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Who Thinks inside of Me?

Some Aspects of Merab Mamardashvili`s Theory of Consciousness

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Abstract: In this article I look at the methodology of one the most unique figures in Russian philosophy — Merab Mamardašvili — who was known for his focus on consciousness. According to him, the application of the subject–object dualism to the analysis of consciousness leads to a series of complications. Within the phenomenological framework of intentionality there is an intertwining of perspective and object to which this perspective is directed. As soon as we try to apply to consciousness subject–object schemes, then we immediately come across paradoxes. It is impossible to determine consciousness by means of subject–object, not only because it is neither an object nor a subject, but also because consciousness inevitably turns out to be “prior” to such distinctions.

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From the very beginning, Mamardašvili analyzes consciousness from a distinctive perspective. ‘Consciousness is not a psychological process, as far as the traditional psycho-physiological meaning of this term is concerned’ (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009, p. 47). In other words, consciousness is essentially something entirely different from the psyche or

mental processes. Therefore, ‘consciousness should be described as going beyond the limits of being attached to some specific mental object — an individual subject (Mamardašvili 1996, p. 44).’

The reasonable question arises: what is this kind of hypothesis based on? And why, if at all, do we need to describe consciousness without attaching it to an individual, a subject?

The reason is clear:

We introduce the ‘sphere of consciousness’ as a notion that allows some contradictions that are caused by the use of the notions of ‘subject’ and ‘object’. They are contradictions brought about by the differentiation, as it were, of the object sphere as a naturally existing sphere, on the one hand, and the subject sphere as an also naturally existing sphere — but with certain psychological or pseudo-psychological properties and characteristics — on the other hand’ (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009, p. 45).

In other words, according to Mamardašvili, the notions of subject and object — and, correspondingly, the subject-object scheme — are not just dualistic; they contain inherent insolvable contradictions. Attempts to solve them tend to be counterproductive. Would it not be better to give up endeavor to speak of consciousness in terms of the subject-object dualism, given the insuperable difficulties in describing consciousness ? (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009)

Let us try to demonstrate this together with Mamardašvili. According to him, in classical philosophy¹ consciousness was understood as an object — pertaining to a human being (the subject), for whom possession of consciousness with all its relevant data is the

¹The term “classical rationality” is unconventional within the European philosophical tradition, but is widely used among Russian philosophers, mostly due to the influence of Mamardašvili himself. His major work *Klassičeskij i neklassičeskij ideal ratsionalizma (The Classical and Non-Classical Ideal of Rationalism)* (Mamardašvili, 1993), should be mentioned in this connection. It would, however, be more appropriate to speak of “the philosophy of classical rationality,” an expression which Mamardašvili invented as an umbrella term referring to European philosophy of the pre-Kant period, while Kant is said to be a borderline philosopher who heralded neo-classical rationality.

most reliable point of starting point. Also, according to the classical philosophical concept of consciousness, the latter is *self-consciousness* (i.e. self-reflection), that is, ‘knowledge of knowledge’ (Mamardašvili 1993). *Consciousness* – in other words, *co-knowledge* — exists when the fact of knowledge is established twice: it is not sufficient to know; one should be *conscious of what one knows*. The self-reflexivity of consciousness is introduced in philosophy as the unique ability for *neutral reflection*. Both words in this phrase are key. ‘Reflection’ means the ability of consciousness to witness its own activity while remaining *the very same consciousness*. ‘Neutral’ means that consciousness is given to itself ‘as it is’, ‘in truth’, without distortion; the privileged access of consciousness to itself consists in the fact that the knowledge of knowledge is *always true*. The principle of self-consciousness has always been, for classical philosophical epistemology, a magic wand of a kind (Mamardašvili 1993). Each time the question ‘how can consciousness be a subject of study’ arises, the philosopher’s answer tends to cite the ‘magic’ properties of consciousness itself (such as transparency and self-orientation). While this perspective may appear to be quite convincing it contains the trap of insolvable paradoxes. Mamardašvili sought to reveal the naiveté of this concept of consciousness.

