

Jakub Mihálik: Consciousness in Nature. A Russellian Approach

Abstract:

This thesis attempts to provide a philosophical answer to the question of how phenomenal consciousness, or experience, can exist in the physical world, i.e. in the world as it is described by science. The thesis has three parts: In the first part (chapter 1) I explicate the concept of phenomenal consciousness and contrast it with other concepts of consciousness common in the literature. Moreover, I suggest that the project pursued in this thesis can be naturally viewed as a part of the more general project of trying to find a stereoscopic view of man, taken by Wilfrid Sellars to be a crucial task for contemporary philosophy.

In the second part of the thesis (chapters 2 to 4) I offer a detailed evaluation of the attempts at a materialist reduction of consciousness. While in chapter 2 I explore and critique the approach of a priori physicalism (Dennett, Lewis, Rey, etc.), in chapters 3 and 4, I focus on the more recent doctrine of a posteriori physicalism and especially its most prominent variety called the *phenomenal concept strategy* (Loar, Papineau, Levin, Schroer, etc.). One problem with a posteriori physicalism is that, as Nida-Rümelin, Goff and others argue, the view cannot make sense of the plausible thesis that our phenomenal concepts a priori provide us with rich knowledge of the nature of their referents. I offer a new version of this type of argument, suggesting that the *non-structural translucency claim*, according to which our phenomenal concepts a priori reveal to us more than merely structural knowledge of their referents, is incompatible with a posteriori physicalism.

In the third part of the thesis (chapters 5 to 7), I explore the prospects of the main non-reductive approaches to consciousness. First, in chapter 5 I focus on strong emergentism, the view that consciousness is an ontologically new property which arises in certain highly complex physical systems. While I initially defend the view against arguments of Nagel and Strawson, I conclude that strong emergentists cannot make sense of consciousness being causally efficacious with respect to the physical world, and, as I argue, even of consciousness being caused or determined by purely physical underlying processes. In chapter 6, I argue for constitutive Russellian panpsychism which is a version of Russellian monism, a non-reductive view of consciousness inspired by Russell's philosophy of science. According to Russellian panpsychism, phenomenal properties are the quiddities that realise the micro-physical roles which physics informs us about. In the course of defending constitutive Russellian panpsychism, I offer new arguments against the main competing Russellian views: emergent Russellian panpsychism and panqualityism. Perhaps the most serious problem for constitutive Russellian panpsychism is the combination problem, i.e. the question, expressed e.g. by William James, as to whether and how micro-phenomenal properties can combine to collectively produce macro-phenomenal properties. In the final chapter I try to show how we can start solving this problem by appealing to the intuitive notion of co-consciousness.