

# CONSCIOUSNESS, MIND, AND SPIRIT: THREE LEVELS OF HUMAN COGNITION

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## ABSTRACT

The article elucidates three important concepts and realities that refer to cognitive phenomena and are often (mistakenly) used as synonyms: consciousness (slo. *zavest*), mind (slo. *um*), and spirit (slo. *duh*). They present three levels of human cognition: individual-experiential, individual-mental, and trans-individual-mental. Simply put: the concept of consciousness pertains to the waking mental life of a human being, while the concept of mind pertains to the ability and activity to consciously comprehend and understand contents and objects of human activity. I delineate three “types” of spirit: personal spirit, objective spirit, and the objectification of spirit in productions of human culture; I have doubts, however, about the existence of cosmic or super-cosmic dimensions of spirit, although some interpretations of quantum physics and modern cosmology suggest that such dimensions are possible.

## KEY WORDS

consciousness, mind, spirit, conceptual thought, objective spirit, personal spirit

## CLASSIFICATION

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The article purports to provide a provisional account of three central concepts associated with cognition (construed broadly). These concepts are often used interchangeably, almost synonymously; however, I feel that this imprecise usage is a rather unfortunate affair, as it not only blurs important distinctions between different modes and aspects of cognition, but it also obscures the being and essence of important “realities”, which determine the cognitive and mental life of human beings. This, in turn, is likely to have detrimental consequences for the development of cognitive science. As already mentioned, my account makes no pretense of being comprehensive: instead of a full-blown definition its goal is to offer a preliminary (tentative) sketch. Consciousness, mind, and spirit stand for three fundamental, yet different levels of human cognition: individual-experiential, individual-mental, and trans-individual-mental, which cannot be reduced to either of the two previous levels.

## **CONSCIOUSNESS (SLO. ZAVEST)**

Let us start with the notion of consciousness. In general terms, “consciousness” denotes the mental state of being awake. Unfortunately, there is but one word in Slovene language to designate such a state, namely *zavest* (“consciousness”), even though the concept itself stands for an array of different phenomena, states, and processes, which are closely interrelated and form a loose network of similarities and commonalities. Recently, there have been attempts to introduce the notion of *čuječnost* (“mindfulness”), particularly in relation to certain meditative states; a similar role is designated to terms such as *pozornost* (“awareness”), *predočenje* (“presentation”), and *občutenje* (“sensation”, “feeling”). Unfortunately, all these terms seem to occupy a relatively fixed semantic domain in “normal” Slovene, and usually relate to specific, mostly short-term (transient) forms of the waking mental life, and not to the more general and permanent mental states and processes. In English, these permanent aspects and modes of consciousness can be expressed by several different terms, e.g. “consciousness”, “awareness”, “sense”, etc., which makes it far more suitable for precise conceptual thought. German language has more affinities with Slovene, in that it has one all-encompassing term for consciousness (*das Bewußtsein*), while other modifications and/or states of consciousness require further “descriptors” or “qualifiers”.

The concept of consciousness refers primarily to the waking mental state of an individual; occasionally, however, it can be used, albeit mostly metaphorically, to denote non- or trans-individual activities of human beings (e.g., collective, social, national, etc. consciousness). In this paper, I intend to focus exclusively on its primary (individual) meaning, i.e., consciousness as a waking mental state of an individual. Closer inspection reveals that the concept encompasses at least three different processes: being aware of sense objects and corresponding feelings; being aware of one’s “affects” (emotions, passions, and volitions); and being aware of one’s thoughts. English language distinguishes between “consciousness” conceived as a quality of intentional mental state, which is often expressed with the verb “to be aware of...”, and “awareness” (in nominal use), which refers to the mental state of sensing and feeling something in the more general sense.

“Awareness” construed in this broader sense does not have to be intentional, i.e. it does not have to have an object, but can also denote spontaneous awareness of what is currently “going on” around and/or within us. The Slovene notion of consciousness (and the same holds true for its German equivalent) is much more closely related to intentionality, and denotes subject’s object-determined knowledge of something. It is true that this knowledge does not necessarily have to be propositional – it can consist of, say, bare noticing of sense impressions (as in, e.g. my spontaneously being aware of, or attentive to, my surroundings),

but it is still object-oriented (e.g. I am aware of a meadow, perhaps even of a lush green meadow, in front of me; I am aware of having a pain in a certain part of my body, of a given emotion, feeling, etc.).

