The Basic Forms of the Conscious and the Unconscious Existence

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Received 3.07.2011, received in revised form 8.10.2011, accepted 17.11.2011

The article discusses the concepts of consciousness and the unconscious as forms of psyche awareness. The planes and forms of mediated and direct knowledge are identified both at the level of conscious and the unconscious.

Keywords: consciousness, the unconscious, mediated and direct knowledge, attitudes

While studying the research of psyche, let’s dwell on the characteristics of the following components of this notion: the conscious, the unconscious and the forms of their existence. Since the 60s of the 20th century there has been an upsurge of interest in the research of the unconscious both at the level of personality and society. This interest was determined by the need to analyze the interaction of the social and the psychic, the conscious and the unconscious.

The notion of the conscious

The etymology of the word conscious stems from the Latin words con (together with) and scire (knowledge). To become conscious of something is to know this something. Mind and consciousness are considered synonymous in their broadest sense. Following Descartes’ vision we say today: “To be conscious means to be in the process of thinking or reflecting on somebody’s thought.” In his ‘Meditations on metaphysics’ Descartes writes of a certain force, devious and intricate, going to any lengths to deceive a man. But if this force deceives him, there is no doubt that he exists: it can deceive him perpetually, but it will never be able to turn a man into nothing unless he stops thinking. Therefore, having reflected on and investigated the lot meticulously, Descartes necessarily concludes that the stated “I think, therefore I am” is inevitably true each time when a man voices it or perceives it in his mind. (Decartes, 1968, p. 342). In fact, Descartes ontologizes consciousness. John Locke defines consciousness as the perception of what is going on in our mind. After Descartes there formed two approaches towards the ontology of consciousness: the monistic and the pluralistic ones. The second approach refers mainly to Leibniz’s doctrine of monads. According to Leibniz, monads exist as ‘simple bodiless substances’, ‘true atoms of nature’. The ability to perceive and conceptualize and the tendency to successive perception are the principal types of activity for any monad, including the soul. Leibniz distinguishes between

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‘simple’ perception, typical for all monads and perception coupled with consciousness. He terms this type of perception apperception. Kant distinguished empirical apperception of inner phenomena (inner sense) and transcendental apperception (pure constant awareness of the self) (Kant, 1964).

Consciousness is specific awareness of the human soul of the objects placed in it ideally, represented and acknowledged. This is one of the spheres of the human soul which creates and reproduces knowledge; it is a means of its existence. Knowledge is always a relationship and a place of connection with the other. A conscious act is something fulfilled in accordance with the premeditated aim.

The structure of consciousness is formed by memory, emotions, feelings, mind, intelligence and will. It is impossible to observe consciousness externally as it does not possess spatial and material capacities. The life of consciousness is theoretically no deductive from the outside world and it is difficult to imagine consciousness as a common object. The only way to describe it is to do so by means of phenomenology: within personal experience and its impression.

In one’s records of the states of consciousness one always has to rely on metaphors. It is still unknown what the origin of consciousness is, how it appeared and why. Sartre, following James, declared that consciousness was a phenomenon of nothingness. It didn’t have its proper structures and substances; it is devoid of its nature. Nevertheless, each of us is convinced that we all have objective consciousness.

Consciousness is usually referred to as subjective reality, not corresponding to objective physical laws. It belongs to the subject in a mystical immanent way, spiritually uniting the man with the Universe; it relates the self to the non-self; it opposes the subject to the object. In this context, consciousness is always immaterial and objective: it is the awareness of some object, the understanding and evaluation of being.

Value laden ideal images are the atomic units of objective consciousness. Immaterial images of consciousness are mystically materialized (objectified) in the language, speech, behavior and man-made objects. The ideal image comprises operational, objective and evaluative components.

The problem of inter subjectivity is connected with the correlation of consciousness and unconscious processes in the human psyche. Inter subjectivity can be considered in two planes: firstly, transpersonally, secondly, transsubjectively. In the former case, transpersonality is viewed as a psychological phenomenon, as specified pre-forms, reflected in the individual’s attitudes and stereotypes. Intersubjectivity as a transsubjective basis of the unconscious may be considered as shared emotional experience, shared being and co-relatedness. Hence the problem of timeless and temporal parameters of the unconscious content of psyche, reflected in the conscious world construction. Transsubjectivity of the unconscious is related to mythological layer of mass consciousness formation, defining shared perception of the world in terms of the individual and society. It realizes itself in critical moments of communal life, overriding both the individual and the society itself.

The unconscious is a vague awareness that the human soul has of objects, not reflected in ideal images. This is the totality of unconscious psychic processes and their products, unaccountable and uncontrolled by consciousness.

