

The Problem of Subjectless Consciousness in Some Western and Eastern Traditions

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ABSTRACT

The research investigates the concept of a “subjectless consciousness” and deconstruction of a classical subject in Western philosophy of the XX-th XXI-th century (especially in structuralism and post-structuralism). It also investigates the “non-dual” consciousness (*jñāna*), “understanding wisdom” (*prajñāpāramitā*) and an extra-subjective “consciousness treasury” (*ālayavijñāna*) in Māhāyana Buddhism (darśanas of *mādhyamaka-śūnyavāda* and *yogacāra-vijñānavāda*). It also explores a clarification to what degree the Western concepts of “subjectless consciousness”, «extra-subject consciousness”, “structural apriori”, “rhizome” etc. may be correlated with the concepts of Māhāyana Buddhist philosophy.

Key Words: subjectless consciousness, deconstruction, Western philosophy, Eastern philosophy, mādhyāna philosophy, Buddhism, post-structural philosophy, postmodernism

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Introduction

We can often see a common delusion concerning that Western classical philosophical tradition believed consciousness to be subjective and substantive and opposed to an object; consciousness besides subject (empirical, transcendental or transcendent) was not perceived.

It was inseparably connected with Western (founded by Christianity) doctrine of personality, which postulates that a person possesses an

individual body (physical) with his individual and unique characteristics, and also possesses a unique consciousness; and self-consciousness as the center of a person. And only in the second half of the XX-th century the views on consciousness thanks to works of such thinkers, as J. Lacan, J. Kristeva, J.-P. Nancy, J. Derrida were radically changed. And in the Indian philosophy, on the contrary, since shraman (the middle of the I millennium BC) period, and particularly in mādhyāna Buddhism (darśanas of mādhyamaka (śūnyavāda) and yogacāra (vijñānavāda)) the problem of subjectlessness (and, accordingly, of subjectless consciousness) was actively investigated – first of all in connection with anātmavāda doctrine of what we shall say below. The problem of our research in this case comprises also a clarification of to what degree the Western concept of “consciousness” may be correlated with concepts of mādhyāna philosophy.

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A. Some Aspects of the Problem of Subjectless Consciousness in Māhāyāna Buddhism

In the beginning we have to say some words about the foundations of Buddhist philosophy as a whole. Unlike the Brahmanist schools (darśanas) seeing behind the illusory world a certain hidden reality, Buddhism insists that the world is absolutely phenomenal, has no intrinsic basis and it has to be explained from itself. The doctrine of “a causal and dependent origination” (pratītya samutpāda) played the role of such interpreting theory.² The main sense of pratītya samutpāda is that all stages of existence are conditionally caused and this causality has especially immanent character which does not leave any “space” for the hidden transcendent reason (God, destiny and so forth). The doctrine of pratītya samutpāda is integrally connected with the other major Buddhist doctrine of anātmavāda – the doctrine of non-existence of the individual eternal substantial (extra-personal) essence within the person (ātman of the Brahmanic darśanas) and also soul (jīva) and the empirical personality as such (puṅgava). Extreme nominalism and phenomenalism of the Buddhist darśanas (in particular Mahāyāna darśanas – mādhyamaka and yogācāra) says that the personality – puṅgava – is only the name designating definitely ordered unity of five groups (skandhas) of instant elements of experience – dharmas. We can say (now in general, without going into subtleties of different complete classifications, of which we shall say later) that those elements are: form (rūpa), sensation (vedanā), perception (saṃjñā), karmic formation (saṃskāra), and consciousness (vijñāna). Together, these elements and groups of elements make the totality of experience.

It is necessary to say that in māhāyāna Buddhism dharmas are considered, on the one side, as dravya sat, that is the elements allocated with the ontological status, “real” elements, and on another – as prajñāpati sat, i. e. as imaginable, or conventional, elements of language of the description of experience. That is our experience is constituted by dharmas, but dharmas themselves we also describe in the terms of dharmas. Here it is possible to give an example

(however, quite rough): our speech consists of words, but thus we also describe words by means of other words.