If a Slovene speaker wants to describe her spontaneous awareness of what is currently happening around and/or within her, she is forced to resort to terms such as “sensing”, “experiencing”, “facing”, etc., which designate qualified ways of being aware that need to be distinguished from the more basic forms of attention. In my view, it is important to distinguish between the purely experiential aspect (moment) from the object- or content-related aspect (moment) of consciousness. The former corresponds to the English term “awareness”, while the latter corresponds to “consciousness”. However, definitional issues do not stop here: there remains at least one further aspect that needs to be resolved, namely the problem of self-awareness. Some authors feel that for every act of consciousness there is a corresponding rudimentary sense of self. The notion of self-awareness, of being aware of one’s self, is, again, extremely complex, and I will not go into an in-depth analysis here; I do believe, however, that it is important to distinguish between a rudimentary, “nonsensical” sense of one’s self, which is present in simply being awake, and more elaborate cognitive forms of self-awareness, which also include mental or verbal forms of self-awareness (i.e. self-reflection). It seems very unlikely that the latter can be found in all conscious beings and all forms of self-experiencing. Consciousness as self-knowledge or self-reflection also constitutes the core of the Latin term *conscientia*, in which all modern conceptions of human consciousness are rooted. As to the general concept of consciousness, I feel that it denotes a more rudimentary sense of one’s self, a sense which does not necessarily have to be present in every state of awareness; rather, it arises only when a conscious being becomes aware of what is happening to it. The possibility of directing one’s awareness towards one’s self is always an open (in-principle) possibility for the living being; but it depends on different “subjective” and “objective” circumstances whether this possibility is eventually realized (enacted) or not.

For this reason, I distinguish three aspects (moments) of consciousness: in addition to purely experiential and objective, there is also the self-aware aspect. The purely experiential aspect is the most fundamental of the three, and serves as the basis for the other two moments. It bears emphasizing that the objective and the self-aware aspect seem to be relatively independent from one another, because a living being, in being self-aware, does not necessarily take its self as an object of consciousness. This latter move occurs only when mental activity (i.e. thinking) “enters the picture”. Similarly, a living being that is aware of a given object is not necessarily a being that is also self-aware. The latter holds true only if the living being conceives of the object as “its” object, i.e., if it relates the object to itself (in a human being this would mean relating it to her “self”).

The concept of consciousness thus cannot be reduced to only one aspect, as it encompasses a rich and complex world of experience, reference, and self-reference. It is for this reason that some theoreticians of consciousness refrain from using exhaustive definitions, and are satisfied by merely providing a list of some of its fundamental characteristics. For example, in her “introductory” book on consciousness, Susan Blackmore seems to be perfectly content with specifying some of the key features of consciousness, i.e., the fact that it corresponds to the state of “what is it like to be an ...”, and of having ineffable experiential or phenomenal qualities (*qualia*) [1; p.7]. In her account of these key features, Blackmore draws on the famous article “What is it like to be a bat” by Thomas Nagel, in which the author argues that the experiential perspective of a given being (e.g. a bat) can be enacted only by that being itself [2].

Similarly, in his latest book, David Chalmers reduces the notion of consciousness to “phenomenal consciousness”, to “being as ...”, or more precisely: “[A]n organism is conscious if there is something it is like to be that organism, and a mental state is conscious if there is something it is like to be in that state” [3; p.5].

Imposing self-limitations on one's definitions is, indeed, a wise and laudable undertaking, but one quickly notices that all of the enumerated "qualities" of consciousness refer only to its non-intentional (purely experiential) aspects, while omitting the objective and self-aware dimensions.

It is for this reason that we must, at the very outset, decide what it is that we are talking about when we are talking about consciousness: Are we referring merely to a non- or pre-intentional "state" of awareness or do we mean other aspects of consciousness as well? For example, it is well known that, for Brentano and other phenomenologists, the objective aspect was of primary importance, while German idealists (from Kant to Hegel) emphasized the reflective (self-aware) aspect. The verdict on which of the three aspects is the most fundamental is still out, but in my view, this role should be assigned to the experiential aspect, although the other two aspects are also present in the conscious life of an adult human being, and seem to be more important for a meaningful and competent existence.

