Baltic Sea Philosophy Essay Event 2025

Response to topic 3: "*Every outside needs an inside, and we do know the inside of some physical things, namely ourselves; consciousness can be understood as the inside of our own physical brain, or how it is in itself. Why not assume that other physical things have insides of the same kind; that is, that they too have (or consist of particles that have) at least a simple form of consciousness? If so, consciousness would be an essential aspect of physical nature, but still more than purely physical.*" - Hedda Hassel Mørch

Essay:

In the quote, Hedda H. Mørch presents an account on consciousness based on the underlying claim that "*Every outside needs an inside*". This is a claim that allows her to further argue that since humans know what's on their 'inside', i.e. consciousness, other physical beings may have a consciousness as well, or at least a primitive form of consciousness that would be inherent in all physical things. This consciousness, while being intrinsically tied to the physical, transcends physicality in the way we know our own consciousness to do. While this syllogism seems valid at first glance, this essay will be dedicated to investigating the premises that it holds to be true. These being that (1) all human beings have a consciousness, and (2) all physical objects have a primitive form of consciousness. Finally concluding by disagreeing with Mørch based on the tautological nature of her claims.

Beginning with the first premise, the proposed fact that all human beings have consciousness is a wildly debated topic in the field of consciousness. Finding proof of the existence of consciousness in other beings has proven to be exceedingly difficult. This, due to the somewhat metaphysical nature of consciousness that Mørch also identifies as "*more than purely physical*." Consciousness exists as a devastatingly private experience within a person, something that cannot really be expressed and demonstrated truly to an external observer. While a person can meaningfully claim to be conscious, and present an account that is deeply similar to our personal experience of consciousness, there can still be some semblance of doubt in their experience. Mørch's theory doesn't inherently suffer from the problem of an unobservable consciousness, however it is based on the *belief* that all humans have a consciousness. If we were to base this claim on *proof*, the claim is much harder to justify.

One approach is to base our proof of consciousness on others based on the fact that other people claim to be conscious. This however is not valid, as then belief is to be placed on personal observation of consciousness. One example that demonstrates the problem of personal observation is the thought that people could experience color differently. While one person could perceive an object of the color 'red' the same as another person perceives 'blue', they would still claim to be perceiving 'red'. They would wholeheartedly believe that they were perceiving the color 'red', as that perception and that concept of 'red' are correlated in their minds. However in the mind of the other person, a different perception is correlated to the same concept of 'red'. Thereby humans are limited to essentially speaking in concepts, while having no proof of what the other person is inherently perceiving in their foreign mind. This is a barrier in language that arises from the private nature of experience and perception. Applying the same logic to the experience of consciousness, there is nothing hindering a non-conscious being from conveying that they perceive consciousness when they really do not. Mørch's theory is thereby irrevocably based on the belief of consciousness in others.

This belief is not inherently a downfault in Mørch's philosophy though. If we view the theory from a pragmatic standpoint, it stands to reason that we have no reason *not to believe* in others. If we take the principle of *prima facie*, or 'at face value', there is effectively no use for logically scrutinising others' consciousness. The private nature of consciousness regards it such that a conscious being and a non-conscious being are effectively the same. Thus the only proof of consciousness that we require is the fact that a person acts as if they

were conscious. Thus it lies in the observable act of conscious behaviour that underlines our base claim that other things than one's own private person are conscious.

While this line of reasoning can justify the *prima facie* consciousness in other humans, Mørch's second claim continues this to a profoundly deeper level by stating that all physical objects have some degree of consciousness. Attempting to put this to reason, we begin with the animal kingdom. Through evolution, human consciousness was developed from primitive animals. It would be a logical absurdity to claim that consciousness is a switch that was flipped on when the first human was born. Therefore, it is not completely unreasonable to say that animals have a primitive form of consciousness. Continuing this thought, we move on to the inanimate world. Analysing animals, we find that they are all constructed of simple particles, electrons, protons, and neutrons. Similarly every other physical object is constructed of the same particles. A question then arises as to what makes animals so special then? Why is the specific arrangement of matter that constructs a rabbit valued more than a rock in terms of consciousness? While a rabbit may justifiably be considered more conscious, it seems unfair to not grant a rock at least the smallest, most insignificant value of consciousness. Thus arriving at Mørch's claim, that all fundamental particles have traces of consciousness, and that more complex consciousness is an emergent property that is inherent to all physical objects.

Taking a step back, we analyse what we're really saying with this claim. Our foundation was built on the observable fact that humans act as conscious beings. Thus consciousness is defined as an action. What this action was, we haven't explored deeply, but we can take self-preservation and rationality to be two rough criteria for human consciousness. Further, animals present a more primitive form of this same consciousness, possibly not rationality but self-preservation remains. Continuing further, inanimate objects present none of these qualities, but may be believed to have semblances of consciousness due to sharing the physical nature of humans and animals. What can be noticed is that at this point, we aren't actually saying anything that has any meaning at all. We tautologically claim that humans act as humans, animals act as animals, and rocks act as rocks. Our metaphysical concept of consciousness has been so stretched and indiscriminately altered that it has lost all power as a meaningful term. Defining consciousness as "*an essential aspect of physical nature*" has led us to claim that a physical form is an essential part of physical existence. The base claim that "*Every outside needs an inside*", i.e. every physical thing needs some metaphysical inside, leads us to claim that every physical thing has a metaphysical inside without any actual meaningful substance attributed to it.

To conclude, through this essay, claims of consciousness made by Mørch were proven to be irrevocably based on belief. This belief in other humans as conscious creatures was justified due to *prima facie* evidence. This claim was inherently founded on shaky ground, and thereby through seemingly logical reasoning if we were to arrive at Mørch's main claim that all physical objects have primitive forms of consciousness, we argue nothing at all. If our claim is that consciousness stems from observable behaviour of consciousness, we require of everything that is granted consciousness to display a behavior to observe. If this behaviour is abstracted so far as to include the mere act of existing, our defined consciousness is truly and deeply hollow. Finally asserting that Mørch's arguments can be valid, but are tautological in nature, and thereby meaningless.