So, dharmas constantly arise and disappear, being replaced by new ones, but caused by previous dharmas according to the principle of causality. These constantly arising and disappearing substanceless dharmas and their groups (skandhas) in the set form a stream, or a continuum (santāna) which is empirically perceived as a “living being”. Thus, any being, including a person, is understood in Buddhism not as invariable essence (whether be it ātman or soul) but as a stream of constantly changing elementary psychophysical conditions. The ontology of Buddhism is the ontology of substrateless process. Thus, not only it is impossible to enter twice into the same river (as Heraclitus said), but there is no the one who could try to do it at least once. In essence, each new moment the new personality exists, which is connected with previous one and caused by it. It is possible here to give an example of a French philosopher Henry Bergson (1859-1941) with shots of a film which we do not see when we watch the movie, perceiving everything as a pure continuum. From the point of view of Buddhism in this case each new life is a new episode of the initialless series, and nirvāṇa is the series final.

The main purpose of the Buddhist soteriological “project” was a transformation of consciousness, a change of its type, that could be described as the replacement of the “distinguishing” consciousness-vijñāna which is based on a subject-object dichotomy, by the “non-dual” (advaya) consciousness – “gnosis” – jñāna – so, it is obvious that the problems of mind, mentality, consciousness and mechanisms of its functioning were in the center of attention of the thinkers from the very beginning of the tradition of Buddhist philosophizing which was always substantially the “pure phenomenology” of consciousness. According to the majority of Buddhist schools, those properties and qualities which we attribute to the external world are actually the projections of our own consciousness. The world is not the world in which we live, but the world which we endure. The Buddhist philosophy appealed both to logic and “rational” consciousness and to gnoxis-jñāna or “understanding wisdom” (prajñāpāramitā). Prajñā consisted in a direct “intuitive grasping” of reality (for example, of śūnyata (emptiness) in the doctrine of mādhyamaka-śūnyavāda), and

² That, we will agree, it is strange enough for the Western consciousness: phenomenalism in a combination with strict determinism! But in Buddhism this determinism refers *only* to the sphere of an illusory (samsaric) being, and the soteriological purpose consists in a disposal from saṃsāra and, respectively, from causal dependence.



this reality was inexpressible within the subject-object frame, non-semiotic, it could not be described and it was non-dual, and consequently, non-verbalized in the language with its grammatical and conceptual forms, which are adapted only to the description of the illusory mental constructs and projections (vikalpa, kalpanā). So, this gnozis-jñāna (prajñāpāramitā) was the consciousness “outside” subject and object.

According to darśana of mādhyamaka-sūnyavāda and its founder – Nāgārjuna (the most probable period of his life – II century A. C.) the main characteristics of dharmas are emptiness (śūnyata), essencelessness (nāiratmya) and groundlessness. In hīnayāna’s darśanas (sarvāstivāda and sautrāntika) there was the principle of pudgala nāiratmya (“selflessness of the personality”); Nāgārjuna supplements this principle with the principle the dharma nāiratmya (selflessness/groundlessness of dharmas); it is a nihilistic step in comparison with sarvāstivāda and sautrāntika. As Nāgārjuna says in the “The Prajñāparamita Heart Sutra”: “Sariputra, the characteristics of the emptiness of all dharmas are non-arising, non-ceasing, non-defiled, non-pure, non-increasing, non-decreasing” (Nāgārjuna, 2000, p. 6). From the point of view of Nāgārjuna, it is meaningless to distinguish dharmas – they “are quite equal” to each other in their hollowness. The only attribute of dharmas is the lack of any attribute, the “attributelessness” and, therefore, their non-semioticity, non-tokenness and non-verbalizeness – animitta. And all that is semiotic, signful, described and verbalized is only visibility and illusion, a fruit of the activity of the distinguishing thought (vikalpa) and its construct (kalpanā).

Nāgārjuna considered that any attempt to create a metaphysical system adequate to reality is doomed to failure: thinking that we describe being, we describe only our ideas of being, created by ours “distinguishing thinking” (vikalpa), which accepts first of all the subject-object dichotomy as a condition of empirical knowledge. In the beginning we hang “labels” on the reality, and then we begin to study them, taking them for the reality itself. Nāgārjuna applies the peculiar negative dialectics which has received the name prāsaṅga (negative reasoning). In “Mūlamadkhyamikakārikā” Nāgārjuna considers and rejects as irrelevant such categories as causality, movement, time,

space, form, quantity, quality, distinction, etc. And the theory of the Two Truths (or two levels of knowledge) follows from it. The first level corresponds to daily practice and empirical reality (sanvritti satya). Concerning this reality we can speak about the conditional existence of space, time, causality, movement, objects, unity, multiplicity, form, quantity, quality etc. This level differs from the pure illusions – mirages, dreams, hallucinations and “empty concepts” – for example, “horns of a hare”, “a heavenly flower”, “fur of a turtle”, “the son of the fruitless woman”. But the empirical reality is so illusory concerning the level of the Highest Truth (paramārtha satya). This level is inaccessible to a logical discourse, but is conceivable with powers of yogic intuition (prajñāpāramitā).

