Review of: "Consciousness, Neo-Idealism and the Myth of Mental Illness"

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The review of the article "Consciousness, Neo-Idealism, and the Myth of Mental Illness"

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I have been invited to review Terry Hyland's article from {Free University of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland} entitled: "Consciousness, Neo-Idealism, and the Myth of Mental Illness" - likely because I have addressed the topic of consciousness in some of my published works.

Terry Hyland's interesting article concerns the philosophy of nature. The author discusses an abstract problem that is important to those who wish to have a deep understanding of the structure of the Universe. In my response to this article, I won't dedicate much attention to the thesis that we should recognize the unnecessary myth of mental illness. Rather, I will try to focus mostly on the claims of "neo-idealism". I will try to express my thoughts on how convincing the theses of neo-idealism are, what is the fundamental difficulty of this concept, and whether there is a difference between the "Physicalist Panpsychism" and "Idealist Panpsychism" emphasized by Terry Hyland.

Terry Hyland cites the following statements at the beginning of his article:

" current philosophy of science have advanced theories which propose that the natural world is imbued with, and indeed dependent upon, some form of conscious or mental element...."

"Philip Goff puts it, ‘consciousness is a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of physical reality’"

" Donald Hoffman (2019) prefers to say, it is consciousness itself – not spacetime, forces or material objects – that forms the fundamental basis of the cosmos. Hoffman argues that ‘space, time and physical objects are not objective reality. They are simply the virtual world delivered by our senses to help us play the game of life’ "

" McGilchrist ... is .. of the view that ‘the stuff of which physical reality is composed is mind-stuff. It is Mind that has composed a physical universe that breeds life, and so eventually evolves creatures that know and create...In them the universe begins to know itself’"

Every thoughtful naturalist (biologist, physician, physicist) in order to relate to such statements must be able to juxtapose them with their own, recognized model of the world. In my opinion, it is necessary to compare these theses with the

average, common thinking about the world. This common conception of the world can be briefly presented by considering:

The analogy between the early Universe and human embryogenesis

According to the Big Bang theory, in the first seconds of the existence of the current version of the Universe, there was… "not much of matter". Initially, there were only leptons, then hydrogen and helium atoms appeared. After a time, stars (energy sources for the neighbourhood) and planets orbiting around them were formed. Inside these planets, various heavier elements appeared. Biological life arose (we don't know how). As a result of evolution (whose mechanism is not clear and agreed upon), living organisms, plants, animals, humans occurred - at least on our planet. Some animals pass the mirror test. In living organisms, the ability to feel (to have "sentience") and to have so-called "self-awareness" appears. Some thinkers (researchers) broaden the spectrum of phenomena similar to “self-awareness" and talk about a more general concept referred to as "consciousness".

Beings endowed with this "consciousness" are characterized by having some degree of free will and can take matters into their own hands. Moreover, people have an incredible drive to understand the world, comprehend the world, and a desire to construct tools. Knowledge about the world is gathered in libraries, databases, computers. The Internet and artificial intelligence systems have been created. Perhaps AI systems will become the dominant intelligent beings in the distant future. At the same time, according to cosmological theories, the Universe is expanding, possibly heading towards so-called "heat death". There are many thinkers who, caring for an optimistic outline of the Universe model, assume that the cyclical Universe model is true [1]. The idea can be illustrated also be a simple figure https://www.angelfire.com/ga3/gean/fig-2-cyclic-universe.jpg Assuming that we indeed live inside a Universe that is cyclically reborn, the creation of "successor universes" will happen. Perhaps such a successor Universe will be “fine-tuned”. Maybe the descendants of us humans will influence this "precise tuning". The creation of a successor universe would be similar to what we assume about the beginnings of our Universe. As I emphasized at the beginning, there was only a plan, a code record, and… "not much of matter". The key is what form such a "record, theoretical outline, code for the next Universe" takes!

This important question can be considered by reflecting on the development of an embryo, considering the embryogenesis, and characteristics of a human fetus. As we know, at the beginning, in the zygote phase, there is only a coded record determining how the fetus, a newborn, and the adult human being should be formed, built, and function. We can say that at the beginning there is only a "record of the nature of an object (entity)", and the object does not yet exist. This record even anticipates that the emerging human fetus will have a brain and that shortly after birth (but not immediately), this offspring will be endowed with the ability for "self-awareness", and when it grows up, it will be fully conscious. At the very beginning, we have only a "coded record of a human being", which is "drafted" on DNA. This record (in fact two records of 3 billion of nucleotides) fits inside one cell, is miniature. However, this record, to exist needs a material carrier, that is the DNA. The whole project for creation of something as complex as a child, and then an adult human, is microscopic, abstract, wise but is written (drafted) on a material carrier known to us.