His first critical attack is directed against the most general principle of ‘consciousness is knowledge of knowledge’. The principal objection is directed to the application of the subject-object model as soon as consciousness is understood as ‘knowledge of knowledge’. There are a number of logical difficulties with this approach which can be illustrated in the following way: To consider consciousness as an object supposes that there is something that is conscious of consciousness, which takes itself for an object in the course of reflection on itself. However, if we admit the existence of this couple - ‘the conscious subject’ and ‘the subject as self-conscious object’, we will need a third term, the self-conscious subject conscious of itself as conscious object’. Thus, we obtain the following alternative: The first option is to arbitrarily ‘stop’ at some stage along

the regression ‘something (an object) of which Subject 1 is conscious, of which, in turn, Subject 2 is conscious, of which, in turn, Subject 3 is conscious, etc’. In this case, if we ‘stop’ arbitrarily consciousness will slip into the unconscious, since not only will the assumed ‘object’ disappear, but also the pole of the hypothetical ‘subject’. We will end up with a self-consciousness that is not conscious of itself (this, on top of everything else, is an oxymoron). The second option is to agree to an endless regression. Hence, we can conclude that the subject-object pattern is inapplicable to consciousness, and that consciousness simply coincides with itself. Or, in other words, consciousness as self-aware subject is one and the same with consciousness *of* herself (as object)(Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009). This latter circumstance brings Mamardašvili to declare that the correct approach is the one in which consciousness is grasped within a phenomenological circle.

First and foremost, Mamardašvili tries to abandon the philosophical pattern of the analysis of consciousness that implies the existence of consciousness (as a subject) and something that such consciousness is conscious of (as an object), since, in this case, the pair (‘consciousness’ and ‘something’ of which consciousness is conscious) should be supplemented with a third member, so that the ‘conscious subject’ could become, in turn, an object, of which something else is conscious. Mamardašvili refers to this third member as ‘Descartes’ third eye’, and to this entire argument as ‘Descartes’ paradox’, since it was Descartes who first most clearly assigned, to the cogito, the wonderful ability to know its own self (i.e. to know the world and, at the same time, to know that one knows it) (Mamardašvili 1993). ‘Descartes’ third eye’ (which, in the extreme case, leads to an infinite regress) marked the beginning of the modern vision of the nature of self-consciousness. Mamardašvili, who disagreed with the modern classical approach (as well as with some aspects of Modernity and Enlightenment philosophy) (Deyanov 2002), was, in this point, more inclined to adopt the phenomenological interpretation – that is, consciousness cannot make itself an object and assume the attitude of an outsider in

relation to itself; in general, this means that there is no need to apply the subject-object dualism to consciousness, since consciousness of oneself does not fit this dualism. In order to avoid an infinite regress, we will need to understand that consciousness relates to itself directly. This direct relation of self to self constitutes the pure immanence of the experience of consciousness (Isayev 1999).

There is another case where we encounter the undesirable prospect of an infinite regress. If we cling to the subject-object pair as introduced into consciousness, we will encounter the following paradox: In order to know anything at all I must already know *how* I will know and *what* I want to know; yet, to know that, I must know *what* and *how* I will know in the latter case, and so on indefinitely. Methods for describing or explaining consciousness as an object domain lead to *infinite regress*, since the successive self-objectivation of consciousness requires at the same time reflective self-verification procedures.

Such *logical paradoxes* are brought about by attempts to access consciousness via the same framework of logical categories, which, in itself, constitutes the fundamental property of consciousness. How then would a meta-description of consciousness be possible? Moreover, consciousness itself is the pre-condition for the possibility of applying such categories. Consciousness cannot be defined via the subject-object or genus-species distinctions – not only because consciousness is neither an ‘object’ nor a ‘species’ — and, for that matter, neither as ‘subject’ nor as ‘genus’ — because consciousness inevitably ‘precedes’ all such distinctions. My consciousness is not an object for a very simple reason: namely, because the consciousness in question is my Ego. Here, any reference to ‘another’ consciousness is of no use – for a person has solely the experience of personal consciousness – as the necessary precondition of any and every ‘other’ experience. Thus, consciousness, as the pre-condition for the outer world objectification, is not itself subject

to objectification². The difficulty with attributing the dualistic principle ('knowledge of knowledge') to consciousness consists in the fact that *what is looked at* cannot at the same time be the position *from which it is seen*.

After revising the classical patterns of the description of consciousness, Mamardašvili suggests the notion of the '*sphere of consciousness*', which he introduces in order to help solve the paradoxes of the classical theory of consciousness (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009). If we assume the hypothesis of the identity of the subject and the object, we will be able to imagine, then, a more universal level of the description of the existence of consciousness than the level of subject-object separation. That is, the 'subject-object' schema will not be considered as the primary schema for consciousness and a different abstract and synthesizing schema will be introduced, viz., the '*sphere of consciousness*'. At first glance, the 'sphere of consciousness' is defined via an opposition resembling the classical one (with 'consciousness as an observer' and 'something of which the observer is conscious'). The object of observation here comes in the form of 'certain facts, objects, and events of consciousness'. Yet, the 'sphere of consciousness' is not a determinate subject, which is taken to be the universal basis of observation within the scope of the reflexive procedure. The sphere of consciousness includes both object properties and subject properties.

