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Possibility of Consciousness Without the Body

*Victor Gojocco, Assist Prof 7
97028606
victor.gojocco@dlsu.edu.ph
Philosophy Department, CLA*

Abstract: The mind and body problem had been one of the perennial problems in philosophy. Since Rene Descartes had formally established the bifurcation of the two contradictory natures mind and the body, philosophy and the other related fields of study such as psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience and others had devoted much years of debates/discussions as to the reality and the solution of the problem. It is from the current trends in the study of the nature of consciousness that this research has based its claim. Specifically this research is based on the studies done by some of the distinguished medical professors from the University of Virginia, in the department of Psychiatry pioneered by the late Dr. Ian Stevenson and his following successors, Dr. Jim Tucker and Dr. Bruce Greyson. As a result of their pioneering discoveries, having taken into account the overwhelming body of data they have dealt with, there are appears today more reasons to think that consciousness or its nature appear to be independent of the brain (body) and that consciousness can in fact exist without a functioning brain. In the past such problems involving the investigations into the nature of the mind, only come from logical reasoning, that is, theoretical discussions that centers on the logical consistencies presented on this issue. That is, so far there have been no physical observable events that could somehow produce with clear evidence as to how consciousness could still exist without the physical brain. But now, there are certain phenomena that had been medically observed as to the possibility of consciousness acting and being present without a functioning brain.

The scope of this research would focus more on the stipulated evidences found by those professors from the University of Virginia in their many years of research on the matter of consciousness. The goal of this research is to bring to the fore those mysterious phenomena discovered from their many years of studies resulting in identifying certain phenomena that could be seen as consciousness could and does exist, or can exist without depending on the physical brain. This research will for the mean time refrain from including other studies in other fields such as neuroscience since its current position on the issues appear to be evidently the contrary while at the same time its arguments are still currently subject to further interpretations and lastly, for the reason of brevity for this paper.

The theoretical framework for this research is through a general hermeneutical approach interpreting the evidences (the phenomena) that had been discovered by the mentioned researchers and be given a philosophical analysis as to the consistency of those evidences. This hermeneutical praxis obviously will not focus on any exegesis of a text since there is none, but to the concerned phenomena in question. The normative presuppositions of interpretative praxis, centers around the indispensability of a rationality assumption of those phenomena. That is, there is a rationality behind those evidences given the hermeneutical engagement. What matters is how do we regard and treat those astonishing phenomena in lieu of the philosophical problem of mind and body. Specifically the analysis will be more on the epistemological rather than the ontological in treating the empirical features of the



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phenomena in question, hoping to find meaning given thru the observed occurrences. The overall method is to present the logical consistency of the phenomena and its logical implications to the reality of the nature of the existence of consciousness.

These observable phenomena could be considered as direct evidences together with their logical consistency as to why consciousness could be seen to exist and not be depending on the physical brain. It could be added that these observable phenomena are quite specific in their nature and very distinct as to its occurrences. These are: 1) Deathbed recovery of lost consciousness, 2) Complex consciousness with minimal brain tissue, 3) Near Death Experience), 4) Memories of past life (Reincarnation)

With utmost logical consideration, from these phenomena notwithstanding some exceptions, one can conclude with much certainty that consciousness could in fact exist and function without the physical brain.

Key Words: Near Death Experience; Past life memories; lost consciousness; minimal brain tissue; reincarnation; end of life experiences

1. INTRODUCTION

From the latest research developments in psychology, medicine, psychiatry, and other related fields there are now documented and recorded cases that could support the claim and clearly suggests that there is strong positive response to one of the perennial problems in philosophy. That is, it could now be understood that there is a great possibility that the phenomena of consciousness (mind) appear to exist independently of the brain (matter). It was Rene Descartes that was known to be the first to have formally defined the mind and body problem. In that, he has shown that the mind (Cogito) thru his methodic doubt does exist by its seemingly immaterial nature. The Cogito is the thinking mind that could not be doubted and therefore indubitable. Doubting itself is thinking and by this process, it affirms itself in existence. The act of doubting therefore presupposes that something is, doing the doubt, and therefore exists. Of course

existence in the Cartesian sense appears to support and side with the reality of the immaterial (thing) referring to the nature of mind which does the act of thinking and together with it, the thoughts within the mind.