The purpose of Nāgārjuna and the mādhyamaka-sūnyavāda darśana as a whole consisted also in the substantiation of relativity and illusiveness of everything existing and mental, in the removal of any binary oppositions and hierarchies, especially subject-object dichotomy. According to relativism of mādhyamaka, nirvāṇa is nirvāṇa only in its relationship to saṃsāra, as well as saṃsāra – only in its relationship to nirvāṇa. Even nirvāṇa does not possess “self-being” (svabhāva) – therefore, both nirvāṇa and saṃsāra are empty and essenceless and their general tathāta (thisness), the original nature, is śūnyata, the emptiness (Nothingness, in Western understanding). Mādhyamaka-prāsaṅgika (the negative argumentation) asserts that mādhyamaka cannot have its own positions or any point of view; its position is purely negative and critical, directed at denying of any positions and doctrines. We could say that Nāgārjuna “eliminates” Kant’s “Antinomies of Pure Reason”, he writes (Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadkhyamikakārikā, 1995):

“Everything is real and is not real,
Both real and not real,
Neither real nor not real.”

And further:

“There is neither eternity, nor non-eternity,
Neither self nor selflessness,
Neither suffering nor enjoying,
Neither purity nor non-purity,
Wherefore incorrect are those views.”



Nāgārjuna also said that the Buddhas taught that “śūnyata” was the termination of all kinds of views; so those who had made “śūnyata” their doctrine are “incurable”. The purpose of śūnyavāda darśana is to refute all possible metaphysical theories as mental constructs (vikalpa, kalpanā) and to show the basic impossibility of creation of any relevant ontology. But this deconstruction of metaphysics has nothing in common with scepticism: the matter is that “reality as it is” is conceivable with yogic intuition (prajñāpāramitā) – subjectless consciousness, but is inaccessible to any discursive thinking based on a subject-object dichotomy which in itself is a product of mental designing and being expressed in the language forms which are completely unsuitable for the description of that what actually “is”,³ instead of our ideas about it.

The philosophy of yogacāra-vijñānavada was devoted to the one task – the clarification of consciousness and investigation what are the mechanisms of its activity and its transformation. This can be seen in a well-known Buddhist philosophical treatise “Milinda Pañha” (“The Questions of Milinda”) (See: The Debate of King Milinda: An Abridgement of The Milinda Pañha. Inward Path, Penang, 1998) in which the conversation of a Buddhist monk Nagasena with the Greek-Indian king Milinda (Menander, II century BC) is described. In the famous philosophical treatises “Abhidharmakośa” (“The Doctrine about Dharmas”) (See: Abhidharmakośa of Vasubandhu. Jayswal Research Institute, 1983) and “Abhidharmasammucaya-bhāṣyam” (See: Abhidharmasammucaya-bhāṣyam. Tatia, Mathamala, 1976) the doctrine of dharmas is presented in detail. The founders of darśana of yogacāra, the stepbrothers, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, (the boundary of IV and V c. AC) are considered – apparently, they are both the authors of the treatise “Abhidharmakośa”.