## **MIND (SLO. UM)**

The concept of "mind", spanning innumerable historical and cultural definitions and distinctions, is beset by even more difficulties. For our purposes, the concept will denote the human ability and activity of consciously grasping and understanding specific contents and objects of human activity. In other words, it will (roughly) encompass the semantic field of two traditional notions, namely that of intellectus and ratio. The distinction between the factual process of thinking and understanding on the one hand, and the normative rules for the "appropriate" use of thinking on the other, have significantly widened the gap between intellectus and ratio, with the former encompassing the totality of factual thought and the latter referring to the "correct", "rational" or "essential" thought. I will use the concept of "mind" to denote all human intellectual cognitive abilities without any normative presuppositions, e.g. without the requirement that thinking and speaking be rational. By doing so, I will be slightly modifying the terminology that I have originally used in my book *Logos spoznanja* (Eng. *Logos of Knowledge*), where the general sense of "mind" was relegated to the concept of "reason". As it turns out, the "requirement of rationality" is merely an addendum: it is closely related to the concept of scientific knowledge and to critical examination of knowledge and practice, and must therefore be treated separately (I will not pursue this topic further in this article).

It is true, however, that we can, and must, distinguish between different forms and levels of thought, e.g. between ideational, conceptual, and intuitive thought; in this sense, it is then also possible to speak of three levels or modes of the mind: ideational, conceptual, and intuitive mind.

Ideational thought is founded on subjective assumptions, ideas, views, and evaluations of a thinking subject. Its "conclusions" have evolved in specific (limited) contexts, but are often uncritically generalized across all individuals and all circumstances. This type of thinking can be very successful in everyday life, with the tacit assumption that people around us think, feel, and evaluate the world and life situations in fairly similar and uniform ways. It can, however, quickly go astray, if this assumption proves false, and we end up facing people who are "different" from us and demand that we acknowledge the validity of their unique views. In the Ancient Greece, this state of affairs was taken up by the sophists, who soon ended up espousing unbridled relativism, which Socrates then tried to supersede with his conceptual dialectics.

By drawing on the idea of a concept as a mentally objective entity, conceptual thought tries to move beyond the limits of ideational thinking. For Socrates, concepts stood for the inwardly perceived essences of things, and were said to garner insights into their necessary and sufficient properties. Necessary properties are properties without which a thing of a certain

type would not be what it is; sufficient properties, on the other hand, imply that we are dealing with a thing of a specific sort. The verbal “recapitulation” of necessary and sufficient properties was believed to furnish an unequivocal definition of a given concept: to know a concept is to know its definition. The Socratic conception of a concept is thus related to essences, and the latter are, in turn, related to types of things, not to individual things; consequently, there can be no concepts and thus no objective understanding of individual things.

The Socratic conception of a concept is founded on the view that construes types and sorts of individual things as objective realities, which is why it soon gave birth to a variety of conceptual idealisms, as manifested in Plato’s and (to a lesser degree) Aristotle’s philosophies. For a long time, Aristotle’s definition of a thing (substance) was deemed “classical”: in order to be able to define a thing (substance) we need to specify its *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica*. “*Genus proximum*” stands for the sum of all necessary properties, while “*differentia specifica*” stands for the sum of all sufficient properties.

In light of subsequent developments in philosophy and science, it has gradually become obvious that the Socratic conception is untenable, as it fails to garner definitions of concepts and ideas that would successfully transcend the relativism of ideational thought. Traditional conceptual definitions are exceedingly rare and can be attained only if founded on a priori “reliable” sources. In the late Antiquity and Middle Ages, the latter included religious dogmas and some of Aristotle’s philosophical principles. For obvious reasons, this approach to epistemology turned out to be a great obstacle for the development of empirical sciences.

Modern philosophy and science have undermined the Socratic conception of conceptual thought, but they have not undermined the need for conceptual thought that would provide for epistemic (and normative) objectivity (as opposed to ideational thought). What was genuinely new, however, was a fierce revolt against absolutisms of every sort, especially against religious and political apriorisms that were supposed to have an exclusive say about what should count as truly objective, valuable, and real. Modern conceptions of conceptual thought draw on the idea of “rule-mastering” – of learning how to efficiently use concepts in meaningful sentences and different contexts. Rule-mastering is a socially developed skill, which means that it does not, and cannot, exist in isolation, but only against the backdrop of rule-following in a specific social context. For this reason, concepts are no longer conceived as mental entities and structures instantiated “in the head” of an individual, but as realities embedded in a broader social practice of rule-following. Concepts are said to be non-private and intersubjective; they belong to the objective domain of sense and reference, and not to names, sentences, or ideas. A vocal proponent of the objectivity of concepts and their principled distinction from ideas was Gottlob Frege; in his view, however, the objectivity of concepts and thoughts resided principally in the trans-subjective and non-empirical realm of pure sense, which harkens back to Platonism [4]. In contrast to Frege, I construe mental objectivity in terms of the intersubjective practice of following rules of meaningful speech and action [5], which has strong affinities with the philosophy of the late Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Providing definitions is merely an auxiliary and not the principal way of introducing concepts into language and thinking. Even in natural sciences, a vast number of concepts is introduced by means of typical examples (specimens) and collections of typical properties of objects: similarities between an object and a set of typical examples correspond (approximately) to what was previously construed as *differentia specifica*, while sets of typical properties stand for (approximately) *genus proximum*. Note, however, that, due to the “vagueness” of empirical concepts, what we are dealing with here are not, and cannot be, clearly defined relations and collections of properties (i.e. definitions in the classical Aristotelian sense).

