

Review of: "On the subject part I: what is the subject?"

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The article is well written: the theses are presented clearly and the text is consistent in its argumentation Also, the article brings an interesting attempt to connect subjectivity and objectivity using motifs from semantic theories and systems theory.

In the theoretical framework of this connection between the interiority of the subject and the exteriority of the objective world, however, I see some problems that I will try to express in the hope that they may help the author in further thinking about the issues.

I find somewhat problematic the Kantian analogies with which the author works. Kant works with the transcendental sphere of reason, while lower organisms do not exhibit a transcendental sphere. The author himself says that “we have no established theory of when an organism ceases to be an “automaton” without subjective experience” (p. 6 – I am referring to the pagination of the pdf version of the article) and works with the idea of “gradual degrees of conscious experience”. But this does not clarify (rather obscures) the problem of the demarcation line between mechanism and consciousness.

The author’s speech about a “transcendental ideal” assumes that organisms relate to objects (implying the thing in itself as an idea to which we infinitely approach). But is such an objective relationship demonstrable, or is it just a retrospective anthropomorphization?

Similarly, terms such as “practical control”, “feedback loop” (p. 2) refer to objectivist theoretical background. Is not this approach overlooking analogues of aesthetic experience, freedom of choice that transcend the practical field? Techno-scientific reductionism seems to me to be resonating also in this statement: “The emergence of intersubjective human awareness and agency are called science and technology.” (p. 2) - Why should only science and technology be identified with intersubjective consciousness and action? Why not language, art, philosophy, faith in something that transcends us, etc.?

Finally, reductionism seems to me to be contained in this statement: “Our surplus in awareness compared to the eukaryote, as chapter three has displayed, is unsurprising because the human organism is made of trillions of separate microorganisms, which means that my higher-order subjectivity emerges from trillions of lower-order subjectivities.” (p. 13) Is the difference between a cell and a human really given by trillions, i.e. by the quantitativeness of complexity? Is it conceivable for an organism to have more quantitative complexity and yet not exhibit reason like a human?

Another problem associated with the above-mentioned lack of clarity regarding the transcendental sphere of reason I see

in the circularity of the author's conception of the relationship between subject and object. The author says that "The creator of my "self," is not only genome but also "patterns of sense-making that are imbedded in "collective learning" through "symbolic communication."" (p. 3) But don't these patterns presuppose some kind of "I" as a center again? Just because this question is not taken into account, man appears to be a "hybrid of nature and nurture" (p. 3). Again it would probably be worth thinking about the problem transcendently (which is implicitly present in author's Kantian analogies).

When the author uses the title "idea", it is not clear whether he means idea as representation or rather in Platonic sense. In what sense are ideas a "lens" (p. 4)? Do they enable experience or obscure it as a phenomenon or finally function as regulative in Kantian sense? Author says that ideas are "evolutionary units" (p. 5) – but does not it presuppose that there must be some foundations (such as ideas) that cannot be clarified from evolution?

The author starts from defining consciousness as a "state of awareness", which he further defines as "signifies all that appears to an observer as it appears to this observer" (p. 6). And he says that "[t]o have any kind of awareness of the physical world, there must be the emergence of an urge towards awareness." (p. 11) In this determination of relation between consciousness and world it is not clear for reader what comes first: consciousness or urge or are they the same? The author further defines the subject as a 'nowhere-place', but what then is the meaning of its relation to "a part of the spatiotemporal realm" (p. 11)? Perhaps this circularity is even more visible from another statement: "Urge, therefore, first springs from the antagonism of the subject-object split. Subjectivity is where this split is ..." (p. 11). But again, does not the whole 'subject-object' already presuppose the subject? How else could we know about this whole?