

# Davor Pećnjak and Tomislav Janović, Towards Dualism: Essays in Philosophy of Mind, Ibis grafika: Zagreb, 2016

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## BOOK REVIEW

Davor Pećnjak, Tomislav Janović  
**PREMA DUALIZMU. OGLEDI IZ FILOZOFIJE UMA**  
(Towards Dualism: Essays in Philosophy of Mind)  
**Ibis grafika: Zagreb, 2016**

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In their book Davor Pećnjak and Tomislav Janović address two central issues in philosophy of mind. In chapters 1-5, they investigate the most fundamental properties of mental states and their mutual relationships. In chapter 7-15, they investigate the mind body problem that, notoriously, concerns the relation of the mind with the physical world. Both lines of investigation are carried forward mostly by engaging with current contemporary analytic philosophy of mind. However, when appropriate, they refer to classic continental philosophers, mostly in the phenomenological tradition.

Following a consolidated tradition in philosophy of mind, the Authors consider intentionality and phenomenal character as the fundamental properties of mental states. Intentionality is the property of being about something. Thus, for instance, the belief that the sun is hot is intentional insofar it is about the fact that the sun is hot. Usually, it is said that the belief has the *content* that the sun is hot. Pećnjak and Janović, referring to the work of Christopher Peacocke, that is primarily inspired by that of Gareth Evans, recognise the existence of mental states with non-conceptual content (Chapter 4). So, they might be saying that the dog is smelling a toast burning, without having to assume that the ascribed representation, that is, this specific way of representing an event, requires that the dog has the concept of toast or that of burning.

The Authors characterise phenomenal character as what it is like to have a certain conscious mental state. Thus, for instance, when we are having a conscious experience of a colour, there is a specific way that characterises our having that experience of colour.

In particular, the Authors maintain that phenomenal character characterises

a fundamental dimension of mental states that cannot be reduced or explained in terms of mechanisms that render accessible a certain internal state to a certain cognitive mechanism.

The rejection of the reducibility of the phenomenal character of mental state to its intentional properties is one of the important claims in Chapter 2. Thus, the Authors oppose representationalism. This is the view that the phenomenal character of an experience is identical or is fixed by its intentional properties. Representationalism has many supporters in contemporary analytic philosophy, including some that would like to naturalise phenomenal character by naturalising intentionality (Michael Tye, Fred Dretske and Gilbert Harman).

The Authors maintain that all mental states have a phenomenal character (Chapter 3). They show that this is the case for beliefs and other propositional attitudes. They refer to epistemic feelings such as those that are supposedly accompanying phenomenal character of intentional mental states. By relying on the phenomenological tradition, they introduce the notion of non-sensory phenomenal character to spell out the phenomenal character that they think is associated with conceptual intentional states.

A central thesis of the book is that a mental state can be intentional only if it has or can potentially have a phenomenal character, and thus it is conscious (Chapter 3). The existence of intentional mental states that cannot have a phenomenal character is denied. This is a quite strong thesis that challenges central assumptions in contemporary cognitive science. In fact, central explanatory strategies in this discipline, as for example in the study of perception, learning, memory and language, refer to the assumption of the existence of sub-personal computational mechanisms that operate on unconscious representations. This explanatory paradigm has also inspired the postulation of non-conscious non-conceptual content that the Authors appears to recognise only in its conscious form.

Their exploration of the relationship of phenomenal character and intentionality covers also the issue whether, as stated by the so-called higher order thought theories of consciousness, what confers to a mental state its phenomenal character, and thus its being conscious, is being the object of a higher order thought (Chapter 5). The principal target of their criticism is the account offered by Peter Carruthers.

Regarding the mind body problem, the book advances a dualism of properties. This ontological view is reached after a criticism of eliminativism, the doctrine that our ordinary conception of mental states and their features will be replaced by mature neuroscience (Chapter 6) and an historical excursion into traditional arguments for dualism (Chapter 7).

Further the Authors offer, and in some cases endorse, several very influential and some less influential contemporary arguments for the dualism of properties. Respectively, Richard Swinburne's arguments based on the metaphysics of properties and events (Chapter 8), the conceivability arguments by Saul Kripke and David Chalmers (Chapter 9), the knowledge argument by Frank Jackson (Chapter 10) and the argument from simplicity by David Barney (Chapter 11). These arguments are aimed at showing that consciousness involves properties that are not physical properties. Given the primacy that the Authors give to consciousness in fixing intentionality, it follows that this latter feature is not physical as well.

In addition, the Authors, by relying on the work of Crawford Elder, elaborate a general ontological view that accommodates their account of the mental in a multi-layered view of reality. In Chapter 13, they oppose the view that all mental processes are computational ones, that, in principle, could be emulated by a computer. Chapter 14 engages with the *mysterianism* of Colin McGinn, who maintains that although consciousness is a natural phenomenon it is impossible for us to understand how this is so. The Authors contend that there is no a good reason why McGinn should couple this latter thesis of cognitive closure with materialism. Instead, they argue that it would combine better with dualism. Although, as stated in the introduction, Tomislav Janović does not endorse substance dualism as Davor Pečnjak does, Chapter 15 offers some arguments to fend off reasonings that highlight the difficulties in the individuation of immaterial substances.