The early-Buddhist Abhidharma (the “Tipiṭaka” canon, V c. BC) spoke of the participation of consciousness in the process of perception from its very beginning. It allocated 6 types of “sensitive consciousness”: 1) visual consciousness, 2) acoustical, 3) olfactory, 4) tactile, 5) flavoring and 6) “mental” (manavijñāna) – as mind (manas) was considered also as perceiving ability (indriya). But later (in

the “Abhidharmakośa” treatise) the darśana of yogacāra could not be satisfied any more with such classification and its founders Asaṅga and Vasubandhu added the list of types of consciousness with two more types: 7) kliṣṭamanavijñāna and 8) ālaya-vijñāna. “Kliṣṭamanavijñāna” means the “polluted” or “obscured” mind; it is also called the “clinging”, or “sufficing” mind as this mind (manas) forms that center of the empirical personality which the person accepts for “I”. Manas is responsible for the emergence of illusion of existence of independent identity, different both from other identity, and from the outside world. Manas generates actively “interested” attitude to the outside world, forming feelings – “it’s me, and these are other people”, “it’s me, and that is the outside world”, “this is mine, and that is not mine” and diverse manifestations of affections, inclinations and rejections following from them. Manas is a root of all forms of egocentrism. Phenomenological manas also is the axis uniting all data of perceptions and all forms of a psychic activity in the integrity called “personality”.

However manas also is not a radical, or basic, c Asaṅga and Vasubandhu consciousness as for it also there is something perceived by it as Ātman (according to Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, not to the Brahmanist thinkers!) is a simple eternal substantive “Ego”. There is still the eighth consciousness – ālayavijñāna (“consciousness treasury”, “consciousness storage”). Ālayavijñāna is a “radical consciousness” (mūla-vijñāna). All other 7 types of consciousness with their intentionality and contents result from ālayavijñāna, or, more precisely, are its transformations (pariṇāma). “This consciousness (vijñāna) is called ālayavijñāna because it is heaped up and accumulated by [the six] cognitive objects, i. e.: visual forms, sounds, smells, flavours, tangible and dharmas.” (Abhidharmasammucaya-bhāṣyam, 1976. p. 51)

But ālayavijñāna at all is not the Absolute or “basic”, “staying” substance: it represents itself as the continuum, and texts often compare it to the river or a stream. “What is called ālayavijñāna? Immediate modification of the mental stream.” (Abhidharmasammucaya-bhāṣyam, 1976. P. 76). It is obvious that ālayavijñāna, as well as everything resulting from it, is changeable (anitya) and instant.

As it was already spoken above, the word “ālayavijñāna” means “a consciousness treasury”.

³ In this case we use the concept “is” in a very conditional way since the original meaning of this “is” consists in that there “is”... *nothing!*
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But what “treasures” are stored in this “receptacle”? According to yogacāra, ālayavijñāna itself is quite passive also as itself does not produce anything, being some kind of a fluid “sack”, “container”. But in this container as grains in a bag (a metaphor of texts of “Abhidkarmakośa”), the “seeds” (bīja) are based. These “seeds” are no other than “saṃskāras” – the “engramms”, primordial elements of information (in the broadest sense of this word), being put in ālayavijñāna from the initialless eras in the process of explication of psychic experience of the subject. Everything that is apprehended and endured by the subject gets to “a consciousness treasury” and is stored in it in the form of experience “seeds”. But at some point, defined by a karma of this being, these seeds under the influence of inherent in them so-called “energy of consciousness” (mati śākti), start “sprouting”, that is to project the contents outside. Before any human being there exists already the knowledge which we rediscover. As a result ālayavijñāna appears in the form of the empirical subject with whom it identifies itself (“appropriates” it), and also the world of sensually perceived objects correlating with it. It is clear that, according to yogacāra philosophy, the “frame” of the empirical subject are seven above-mentioned empirical forms of consciousness which, in turn, represent the transformations of basic consciousness (ālayavijñāna). It is interesting that for designation of the empirical subject the yogacāra darśana uses the word grāhaka – “grasping”, and for the object – grāhya (“grasped”).⁴ The most important for the yogacārics and the Buddhists of a Mahajana as a whole is the aspect of inclination, attachment, and affective obscureness of the subject “clinging” to sensual objects. In the course of perception in ālayavijñāna new “seeds” (bīja) are put, and all the process repeats. Thus it is impossible to say what was earlier – “chicken or egg”, that is whether there was the first act a projection of “seeds” or “putting” seeds in a “bag” of ālayavijñāna in the course of perception. The question is absolutely incorrect as these processes had no absolute beginning, they are initialless.

The project of “releasing” of consciousness in the yogacāra darśana meant a “turn” (comparable with metanoya – Greek) of ālayavijñāna from projecting outside to intention

to itself which was called aśraya-parāvṛitti. The “devastated consciousness treasury” thus becomes a pure consciousness, free from any duality and a dichotomy, out of subject and object opposition. Now it is a subjectless and objectless gnozis – jñāna.

