leibniz). Thus, monism is "*a philosophical theory that maintains that there is one, and only one, substance*" (Flew, 1984). Moreover, dualism is "*a theory concerning the fundamental types into which individual substances are to be divided. It asserts that substances are either material or mental, neither type being reducible to the other*" (Flew, 1984). Finally, pluralism means "*the view that the world contains many kinds of existent, which in their uniqueness cannot be reduced to just one (monism) or two (dualism).*" (Flew, 1984)

Within monism, three other perspectives can be distinguished: physicalism (which states that everything is matter) – ex. the Vienna Circle; idealism (which considers that everything is mind) – ex. Berkeley, Kant or Hegel; and dual-aspect monism & neutral monism (which hold that both matter and mind come from a deeper structure). Restated, physicalism, or

"*the doctrine that all propositions asserting "matters of fact and real existence" can be formulated as statements about publicly observable physical objects and activities.*"(Flew, 1984). On the other side, idealism is "*a name given to a group of philosophical theories that have in common the view that what would normally be called "the external world" is somehow created by the mind*" (Flew, 1984)

Neutral monism (represented by Mach, James, or Russell) differs from dual-aspect monism (represented by Jung-Pauli, Eddington-Wheeler, or Bohm-Hiley) in that the former considers mind and matter to have ontological status, while the latter considers them to have epistemological status. However, both these perspectives maintain the existence of a single and whole deep structure in which mind and matter are rooted. This distinction is highlighted by Gerald Baron as follows: "*Perhaps one way of understanding this [distinction] is to categorize the difference in terms of whether they are ontic or epistemic. As I am not a professional philosopher, I will use the terms related to things that are real or have objective reality outside of knowledge or perceptions for ontic. For epistemic, I will use terms more related to knowledge, as in what we know or can experience. As I understand the differences then, in neutral monism the mental and physical are ontic and represent objective reality as does the neutral domain from which they emerge. In dual aspect monism, only the foundation from which the mental and physical emerge is considered ontic- real. The mental and physical are both epistemic or more related to our experience of them and knowledge of them. The distinction that makes them separate is something that occurs outside the foundational reality, which is not affected by this external distinction.*" (Baron, 2022)

This discussion about monism, dualism, and pluralism can be summarized in the following image well explained by William James (quoted by Gerald Baron): "*Out of my experience, such as it is (and it is limited enough), one fixed conclusion dogmatically emerges, and that is this, that we with our lives are like islands in the sea or like trees in the forest. The maple and the pine may whisper to each other with their leaves… But the trees also commingle their roots in the darkness underground, and the islands also hang together through the ocean's bottom. Just so there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir*" (Baron, 2022)

In conclusion, several thinkers from the perspective of dual-aspect monism will be cited for how they define the deep structure in which the mental and the material are rooted. These quotes are taken from Gerald R. Baron and his articles on dual-aspect monism, published in medium, in 2022; as well as from Harald Atmanspacher & Dean Rickles' book, "Dual-Aspect Monism and the Deep Structure of Meaning", also published in 2022.

1) Carl Gustav Jung & Wolfgang Pauli – Unus Mundus
- "*Through letters that went on for over twenty years, the two great minds shared ideas about what these things could mean for our understanding of the world. They concluded that the best explanation could be captured in the words Unus Mundus – one world. This was a world outside of time and space, a unitary world that remains unitary. Both mind and matter are within this world of the deep reality. Within that deeper reality, archetypes can impinge on the experiences of mind [and matter]. Synchronicities are to be expected as minds and matter are totally and deeply intertwined.*" (Baron, 2022)
- "*(…) Jung (1963) adopted the notion of an Unus Mundus, one world, from the medieval alchemist Gerhard Dorn to postulate a single undivided reality that presents itself as neither physical nor mental. This Unus Mundus is the basis for a whole set of elements emerging by distinction that are still psychophysically neutral: the archetypes.*" (Atmanspacher & Rickles, 2022)

2) Arthur Eddington & Archibald Wheeler – Spiritual World & Pregeometry
- "*Both Eddington and Wheeler considered the underlying reality from which the mental and the physical emerged (…) What is this underlying reality, then? For Eddington, a more spiritually-oriented thinker than Wheeler, [it is called] "the spiritual world". (…) For Wheeler, intrigued as he was by Einstein's relativity, this world was what he called "pregeometry".*" (Baron, 2022b)
- "*(…) the subjective mental M and the objective physical P are bound together in a mutual embrace, coming from some deeper, psycho-physically neutral [PPN] reality, called "pregeometry" by Wheeler and the "spiritual domain" by Eddington*" (Atmanspacher & Rickles, 2022) Furthermore, "*In addition [to physicalism and idealism], we find the view that what there is beyond this structural knowledge, replete with its physical (P) and mental (M) aspects, is what Eddington calls "the spiritual world": a deeper, transcendent reality that does not partake in the subjectivist treatment of physics, nor can it be nailed down by objective descriptions – it appears to be something like the "absolute" that we have met elsewhere, accessible by mystical experience.*" (Atmanspacher & Rickles, 2022). Finally, "*Wheeler has his own version of this [Unus Mundus] in the form of his so-called "pregeometry", which is neither mind nor matter (nor spacetime), but something underlying all three.*" (Atmanspacher & Rickles, 2022)

3) Basil Hiley & David Bohm – Holomovement
-"*There may be entities that arise by decomposition of the undivided reality and yet are psycho-physically neutral, so that they have no mental or physical properties. Pauli and Jung refer to these as archetypes, culturally invariant patterns that exist prior to the mental-physical split but serve as ordering factors for M and P once those become separated. In Bohm and Hiley's terminology, these archetypal orders are called implicate orders, each of which can acquire differentiation by explication. Eddington and Wheeler*

*use the general notion of structure to characterize such contents of the psychophysically neutral. Each of these thinkers attempted to define in some way the underlying reality. What is this thing that incorporates archetypes, structure, and the implicate order? Each thinker had their name for it. Pauli and Jung used Unus Mundus, one world (…) Eddington called this the "spiritual world", and Wheeler called it "pregeometry". Bohm and Hiley call it "holomovement".*" (Baron, 2022e)

-"*Because the implicate order is not static but basically dynamic in nature, in a constant process of change and development, [Bohm] called its most general form the holomovement. All things found in the unfolded, explicate order emerge from the holomovement in which they are enfolded as potentialities (…). Though the holomovement is to be understood as a totality, something akin to the One of Parmenides, it is nonetheless a dynamically evolving entity in universal flux, closer to Heraclitus.*" (Atmanspacher & Rickles, 2022)

**Statement on the Use of AI Tools** | *No AI tools were used for data analysis or synthesis, for any means: description, interpretation or prediction*

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