Research of the unconscious, as a reflection of being, dates back to well established philosophical tradition. This research concerns the problem of existence and substance. In this case, the unconscious is the origin of all substance, the origin of being and knowledge. According to this tradition, the unconscious is
viewed as a universal foundation, as a substance or logos given to the individual in the form of ‘spontaneous emotional experience’.

On the other hand, the unconscious in terms of philosophical tradition is considered as a background, pre-existence comprising everything. The unconscious is regarded as a background for the revelation of being, as a background being the source of everything, which singles out and creates being through self-cognition of its phenomena. The unconscious is comprehended as the beginning and the source of formation. Therefore, the unconscious is interpreted as a force, permeating all being, including the individual in his behavioral acts and his psyche. In this respect, the unconscious is interpreted as a stimulus towards the outside world formation and its awareness.

The unconscious in the history of philosophy and psychology has often been regarded as the opposite of consciousness. We would like to emphasize that these opposites, consciousness and the unconscious, being poles apart of the human soul, also have similar features and maybe be interpreted in their dialectical interrelation. The unconscious as a different being of the conscious is present in the conscious as the non-being, as a structure of the object and the basis of communal spirit. In this respect consciousness exists, manifesting itself in the process of objectifying the unconscious, producing itself in the object, self-awareness and self-sensation.

The unconscious plays a great role in social reality construction; it is widely present in mass behavior and societal norms, in identity formation and its unconscious aspirations.

The unconscious is the basis of the individual’s system of behavior and the results of his thinking as well as the other’s activity, which is supported by attribution processes.

Consciousness and the unconscious, being quite different, possess their own distinct characteristics and some common informational content, as well as common functions. If we regard consciousness and the unconscious in terms of dichotomy but still as two concepts belonging to one common entity – the human soul, we can suppose that these parts have some common attributes of the whole but different means of expression. Let’s try to construct the concept of consciousness and the unconscious as of ‘one’s other ‘in terms of their means of expression.

Knowledge is the product of consciousness, while the unconscious produces attributes. Let’s construct a scheme in order to distinguish the forms of knowledge manifestation and knowledge development in terms of the soul and spirit influence. The same should be done regarding the unconscious to determine how different forms of knowledge and attitudinal reactions are reflected in the spheres of consciousness and the unconscious. (Fig. 1).

Thus consciousness, fulfilling itself in the form of knowledge, exists in its two types – mediated and direct knowledge, which is connected to the plane of the soul and spirit, as well as psychic and spiritual capacities. The planes of mediated and direct knowledge are related to different sources of knowledge acquisition: mediated knowledge is derived from the soul while the direct one is derived from the spirit (being innate).

Mediated knowledge, acquired by means of the outside world analysis, regulates and directs the individual’s practical activity. Taking into consideration the plane of consciousness connected with the acquisition and existence of mediated knowledge, several forms can be distinguished: emotional / perceptual knowledge, rational knowledge, expressed in notions and the will. The analysis of mediated knowledge refers to knowledge formation as a unity of the perceptual and rational affected by the individual’s perception of himself through volitional effort. The influence
of individual abilities, life experience acquired over one’s lifetime accounts for the fact that similar knowledge results in different world perception in different individuals.

Conceptual images, formed in one’s consciousness, are able to determine and express the essence of an object or a subject even though there is always some vague image in one’s consciousness, which is not totally erased by concepts. This innate, vague image may exist in the form of illusion, extra content of words, legends and myths, all of which is perceived by individuals but not realized in the form of concepts. In order to uncover the content of these vague images the presence of something or someone different is necessary. Victor Frankl writes: “Only to the extent I step back to the background, forget my own existence, do I get the opportunity to see my own existence, I gain the chance to see something greater than myself”. (Frankl, 1990, p. 73). As a way to understand innate images Emmanuel Levinas coins the term ‘face’, ‘the face of the other’. This concept “leads us to the understanding of the meaning preceding my Sinngebung, and therefore, independent of my initiative and my power. The concept of the face defines the philosophical precedence of the existing over being, the appearance, which does
not call for power or possession… This concept of
the face enables us to describe the immediate…
The immediate means face to face” (Levinas,
1999, p. 67).

The ultimate foundations of consciousness
and conceptual cognition are only achieved by
means of abstraction from these perceptions and
experiences.

While the abstraction itself is based on
feeling, on doubt as a mechanism of consciousness
distraction, it also creates the opportunity to
develop thought and perception, which evidences
the necessary connection of perceptual and
conceptual cognition.