In their aspiration to overcoming of any binary oppositions and hierarchies the mādhyamakās and yogacārics may be compared with the Western structuralists and poststructuralists. There are some similarities: the Buddhists had a soteriological purpose, aspiration to release by finding of a certain (true) knowledge. Understanding of hollowness of reality and mentality, the illusiveness of a subject and also subject-object dichotomy was a way to discontinuing of duḥkha (suffering, undergoing) and finding of nirvāṇa. The poststructuralists criticize a classical subject as a “donator of meanings” (especially Cartesian), assert the availability of “structural (cultural) apriory”, the illusiveness of any dichotomy (especially “subject – object” opposition). They do not set any purposes of transcendent character, but their purpose of appropriation of true knowledge, perhaps, may be called “soteriological”.

B. Some aspects of the Problem of Subjectless Consciousness in a few (post)structural approaches

Under subjectless consciousness in most poststructuralist contexts is implied some “I” that is actually devoid of individual psychological characteristics. It comes to such a dimension where there is no subject that is actively and independently thinks and acts thinking. He doesn’t personally generate something that we call consciousness. The consciousness is there, but it is not attributed to the subject in the sense of classical psychology or philosophy. It is a consciousness, but at the same time it operates without some kind of psychological “I”. On the contrary, some “I” is only possible because it involved into originally subjectless consciousness. “I” connects and transmits the consciousness which operates autonomously. Therefore for each “I” the experience of consciousness will be something spontaneous, not something which is controlled and managed by this “I”.

It is clear that such subject dramatically differs from the Cartesian subject in classical

⁴ We can compare it with Husserl’s “noesis” and “noema”.
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philosophy, with its famous principle of “cogito”, where Descartes talked about the subject as the one who primarily controls his own mind (has the private access into his mind, controls the reflection, cannot be false in relation to his own mental states, etc.). All these principles will be challenged by poststructuralism (called sometimes postmodernism). This approach tries to eliminate the subject as one who owns consciousness. This idea will get very different manifestations and will be developed in a variety of theories and approaches. Often they are given the collective name “the deconstruction of a classic subject. The main strategy of this approach to dissolve the subject into a numerous of objective processes, which exist as real and ontologically primary entities. Otherwise the subject is a kind of ontologically secondary entity, sort of epiphenomenon or even illusion. Mentioned objective processes (often called structures or practices) might be very diverse in social, cultural, economic or political way. Strictly speaking, they could be even physical (for instance neuronal), but poststructuralism mostly prefers to work with symbolic (non-physical) systems trying to reduce the subject toward them.

In general, the concept of “subjectless consciousness” means the elimination of privileged status presumably belongs to subject. Classical subject in Western tradition is characterized as self-reflected person and this idea adopted in metaphysics. The logic of this concept opposes the Cartesian and Christian traditions. Counter-Cartesian implication of this concept was most clearly formulated by Lacan in his famous formula: “I am thinking therefore I am not existing, I am existing, therefore I am not thinking” (Lacan, 1988). Counter-Christian implication presupposes the historical arena for the origin of subject as a product of social relations.

Lacanian formula means that the real mental activity of the subject lies on the other side of his own inner life, it is radically spontaneous. First of all that means subject is an epiphenomenal effect of different external for him/her processes, such as language, culture, society, religion as well as unconscious impulses, values, ideology, hidden or apparent political authority, moral prescriptions, etc. As a result the classical European intuition on privileged inner dimension of “I” which was responsible for production of consciousness is questioned.

According to poststructural critique the subject doesn't have private access to his own “I”, because this access is mediated by a set of conditions, each of which is not produced by the subject, but precede to him. Reflection, then, is mediated with the Other (the concept which collect and symbolize the set of external practices). The study of the subject then orientated to the so-called “archaeological excavations” (Foucault 2002) that contrasts the classical Socrates's principle of “know thyself”. The subject is not able to know himself, because he's given himself as the Other; the essence of the subject is always in a different external to him place. For example, the language precede and mediate to what person would like to say, the order of desires, for instance some advertised commodities, goods and services precede and mediate a single desire which someone could desire. The idea of these anonymous practices is expressed by another key formula that explains the thesis of “Subjectless Consciousness” in poststructuralism: “transcendentalism without transcendental subject”, which was formulated by P. Ricoeur (1974). Thus, the subject presents a point at the intersection of different external practices.