It may be argued that common sense seemingly induces us to connect consciousness with the subject. When we say that consciousness is the subject pole, the main thing is to escape the trap that language sets for us. The point is that by asserting 'subject = consciousness', we inevitably give rise to the question of the availability of an object (for common sense and logic tell us that there is no subject without an object).

² The first most intelligible explication of such difficulties is encountered in Husserl's phenomenology, from which it follows that the subject-object mechanism is not applicable to consciousness, and that consciousness which is conscious coincides with consciousness, of which the former is conscious. Within the intentionality principle, there was already an idea of existence of some inevitable 'splicing' of the look with the object looked at – or, in other words, it is asserted that the conscious subject is 'spliced' with the object, which such subject is conscious of, i.e. the original unity of the subject and the object (Dolidze 2002).

Essentially, there is no ‘empty’ consciousness; consciousness is always *about something*. Mamardašvili resorts here to the phenomenological concept of ‘intentionality’. What is meant thereby is that an act of consciousness is relational, it is directed to something *beyond* itself. A thought cannot be directionless: it is always related to some object. The fundamental insight of phenomenology is easy to prove; it will suffice to think of nothing. It should be noted that such ‘of-something-ness’ is neither an attribute nor a property of the thought; it is what constitutes it, since it is due to this ‘directedness’ that a thought is structured as a thought. Without intentionality — without ‘directedness at’ — there is no subject. By this clarification, they warn us against considering the subject as something separate and self-contained; something that may, on occasion, direct its thoughts towards objects. A subject — or a personal experience — emerges only when intentionality is directed to an object-pole which retroactively (reciprocally) constitutes the subject-pole. Perceiver and perceived are indissociable within a single act of grasping; one never precedes the other. Accordingly, in view of the structure and properties of intentionality, we can revise the traditional philosophical terminology and cease speaking of ‘subjects’, since this notion is freighted with a string of false associations.

Thus, the first thing we encounter while observing consciousness is that the structure of an event for consciousness is different from that of a worldly event. Furthermore, an event in consciousness not only defies description by means of the subject-object pattern; it also defies decomposition into notions such as ‘substance’ (essence) and ‘phenomenon’. In classical philosophy real existence is mostly the prerogative of substances (essences), whereas phenomena are something that is essentially not endowed with its own being. But inside the consciousness there is no possibility to separate the essence from the phenomenon. Phenomenon gets its independent existence

and has no need in any other essence for its existence. For an event in consciousness, there is absolutely no possibility to separate substances from occurrences. An occurrence in pure consciousness acquires independent existence and does not need any other substance to support its existence. Under such conditions, it becomes a special occurrence, or something that phenomenology tends to refer to as a *phenomenon*. The structure of events (or states) of consciousness is built up from phenomena. What is a phenomenon? A phenomenon is a certain integral formation of consciousness that cannot be decomposed and does not need to be explained through something else. For instance, when I see, from a window, the façade of a neighboring house, this fact constitutes a phenomenon in my consciousness. A phenomenon is self-sufficient; therefore, phenomenology assumes the outside world *qua* outside ‘factored out’ and fully concentrates on the phenomena. After demonstrating the inapplicability to consciousness of the ‘subject-object dualism’ and ‘substance-occurrence pair’, Mamardašvili further attempts to show that it would be equally incorrect to speak of the operation of consciousness in terms of *cause-effect relations*. This is accounted for by strictly formal reasons: as soon as we give up dualism causality can no longer enter the picture, since the cause-effect mechanism is constructed in accordance with the subject-object pattern, and vice versa.

However, the abandoning of causal methods for describing the operation of consciousness is based on more substantial grounds. Mamardašvili insists that my previous thought — for instance, coming to understand a certain idea — in no way influences any current understanding (pursuant to cause-and-effect laws). No matter how obvious some idea was, of which I was clearly conscious of yesterday, today I will have to start my journey to understanding from scratch. Understanding according to Mamardašvili is quite a mysterious, spontaneous and unpredictable process. This spontaneity does not invalidate our efforts, but also the whole totality of efforts does not guarantee success in understanding. Understanding is an event that we can, of course, influence (think,