The third form of mediate knowledge is the
will. Following Descartes’ ideas, researchers
have emphasized that practically oriented mind
always has in origin aspiration or passion, which
is innate. Hence, the true origin of the psychic
and its primordial form is not the mind as a form
of perception, but volition and feeling.

As far as the will or conscious volition is
concerned, it was Gottfried W. Leibniz who
noted that ‘the idea of volition comprises the idea
of intelligence” (Leibniz, 1982, p. 305). In Arthur
Schopenhauer’s philosophy, the ineffective world
of perceptions is opposed by the will as the
essential force preceding cognition.

Thus in philosophy and psychology the
following concepts have been formed: affect
perception is the origin of psychic phenomena,
on the other hand, perception, sensuality and
the will produce experience, and vice versa,
experience produces volition. Thus, mediated
knowledge, acquired by means of logic, exists as
the movement of concepts, feelings and the will.
It is ‘the rigid essence of the action’, exploring
the object and acquiring mediated knowledge of
this object, which approaches the individual to
the boundaries of the object, improves his ability
to distinguish between the objects and thus, it
enables us to expand our knowledge of the object
and to change the explored objects, the nature and
the world itself.

Forms of direct knowledge, related to
spiritual abilities of the individual present a
different mode of consciousness existence.

We regard direct knowledge as existing
in the form of intuitive and mystical images; it
is connected to spiritual abilities of the soul by
means of ‘processing’ the influence of the spirit on
consciousness, spiritual abilities demonstration
and the individual’s natural gifts.

If consciousness exists in the form of
knowledge, then the unconscious as a specific
form of individuals’ awareness, results in certain
predispositions towards action or attitudes.
Attitudes as a form of the unconscious can
be considered in terms of two planes of their
formation and manifestation. Soul aspirations
promote specific material attitudes: a) vectors
of situational attraction; b) stereotypes and
prototypes; c) sexual drives (in Freudian theory).
The formation of universal attitudes is related
to spiritual aspirations, affected by the Spirit
and manifesting themselves in archetypes, the
experience of unity with the world and in the
forms of universal innate predispositions.

In terms of mediated knowledge, one can
state that paired forms of the unconscious are
‘one’s own other’ towards it. On the level of
consciousness emotions and feelings correspond
to certain unconscious vectors of situational
attraction. Affective experiences mostly act as
vectors of situational attraction as they present
immediate perception, which Kant called “inner
understanding” and Carl Jung (Jung, 1994) termed
“subjective components of conscious functions”.
They act as subjective reactions to a new object or
subject. Quite often these reactions are incorrect,
unfair, inaccurate, leading to awkward situations
both in one’s thinking and behavior. Apart from
this, the vectors of situational attraction also
comprise unconscious mechanisms of social
perception, such as the first impression effect, halo effect, physiognomic reduction, attribution, fundamental attribution errors, etc.

Another type of unconscious awareness of the world is its expression in body patterns, which are formed in the individual’s mind. Body patterns reflect the forms of situational attraction. One of the first psychologists, uncovering these patterns, was Wilhelm Reich.

The second type of specific objective attitudes is presented by stereotypes and prototypes, which are opposed by knowledge in the form of concepts on the level of mediated knowledge. Automatic human actions, as defined by Bleyer when he was describing the unconscious, or actions that are voluntary but unconscious, also belong to this group. Finally, the third pair is interconnection and opposition of the will on the level of the unconscious. The unconscious is the determinant of activity. This definition reveals such attributes of the unconscious as power and drive independent of human consciousness. The concept of the unconscious as a drive is thoroughly presented in psychoanalysis.

The influence of the unconscious as a drive was mainly described by means of the idea of volition by Arthur Schopenhauer, which greatly affected the development of psychoanalysis and the whole culture of the 20th century. According to Arthur Schopenhauer, the will as an essential definition of power and action precedes objective perception and determines it. Sigmund Freud terms this force the drive, existing as an impulse, as “impulse stimulus”, emerging and emanating from the inside, from the organism itself. “… we cannot affect unconscious desire, it stands apart from all contradiction, while conscious desire is restricted by all other conscious aspirations, opposed to the initial one”. (Sigmund, 1993, p. 307). The drive is interpreted as self-impression, which is impossible to ignore, as it is impossible to ignore oneself as this self-impressionability is like a burden on the human soul. Self-impressionability as a manifestation of unconscious activity is a vague but essential reason of human behavior, which makes the individual address his presentiment as a potential for change and activity promotion. Immediate knowledge is revealed in such forms as conscience (being a message from consciousness), intuition and faith. Therefore, this type of knowledge is not connected to logical evidence, but is based on faith and trust.