To entirely cover all these approaches is not possible in one research, so I will consider only one of the most underlying idea significantly belongs to poststructuralism. According to this idea consciousness, mind as well as thinking itself are totally spontaneous subjectless activities in the sense in which it does not need control of the conscious subject.

According to some poststructural approaches, especially such as J. Lacan, J. Kristeva, J.-P. Nancy, J. Derrida (Elliott, 1996) consciousness is neither a thing nor a relation between things, nor a unique set of properties and qualities, nor a process, but, rather, is related to something that makes all the above possible. With such a definition, consciousness appears a certain equivalent of a ‘black box’: we can see what is at its input and what is at its output; however, if we address what is inside it, we fall into insolvable contradictions. But will we confine ourselves to describing consciousness by means of the structure of ‘consciousness is related to ...’, or have courage to say that ‘consciousness is ...’ and try to define what it is? Given the ungratefulness of the second option, poststructural philosophers will choose it.



We have to start with the specificity that the mentality is not only in its privacy, but also in its “ex-locatedness” – a predeterminedly paradoxical ontological status. What kind of space does a thought have? Ontology is expropriated by things; how are, then, non-things given? The paradox is already contained in the word ‘non-thing’ as it is. It is the unique ontological status that the original mystery of consciousness consists in: it exists, but it is not a thing. This peculiarity of consciousness makes it akin to being. Already Heidegger, in his phenomenology, attracts attention to the impossibility of speaking of being in terms of things or properties (Heidegger, 2000). Thus, when we peruse a piece of chalk, we cannot, no matter what we do, detect being in it – i.e. detect something that makes this thing existent and different from a piece of chalk that we could have only imagined or thought of. Where, in a thing, is it being hidden? Obviously, an imaginary piece of chalk and the actual existing piece of chalk differ in some way, but what is this something in which they differ? The difficulties in detecting this ‘something’ allow us to say that being exists, but it is not a thing. Poststructuralism agrees with such interpretation of being and further adds to it that we can – and must – say the same about consciousness: it exists, but it is not a thing. How can we comprehend it? Here, poststructuralism tends to adopt the skeptical point of view: a person can succeed in comprehending the things of the objective world, which are ex-located in relation to him; however, the way, in which such comprehension works, will hardly become similarly positive knowledge (Elliott, 1996). So, will the knowledge of what consciousness is be purely apophatic?

It should be noted that the tradition to speak of consciousness elusively and rather in terms of something that is never given but through which everything else is given is stable enough in philosophy. Since the time of Plato, philosophers have been discussing, in one way or another, by directly pointing to consciousness in a hope to acquire it as a certain object for observation contain an elementary – though not at once conspicuous – logical inconsistency: indeed, how can we make into an object, something by which we objectify all other things? Kant maintains that the carrier of consciousness is always given to himself as a phenomenon rather than normality. Access to operation of consciousness in its transcendent depth is barred

for the subject: the latter rather deals with results of already completed work. Consciousness proves to be always at least one order higher than the order of components of the content that constitute the experience of consciousness, and, in this sense, it is forever already eluding and cannot be grasped directly. At the same time, consciousness, though it defies direct perception, allows perceiving of any content. If we select parameters of consciousness in such a way, we will, back in Plato’s famous Allegory of the Cave, encounter not direct but rather indirect definition of consciousness, namely – comparing it with light. Of course, it was not only Plato who, in his contemplations on the nature of consciousness, resorted to the image of light. We remember very well Descartes’ illustrious ‘light of reason’ and the many cases of assimilating consciousness to light in the works of medieval mystics; even in modern philosophy, this metaphor is not unusual (Kristeva 2000). But what do all these similes actually mean? And can it be explained which peculiarity of consciousness makes us use the metaphor of light? Thus Lacan states that it is Plato with whom we find the key to understanding this – in his immortal Allegory of the Cave (Lacan, 2006). Everything in this parable has a deep symbolical meaning. Let us remember that people staying underground in a cave are chained in such a way that they cannot move and face only the wall in front of them. There is a fire in the cave; it emits light; it is critical that the fire is located behind and above the prisoners’ heads, at a considerable distance from them. Lacan points out that the location of the fire behind the prisoners and the fixed position of their heads could mean, with Plato, only one thing: in our ordinary state, we cannot turn back; we cannot turn our head toward the source of light – toward consciousness – and see it directly, just like we see things which turn out to be mere shadows. Conscience-light that allows seeing things but cannot be seen directly always stays a step behind, a moment earlier, and of a next-higher order. It is always already in action, whereas we take, for primary things, its mere effects or results. The parable further reads that the people in the cave watch only the shadows and take them for genuine and true objects, because they have never seen anything else. The shadows, though, result from the sophisticated structure of the cave, which, as we have already understood, symbolizes, in fact, the world, the thinking



