

CO-OCCURRENCE OF SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE ASPECTS OF CONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE

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Since the later part of twentieth century we have been coming across an ongoing debate on the nature and function of mind. Often the debate is centred on the two theses. According to some, mind is a phenomenal concept; according to others, mind is a psychological concept. The reason behind this may specifically be traced back to Descartes' (1596-1650) concept of mind where he claimed that the idea of unconscious mental concept is a contradictory demand. On the other side long after Descartes', Freud (1856-1939) said that there are many activities of the mind which are unconscious. In the mean time, we also found the Behaviourists who claimed that there are no mental states at all. Though some Behaviourists accepted the existence of consciousness afterwards, but they gave no special attention to it. In this connection, we may also mention Ryle's (1949) proposal which declared that – all our mental concepts can be analyzed in terms of certain kinds of associated behaviour, or in terms of dispositions to behave in certain ways (Logical Behaviourism). In the period of Logical Behaviourism, there arrived the Functionalists like David Lewis (1966) and David Armstrong (1968), according to whom a mental state is defined wholly by its causal role.

The investigation about these two types of concept of mind should begin with the inquiry that whether the two are really different or same under two different titles. If the difference is tenable then the next question will be which type of concept is applicable to which type of mental state. It may be the case that both the types of mental properties are present in all the mental states. In fact, both of the concepts of mind have so much important role in discovering our mental world that none can alone give us the complete explanation of any mental state. Yet, in view of the above-mentioned debate, the following questions arise:

- i) Are both of the concepts of mind are equally capable of manifesting any type of mental state?
- ii) Is any one of them more capable than the other?
- iii) Can one type of concept be reduced to another type?

iv) Can the existence of any one concept be totally ignored?

I think we cannot explain any mental state without involving these two concepts and consequently we cannot abandon any of these two. If we take an example of a mental state and proceed then it will be easier to understand the whole thing. In this paper I intend to assess Thomas Nagel's article (1974) "What It Is Like To Be A Bat", Frank Jackson's article (1986) "What Mary Didn't Know" and David J. Chalmers' 1st chapter of the book *The Conscious Mind* (1996) entitled "Two Concepts Of Mind", to give a suitable explanation of the mental state called 'conscious experience'.

Generally we think that we have sufficient knowledge about conscious experience. But whenever we try to describe this entity we face strange problems. According to *International Dictionary of Psychology*, consciousness is 'having of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings; awareness'.¹ Initially the objection may generated here is that there are thoughts and perceptions which influence our mind without awareness about them. Of course, our general concepts of feeling and awareness support the definition.

However, let us start our discussion on this issue with some preliminary views of Nagel and Jackson. Nagel declares that '... fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism – something it is like for the organism. We may call this the subjective character of experience.'¹ Chalmers also argues that '... a mental state is conscious if there is something it is like to be in that mental state, if it has a qualitative feels – an associated quality of experience. These qualitative feels are also known as phenomenal qualities, or qualia for short.'² These two views give us such an impression that we naturally prone to include conscious experience under phenomenal concept of mind. Because of the fact that 'on the phenomenal concept, mind is characterised by the way it feels' and here conscious experience is equated with 'subjective character of experience' or 'qualitative feel' or 'phenomenal qualities' or 'qualia'. More stress is given on the term 'what it is like'. On the other hand, psychological concept of mind accepts that mental states have no role in giving appropriate reasons behind our behaviour. Alternatively we may call psychological concept as 'explanatory systems of functional states' or 'intentional states' or 'causal role of experiences in relation to typical human behaviour'.

Both of the concepts – the phenomenal concept and the psychological concept, ascribe that mental states are some kind of internal states. Cognitive scientists question the acceptance

of conscious experience and its importance. For them, if these internal states are used only for giving explanation of our behaviour then whether they are conscious or not do not matter. Unconscious internal states can control our behaviour. We can regard it as another point of view about conscious experience.

We see that phenomenal qualities of mind are totally dependent on the subjective phenomena of the cognitive agent and always associated with the respective agent. But the supporters of psychological concepts of mind always try to establish the theory from an objective point of view. They always try to reduce the subjective factors of experience into some physical processes. If it be possible then we can observe the quality of experiences that others have. It is something like that if I know mine, I can know all of them who belong to my category. But the problem persists because we differ in our point of view or attitudes towards any subject. Without being in a same position I cannot have the same quality of experiences which they have. I couldn't even infer or imagine the very feeling, though I may assume that I can, by observing their behaviour. As I realise every time that I have subjective experience and if it is not merely a type of behaviour then I cannot ignore the existence of it in other minds. But as my subjective feeling is purely mine, so their minds also have the same nature. So we can't reject the phenomenal concept of mind.