Conscience is the most vital element of knowledge. Immediate knowledge enables the individual to distinguish between the good and evil by means of conscience. Conscience, preceding any individual’s action or deed, reflected in moral categories, is a ‘message’, anticipating an action or justifying it. It may also lead to the state of self-discontent, which the individual experiences while feeling remorse. Conscience is a form of consciousness existence, connected to spiritual functioning, which acts as a certain ‘barrier’ between the good and evil, distinguishing between the individual’s benevolence and his wickedness and informing him of this. Undoubtedly, the individual can justify himself by means of attribution mechanisms and silencing the conscience; nevertheless, in his heart of hearts he is aware of his actions.

The most complicated problem which needs clarification is the description of the unconscious level, acting and being defined by spiritual aspirations as the Spirit influences the human soul. This impact results in human universal attitudes.

The first type is the individual’s experience of his unity with the world.

If conscience is regarded as a form of direct knowledge, providing the individual with the perception and evaluation of his actions, we consider that the experience of unity with the world, the acceptance or non-acceptance of the
world is the origin of conscientious evaluation. The experience of unity with the world can be comprehended as ‘numinous’ experience (according to Carl Jung), which can transform and change the individual’s outlook and fill his life with meaning. The experience of unity forms basic human attitudes, such as the predisposition to act in a certain way, in accordance with material or spiritual attractors as unconscious drives. These attractors reveal the objective existence of the unconscious, preceding the individual’s interpretations by means of the forms of culture structures, cultural patterns and transmission of traditional, habitual meanings.

The experience of unity with the world may be interpreted as an attitude, the individual’s aspiration to utmost objects and phenomena, such as the God, the Absolute, the Law. These experiences do not imply specific expression of the above mentioned phenomena; they possess a certain ‘non-representation’ in concepts, requiring extra language and metaphorical expression. At the same time, an image, expressing utmost objects, readily appears in our mind if certain signs and states are present. This is obvious in art, which is called ‘visible essence’ and visual thinking in psychology.

Another form of universal attitudes of the unconscious providing information is archetypes and archetypical images (they are opposed by intuition on the level of consciousness). Archetypes, according to Carl Jung (Jung, 1998), are primordial myth creating patterns of thinking and behavior. Archetypes are genetically predetermined and they manifest themselves in human consciousness in universal symbolic images, reflected in dreams, myths, religious images and philosophical ideas.

The third form of universal attitudes of the unconscious is something that can be termed universal, innate predisposition of the individual as distinct from faith as a form of direct knowledge. It is the discovery and description of this pair that presents the most complicated problem. The individual lives and develops as a part or representative of the human race. There are some mechanisms, regulating the individual’s behavior as a biological and social being that predetermine his very existence. These laws are innate to the individual; they contribute to human population survival and predispose the individual’s reactions and behavior on the level of population. The existence of such mechanisms can be evidenced by the stress reaction mechanism. It is widely known that a stressor impact can trigger two types of reactions in individuals: the passive and the active one. These reactions are innate and they predetermine typical features of the individual’s behavioral and emotional reactions to stress. Evolutional psychology studies another form of predetermined behavior. Evolutional psychology emphasizes the fact that procreation is the essence of life. In this connection we are programmed by nature to help not only relatives but other people as well. Evolutional psychology recognizes two types of altruism: devotion to the clan and reciprocity. Undoubtedly, there are different social models to explain reciprocity and they cannot be denied, but in this case we would like to stress that we should also explore the evolutional origin of human behavior in accordance with the ethical and religious codes and postulates that have been formed in human society.

On the other hand, the content of universal innate predisposition may be interpreted by means of the mechanism of introversion and extraversion, described by Carl Jung, which in a sense determines the individual’s attitude to the world in terms of introversion – extraversion preferences of the individual.

By all means, this form of universal attitude of the unconscious produces a state of trust, preceding all conscious faith. This means
trust in one’s nature, one’s essence, vague understanding of one’s predisposition, such as following one’s karma or destiny, which is perceived by the individual as the pursuit of his existence predisposition. The universal innate predisposition evokes the drives, faith and human will in order to act and believe in one’s action and one’s predisposition. By all means, the analysis of the unconscious permeated by the Spirit or intention of nature needs further development. We consider this thesis to be target setting, promoting our search in the unconscious nature of the soul for the basis of what unites the biological and social nature of the individual in his comprehension of this unity.

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Основные формы проявления сознательного и бессознательного

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В предлагаемой статье рассматриваются понятия сознания и бессознательного как форм информированности психики. Выделяются уровни и формы опосредованного и непосредственного знания как на уровне сознания, так и на уровне бессознательного.

Ключевые слова: сознание, бессознательное, опосредованное и непосредственное знание, установки.