Ludwig Wittgenstein called our attention to yet another category of concepts that are explicitly dependent on typical examples and typical properties. These concepts cover a

broad set of phenomena or objectivities that cannot, even in principle, be lumped together under a common definitional denominator. With concepts of this type, the most we can do is to provide sub-types, which can then be further characterized by typical examples and/or properties of members of the same family. We know that it is usually impossible to identify non-trivial common features that would characterize all members of a given family and distinguish them from members of other families. What we can do, however, is determine what it is that connects all sisters, all brothers, brothers and sisters, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, the father and the mother, etc. These partial similarities correspond to typical properties connecting different family members; but there are no non-trivial properties that would determine all family members. Wittgenstein calls these types of similarities “family resemblances” [6; pp.65-72]; following his lead, I refer to concepts which are based on family resemblances “family concepts”.

The impossibility of providing clear-cut definitions for most concepts, their “vagueness” and embeddedness in larger frameworks of family resemblances, have thrown a rather grim light on the idea that concepts have a priori, purely rational content. However, this does not necessarily mean that concepts, as something that is principally different from ideas, are merely illusions of the mind and language, as claimed by some radical empiricists (e.g. Quine, Sellars, etc.). A given concept encompasses not only all actual examples, i.e., all actual objects corresponding to the content of the concept, but also all potential (non-actual) examples. The concept “human being”, for example, covers not only all real human beings that have lived, live, or will live in our cosmos, but also all possible human beings.

According to a strictly extensionalist view, a concept is determined by its extension, which comprises a set or a class of all actual examples of a concept. But this approach seems unsatisfactory, as it tends to overlook “counterfactual” aspects of concepts. Understanding a concept opens up the domain of real counterfactual propositions of the type “If it were the case that A, then it would be the case that B”, which cannot be reduced to indicative conditionals of the type “If A is (not) ..., then B is (not) ...” and additional conditions, unless the latter are themselves counterfactual in nature. But the very fact that counterfactuals refer to non-actual, yet possible situations and objects, indicates that they represent the move from the actual to the possible, the merely conceptual, even the a priori [7, 8]. Here, a question can be raised as to what do concepts and conceptual thinking actually stand for: Do we really need to rely on some a priori knowledge of ideal realities, such as Platonic ideas, Aristotelian essences or Kantian transcendental forms of pure thought? This is where we run into the third “ingredient” of my paper, the reality and the concept of the spirit.

Intuitive thought is an extension of conceptual thought. Contemplation, which is an essential element of intuitive thought, is said to be able to (at least partially) transcend sensual perception and provide us with momentary and supposedly non-rational insights into a given problem.

It can take place on a very rudimentary, “pre-rational” level (e.g. the early stages of the mental development in children, states of narrowed consciousness, etc.) or on a trans-rational level in the form of synthetic and holistic insights [9]. However, the popular impression that intuitive thought excludes conceptuality per se is misleading, because – barring the prerational “knowledge” in young children or the transrational consciousness found in trances, mystical experiences, etc. – it is still based on tacit (hidden) mental activity that is running in the background and ultimately gives intuitive insights.

Highly developed intuitive thinking is similar to perception in that it makes us intellectually aware of abstract ideas, just as sensual perception makes us aware of sensual objects [10].