mechanism, and the cognition process itself. Between the fire and the chained prisoners there is a raised walkway, along which people carry various things symbolizing ideas that exist in fact. Those things cast shadows, which the prisoners take to be real physical objects and things that are given to us in our sensing experience. Those 'things', though, are essentially fictitious, since the parable tells us that the world that we perceive and cognize in the modus of an ordinary (not specifically philosophical) attitude, is merely a certain verisimilar illusion. But then one of the prisoners is freed and turns his head towards the source of light; the sudden change makes his eyes hurt severely, he is almost blind struck, and tries to return to his usual position, so as to look at what he can see clearly. However, the freed prisoner gradually becomes accustomed to light, and understands that he now sees something more true than he had been seeing before he was freed; he tries to walk further, to the light; he leaves the cave and sees the Sun, in the light of which he sees real things (these are, of course, the ideas, which exist in fact and are not fiction), and finally understands that it is the light that is the source of the true vision, i.e. knowledge. Obviously, the lucky escapee symbolizes a philosopher who has changed the ordinary thinking attitude to an authentic philosophic attitude. It is no coincidence that almost all philosophers read the brilliant Plato's allegory of the cave. But why, after all, does Plato compare consciousness with light? Poststructuralism believes that the metaphor of consciousness as light in philosophy is not an occasional one; it has deep symbolical meaning (Kristeva, 1982). Indeed, the metaphor of light provides a most bright illustration of what we keep implying: like light, consciousness makes things visible (shadows on the wall), but it does not allow seeing itself as a thing (to turn the head and see the source of light). In the more sophisticated language of philosophy, consciousness can be referred to as a transcendental condition of the possibility of consciousness staying in the world. This complex structure, however, still needs clarification. And, while metaphors and symbolic images are not always good for philosophy, sometimes they are indispensable: this happens exactly when thought comes to its limit (we will discuss it below). But this is what a philosophic discussion on consciousness results in – bringing thought to such a (limit) state. At the most critical moment, the philosophical discourse, which

employs clear and evidential wordings, has to start speaking the language of elusive metaphors and symbolizations. It has to say: consciousness is like light, since we see everything in the light, but cannot see the light itself. Similarly, all things are given in being, whereas being is not given (as a thing). In the same way, we perceive all objects through consciousness; yet, we do not perceive consciousness as an object. Structures of consciousness are transcendental; they are not given as objects or things, but everything else is objectified through them. Actually, thinking in this case is something that appears before us; it is a state, in which the vision sees itself. Light: this is illuminating itself, and can happen only by itself. To make it piece by piece, to form gradually, step by step, adding information to information is not possible. To clearly imagine the mystery which remains a mystery, ancient people employed the metaphor of light, which expressed exactly this meaning.

The metaphor, of course, is not the point; it just illustrates something that is imparted as a quite clear speculation. Actually, poststructuralism needs to express one principal thought: something that makes man's being possible, i.e. the ability to understand and to think, and, consequently, to be possessed of consciousness – or, to put it in a simpler way, consciousness itself – lies beyond the boundaries of man (Nancy, 1979). It is something that does not belong to him, yet makes him. Consciousness does not belong to man, but man belongs to consciousness: this is the leitmotif of poststructural philosophy, which reveals in it, both, a follower of the classical Platonism as well as a consistent transcendentalism (Rapaport, 1989). Man neither owns nor orders his conscious acts⁵. He is a subject not because he commands consciousness, but because he partakes of it. Accordingly, we cannot have 'knowledge' of 'what consciousness is' as it is: this is not a traditional knowledge, for we can neither speak it out nor reveal nor demonstrate. We can be in such a state; however, it is almost impossible to express it. Here, poststructuralism follows a certain line of the classical tradition; for such deep intuition appears together with philosophy itself – at least, since the time of Plato:

⁵ Of course, such speculations are somewhat conditional, since a person can "order" his conscious states, i.e. switch over from solving a mathematical problem to watching a film or reading a book. All (post)structural philosophers (Kerby, 1991) need to say is that we cannot set the deepest mechanisms of our consciousness, whereas "surface" mental state are quite controllable.



