

ФІЛОСОФІЯ СВІДОМОСТІ

УДК: 130.3

O. V. Kulieshov

THE CAUSES OF CONSCIOUSNESS: ANTI-PHYSICALIST ARGUMENTS

The paper deals with factors enabling the existence of consciousness as a whole, leaving aside individual conscious states or processes. These factors are supposed to be either physical or non-physical. The purely physicalist explanation leads to one's admission of identical brains and other substantial for brains' functioning physical factors being able to produce identical consciousnesses. The impossibility of this situation entails that there are no purely physical causes of consciousness.

Keywords: *consciousness, identity, physicalism.*

The theme of this article needs to be explained, since it may be misconceived. My subject-matter is not consciousness itself, but its causes, which may well be different in its nature from the nature of consciousness. Neither my concern is about the causes of individual mental states or properties. Such causes may also be quite different from the general causes of consciousness itself. It is not impossible, for example, that some individual mental objects are the effects of other mental objects while the general causes of consciousness are exclusively physical. The problems of mental causality may be laid aside for a while as well. This type of causality is surely not what I mean. My aim is to examine the possibility of empirically and logically grounded decision as for the factors enabling the existence of consciousness as a whole. These factors are either physical or non-physical or both – the dichotomy of physical and non-physical factors exhausts the logical (the most general) possibilities. This logical space is just where I'll try to find the needful decision.

No doubt, any reasoning on the causes of consciousness is inevitably based on some presupposed understanding of consciousness as well as of physical reality. So let me begin with preliminary explication of the terms crucial for further argumentation. This explication necessary is axiomatic in its form; in other words, some statements are taken for granted without discussion. It doesn't mean that they can't be discussed; they are taken as axioms only within this article.

Consciousness is conceived here on experiential grounds, on everyone's knowing (be it even an illusion) that there is such thing as her or his consciousness. The nature of this thing (either physical or not) is out of discussion here. There enough to be two phenomenal characteristics recognized by me and – hopefully – by all other human beings. Firstly, all conscious phenomena coexist with outer reality objects, differ from them (even if not being phenomenally distinguished) and correlate with them. Secondly, all conscious phenomena coexist and correlate with the Self or the Subject (its nature being also not necessarily explicable). This presupposed understanding of consciousness is – I believe – to be accepted by commoners as well as by specialists (maybe with some reservations).

The same experiential grounds suffice to recognize the meaning of the other key notion of *physical reality*. We need not to have its full understanding; it is necessary, first of all, to acknowledge that this reality exists and differs from what we feel to be our consciousness. It must also correspond to modern physical conceptions. So, generally speaking, it is reality which is accessible to contemporary natural sciences. One may object that the future development of natural sciences will radically change our physical conceptions. Even so this consideration has no destructive impact on conclusions I'm going to entail, as my objective is to establish the correlation between the physical reality as it is seen *now* and the causes of consciousness. It is essential to add that complete change of physical conceptions looks implausible. The history shows that earlier ones do not disappear, but tend to be incorporated in new paradigms. In this context even ordinary folk ideas about physical reality, having existed for thousands years, cannot be regarded as totally false.

The generally accepted physical reality features include its objectivity, in other words, its separability from the subject. The objectivity of physical reality entails

that it can be acted on. It can be changed. The second general feature is the spatiality of physical reality. It leads to individual physical objects' existence. There are numerically distinct physical objects which can also differ in their qualities. The third important physical reality characteristic is its structural composition. Physical objects (maybe, macro-objects exclusively) can be decomposed into some more elementary objects. The reverse process, naturally, is also possible. Thus stated general features of physical reality give us an opportunity to characterize *non-physical reality* as subjective, non-spatial in physical sense and, maybe, structureless.

One more presupposition is needed for further reasoning. The notion of *cause* must be clarified in its usage within this article. By this notion it is meant what is called the necessary cause, that is, an object (real entity), namely the cause, which existence is necessary, but not always sufficient for the existence of another object, namely the effect. The cause then is an object or one of a totality of objects which are both necessary and sufficient for the existence of another object, being called the effect of this cause. It is supposed also that reality can be divided into causes and effects so that any object is either a cause or an effect or both.

