

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

Félix Cova¹

¹ Universidad de Concepcion

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

In the article *Consciousness, Neo-Idealism and the Myth of Mental Illness*, Terry Hyland revisits Thomas Szasz's critical approaches to mental illness and relates them to the contribution that can be made to this critique by what the author identifies as a sort of neo-idealist approaches of analysis of the relationship between consciousness and the brain. It is precisely the presentation of the central ideas of these diverse "neo-idealist" authors, with whom Hyland identifies himself, that is the major contribution of the text.

Unlike most of the positions in philosophy of mind, where the existence of material reality is not the main problem and it is the existence of consciousness that appears as the "difficult subject", Hyland presents a series of authors who would have in common to approach the subject from a perspective in which it is material reality, as it is usually conceived, that is problematized, while the existence of consciousness would be the most immediate and unquestionable datum. The authors mentioned, with representative quotations, are diverse: David Chalmers, Philip Goff, Shan Hao, Donald Hoffman, Christof Koch, Galen Strawson, Steve Taylor, among others. In some way, it is suggested that these authors would have in common a kind of panpsychism, which alludes to the natural world being imbued with and dependent on some form of consciousness. Situating this type of approach historically, the author comments on the history of Shan Gao's panpsychism, where he places, arguably, ancient authors such as Plato and Aristotle, and more contemporary authors such as Russell and Whitehead, in this type of approach. Along the same lines, he cites the work of Iain McGilchrist, who also favorably reviews the history of panpsychism and situates in it authors such as Schopenhauer, James, Dewey and Bergson, and who proposes that consciousness would be ontologically prior to matter.

It is thus clear the author's intention to show that panpsychism would have a long and solid tradition in the history of philosophy. This explains the profusion of quotations and authors that are pointed out throughout the text. It should be noted that this profusion is done in a coherent and persuasive way, although it is debatable. An attempt is also made to support the approaches with contemporary scientific developments such as Ian McGilchrist's research on the split brain. In this respect, this constitutes a weakness of the article, since research on the differences between "right brain" and "left brain" has produced much more complex and controversial results than the article suggests, limiting itself in this respect to describing McGilchrist's work and position alone.

Given the interesting and novel nature of the text, and its well-founded argumentation, it is an article of interest. In my opinion, its weakness is its excessive ambition. On the one hand, it presents a tradition of thought which it describes as neoidealism of consciousness and tries to show its roots in the history of human thought, but without sufficiently problematizing it. Precisely the recourse to history and to different sources of authority seems to be the author's way of

accounting for the highly dubious and controversial aspects of the ideas presented, without addressing them directly. On the other hand, the approach to Szasz's ideas is very insufficient and, in fact, does not seem very pertinent in light of what is the true focus of the article. Szasz's vision, according to the author, would be enriched if he could have taken into account this broader idea of what consciousness would be. Given the vagueness and superficiality with which this point is approached, it would probably have been better for the article to focus only on the discussion of the strengths and limitations of the neoidealist views of consciousness. [Translated with DeepL](#)