After Descartes, modern philosophy and thereafter had inherited this mind and body problem and many philosophers had presented arguments on either side of the fence. It is a problem that could not be ignored since by the very nature of consciousness (mind) it directly points to the human self and its intrinsic nature.

The problem of the nature of consciousness is the essential core of what humanity is about. As Plato have emphasized, the most important question is on the death of the individual person. What happens after we die? Therefore by its very nature, the problem of consciousness inevitably presents an indisputable necessity for its investigation.



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One of the main questions with regards to the nature of consciousness is, Is consciousness produced by the brain? This question presupposes the main current view regarded by most fields in science that consciousness is indeed produce by the physical brain. That consciousness is a by-product of the brain itself. That is, as can be seen when a person had been drugged, under the influence of liquor, or having psychological trauma the consciousness of the individual is clearly affected. The argument states that if the brain and its cells are physically affected then consciousness and its behavior would definitely behave accordingly. Drugs thus clearly influence the brain and evidently produce hallucinatory effects conjuring up hallucinations within consciousness. And lastly, there is the major assumption that upon death of the individual including its brain, no conscious activity must at all be present much more with any effects by consciousness itself since brain activity with all of its electrical impulses have completely ceased.

This research assumes what had been taken to be accepted by the researchers themselves as regards with the reality of those certain phenomena that are quite puzzling for their seemingly unexplained occurrence. That is, for the fact that such strange events in fact did occur, then it is safe to assume that those peculiar phenomena is indeed part of our reality! By the topic alone, it goes without saying that this research is not only significantly interesting but most valuably important for the reason that it gives us more consistent explanations as to the reality of one of the most basic human elements and giving us a more coherent perspective of our human

condition. Before any human progress is to be achieved, it is best to have a clear understanding of the very nature of human consciousness and how it affects, directs and give meaning to the most basic aspect of human life itself. The documented occurrences in question clearly suggest clues as to the nature of consciousness itself that could no longer be ignored. Any further future developments on this topic would greatly improve our human understanding of whom we really are and our relation to existence itself and all of its corresponding human concerns in society.

This research asserts a major claim in the field of study on consciousness. It presents the possible answers to the nature of human consciousness. It will present a different opposite view to the dominant position taken by science that consciousness is produced by the physical brain. That is, consciousness only arises with the biological physical process of the brain together will all of its electrical impulses detected and recorded by, for example the EEG. The elements of the claim of this research are to consider seriously certain mysterious phenomena that evidently appear and suggest the possibility of consciousness existing even without the physical brain. These elements are the 4 possible evidences. The four cases of evidences that point to the reality of consciousness appear to exist independently of the body are:

1. Deathbed recovery of lost consciousness
2. Complex consciousness with minimal brain tissue
3. NDE (Near Death Experience)



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De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
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4. Memories of Past Lives (Reincarnation)

Though all these cases have been known to have occurred and have been recorded, their phenomena are still in need of further rational explanation as to why they occurred and as to their relation to the nature of human consciousness. The point of the matter is these observed cases appear to clearly suggest that consciousness can and do in fact exist even without a physical functioning brain. Though it is understood that these phenomena are not the norm they must still be included as part of the aggregate of data regarding the study itself. According to W. James, the best way to understand the normal is to study the abnormal.

2. MAIN CLAIM

This research claims, in view of recent developments in the study of consciousness, that it is now possible to have a stronger view (reason) and consider that existence of consciousness without its dependency on the physical brain. If the general understanding and predominant view that consciousness is indeed produced and dependent on the brain there must be a given explanation confronting those mysterious phenomena occurring in humans clearly indicating the opposite view might be true. Majority of science takes the understanding that consciousness comes from the brain and represents the materialistic, reductionist position that the parts of the brain, its cells and all its neurons by an aggregate cohesiveness will turn on and produce consciousness. This

physicist position is based on how science completely depends on its empiricist framework. Definitely the cited phenomena are documented and that their implications are serious enough to warrant an extensive investigation not only as to why they occur but as to what their implications directly suggest. These phenomena are listed on the result and discussion.

2.1 Methodology

This paper will use and present thru philosophical hermeneutics wherein the philosophical analysis of the four phenomena in question will be given the logical interpretation as to the meaning it gives to the philosophical mind and body problem and how the occurrences need to be treated. The method will try to bring out the philosophical implications as to the meaning of each significant phenomena and how one arrives to a more convincing rational position as to why consciousness and its nature could be clearly seen as not totally being dependent on the physical (material) brain.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1) Deathbed recovery of lost consciousness.