The logical universe of causes is confined to two classes of physical and non-physical causes defined by the notions of physical and non-physical reality. It is supposed finally that an individual human consciousness is the effect of some cause or causes (not excluding consciousness itself). And that will do with presuppositions.

The task of finding the causes of consciousness has some possible solutions. The causes may turn out to be purely physical, purely non-physical or to be mixed in different ways. Non-physical causes are admitted by various types of dualism. Among them only classical substance dualism dividing reality into two separate substances – physical and non-physical – makes such explanation necessary. Emergentist or property dualism distinguishing physical and non-physical properties of physical objects might have made different choices as for the causes of consciousness.

Any type of materialism or physicalism in philosophy of mind – from classical Enlightenment materialism to the last century behaviourism, identity theory, physicalist emergentism, or functionalism – proceed from the assumption of purely physical causes of consciousness. Consciousness, according to this point of view, is

a part of the physical world sharing its ubiquitous causal interdependencies. The view may be assessed as dominant nowadays among intellectuals. Scientific findings, mostly those of neuroscience, witness the influence of the brain, the body, and the interacting with the brain and body physical environment on the consciousness and conscious phenomena. Scientific results don't diverge with commonsense beliefs. It must be observed that the existence of consciousness apart from the existence of brain and its physical surroundings has not been reliably recorded up to now. The causal role of brain and other physical factors in personal consciousness functioning seems very probable. Still no present scientific data can ground with sufficient necessity the statement asserting physical factors to be the only causes of consciousness.

So the specific aim of the paper is to confirm or to refute the possibility of purely physicalist explanation of why there is such a thing as consciousness. The impossibility of this explanation would be the evidence for non-physical causation. My starting point is naturally the physicalist assumption that the brain and other physical factors are those completely causing consciousness. I'll try to reach a definite conclusion, resting upon aforesaid presuppositions and some other empirically or logically valid considerations.

If an individual consciousness is entirely caused by an individual brain in its individual physical surroundings, then artificial building up of a brain must lead to the emergence of real consciousness. These are beliefs of many modern philosophers, not only materialists but dualists as well. J. Searle, for instance, is firmly convinced that «because consciousness is entirely caused by the behavior of lower-level biological phenomena, it would in principle be possible to produce it artificially by duplicating the causal powers of the brain in a laboratory situation» [5, p. 92]. D. Chalmers, who qualifies himself as a dualist, goes even so far as saying that «it remains as plausible as ever, for example, that if my physical structure were to be replicated by some creature in the actual world, my conscious experience would be replicated too» [1, p. 110].

However these convictions leave open the question about the possibility of artificial brain construction. This question, I think, is to be answered positively since

we have acknowledged aforementioned properties of physical reality. Its objectivity and structural composition make possible uniting the micro-objects into the macro-objects. Macro-objects of any structure and qualities are in principle technically constructible. The same properties and spatiality enable, moreover, the technical possibility of creating more than one object consisting of uniform elements and having identical qualities. Such objects will differ numerically but not qualitatively. I can only agree with T. Nagel's words that «there is nothing unique in the physical composition of our bodies» and «an animal organism is composed of ordinary elements, which are in turn composed of subatomic particles found throughout the known physical universe» [4, p. 28].

If human brain, human body, and environment factors are physical objects, then these statements are valid for them. It is technically possible to create artificially two or more indistinguishable by its physical structure brains and bodies placed in the same physical environment. And so there are no insurmountable obstacles in creating numerically different but qualitatively identical consciousness media.

Now let me apply the assumption of purely physical causes of consciousness to this imaginary situation. Suppose that someone has created two identical brains as well as other significant for the existence of consciousness physical factors. In this case two numerically different, but qualitatively identical consciousnesses must arise. Is it possible?

According to what we know about consciousness, it may be divided into two constitutive parts – phenomenal states and self-consciousness. Both are necessary for the existence of consciousness. There are, of course, some doubts as for the omnipresence of self-consciousness in conscious states and hence, for its constitutive role in consciousness. I mean J. Searle's conception. He distinguishes between the ordinary notion of self-consciousness and the technical philosopher's notion. For the former notion he denies that every state of consciousness is also a state of self-consciousness. In technical sense we can always move our attention from the *object* of the conscious experience to the *experience* itself and so self-consciousness is always ready to appear in the focus of our attention. In this sense self-consciousness is ever present in consciousness being somehow attached to every conscious state.