On the other hand, some theorists who believe in psychological concept of mind claim that though conscious experience should not be rejected but they are ultimately reducible to some kind of physical processes. If we do not accept the objective position then the concept of mind will remain a mystery forever creating puzzle among in our mind. If knowledge is restricted only within my realm, then its range will be very short. The problem is that if the theorists assume that every mental state can be reduced in a physical process then we have to signify the correct subjective experience so that we can point out the appropriately reduced physical process. No one can do the job for me. Yet again if we know the exact subjective experience then that kind of knowledge will be associated with another subjective experience. So there is no possibility of complete reduction of phenomenal concept of mind to psychological concept. We have to investigate that whether subjective experiences have objective nature and/or the objective processes have subjective nature. We have to look after first the general nature of the subjective and objective problems.

Often we regard that 'to be conscious of something' refers 'to know about something'.

We have considered other minds, the nature of their conscious experience. But can we have certain knowledge about our subjective experience? We think that we know all about ourselves but actually we do not know. Jackson states that after getting only the physicalist account of knowledge of something we may have the impression that we know the matter completely.³ But after having the direct experience of the subject and realizing the associated subjective nature we recognize that we have a new kind of knowledge which we did not have earlier. I realize another aspect of the same thing or the connected qualia. If we believe that physicalism is all that is there and if we know the physicalist account we know all, then this kind of subjective experience has no place in our knowledge realm. Imagination also cannot give us this type of knowledge because we cannot imagine that this type of knowledge exists.⁴ But we can't ignore that we depend on imagination when we lack any kind of knowledge and want to fulfil the gap.

Physicalist may argue that all types of feelings are actually some types of deduction from other knowledge and there is no need to accept the special subjective nature of mental states. After experiencing anything first time directly, it is obvious that there should be some new internal states and processes of the brain which will control our behaviour differently. As Jackson states it: 'it is knowledge how rather than knowledge that.'⁵ But our debate is going on whether physicalism gives us the complete knowledge or not and it has been shown that it is not all whatsoever because I have to admit that I was in dark about those new kinds of experiences. I was also wrong about the other minds because I claimed that I know all about them but I have no assumption about the subjective nature of their experience as well as mine.

Beside 'conscious experience', if I want to consider any other mental state, like 'perception', we will find the same situation here. According to Nagel, '... structural features of perception might be more accessible to objective description, even though something would be left out.'⁶ According to Chalmers, '... the concept of perception can be taken wholly psychologically, but it can also be taken phenomenally, involving the conscious experience of what is perceived.'⁷ Justification of the fact that how the two kinds of mental properties reside in one type of mental states need to involve the notion of sensation. If perception tends to be psychological then the phenomenal part of it is sensation. Unconscious perception may be possible but generally we think that sensation could not be unconscious. Whenever there is

sensation there is a corresponding physical process which is called perception.

In this way we can verify that more or less all mental states occupy the co-occurrence of the two concepts - one is the phenomenal concept of mind and the other is psychological concept of mind. As we see that 'to be conscious' is just 'to instantiate some phenomenal quality' and again consciousness can also be used to refer to a variety of psychological properties, such as reportability or introspective accessibility of information. Therefore there are differences between these two concepts of mind and they exist in may be all mental states in such a manner that we cannot even reject any one of these concepts or reduce any one to the other or have total knowledge of one without the other.

Notes and References

1. *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, p.3
2. "What is it Like to Be a Bat?" p.519
3. *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, p.4
4. "What Mary Didn't Know", p. 567
5. "What Mary Didn't Know", p. 568
6. "What is it Like to Be a Bat?" p.525
7. *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, p.18

Bibliography

1. Nagel, T., "What is it Like to Be a Bat?", in *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, N. Block, O. Flanagan and G. Guzeldere (eds.), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, Bradford Books, 1974.
2. Chalmers, D. J., *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, New York and Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996 .
3. Jackson, Frank, "What Mary Didn't Know"," in *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, N. Block, O. Flanagan and G. Guzeldere (eds.), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, Bradford Books, 1986.