It bears emphasizing, however, that intuitive insights do not disclose “immediate truths”; on the contrary, what they provide are merely hints or indications which can be used as

reasonable assumptions about the problem we are trying to solve. Intuitive thought surpasses the power of conceptual analysis in its ability to garner wholesome insights into the nature of the problem, but it lacks the clarity and comprehensiveness of the latter. For this reason, intuitive thinking can be deemed valuable and reliable only if preceded by rigorous conceptual analysis. The impression of immediacy and directness of intuitive thought is a mental delusion of some sort, which can function as a powerful motivating factor for accepting certain synthetic insights as a starting-point for further deliberation and action; but it can also be misleading in that it conjures up a sense of finality and absolute clarity. Intuitive thinking is often used for non-epistemic and practical purposes, e.g., aesthetic and moral deliberations, examining individual choices in decision-making, deepening our spiritual beliefs, etc. It is therefore difficult to pass judgment on its epistemic contributions, and needs to be interpreted against the backdrop of these practical purposes. But in the face of thorny disputes between proponents and opponents of different aesthetic, artistic, moral, political or religious ideas, the epistemological analysis of its main achievements runs the risk of becoming an unproductive squabble over principles or even over taste. Here, a wise course of action would be to simply stick to the principles of “common sense”, comprising experience, well-grounded conceptual thinking, and critical introspection, with the proviso that even these methods are limited and fallible. It is therefore safe to conclude that conceptual thought plays a central role in intellectual endeavors of human beings, because it alone provides clearly articulated contents of intellectual activity.

Let me end this section with a word of “Wittgensteinian” advice: all methods that build on something that was originally accessible only to the individual are in need of external criteria and assessment [6; p.580]. This is the only way we can hope to achieve intersubjective comparability and general validity of insights that were attained by pure reasoning or intuition [5].

## **SPIRIT (SLO. *DUH*)**

In contemporary philosophy, especially in contemporary philosophy of mind and philosophy of cognitive science, terms like “consciousness”, “mentality”, “mind”, and “spirit” are often conflated. English language uses the “all-embracing” term “mind”, whose universality makes it impossible to translate it into Slovene and other European languages. The Latin “cogitatum” is of similar cloth, and denotes far more than only “thinking”, which is the most common translation of the term. Germans have a similar word “Geist”, whose meaning, however, is much more definite, and usually refers to those aspects of mental and cultural life that involve self-awareness and self-reflection. In this regard, the Slovene term “duh” (here: “spirit”) is much closer to the German “Geist”.

The tradition of modern subjectivism (hearkening back to at least the time of Descartes) played a crucial role in the fact that we now understand human mental life as the internal essence of an individual and that we so greatly cherish the identity of consciousness, mind, and spirit, but also of mental and cognitive states. In so doing, however, we tend to overlook the intersubjective and transpersonal aspects of epistemic, evaluative, and emotive processes. I call this view “spiritual individualism”, and it is clear that it hinders our understanding of epistemic, evaluative, and emotive modalities, which are important for many people who share a common social, cultural or institutional environment. Further, spiritual individualism reduces these complex phenomena to individual forms of knowledge, cognition, evaluation, and understanding, thereby neglecting inherently transpersonal and objective meanings, truths, and values. In my opinion, such understanding gives rise to false conceptions of both individual and social phenomena, and has contributed significantly to the crisis of the contemporary human world [11].

It is my contention that cognitive science and philosophy of mind need to reaffirm the concept of spirit, or more precisely, the concept of objective spirit. The concept of spirit includes both individual and trans-individual (inter- and trans-subjective) potentialities for competent behavior in one's life world, but also for the enactment of these potentialities in consciousnesses and minds of individuals as well as in "spiritual productions" of people in the course of human history. It therefore cannot be reduced to conscious or mental acts of individuals: spirit is necessarily trans-individual, although it can be partially grasped by individual minds and consciousnesses.

In what follows, I will steer clear of the attempts that try to reduce the spirit to individual cognitive functions and the attempts that try to metaphysically objectify the spirit. I strongly oppose (neo)positivist tendencies in contemporary philosophy and science which claim that the concept of spirit is obsolete and lies outside the purview of science. It is well-known that the most comprehensive theory of spirit was put forward by Hegel. In his view, spirit is some sort of synthesis and extension of logic and nature. Hegel studies spirit under three headings: subjective spirit, objective spirit, and absolute spirit. Subjective spirit is (in brief) the aspiration of a conscious subject towards freedom and the realization of freedom for an individual; objective spirit is the capacity of a human being of rational identification with, and differentiation from, other people in the medium of freedom; and lastly, absolute spirit is the identification of spirit with the absolute idea, as realized in the highest achievements of human culture: religion, art, and philosophical sciences. The most innovative part of Hegel's theory of spirit is his concept of objective spirit, encompassing, as it does, objective human achievements in both social and cultural domains (e.g. morality, law, state). Some prominent philosophers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century have modified Hegel's ideas in the vein of historicism or phenomenology (Dilthey, Simmel, Cassirer, Hartmann). In what follows, I will draw on some reformulations of the concept of objective spirit, as provided by the phenomenologist Nicolai Hartmann in his book *The Problem of the Spiritual Being* [12], and add some of my own insights.