This term had been used by Dr. Bruce Greyson¹ referring to patients who before having died unexplainably regain full use

¹ Greyson, Bruce, **Is Consciousness Produced by the Brain?** by Bruce Greyson, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPGZSC8odIU>



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De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
June 20 to 22, 2017

of their consciousness. These are cases where the individual's consciousnesses have been greatly affected by brain diseases such as Alzheimer, Parkinson's, stroke, meningitis, abscesses, schizophrenia and other mentally debilitating afflictions. These patients have completely lost their consciousness and even some were reduced to vegetative states having lost their ability to think and communicate and their cases have been documented in medical literature. Minutes, hours or days before their death, these individual suddenly regain clear consciousness. Dr. Bruce Greyson states that there have been 85 documented cases from medical literature that mental clarity has all of a sudden returned. Furthermore, recent studies on "end of life" experiences in Great Britain, care givers in nursing homes report that 70% of patients have exhibited the sudden return of their consciousness. There were cases patients with dementia became completely lucid before their death. A recent case² was a 42 year old man who developed a malignant brain tumor that rapidly grew in size and had completely damaged his physical brain rendering him incoherent, bizarre in his behavior. He became delirious totally making no sense and would not sleep. Then, one night he appeared calm and started to speak coherently, and spoke to his wife the following day about his imminent death. And after a few minutes he went to sleep and died. Another case was an 81 year old woman, who suffered from dementia for a

² Ibid.,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPGZSC8odiU>

year and would not recognize any of the relatives that took care of her while in the hospital room. One night her son Lider who has watching over her doing a crossword, he notice that his mom called him by his name and looked on to him in total recognition and said, "My son Lider I will recite a verse for you". She recited the poem out loudly and clearly and right after leaned back on her bed and died.

2) Complex consciousness with minimal brain tissue.

Another case³ in 2007, a high school honor student who after an accident needed an X-ray of her brain, was discovered that she had no cerebral cortex at all! What was revealed from her X-ray that she only had a brain stem and nothing inside her skull.

Another case was of a child with hydrocephalus. Hydrocephalus is fatal especially if it were not treated not only damage the brain but lead to death. John Lorber a British neurologist noticed that many of the hydrocephalus patients including adults do function in the normal sense and lead normal lives but having minimal brain tissue caused by hydrocephalus. One phenomenal case was a graduate student of mathematics from Cambridge University with an IQ of 126, whose brain cavity showed practically empty due to severe case of hydrocephalus.

3) Near Death Experiences.

These are reports of people who have died and came back to life claiming of having profound experiences of the beyond.

³ Loc.cit



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De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
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They report exceptional mental clarity, vivid sensory imagery, a clear memory of the experience, an experience more real than their everyday life. All of this occurring under conditions of drastically altered brain function under which the materialistic paradigm would say is not at all possible. Significant common features of NDE are changes in emotional state, in thinking, paranormal features and other worldly features. Reports of time stopping, sense of revelation, immediate of full knowledge about reality, thoughts a clear, life review. Overwhelming sense of peace, unconditional love, OBE, hearing other worldly sounds, seeing colors not seen on earthly life. The main point of the NDE with regards to consciousness is that the brain has supposedly died but yet many or most of the experiences report thinking clearly than usual, thinking faster than usual, thinking more logical than usual, more control of thoughts than usual.

One phenomenal report⁴ was a nurse who tried to commit suicide by overdose and as soon as he became poisoned, he changed his mind and started to reach the phone for help. He started to hallucinate seeing many small people preventing him to reach the phone to call for help. All of a sudden he went out of his body viewing now his body from above the ceiling seeing his body sway towards reaching the phone. But at that moment he could not see the hallucination he was having before he popped out of his body. Here it appears that consciousness left the poisoned body and which did not affect his consciousness since his mental clarity was present observing what was happening to his body (brain)

⁴ Loc.cit

being affected by the poison and not seeing the hallucination.

Other NDE reveals that the patient having died have actually seen the actual resuscitation that had been done to him while he flat lined. The patient's account was verified as an accurate description of the resuscitation that was done to him.

Other intriguing recorded data are of visions of people who are born blind accurately describing the things around them while being resuscitated. From all of the published cases of blind people 92% were accurate in their description of the things and event around them.