memorize, discuss etc.), but we are still only partially active against acts of understanding. Because when understanding finally happens, we just accept it passively. We, of course, are not entirely passive, but we are not entirely active either — it would be more right to say that we are active in achieving our understanding, but we are passive in relation to the understanding, when it finally happens. It is not that we do, it's that happens to us. Understanding is a process that is always launched from scratch; it has no history — nor any causal connection with the past. Therefore, it would be much better if we give up the causal metrics for describing consciousness altogether. This is a rather complex idea; it will be much easier to verify whether Mamardašvili was right by considering some examples from the psychology of the process of understanding. What he had in mind are certain well-known situations in which, after going mentally through all the steps for finding a solution to a problem, we still not guaranteed to find the solution. Thus, if I am thinking on getting solution to some mathematical or logical task, step by step considering all the conditions and data being at my disposal, the decision, however, may not be achieved, it may escape me. And when a decision finally comes, it looks like an increment, as a kind of addition to what there was (in the form of data or intermediate reflection). It does not appear from the entire previous history of my mental efforts, though it is obviously related to them. The decision is more like to add to these efforts as a reward or blessing for this hard work. Hence, there is a frequent thought of Mamardashvili: thinking can be compared with the prayer, after which we will be blessed with understanding. In other words, a step-by-step transition from Idea 1 to Idea 2, and then to Idea 3 may still fail to bring me to Idea 4. Strictly speaking, my understanding is not guaranteed by anything: it occurs regardless of anything that could cause it. Of course, it would be an exaggeration to say that an idea can come to mind in conditions when it was not preceded by any preliminary thinking — for instance, thinking about what others had said earlier. However,

we understand well that attempts to induce a thought do not guarantee success. In the same way, according to Mamardašvili, one can never reconstruct the path that brought a thinker to a certain idea. You cannot show, step by step, how Newton arrived at his idea of earth gravity. Certainly he did experiment, he wrote about his thinking, he reconstructed logically what he was trying to discover, etc. It is all like that. But now let`s imagine that thousands of people, including physicists can observe one and the same experiment and see nothing curious in it. And we can imagine a situation, that other scientists read Newton's treatise and still do not understand it. We know of many examples from the field of philosophy, when some work was published, but its contemporaries did not understand it. And then something inexplicable happened and idea was conceived. Mamardašvili doesn`t intend to say that understanding has no history or constituent elements - of course, they are and without them understanding cannot be achieved. He just tries to say that all these steps do not guarantee, do not provide the success in achieving understanding, they are conditions that are necessary, but not sufficient. Thus we can show succession and consistency of Newton`s thinking steps within a certain segment; however, a moment will inevitably come when we will have to say that he arrived at his idea by means of a ‘mental jump’ (insight). Nothing in his previous speculation guaranteed him success; had there been another thinker in his place, it might have so happened that he would have failed, after fulfilling the same mental actions, to arrive at the final idea. Thus, identical intellectual steps do not always bring about identical intellectual events.

This motive is directly connected to another consideration of Mamardašvili, namely revising the classical concept of *self-consciousness as reflection*. What is at stake here is the question regarding the ability of consciousness to remain neutral or transparent with respect to itself. Classical philosophy understood this miraculous quality as the ability of consciousness to monitor its operation, i.e. essentially the ability to maintain a self-reporting mode (Vladiv-Glover 2006). The basic characteristic of such self-monitoring is

the transparency of the reflective function; it neither adds anything nor takes anything away, it merely keeps a record of the operation of consciousness ‘as such’. This provision is consistent with an important assumption of classical philosophy for which ‘the immediately self-given nature of consciousness is the most reliable point of origin for any occurrence’ (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009, p. 67). Pursuant to this thesis, it was assumed that consciousness has direct experience of itself, i.e. the states given to it allow it to confidently say that it knows its motives. This classical notion is precisely what Merab doubts. According to Mamardašvili, psychoanalysis struck a major blow to this idea drastically changing the concept of consciousness: instead of the classical formula (‘I know that I know’), psychoanalysis suggested its own formula (‘I do not know that I know’) (Mamardašvili 1996). The latter is nothing but a definition of the unconscious. As we see, the unconscious, despite the somewhat unfortunate descriptor (‘the *un-conscious*’), reserves space for knowledge; it is not the ‘*absence of knowledge*’. The unconscious is indeed a form of *knowledge*; yet, it is a knowledge occurring in such areas of the human psyche where the famous Cartesian ‘light of reason’ cannot penetrate. Being hidden we sometimes fail to guess that we carry such knowledge. The idea can be illustrated by a series of examples. For instance, if we are asked whether we know that we came to life not as a result of a union of winged monkeys, we will find, most likely to our surprise, that we do know the answer, though we have never thought about it and never deemed ourselves capable of an error-free response. There are, of course, more serious examples – such as the human ability to give answers to questions to which – as it sometimes seems to us – we have no answers. Often, quite unexpectedly, we find within us information of which we were unaware. For these reasons, Mamardašvili declares that should the term ‘consciousness’ be applied to the unconscious (i.e. to sub-conscious spontaneous mental processes) it will lose any definitive meaning it has. ‘Thus, the first objective is to transform the unconscious to consciousness, and by this transformation to convert a man’s

(mental) state to that of a new, conscious experience. It will turn out then that the unconscious is what ‘used to be’ consciousness, and it is only in these terms that the comparison or differentiation of the unconscious and consciousness makes sense. When compared to consciousness, the unconscious makes sense only when it is related to consciousness, i.e. when it constitutes some specific element of consciousness, or, rather, former consciousness.’ (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 1971, p. 352). In this case, we have what he refers to as the ‘phenomenological’ paradox (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009).