But it is the ordinary type of self-consciousness which is commonly meant self-consciousness [5, p. 141–143].

On my opinion, the stronger claim could be made here. The ordinary and the technical notions of self-consciousness refer to the same situations only to its different aspects. What matters is self-consciousness position within conscious experience – central («acute self-consciousness» in J. Searle’s term) or peripheral (corresponding to the cases of self-consciousness absence in the ordinary sense in J. Searle’s description). So «technical» self-consciousness may be interpreted just as ‘peripheral’ and as such it must be present in every situation involving consciousness.

Furthermore to be necessary constitutive element of one’s consciousness it is of no need to be present in all conscious states. Suffice it to say that consciousness as a whole doesn’t exist without self-consciousness. Nevertheless I think that self-consciousness is present in all conscious states. Consciousness is a world view. And every view has a point of view. It seems obvious that, as it is stated aphoristically by D. Dennet, «wherever there is a conscious mind, there is a point of view» [3, p. 101]. So there is no view without its point to be always present there. And this point is conscious Self. Surely, self-consciousness can be out of the focus of attention. But it is unimaginable that the Self would be completely excluded from consciousness. If it happens, then the whole consciousness is lost. So I can conclude that self-consciousness is defining ingredient of consciousness. Any consciousness has its specific self-consciousnesses.

Hence, if there are two different self-consciousnesses then there are two different consciousnesses. Qualitative identity of two consciousnesses means thereby the same identity of its self-consciousnesses.

But the notion of self-consciousnesses identity is senseless.

Phenomenal consciousness consists in phenomenal qualities (or qualia) caused by qualitatively different objects. Qualitative identity of numerically different objects makes possible numerical difference of identical phenomenal qualities. We are able to imagine two qualitatively identical objects. There may be also such qualitatively identical objects in different consciousnesses. Therefore the existence of two or more identical phenomenal consciousnesses is logically acceptable.

Self-consciousness is quite different in this respect. It is closed reality; everything that is identical with it in any way – either qualitatively or numerically – is the same self-consciousness. It follows that numerical identity of self-consciousness is identical with its qualitative identity. It is logically impossible for two or more numerically identical objects to exist. The same must be true about two or more identical self-consciousness (in any sense of identity). Our intuition confirms this impossibility. Two or more of our Selves are unimaginable.

These statements may be reformulated. Numerical difference presupposes that there are some objects objectively related. Objective relations are those existing between realities which are to some extent exterior one to another. Even partially objective realities, such as phenomenal representations of outer objects, may be numerically distinct. But it is not the case of self-consciousness. There is no outer self-consciousness to relate with. Self-consciousness is purely subjective, we can find here no traits of objectivity as it is the relation between the Self and this very Self. Apparently, there may be no numerically (by another term – objectively) distinct self-consciousnesses.

The fission of the Self as a result of fantastic neurosurgical complete disconnection of the brain's hemispheres depicted by some philosophers is the example of such unimaginable situation. It seems to be no more than purely speculative idea. Real cases of multiple personality recorded by psychiatric practitioners by no means witness the coexistence of identical Selves. Neither would do the (implausible as they are) presumably reverse cases of the same consciousness in different bodies. There is, for example, the case of twins, Greta and Freda in York, England who «seem to act as one» described by D.Dennet as the evidence that 'two or more bodies sharing a single self is not a mere fantasy» [3, p. 422]. If such cases are possible, what is at issue is the existence of one Self in two bodies not numerically different identical Selves.

So let me take it to be established that no two or more copies of the same self-consciousness are possible. This inference holds for consciousness in whole so far as self-consciousness has been defined as the necessary constitutive element of consciousness and no two objects may be identical having different constitutive ele-

ments. So there are no such things as identical consciousnesses in either sense of the term *identity*.

What further conclusions may be arrived at on these grounds? It follows obviously that qualitatively identical but numerically different physical factors cannot produce only numerically different consciousnesses. Neither it is possible to produce the same consciousness by numerically different but qualitatively indistinct physical factors. Numerically distinct physical objects (according to spatial character of physical reality) can produce only numerically distinct physical states or properties. Hardly imaginable as it is, the unique self in different brains cannot be the effect of purely physical causes.