Both Hegel and Hartman agree that spirit, although closely aligned with mind and consciousness, cannot be reduced to either of the two. "Spirituality" of human consciousness is reflected in the fact that we, as human beings, are open not only to the (physical) environment, but to the world. People need a common "spiritual sphere", in which they grow in proportion to their social responsibility and cultural awareness. This "sphere" is more than a mere sum of individuals who are socially and culturally active, and is also not to be mistaken with an abstraction from individual consciousnesses and minds; instead, it is a unique reality, which they inhabit just as they inhabit the material world. In Hartmann's words: "Mere consciousness separates people from one another; it is spirit that unites them [12; p.61]" However, according to Hartmann, spiritual reality is not independent of nature or ontologically primary, as it was the case with traditional metaphysics and Hegel, but can only evolve and maintain itself against the backdrop of material reality, in which human beings exist as living entities.

Hartmann distinguishes between personal (subjective) and objective spirit, discarding Hegel's notion of absolute spirit and "subsuming" its main characteristics under the heading of objective spirit. Only personal spirit can be said to "have" consciousness: it provides human beings with the ability of self-awareness (sense of self) and of ethically responsible behaviour; objective spirit, on the other hand, pertains to social communities, nations, and cultures. "Within" the category of objective spirit, Hartman distinguishes a further subcategory, namely that of "objectivized spirit". The latter is construed as the totality of objectifications of objective spirit in the form of productions of human culture, e.g., works of art and science with lasting and transpersonal value and meaning. For Hartmann, spirit exists only in its manifestations, i.e. in its ways of self-expression – consequently, it is always

creative and dynamic. Objective and personal spirit mutually support and complement each other: personal spirit finds its highest expression in the achievements of objective spirit, whereas objective spirit can live only in and through individual spiritual productions. Objective spirit is not to be understood as a “subconscious” or “transconscious” entity.

Hartman’s conception of spirit has its strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths are undoubtedly its “non-metaphysicality”, its strict rejection of subjectifying and objectifying tendencies in the current approaches to spirit; its weaknesses lie primarily in its inability to elucidate what the relative independence of (objective) spirit in relation to individuals or “personal spirits” actually pertains to. I feel that these flaws can be at least partially remedied by drawing on some of the ideas found in the late Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

In his *Philosophical Investigations* [6], Wittgenstein uses a concept that is quite similar to Hartmann’s notion of objective spirit, namely “form of life” (Lebensform). Wittgenstein suggests that, by following rules that regulate our speech, thinking, and acting, we become embedded in a network of behaviors which he collectively refers to as a form of life. A form of life is usually shared by a group of people with common culture, language, customs, etc., and provides for considerable coherence in actions, meanings, verbal expressions, and norms among members of the group. It is “what has to be accepted, the given” [6; pp.572]. Language, thoughts, and intentions are all part of human forms of life, with language playing the central role. If a human being is to survive as a social being, it is necessary to presuppose a certain level of coherence and interconnectedness between different types of linguistic and non-linguistic behavior. It is safe to assume that there is a considerable amount of congruity between people who follow a common set of rules, although, as Wittgenstein never tires of insisting, there is no external or internal force that would actually make them behave in such a uniform way.

To my mind, the transpersonal meaning, value, truth and meaning of ideas, concepts, propositions, actions, and human artefacts stem from a network of basic rules that are followed “blindly” or in a very similar, perhaps even identical, fashion by members of a community sharing a common form of life. By “blind” I mean that it does not require any deliberation on the part of an individual as to whether it is (in)correct to follow the rules that she, in fact, follows. All the other rules that are present within the same form of life can be deduced from these fundamental rules. However, to follow a rule blindly does not mean that all people in similar or identical situations follow it in the same way; but it does mean that similarities between different “styles” of rule-following are so pronounced that it is safe to assume that people deviate from the “common” rule-following very rarely. The rule-following uniformity is significantly reduced in the case of higher (more complex) rules: Think of a great variety of linguistic utterances and of occasionally very “creative” ways of grammatical rule-following in live speech. It could be maintained that the normative validity of human behavior “supervenes” on the fundamental correspondence between words and actions, i.e. on the blind following of fundamental rules pertaining to a given form of life. This supervenience is facilitated by a specific set of (relatively) fixed “objects” functioning as rule-following exemplars, norms or standards. These “objects” play a central role in education and upbringing and in mediating discussions and conflicts.