We can now return (by analogy) to the record for a new universe or to pondering "what is", "what exists" just before the Big Bang or in the first seconds after the Big Bang. Cosmologists tell us that even atoms didn't exist just after the Big Bang, that leptons (electrons) emerged first. But what did they emerge from? Cosmologists say it was the beginning of time and space. Moreover, physicists, gaining knowledge about the nature of matter with devices like the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), tell us that matter, if looked at more and more closely (in greater and greater “augmentation”), is more a set of 'relations' then "hard elements".

That “something” that - at the beginning of our time and space - determines the structure and operation of the Universe that is to come into existence is probably something "wise".

Unfortunately, the only analogy we have is the recipe for a human inside an embryonic cell (zygote). The recipe for a human written in DNA is also "wise" - because it leads to the creation of an incredibly complex entity.

The question arises what determined the formation of this record, composed from nucleotides of DNA. Well, we know that it was created for a long time, throughout the entire evolution of living things, initiated, however, originally by the recipe for the Universe.

So we come to the conclusion that - in a sense - Terry Hyland and his master Bernardo Kastrup [2] are right in saying that something ontologically - primitive is something "wise" that is not of a material nature. However, it remains an open question in what form, in what state, that wise something exists.

I note that Terry Hyland, quoting Strawson, writes: "we do not know enough about the nature of "the physical" – to argue that the physical and the mental are irrevocably distinct and irreconcilable". Yes, it seems to me that the "form of existence" of this primal, wise reality, which initiates the creation of a new Universe - is something that has some structure, because “something wise” cannot be homomorphic and not consist of elements, although these elements are not material elementary particles.

The notion of panpsychism is useful in answering some questions but anyhow, for the realization of self-awareness, a "material" brain is necessary.

Apart from the above my statements about "Physicalist Panpsychism" versus "Idealist Panpsychism", I would like to draw attention to the often overlooked issue of different understandings of the word "consciousness". Failing to specify what we mean by this term leads to many misunderstandings. The concept of self-awareness is more unambiguous. We can explain what self-awareness is. We can say that:

{... it is the comprehension of one's individuality in relation to other persons (and objects) perceived around us and the capacity to perceive oneself against the backdrop of visions of the external world, with cognizance of one's past existence and anticipation of potential future occurrences}.

To refine this explanation, it's crucial to introduce the concept of **imagination**, along with the notion of **self-perception**. When imagining previously observed objects like an apple, a tree, we recall images of these objects from memory. We

often describe this phenomenon as "visualizing something in the mind's eye." So, we can redefine self-awareness as the nervous system's ability to {visualize oneself in the context of the known world's images or against the mental depiction of the world}.

The phrase "visualize oneself" requires further clarification. Lifeforms, particularly humans, continually perceive themselves during periods of wakefulness. Apart from visual and auditory sensations, animals and humans also experience internal bodily perceptions. These stimuli come from surface sensory receptors, joint sensory receptors, and sensations from body organs. Self-perceptions also incorporate autobiographical information. Shortly after awakening, there's a moment of swiftly retracing one's biographical journey, a mental voyage into the past that confirms one's identity. Consciousness arises only during wakefulness when bodily perception occurs, so the self-image is somewhat distinct from the imagination of an object known from visual perception. The self-image is layered on top of self-perception. Hearing natural language words, such as an apple, a tree triggers the same neural structure that was active during the perception of images of these objects. However, the neural process that follows the activation of the word "I" is far more complex, and it necessitates consideration of the significance of the endogenous electromagnetic field [3].

The "hard problem" isn't hard if we take into account what we now know about the structure and function of neural circuits active in the realization of the person's subject (subjectivity).

The meaning of the word "I" exists. It is much more than the typical imagination of a visually perceived object. In this case, the circulation of impulses in the thalamocortical neuronal circuits reaching the pre-frontal lobes also inevitably excites the electromagnetic field, but it is essential that a certain electromagnetic shape, a certain spatial structure (not process, but structure), is created, which we can tentatively understand as a representation of the subject of this person [4]. The raised Chalmers' "hard problem" is then easier to interpret, as "there is already something" that undergoes modifications under the influence of external stimuli.

It is possible that this initial thought (founding entity, recipe, program) for the Universe, wants to materialize (make it real), otherwise it is not complete.

Thus, we must distinguish different levels (theoretical tools) of talking about so-called consciousness. Someone said that for predicting the trajectory of a ballistic rocket, Newtonian physics is enough. Quantum physics will not help in this, which does not mean that theses of quantum physics are not needed. They are useful for considering another level of behavior of material objects. Similarly, in the issues of {sentience, self-awareness, consciousness}. For describing human behavior, it is useful to assume that his nervous system is complex enough to realize self-awareness. However, when we consider such problems as the sources of origin of all humans, or more broadly, of the entire universe, especially at its beginnings, we must acquaint ourselves with the concept of "panpsychism".

Therefore, I think that Terry Hyland's article helps us to consider that on a cosmic scale, the plan for the Universe, the recipe for the Universe, and its detailed design has a mental character, has the character of information even though we don't know how it is written down. It is therefore worth knowing and even developing the concepts of neo-idealism.

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