However, the most important thing for Mamardašvili is that any conscious act is preconditioned by acts that *have occurred before any self-consciousness* while remaining inaccessible for the latter. What is meant here is that there is some ‘non-objectified remainder’ in thinking, which *indeed constitutes thinking as it is*. This statement can be easily verified: a subject would find it difficult to give a clear answer to the simplest question of ‘*how* do we think?’ Mostly, such answers would come in the form of certain tautologies, with thinking described with reference to thinking itself. ‘...we could not understand if we did not already understand. In this sense, to have consciousness means to have a tautology: we understand because we understand’ (Mamardašvili 1990, p. 8). Each of us will agree that when he or she sees a thing, he or she understands that it is exactly *he or she* who sees it. The problem is that we do not see *how* we see. Do we understand *how* we understand? Can there be an algorithm that would decompose the procedure of understanding in such a way as to enable someone else — or even we ourselves — to reproduce it? If we agree with this line of thinking, we will find no difficulty in accepting the conclusion that follows — namely, that, in respect to our thinking it would be altogether correct to say that understanding sometimes *happens* to us. Assume that we have the task of solving some mathematical problem or guessing a pre-determined word. Assume, too, that we fulfill the task successfully. However, when we are asked to explain *how* we arrived at our solution all we do is *duplicate* it. In most cases, under the pretext of

explaining the process of thinking, we start thinking again. We *show* the solution once again, but find it difficult to reveal its genesis (Mamardašvili, 1996). Similarly, reading the proof of the Pythagorean theorem for the first time we may fail to understand it; reading it a second time may bring about understanding, whereas a third reading could be absent of understanding. In such a case, we may well remember that we did understand, but at present we have no understanding. There was understanding, but it ceased to be. In this case, it can be said that *understanding comes to us*. Our language is quite illustrative here: when we say that an idea ‘has come to mind’, we try to communicate our sense of ourselves as passive observers of the work of consciousness, which is inaccessible and only partially under our control. When we describe the operation of consciousness, we can speak only “after the fact” as if about something that has happened. To emphasize this circumstance, Mamardašvili employs the special term ‘*fact of consciousness*’ (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009). A fact is something that stands by itself and can only be witnessed independently of an observer, who can note the fact, but cannot change it.

Furthermore, we are not conscious of the many mental operations that we carry out, as we implement such skills as speech and counting. For instance, nobody would disagree that, when we speak, we do not think about the rules of language (grammar), though in most cases we speak (in our native language) correctly. And, finally, when we are busy thinking about something, we are aware that we are only indirectly relevant for what is taking place: thinking flows according to its own laws. Everything looks as if it were process without a subject: problems are solved, verses are recalled, sentences are formulated, images are drawn etc.

So how do self-consciousness and pre-reflective thinking (*‘cogito’*) stand in relation to one another? According to Mamardašvili, they are entirely irrelevant to one another and, moreover, not mutually transparent. They stand to each other in such a way that self-

consciousness is not a neutral but an active process, which, in the course of its intervention *changes* consciousness. This problem was described years ago in Hindu philosophy: if I fix on some fact of my consciousness, then my state of consciousness changes; consequently, myself is already not ‘me’, and so on. Often, psychologists speak of the mutual inhibition of the self-conscious and non-self-conscious experience of consciousness. A typical example they give is that of a millipede that, pondering over its progression, ‘freezes’ in perplexity as to which of her many tarsi it should use first. However, the experience of mastering a foreign language — much like the experience of communicating in our native language — provides equally vivid evidence of the fact that keeping grammatical structures in mind and attempting concurrently to use the language hardly go well with each other. We can approach consciousness unconsciously as well as consciously. In case of an unconscious approach, consciousness is deemed a case of reflection or cognition, i.e. consciousness acts, on itself, as some special cognitive process. In such a case, consciousness remains ‘in its place’ and ‘nothing is done’ to it. But here, we assume something different. We proceed from a somewhat crazy assumption that at this very moment — now — when we are discussing the problem of consciousness — when, as we put it, ‘we are working with consciousness’, we, in a way, eliminate it as some spontaneous and natural process. This is exactly what the struggle with consciousness consists in’ (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009 p. 23 p.).