However, it bears emphasizing that blind rule-following needs to be conceived not as an individual, but rather as a communal practice. It has developed in a communal setting as the result of group-based training processes, which enable each individual to gain proficiency in relevant rule-following patterns, thereby “freeing her of all doubts” as to how a given rule is to be used in specific contexts.

In the remaining few paragraphs, I would like to defend the following thesis: the fundamental form of objective spirit of individuals who share a common form of life encompasses a

dynamic wholeness of rules (pertaining to language use, epistemic norms, etc.) in a given inter- and trans-personal situation of human life [11; p.97].

I use the term “wholeness”, and not “totality”, because totalities are mostly conceived as abstract objects, whereas in the case of objective spirit we are referring to an implicit “wholeness” which is not an object, but a generalized aspect of the mastering of the situation.

The proposed concept of spirit is defined situationally and contextually, and therefore cannot be reduced to one specific situation. The core of objective spirit is to be found in the wholeness of implicit and often subconscious presuppositions underlying both our abilities to understand and sensibly react to a given situation, as well as in the implicit consequences that follow from such an understanding and (re)acting. To simplify: the purported wholeness of rules stands for “the objective spirit of a given situation”. People act and react first and foremost to the given social situation that seems relevant for them. Their primary and most lively “contacts” with the sphere of objective spirit (of their community at a given historical time) are made in and through their specific social situations. Such situations are, for example, interpersonal interaction and communication, cooperation with other people, everyday situations at work, in the family and during leisure, even fleeting occasions of being together with others at the same place.

The proposed concept of spirit is defined situationally and contextually, and therefore cannot be reduced to one specific situation. The core of objective spirit is to be found in the totality of implicit and often subconscious presuppositions underlying our ability to understand, and sensibly react to, a given situation, as well as in the implicit consequences that follow from such understanding and (re)acting. To simplify: the purported totality of rules stands for “the objective spirit of a given situation”.

The objective spirit of a concrete social situation is of course only the most fundamental, elementary form of objective spirit. Higher and more complex forms of objective spirit are instantiated in more complex and permanent forms of social situations, e.g., in social institutions, media, and means of mass communication (e.g. mass media), etc. I do not, however, presuppose the existence of the “highest” form of objective spirit – the objective spirit of humanity as a whole, which would encompass all “lower” forms of objective spirit as its elements, aspects, or modes. It is true that, in contemporary “internet society”, one might talk of “spirit of humanity in the present”, but this too seems to be more like an idealization or an idealized spiritual potential of humanity in the present than the actual “state of spirit” that would impose specific content or rules on all “lower” forms of objective spirit.

It is possible, however, to conceive of constituents (elements) of objective spirit as specific types of abstract objects – call them “productions of spirit” or “spiritual productions” (e.g. content of works of art and science). Although such understanding is but a linguistic fiction, it has real implications on the way people think, speak, and act. The explicit or implicit belief in the existence of abstract contents “situated” in the sphere of objective spirit is but an idealized consequence or an end result of a given set of conditionals which all competent rule followers of a given community (with a given form of life) at least tacitly accept in their everyday social practices.

Every “example” or “instantiation” of objective spirit differs in how it is experienced or conceived by individual human beings, because it is only latently or potentially present in experiences, conceptions, utterances, and actions, whereas the very act of experiencing or conceiving is something actual. For example, the content of a certain work of art serves only as a potential for its being experienced or conceived by a group of concrete individuals in their concrete life situations. Occasionally, and only partially, this content can be actualized

in concrete acts of consciousness and understanding of a group of sufficiently motivated and attentive individuals. In such cases, objective spirit can be said to realize itself in and through these individuals. Following the example of Hartmann, I use the term “objectified spirit” for cases where the actualization of spirit is associated with a certain public and objectified expression of spirit, e.g. in a work of art or science.

