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THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

[*IRREDUCIBILNOST ZAVESTI*]

Consciousness, phenomenal consciousness, the subjective qualitative character of experience, or simply experience, is something with which we are most intimately acquainted. This concept has two fundamental properties: primitiveness and subjectivity. Phenomenal consciousness is a primitive or fundamental concept. This means that we cannot define it by using more basic or simpler concepts. Since it is not complex but rather a simple or primitive concept, any attempt to define consciousness using other concepts would ultimately prove itself to be circular. Phenomenal consciousness is essentially subjective. We understand experiences as subjective phenomena in a specific way, from our own unique perspective, while, in contrast, objective phenomena can be understood in an identical manner from multiple different perspectives. The consciousness can be hard to fit into the concept of the natural world. The natural world, according to the contemporary naturalism, is synonymous with the physical world. A completed physics, science dedicated to studying the world at the fundamental level and the laws which govern it, should in principle be able to provide a complete description of such a world. It is difficult to conceive how consciousness, something that seems significantly different from the processes found in nature, could be part of the physical world: conscious states are, among other things, subjective and private, while physical processes are objective and public. Phenomenal consciousness is undoubtedly connected to physical processes – science has observed and partially described stable correlations between brain processes and conscious states, but it has not answered the question of why these correlations exist in the first place. The nature of the relationship between physical processes and conscious states, despite significant advances made in the domain of neurophysiology, remains mysterious. Is it even meaningful to speak of conscious states or, in philosophical jargon, of qualia? If we assume that they do exist and, accordingly, that phenomenal consciousness exists, that there is a world beyond our conscious representation of it, and, finally, that the naturalistic picture of the world is, in principle, correct albeit incomplete, then we can pose the following question: is it correct to assert that physical processes *produce / cause* conscious states or, on the contrary, that physical processes *constitute / are* conscious states?

The main thesis of this dissertation is that phenomenal consciousness cannot be reduced to its physical substrate conceived in a traditional way. In order to defend this thesis, I will present two arguments in favour of it – Descartes' reason and Kripke's reason. Saul Kripke will be presented as the most influential contemporary successor of Descartes, at least in the domain of philosophy of mind, and philosophers like Thomas Nagel or David Chalmers as post-Kripkeans who employ Kripke's modal argument against physicalism. The first reason for rejecting the idea of reducibility of phenomenal consciousness to its physical substrate – Descartes' reason – can be expressed in the following manner: identification of a certain brain process with a certain conscious state does not help us to understand why this brain state constitute that kind of conscious state. In such a case, an objective process is equated with a subjective process, i.e. with a certain perspective, without providing any explanation of how the perspectiveless process could give rise to the perspective as something staggeringly different from itself. The second reason for rejecting the idea of reducibility of phenomenal consciousness to its physical substrate – Kripke's reason – rests on the claim that the analogy between equating conscious states with physical processes and equating one set of physical phenomena with another set of physical phenomena simply does not hold. The latter strategy is justified, while the former is not.

In the first part of the dissertation I will assume that there is a world beyond our conscious representation of it and, on the basis of this assumption, I will follow David Chalmers' proposal and construct the logical space of all possible philosophical positions regarding the relationship between physical processes and the conscious states dependent on them. The history of thinking about this issue will lead me to position Descartes and Freud – the thinkers who shaped the contemporary understanding of the relationship between physical processes and the associated conscious states – within the aforementioned logical space.

In the second part of the dissertation I will try to reconstruct Descartes' thinking about the mind-body problem. According to the orthodox interpretation, accepted by Chalmers, Descartes was a dualist who believed the mind and the body are two ontologically distinct substances that can causally interact with each other. I will acknowledge that such an interpretation can be supported by Descartes' texts. However, Descartes' *oeuvre* is such that this interpretation cannot be the definitive one. I will propose a heterodox interpretation of Cartesianism according to which Descartes can be interpreted in three other ways. Descartes will be presented as a precursor to the three positions within the context of contemporary philosophy of mind: a version of materialism (McGinn's mysterianism), a version of panpsychism in a broader sense (Nagel's neutral monism), and even a version of panpsychism in a narrower sense (Strawson's realist monism).

In the third part of the dissertation I aim to present Freud as the thinker responsible for leaving the Cartesian tradition, in all of its variants, behind. I will propose not only possible, but also convincing reconstruction of the Freud's take on the mind-body problem. Freud will be presented as a staunch materialist, a physicalist *avant la lettre*, and the fundamental ontological assumptions of his philosophy of mind will be criticized accordingly.