

CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF EVOLUTION

The following investigations attempt to present some philosophical views on the origins of human mind and consciousness. They are inspired by recent findings in biology, cognitivist and social studies, in the light of which thinkers strongly oppose those contemporary conceptions of mind and consciousness that are inspired by the philosophical ideas of Descartes. They suggest to view the ontological status of consciousness from a naturalised perspective without, however, reducing either mind or consciousness to the processes which are of neurophysiological, informational, behavioural or typically interactional nature.

THE NATURALISED CONCEPTIONS OF MIND

The post-Cartesian discussion about mind and consciousness involved the following approaches concerning the psychophysical question: autonomism, parallelism, animism, interactionism and epiphenomenalism, all of which, in some degree, assumed the independence of psychic forms of the body. These views were radically opposed by the monistic approaches, some of which, described as materialistic, viewed spirit merely as a function of body, while others, known as spiritualistic, reduced body to a form of spirituality. These arguments have by now become historical, except for those few thinkers who, mostly because of their ideological background, defend the dualistic standpoint unmindful of the academic research into the phenomenon of mind and consciousness.¹

Modern views on the status of psyche and its relation to body can be basically classified into the following categories: “eliminating materialism”, “inferring from folk psychology”, “functionalism” (strong version of artificial intelligence), “intentional approach” and “eliminationism”. All of them strive to do away with the question of “the being of mind” and virtually reduce mind to a phenomenon: either a neurophysiological process, a version of computer artificial intelligence or a mode of using language. The common characteristic

of all these approaches is undoubtedly *naturalism*. "This conviction," as Bogdan Chwedeńczuk rightly observes,

is followed by an expectation that the academic cognitive perspective will witness some discoveries and theories which would allow to integrate consciousness, so far quite resistant to nature, into a uniform vision of the world. Naturalism results in the rejection of a centuries-old "mythology" with its "substantial soul" and privileged access given only to 'me'.²

Hence, the naturalised conceptions of mind view mind and its consciousness as phenomena which are explained in terms of Darwin's theory of evolution; they are seen as evolutionary products that came into being as a result of countless processes of mutation and innovation as well as selection in living organisms leading to the rise of the brain with all its complex functions. These conceptions are based on the data supplied by such disciplines as: ethology, neurophysiology, the theory of games and systems as well as language, communication and cultural studies. The most important representatives of the approach are considered to be the three following authors: John A. Searle, Antonio R. Damasio and Daniel C. Dennett. As far as the classical questions of the nature of mind and the relation between soul and body are concerned, all the three authors look for arguments rejecting the problem of "the Cartesian bridge," which implies the existence of an impassable gap between the body and its mind.

Although evaluations of scientific data done by the scholars differ from one another, which results in slight differences between their conceptions, they are essentially convergent in their views on what mind is, how it works and how it should be explored. Thus, it can be assumed that they adopt a moderately *functionalist* standpoint, which says that mind is a function of neurophysiological processes which go on in the brain and which are reactions to stimuli from the natural and social environment in which a given human subject of psychic activities lives and functions. Mind, being a function within which consciousness originates, becomes an independent being, not reducible to the natural and social processes that underlie it.

DANIEL C. DENNETT'S MODEL OF MIND

We shall now focus our attention on one of these conceptions, namely D. C. Dennett's *phasal* conception of the evolutionary development of human mind. According to Dennett, human mind is an effect of successive stages of development of mental structures in living organisms. The sources of these mental structures are located at the base of mental processes in man,