Mamardašvili means that when we are actually thinking, we have no witnesses for our thinking experience; yet, as soon as such witnesses appear, thinking comes to an end. Hence, we can draw the rather paradoxical conclusion that *consciousness is a profoundly unconscious process*. The thing that we used to refer to as consciousness (the experience of self-conscious self-grasping) is a sort of a naïve attempt to arrange a date with ourselves. Thus, we will hardly manage to gain access to our own consciousness. Even if we happen to be in the ‘sacred’ place, all we will find is that consciousness was

there, but has already gone. In our attempts to understand ‘how consciousness works’ we introduce changes to processes that flow in a quite independent manner. That is, roughly speaking, in our presence it no longer works as it did ‘in reality’. The peculiarity of consciousness consists in the fact that when we attempt to describe it, we eliminate the conditions of its existence. We bring an ‘uncontrollable disturbance’ into the ongoing process. This can be compared to a situation when I try to see a place where I am not present. While I am not there, I cannot see it; as soon as I am there, it ceases to be ‘a place where I am not present’. We can give other, quite naïve, examples: for instance, our inability to see our entire body, in the same way as we see other people’s bodies, is a good illustration of how consciousness is structured. We cannot see our body as a whole, because our eyes belong to this very body. Similarly, we cannot explain consciousness, since the explanation belongs to this very consciousness.

Finally, the difficulties that we have discussed above come down essentially to this: classical methods for describing consciousness always come across something that eludes reflection, though they are themselves inseparably associated with the course of reflection (Vladiv-Glover 2006). To solve such difficulties, we should give up the claim for the sort of full understanding that was the goal of classical philosophy.

It is obvious, for Mamardašvili, that contrary to what many modern philosophers believed, self-consciousness does not have a primary status. Consciousness, apparently, is not endowed with the miraculous ability to reflect itself. It is not this fantastic ability of consciousness that enables it to reveal itself. Quite to the contrary, the non-reflective consciousness makes self-consciousness possible. Here, Mamardašvili implies that there is some *pre-reflective cogito* which forms a *precondition for that which is called the Cartesian cogito in the classical paradigm*. However, Mamardašvili believes that some arguments in favor of the non-identity of thought and reflection can be spotted even in the Descartes’ teaching. ‘I think’— that is one thing. And “I think that I think”— that is

another. But in what terms is it possible to distinguish one from the other? I repeat that this is a fundamental distinction, first drawn by Descartes. Of the first side of this distinction (“I think”), Descartes would say that it is some kind of nonverbal state of activeness in the *here and now*, existing within the performance of its own being. That is, when something is performed, it exists at the moment of performance and for so long as the performance continues’ (Mamardašvili 1990, p. 12). That is, each conscious act is preconditioned by certain acts that have already occurred without self-consciousness being involved and remain non-reflected in my consciousness. The pre-reflective cogito precedes the Cartesian cogito. A certain ‘non-objectified remainder’ in thinking constitutes the most active ‘spring’ of thinking: anything in the human psyche which cannot be examined objectively, and to the degree to which it cannot be examined objectively, makes up consciousness.’(Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009, p. 86).

This position is quite consistent with the provisions of classical psychoanalysis (Vladiv-Glover 2006). In psychoanalytic theory, a very powerful *concept of the unconscious* is governed by appealing to the presence of the non-reflected in the structure of consciousness, which, by virtue of this presence, becomes apt for mental work. In this case, the unconscious is not forever inaccessible and incommunicable; on the contrary, it, at its own ‘discretion’, communicates with consciousness by means of the symbolic. In the psychoanalytical tradition, the unconscious actively exchanges images-phantoms with consciousness, whereas the dreaming zone carries out the function of transportation. However, no matter what kind of relationship exists between them, the unconscious, being a precondition for operation of consciousness, never becomes a part thereof.