It is impossible to critically engage with a book of such a width that touches upon so many different interrelated topics. I would like just to focus on the Authors' criticism of representationalism. In fact, this appears to be a turning point in the first part of their book. Their further accounts of the relationships between intentionality and phenomenal character depends on this view.

They respond to the argument from the transparency of experience that some representationalists have used to support their view (Harman, Tye). This argument can be taken as involving two steps. First, it is argued that introspective evidence does not show that that our experiences have a phenomenal character, because we are not aware of our experiences. For instance, in seeing a red surface we are not aware of the experience of red, instead we are aware of a surface that appears to be red. Second, what we are aware of is what the experience represents the world as being. For instance, in seeing a red surface we can only be aware of what it represents,

in this case a surface that is red. That is, we can only be directly introspectively aware of the representational content of the experience. One response by the Authors, that is worth quoting entirely, is the following:

First, we believe that this type of complaint simply misses the target, i.e. it does not refute what we are trying to show in this chapter. Namely, we do not see how the argument of transparency of experience – which, note well, also relies on the introspective evidence, only interpreted differently – could dispute such a fundamental, most directly available fact that every conscious state, unlike its unconscious version, has a phenomenal or qualitative component, no matter that this phantom entity, at least under normal circumstances, cannot be introspectively identified and analysed as a separate part of the mental state, independent from its intentional content. (Pećnjak and Janović, 2014: 21)<sup>1</sup>

This remark seems to be methodologically unfair to representationalists insofar it is made by the Authors who, in the initial part of the book, declare their allegiance to first-personal methods in the study of the mind. Moreover, in no place they specify the peculiar observational conditions under which phenomenal character can be shown to be separable from intentional content.

However, the Authors offer also positive arguments or indirect evidence to prove the independence of phenomenal character from intentional features of the experience. In one of them, they compare a perception of a house with the mental image of the same house (p. 21). They conclude that the difference between the two experiences, in terms of intensity, clarity, and richness of detail must be in the phenomenal character of the experiences and not in their intentional features (probably, because both are about the same house).

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<sup>1</sup> English translation by the author. The original in Croatian is: “Kao prvo, smatramo da ova vrsta prigovora jednostavno promašuje metu, tj. da ne opovrgava ono što nastojimo pokazati u ovom poglavlju. Naime, ne vidimo kako bi se argumentom transparentnosti iskustva - koji se, nota bene, također oslanja na introspektivnu evidenciju, samo drugačije interpretiranu<sup>27</sup> - mogla osporiti tako temeljna, na najizravniji mogući način dostupna činjenica da svako svjesno stanje, za razliku od svoje nesvjesne inačice, ima neku fenomenalnu ili kvalitativnu komponentu, bez obzira što taj fantomski entitet, barem pod uobičajenim uvjetima nije moguće introspektivno identificirati i analizirati kao zaseban dio mentalnog stanja, nezavisan od samog intencionalnog sadržaja.” (Pećnjak and Janović, 2014: 21)

It is not clear why such a difference is not about the ways in which the two experiences represent the world as being. Consider that besides the first perception  $P_1$  of the house there is also, after a short time, a second perception  $P_2$  of the same house under the same visual conditions. It seems plausible to say that  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are representing the house with a similar degree of correctness and that it is greater than that of the mental image. Now, such a representational difference can only derive from the similarity and difference in intensity, clarity and richness of detail of these experiences. Thus, we might conclude that these latter properties are representational features of the experiences.

It cannot be replied to this that intensity, clarity, and richness of details are phenomenal characters that fix the representational properties of the experiences. This, of course, is consistent with the Authors' account of the foundational role of consciousness in intentionality. However, this reply would require exhibiting the further intentional properties of the experience that are so fixed by their phenomenal character. At least introspectively, it seems that no other properties, besides the supposed phenomenal characters that could ground the representational differences and similarities mentioned above, are in sight.

Despite my reservations above, it must be acknowledged that Pećnjak and Janović have written an impressively wide-ranging book that touches upon several central contemporary debates in contemporary philosophy of mind and in relevant areas of metaphysics. They scholarly address these issues and advance clear positions with well-developed arguments. In the first five chapters, where the fundamental features of mental states and their mutual relations are investigated, the book offers a very original discussion and frames in an innovative and intriguing way a significant fragment of a philosophical theory of the mind. The second part, chapters 7-15, relies on an accurate selection of contemporary arguments and the Authors present and discuss them forcefully. One interesting and completely original feature of the book is the use in many places of the predicate logic to analyse the available theoretical positions and the relevant concepts. This confers a great level of clarity and precision to many discussions in the book.

Overall, the most important feature of the book is that, with their opposition to in necessarily non-conscious representations and to the possibility of characterising mental states computationally, the Authors offer an alternative paradigm that challenges a wide range of theories and research programmes in contemporary cognitive sciences. Although the book will not convince everyone that their challenge cannot be met, surely their arguments should not be ignored.

In conclusion, the book offers to any expert in the field of philosophy of mind the possibility of engaging with a well-articulated and far reaching philosophical view on the nature of the mind that is developed by engaging with several streams of contemporary discussion. Advanced philosophy students, who are at least familiar with predicate logic, beside the original position of the Authors, will find in this book a useful point of entry into several important contemporary debates within the analytic philosophy of mind and well-chosen pointers to relevant views also within the phenomenological tradition.