'From the moment that we 'find ourselves' in consciousness, our usual mental mechanism of reflection is amplified by transcendental conditions of consciousness'. We cannot explain what is 'beautiful', 'kind', 'fair' or 'absolute', nor can we explain 'time', 'space', 'being' etc. – whereas understanding of what it is becomes closest to us, almost obvious, like mathematical or logical axioms. However, similarly to axioms, we find difficulty with providing a definition for these notions; we cannot find the genus if we turn, for example, the notion of 'absolute' or 'time' into a species. On the other hand, the feelings of time – same as the idea of the absolute – just like criteria for any assessment are universal. In the formula of light, we can now substitute the respective variables: everything is given in time, whereas time itself is not given; everything is given in space, whereas space itself is not given; everything is given in being, whereas being itself is not given. In philosophy, this provision has been repeated a lot of times; in the general form, it consists in that none a priori knowledge allows grasping it as a genus-species, causal, illustrative and actual status of things. This is brought about by two peculiarities of such knowledge: 1. It is finite (for 'being', there is no genus), and 2. It cannot be different ('time' and 'space'). Thus, we can imagine a different content of the world's facts; however, we cannot imagine different forms for such facts, such as space, time or other logic laws. Why does man think and perceive reality in terms of three-dimensional space? Here, we can only invoke the organization of human sensibility, which is arranged in space in a three-dimensional manner; however, we cannot answer the question 'why'. Because we do not have an appropriate point from which we could look from the outside at such sensibility. We can see a fact, note it; however, we cannot explain where it derives or deduce it mentally. Again, it looks like a mystery, because there is a difference between 'what can be made' and 'what is being made. There are some things that man makes, and there are some things that are made, in a way, by itself. But how can we understand it? What is meant by 'to make'? To make, roughly speaking, means to be able to construct from components. If something can be made in some way, it probably, can be made in a different way. But can we make, for instance, in a different way the acts of our sensibility, which arranges objects in the three-dimensional space? Looks like we cannot because it is not we who 'made' this

perception, formed it from its components, added information A to information B, summed it up and came through it step by step and part by part. But that is not how it happened; it occurred spontaneously, independently. We did not obtain the state of thought by means of addition; it was made of itself; and through it (or in it) we see what was made.

Lacan in this regard and also in regard with his psychoanalytic practice wrote the following: "Through the discourse of the patient and through the symptoms of neurosis speak structures, and not the subject. As if before any human being there were certain knowledge, a certain system, which we reopens (see above the passage about "energy of consciousness - mati śākti, which is also is a type of rediscovering the knowledge but in this case in Eastern philosophical tradition – we add.). In some sense now the return to the point of view of the XVII century is taking place, with one crucial difference: not the man is put in the place of God, but an anonymous thinking without the subject, knowledge without identified subjectivity" (Lacan, 2006; p. 123).

The above may be applicable to consciousness itself and to its carrier (the subject). The subject did not create himself; he did not make his consciousness and did not establish laws of thinking; all this is given to man in the ex post facto mode. Man is always given to himself as some output or result, but with its origin lost. In such a structure, the first step is missing; however, there is the second step, the third step etc.; but no matter how hard we may try to collect together the entire set, the first element will always be missing. It would be more correct to compare such a world with a 'theater play, which we always watch beginning from the second scene'. That is why conscience, which illuminates the entire world, is never present in the world itself, though it provides for presence of all other things in it. On the other hand, cognizance of himself by man involves reproduction of the procedure of construction of man. According to poststructural approaches, if man wishes to know himself, he would have to make himself from pieces. However, since, in the process of assembling such structure, the first element will always be missing, the problem is unlikely to ever have a solution.

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