To clarify the idea, Mamardašvili introduces the notion of the ‘*state of consciousness*’ (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009 p. 45-46). The state of consciousness is understood as the operations of consciousness that result in its productivity, but still defy perception/recognition? This state is not ‘inherent’, so to speak, to psychic acts, since it is

not imminent to the psyche at all. Reflection may exist in the ‘state of consciousness’, which is not grasped by reflection itself. If I understand something, the laws, in accordance with which my understanding occurs, cannot be understood; my understanding, therefore, cannot become part of my understanding experience. Understanding is not grasped by understanding; it is essentially a projective process. This means that it reveals itself as a result rather than a hidden mechanism; understanding always comes with some delay: when the work of consciousness is done and complete, understanding is given to us as an effect or a result, possession of which does not enable us to deduce how such an effect or result was obtained. It is this circumstance for which Mamardashvili introduces the notion of the ‘state of consciousness’. It ‘enables us to work on that side of our being that cannot be an object (or the subject!) of any scientific analysis. Just as anything that cannot be objectively analyzed in the psyche — and to the extent that it cannot be so analyzed — is consciousness, so everything in the psyche that appears to us beyond consciousness may be, following the introduction of the category the ‘state of consciousness’, attributed to consciousness as its state’ (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009, p. 86). In spite of the fact that we cannot make the work of consciousness transparent and consistently thought-through, we still feel that something *has happened* to us — we feel that *understanding has happened* to us. Had there been no such feeling, we would not have been able to verify our understanding and record it as a fact. However, such an experience is accessible to us, which fact the Mamardashvili and Pjatigorskij attribute to the ‘state of consciousness’ as well. It essentially ‘provides the opportunity of ‘transferring’ consciousness to the sphere of accessible experience. In a similar way, in psychoanalysis, the sphere of the unconscious, which is fundamentally inaccessible to direct experience, becomes accessible indirectly, symbolically, through the specific reading of texts during a psychoanalytic interview. If we consider the psyche as the text of consciousness, we can conclude, then, that the ‘state of consciousness’ is essentially a possibility, for

consciousness, to interpret the psyche as consciousness itself (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009).

Psychoanalysis is not unique in these regards; we find similar reflections in by such psychologists as Jean Piaget (see Piaget 1952). They are found as well in the works of leading twentieth century philosophers, including Edmund Husserl (see Husserl 1931) and Jean Paul Sartre (see Sartre 1966). In all these cases, the idea is that every conscious act is preconditioned by acts taking place outside of or without any reflexive knowledge and as such inaccessible to the latter. Here it is claimed that there is a certain ‘non-objectified remainder’ in our thinking that constitutes it as it is. In this regard, it is apposite to mention Piaget’s famous experiments in which children performing the simplest arithmetical actions were not able to answer the question as to how they came up with them; they simply duplicated the solutions. Their explanations consisted in repeating the arithmetical action. If one were to extrapolate from these most basic observations the work of consciousness in general, one could conclude that understanding the entire multitude of things that make consciousness accessible to us does not, nevertheless, permit us understand how this understanding itself is constructed. It is not possible to devise an algorithm that would reveal the process of our understanding in such a way that not only someone else could reproduce it, but that we, first of all, would be able to do so as well, since, as stated above, re-reading the Pythagorean theorem does not guarantee the comprehension of that state of understanding that we experienced the other day. That said, it is much more appropriate to claim that our understanding just happened to us, and our language here is sufficiently indicative when we say that ‘the idea just came to us’ (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009).

Hence it follows that mental states (an even better term is ‘mental events’, thereby emphasizing that we are witnesses to our own not always transparent activity) are given to us within the framework of actual fact, once ‘everything has already happened’. And this

is also how understanding is constructed: at some point we become witnesses to our own understanding. Therefore, when our thinking happens we are aware that it is taking place even though we cannot describe it (Stafecka 2009).

Mamardašvili then proceeds and asks the following question: Once a non-reflective (incogitable) occurrence becomes, after all, a thought-object (for instance in Mamardašvili's own analysis or by me who is now explaining his views), would this not mean that this 'incogitable' is quite cognizable after all, given that it has been stated almost characterized, and almost explained? What is meant here is not, of course, that the *content* of the non-reflective occurrence attains clarity, but merely that we — strictly formally — understand that in the depths of consciousness there is something that cannot be highlighted by consciousness. How do we understand this? How does this thought become intelligible to us? For if there is consciousness of the 'pre-conscious', reflection of the 'pre-reflective', and expression of the 'inexpressible', is consciousness not directly involved, by reflection or language (expression)? Mamardašvili notes that this is the key question that reveals the nature of thought and thinking. The point is that to find oneself in the aforementioned 'vicious circle' means that thought has run to the limit of the form — or, more precisely, has become aligned with the pure form of thought, has coincided with itself. In this case, the pre-reflective or the incogitable is something that coincides with the form as such (the logical form, as Ludwig Wittgenstein would have put it — see Wittgenstein 1958) of reflection or thought.³ The best example of this is the meditative method of successive elimination of all individual, specific states of consciousness, which might depend on our subjectivity. What remains after abstracting from anything individual or specific will constitute the 'empty' form of thought, its pure immanence, limited to individual consciousness. But though it is impossible to leave it, it is possible to 'place