To top it all, some NDE report of seeing past dead relatives or even Jesus Christ passing on some information about the future to which the experiencer soon would realize to have come true. These are called 'veridical NDE'. But since the person have died, flat lined, empirical science pre-suppose that the biological physical brain is already dead, non-functional, but where and from whom did the individual who have just died get such information?

-Thus the argument that is involved here is if a person have died and accordingly that the brain has ceased to function, why is it the people who had NDE relate dramatic testimonies of an afterlife complete with accurate descriptions on information of what they have been told from the next life?

4) Past life memories.

This term is used by one of the pioneers Dr. Ian Stevenson. These cases are coming from reports from little children having



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past lives memories. This phenomenon have been studied and pioneered by Dr. Ian Stevenson formerly the head of the Psychiatry Department of University of Virginia. From the findings of Dr. Stevenson, more than 2500 cases have been documented and certain mysterious issues have surfaced. Children as young as 18 months old begin to tell about having remembered a past life, accurately remembering the places, people and events and even how they have died from their previous life. Other mysterious findings where the birthmarks of the present child would lead to the discovery of how the former life was killed. Birth marks directly reflect certain entry and exit wound of the former life the child had lived. Physical deformation of the present child at birth are traced to some accident of the former past life the current child had lived. This clearly presents a reality that former lives do greatly affect the next reincarnated life of us humans.

What is directly implied by past life memories is that the past life memories remembered by the child would put into question as to where did those past life memories of the child originated? Not unless those memories are carried over by the individual consciousness that have died in the former life and had been carried over after being reincarnated to a new body! One famous case⁵ is the boy named James Leininger who at two years old had persistent nightmares of himself burning in a crashing world war two fighter plane. When asked by his parents, little James named accurately the ship where his plane flew off and even his World War 2 buddies

by name, who one of them is still alive. James knew certain family information of the sister of his former life that nobody knew! Reincarnation clearly support the contention that human consciousness appear to exist and could exist without the physical brain.

4. OPPOSING VIEWS

There are of course differing views from what this research is contending. A dominant argument against the main contention that consciousness do exist without the brain and commenting on the NDE issue, other researcher skeptics contend that such NDE experience is simply caused and produced by certain chemicals in a dying brain. These chemicals are like dopamine, adrenaline, DMT (dimethyltryptamine), endorphin etc. skeptics contend that these brain chemical cause the NDE experiences. Though there had been major studies on DMT, there are certain aspect of DMT experiences that does not accurately reproduce NDE. One dominant trait in NDE as contrasted to DMT experience is the coherency of the experience. NDE appears to contain logical coherence while DMT experiences produce certain psychedelic experiences. Another argument forwarded against NDE is that as the brain dies of lack of oxygen, the brain begins to hallucinate and producing NDE. But this argument is easily rebutted by showing the logical consistencies of NDE as compared and contrasted to hallucinations where the majority of experiences are incoherent.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Having explained the reality of the

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnXxC-nVsJY>



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De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
June 20 to 22, 2017

actual cases, 1) Deathbed recovery of lost consciousness, 2) complex consciousness from minimal brain tissue, 3) Near Death Experiences and 4) Past life memories, it can now be concluded that these real empirical occurrences from human experience places a heavy weight on the possibility of consciousness existing independently of the physical brain. These four out of the normal phenomena appear to be overwhelming instances/cases that open and point clearly to the possibility of consciousness existing without any material support (from the brain). Strictly speaking, all this reveal that there are very good reasons to think we are not our physical bodies and that our sense of self is not diminished or dimmed just because we are out of our physical body. One other obvious implications from all these is that medical sciences, psychiatry, psychology, neurology and others are now faced with a reality that demands an explanation not only within the parameters of standard empirical science but implies a need for a different scientific paradigm since most if not all of these phenomena appears to go beyond the objective, empirical descriptions of material science. Though it is true that these phenomena are not of a regular occurrence, but still for the fact that they do occur, such mysterious phenomena can no longer be ignored and obviously current empirical science is pushed to its very limits. It must be clearly emphasized that those four documented issues would press the materialist paradigm of science to either accept the opposing view which is immaterialism or simply further construct a scientific model/theory that could coherently incorporated those seemingly immaterialist events of consciousness.

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Presented at the DLSU Research Congress 2017
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
June 20 to 22, 2017

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