But what is the “medium” or “vehicle”, whereby the transpersonal potential of objective spirit can enter into the mind or consciousness of an individual and society at large without the mediation of concrete objectifications of spirit? Vincent Descombes refers to these fundamental vehicles of objective spirit as “institutions of meaning” [13, 14]. Social institutions have their own lives and enable us to think and deliberate on things that cannot be successfully resolved only “in our heads”. Similar ideas to those proposed by Descombes can be found in notions, such as “mental institutions” and “socially distributed minds” by Gallagher and Crisafi [15, 16], and “extended minds” by Clark and Chalmers [17]. The main difference, it would seem, lies in the fact that Descombes speaks of the realm of meaning, which is “embodied” in social institutions, while the other authors speak of the process of distribution, externalization, and extension of the mind, which occurs when one uses one’s mind and consciousness in social contexts. The process itself is supervenient on mental states and processes of personal, environmental and social origin, but cannot be reduced to them. It could therefore be claimed that Descombes focuses more on the structural, while the other authors attend primarily to the processual aspect of objective spirit. I see these approaches as an important development in the history of spirit, which is much more in tune with Hegel’s original dialectic, as is the case with many of the more speculative interpretations of his philosophy. If we construe objective spirit as something that is alive, then it must manifest itself as an ongoing process of externalization and distribution by means of different sources of meaning and knowledge that are usually embedded in processes that transcend the strictly mental and/or conscious domain. The central aspect of this all-encompassing activity is the already mentioned process of rule-following in its multifarious guises (the latter is to be conceived very broadly, so as to also include changes of rules and their general application).

Historically, the concept of spirit was often criticized because of the idea of cosmic or even trans-cosmic spirit. Speculative suggestions of this type cannot be verified scientifically, and are often explicitly metaphysical in nature. But they are not completely irrational, as they allow for rational speculation about the existence of such spiritual dimensions. For example, some interpretations of quantum mechanics allow for, or even demand, the existence of “cosmic observers” whose “role” is to constantly “break” the holistic cosmic quantum potential, which is formally represented by a common wave function of all physical processes in the cosmos, comprising trans-chronological and trans-spatial superpositions of mutually entangled cosmic quantum states. The purported cosmic observers “break” the quantum potential into a set of stochastic (mostly non-linear) assemblies of different real possibilities, manifesting themselves as physical events [18-20]. Similar ideas can also be found in Bohm’s theory of cosmic quantum potential and implicate order, which “enfolds” itself into consciousness and cosmos [21]. Another important source of hypotheses about the cosmic or trans-cosmic spirit are altered states of consciousness, e.g. mystical states, artistic trances, drug-induced experiences, etc., which “throw” the person out of herself and into a spiritual world of some sort.

It is hard to draw any firm conclusions as to the validity of such speculations, as they are in need of additional theoretical and empirical research both in the field of quantum cosmology and the field of altered states of consciousness [22]. In the chapter on spirit in physical reality in my book *Mind in Nature*, I outline some rudimentary ideas about consciousness construed as a field of potentiality that gets actualized through the experiential actor’s becoming aware of her experiential flow, which can be, at least formally, compared to certain aspects of

quantum-mechanical potentialities and their actualizations in physical observations [23]. But the consciousness of a person who experiences and directs these leaps from inattentiveness to attentiveness transcends the domain and scope of quantum mechanical aspects of experiential consciousness. As noted in my critical survey of quantum models of consciousness, this requires that we posit a special experiential perspective, “denoting awareness or cognizing of the experiential subject’s token- and type-specific experiential perspective, which – in human beings – translates into an awareness of the ever-changing aspects of one’s actual presence ... in relation to personally, socially and historically definable chronological and spatial closeness/remoteness of things and events experienced by the subject” [24; pp.95-96]. This, however, transcends the domain of experience and consciousness en masse, and demands that we pay heed to the subject-accessible knowledge of her specific relations to the world which she shares with other people. We are dealing here with a strictly spiritual domain, or more precisely, with the objective spirit of different situations experienced by an individual and shared by other people with which she interacts.

Thus, it would seem that quantum models of consciousness also transcend the realm of mind and consciousness, and presuppose the existence of spirit construed as a trans- and interpersonal potentiality that manifests itself in and through “breaks” of actual realizations of personal spirit in individuals. Cosmic dimensions of spirit are undoubtedly interesting, but (at least at this point) not elaborate enough to help us (co)construct the concept of spirit, which I identify with the concept of objective spirit, an indispensable feature of human life.

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