³ Lev Vygotsky would say 'the plan of thought' (see Vygotsky L. *Thinking and Speech*) and Jacques Derrida would say 'the trace' (see Derrida J. *Of Grammatology*)

oneself at its very edge'(Mamardašvili 2002). This is what philosophy mostly deals with (Mamardašvili 2002).⁴

In this way we have arrived at the theme stated in the title: who thinks inside of me, if I myself remain a mere witness of the mysterious processes that go on entirely without my involvement? If we follow Mamardašvili's logic, everything appears as if consciousness is able to perform some work, with respect to which the subject absolutely fails to actualize its subjective powers: it neither monitors nor determines nor adjusts what is referred to as the process of understanding. Unfortunately, a person cannot order him/herself to understand something in the same way as he/she can command him-/herself to raise his/her right hand. We can only make some indirect efforts with respect to the process of understanding; yet, we cannot influence the process directly. All the carrier of consciousness can do is act as a passive record-keeper and observer of consequences that accompany the hidden processes occurring in the 'black box' of consciousness. Our thinking keeps us at a considerable distance: we can take immense pains to understand something, and still understanding may fail to be revealed to us. On the other hand, it may so happen that at an absolutely spontaneous and unprepared moment we will feel, quite clearly, that we have grasped the meaning of some idea, connected all its logical chains, and something that seemed obscure to us has instantaneously cleared up, and has become comprehensible and distinct. At such moments, we have the right to say that we have understood something — though, it would be fairer to say that *understanding happened to us*. Thus, understanding occurs according to internal laws, and man *acts as an object – rather than a subject — of understanding*. To the question, 'Who thinks inside of me?', we could answer — 'The thought itself', though we are accustomed to believing that it is my Ego that thinks in me

⁴Philosophy is a 'struggle' to record the things that are 'closest' to consciousness, but unknowable by it' (Padgett 2007).

— Me myself. Mamardašvili would say that one's 'self' knows of its thoughts no sooner than after the thoughts has already occurred, but it cannot 'order' thoughts in the same way as one orders dinner in a hotel room. And, therefore, no matter how extraordinary such an answer may sound, Mamardašvili would be ready to say that it is the thought that thinks inside of me rather than 'Me myself'. '...man, unlike all other beings known to us, possesses consciousness. And this means that he has the possibility of experiencing precisely those things or states that it is impossible to obtain in a natural manner—as a product, let us say, of some physiological mechanism. For example, it is impossible to have thoughts obtained through the simple continuation of the natural mental powers given to a person...' (Mamardašvili 1990, p. 11).

This interpretation obviously puts in question the multifarious subjective and substantial properties of one's 'self'. For Mamardašvili, 'self' is not even a structure; it is a state of consciousness. This is the circumstance with which the difficulties in objectification of 'self' are connected, and which have been present in philosophy since David Hume. 'Self' is not given to us as a thing, a property or a certain entity; it is not given to us at all when we try to 'extract' it (Hume, 2010). In his time Hume demonstrated, that no matter how hard we might try to capture our 'self' as something definite, we would forever come across no more than scattered impressions (Hume, 2010) (Mamardašvili refers to them as psychical impressions). For instance, feelings of tiredness or buoyancy, comfort or discomfort; being visited by various images, thoughts of the past or the future; yet, none of this is the feeling the 'self' lives through. Strangely enough, my 'self' cannot be felt; it can only be '*appended by means of thinking*' to what is really felt. If we take into account Mamardašvili's speculations, Hume's observation will seem quite justified. 'Self' is a state of consciousness that can think of anything except itself. 'Self' cannot objectify itself as a mechanism of thinking. Thus, Mamardašvili insists that language is the source of the mistaken interpretation when we include a fact of consciousness in some sphere of

our ‘self’, for instance, when we say: ‘I have come up with an idea’ or ‘I have thought of something. In spite of such usage, according to Mamardašvili and Pjatigorskij, we should resort to other linguistic structures, such as ‘I have entered into an idea’ or ‘I have found myself in a thought of something’ (Mamardašvili, Pjatigorskij 2009, p. 61). Such phrases might seem stylistically unnatural; however, from a philosophical point of view, they are more correct, since they make it clear that one’s ‘self’ is found inside facts or structures of consciousness, rather than vice versa.

Thus, a subject is not the subject ~~for~~ of his own thinking, but rather an outside observer: he/she may know what contributes to his/her understanding and what does not, and can try to assist it; yet, nevertheless, the relationship between a person and his/her understanding should rather be described in terms of *hope* than in terms of subject-object subordination.

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