There is, of course, D. Davidson's conception of mind and causality based on his idea that one physical cause of some sort may lead to different effects. And just this happens in human brain. The same physical processes may lead to different mental events. There is no nomological order in causal processes leading to mental states. D. Davidson holds that «two features of mental events in their relation to the physical – causal dependence and nomological independence – combine» [2, p. 224]. Hence «mental events as a class cannot be explained by physical science; particular mental events can when we know particular identities» [2, p. 225]. But the lack of nomological order must make possible that the same causes would sometimes produce the same effects and sometimes not. This doesn't hold in our case. The same brains (as it have been found out) never produce the same consciousnesses. There *is* nomological order here.

The only inference one can make is this: numerically different physical factors (brains, first of all) may produce only qualitatively different consciousnesses.

Nevertheless it is obvious that qualitatively identical but numerically different brains (and other physical factors effecting consciousness) are possible. As far as these brains won't produce qualitatively identical consciousness, as they have to do in case of purely physical causes of consciousness, there must be some other causes of differing consciousnesses. But brains and other physical causes engaged in my reasoning exhaust the sphere of physical causality. So there is no alternative to con-

clusion that some non-physical cause participates in consciousness emergence and functioning.

This non-physical factor may be consciousness itself, but then it must exist before its encounter with the brain. Or this may well be some pre-conscious factor belonging to non-physical reality. Being far from making definite assertions as for the nature of this non-physical factor (and still less tending towards religious explanations), I cannot but state its existence. The statement, I have come to, may seem implausible in fashionable scientific context. Nevertheless, if presuppositions taken are valid, I conceive nothing being capable to refute the resultant conclusion that there exist non-physical causes of an individual consciousness.

It may be objected that this conclusion runs counter to the principle of causally closed physical universe acknowledged by the evident majority of philosophers. In fact the idea of non-physical causes of consciousness doesn't contradict the principle of closed physical causality, provided that we admit non-physical nature of consciousness. It is with so called mental causality where the problem arises. In this case some physical events turn out to be partially caused by non-physical factors. Not proposing the decisive solution of this problem, I should observe that the principle of closed physical causality has no logical necessity. This principle is founded on empirical basis and is no more than a postulate accepted by reasons of convenience. This principle accordingly is liable to various modifications; it must be constantly verified. In any case I can't but admit that harmonization of the principle of closed physical causality with the non-physical causality conclusion, made in this article, is problematic.

References

1. Chalmers D. J. *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* / David Chalmers. – New York : Oxford University Press, 1996. – 375 p.
2. Davidson, D. *Essays on Actions and Events* / Donald Davidson. – Oxford : Clarendon, 2001. – 324 p.
3. Dennett D. C. *Consciousness Explained* / Daniel Dennett. – New York : Back Bay Books, 1991. – 511 p.

4. Nagel Th. The View from Nowhere / Thomas Nagel. – New York : Oxford University Press, 1989. – 244 p.
5. Searle J. R. The Rediscovery of the Mind / John Searle. – Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 1994. – 272 p.

Кулешов А. В. Причины сознания: антифизикалистские аргументы

Объектом рассмотрения являются факторы, обуславливающие существование сознания в целом, а не отдельных индивидуальных состояний и процессов в сознании. Предполагается, что эти факторы могут быть либо физическими, либо нефизическими. Доказывается, что чисто физикалистское объяснение ведет к признанию тождества сознаний, порожденных тождественными физическими факторами. Из невозможности этой ситуации вытекает невозможность существования только физических причин сознания.

Ключевые слова: сознание, физикализм, идентичность.

Кулешов О. В. Причины свідомості: антифізикалістські аргументи

Об'єктом розгляду є фактори, які зумовлюють існування свідомості в цілому, а не окремих індивідуальних станів і процесів у свідомості. Робиться припущення, що ці фактори можуть бути або фізичними, або нефізичними. Доводиться, що суто фізикалістське пояснення веде до визнання ідентичності свідомостей, утворених ідентичними фізичними факторами. З неможливості цієї ситуації випливає неможливість існування лише фізичних причин свідомості.

Ключові слова: свідомість, фізикалізм, ідентичність.