Invitation and call for papers

Respected Sir/Madam/Professor

On behalf of the Department of Philosophy, University of Madras, Chennai, we wish to organizing ICPR (Delhi) sponsored, a two days National Seminar on the them title on “Phenomenology of mind and Consciousness: Indian & Western perspective”. The date to conduct of the seminar is fixed from 14.11.2018 to 15.11.2018. A brief concept note is also enclosed herewith for your kind notice.

We would be happy if you could kindly accept our invitation and present a paper in the Seminar and which relates to the focus of the theme. We will be happy to provide accommodation and DA/TA as per the ICPR norms to the selected paper. Kindly send your full paper on or before the September 20th of 2018.

Since we have to submit the full papers to the ICPR, New Delhi, prior to the seminar for the release of the grand, we kindly request you to send your paper on or before the date, i.e. September 20th of 2018.

Kindly give your consent at the earliest and send the topic and brief abstract on or before the 05th August of 2018.

Thanking you

Yours Sincerely,

(M. Venkatachalapathy)
Director of the Seminar

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*Phenomenology of Mind and Consciousness: Indian and Western Perspectives*  

**Concept Note**

The three important turns in philosophy in the twentieth century are: linguistic (Wittgenstein), hermeneutical (Heidegger, Gadamer) and cognitive (Fodor, Churchland, Dennett). The interrelation among the above three turns and the significance of cognitive turn in philosophy is discussed in recent debates both in Indian and Western philosophical traditions. Thus consciousness reemerged as one of the problems of scientific (A.K. Mukhopadhyay, B.V. Sreekantan, Rajesh Kasturirangan) as well as philosophical schools (Buddhism, Advaita and other ancient traditions of India and Asia).

The relation between qualia and consciousness is one of the important issues in cognitive science. Though some defended the thesis that “to be conscious means to have qualia” (David Rosenthal), some questioned it. The view that “to be conscious means to have qualia” implies the qualitative consciousness. Nagel argues that an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like *be* that organism—something it is like *for* the organism. The phenomenological method explains the significance of consciousness in a philosophical way. It is associated with others, i.e. consciousness, experience, feelings, sensations, qualia, subjective, introspection, reflection etc. There are two ways in which phenomenology can operate: (1) from the first-person point of view and (2) from the third-person point of view. The behaviorists have challenged the first person perspective. But the behaviorism has lost its significance and hence there is a re-look of the problem by the cognitive science. Dennett in *Consciousness Explained* argues in favour of the method of heterophenomenology, which according to him is the right method of studying consciousness. Heterophenomenology is a method of phenomenological description that can do justice to the most private and effable subjective experiences. It has objectivity, neutrality and respect for the heterophenomenological subject. It is neutral since it is neither subjective nor objective. Thus third person perspective is the best method for studying consciousness according to Dennett.

Why does Dennett attack the first person perspective? Because it is anti-materialistic and anti-scientific. Is Dennett right? It is necessary to examine Colin McGinn, Searle and Nagel here. Searle tries to present the theory of consciousness with naturalistic theory of mind. He tries to say that consciousness is an irreducible, physical feature of the brain within a non-reductive type
of naturalism. "Consciousness is a biological feature of human and certain animal brains. It is caused by neurobiological processes and is as much a part of the natural biological order as any other biological features such as photosynthesis or digestion, says Searle."

With this background, it is necessary to re-look at the problem from Indian perspective. Will the distinction between foundational and functional consciousness made by Advaitins solve the problem of consciousness studies? Since objects are unthinkable apart from consciousness, what is the role of foundational consciousness? Are we not taking an "ontological leap"? A study of three worlds of Popper, Eccles and Hatherour will help here without transgressing the limits of the world. Also it is important to see to what extent the various empirical theories of consciousness of Indian tradition are compatible with naturalistic account of consciousness. It is also necessary to see to what extent, the transcendental arguments of consciousness in Indian philosophy matter to modern consciousness theorists.

The Buddhist refutes the idea that "This alone is Truth; and everything else is false". Buddha says that to be attached to one thing and to look down upon other things as inferior --is the wise men call a deter". Mind (mano) is Buddhist philosophy is explained as follows. Mind is not spirit as opposed to matter. It should always be remembered that Buddha does not recognize a spirit opposed to matter. Mind is only a faculty or organ (indriya) like the eye or the ear. Consciousness, according to Buddhism is this: Consciousness is named according to whatever condition through which it arises, on account of the eye, and visible forms arises a consciousness called "visual consciousness". Similarly one can talk about different consciousness. Thus consciousness is named according to the condition through which it arises. Knowledge according to Buddhism has three degrees: (1) opinion (ditthi), (2) reasoning and reflection (vitakka-vicara) and intuition. i.e. illumination (bodhi).

Two concepts of truth are discussed in Madhyamika Buddhism, the paramarthasatya and samvritisatya. The first is the Absolute truth. It is the knowledge of the real without any distortion. Usually the categories are distorting the real. The Absolute truth is beyond thought which is discursive, language and empirical activity. The samvritisatya is known as the so-called thought. It is defined as that which covers up entirely the real nature of things and makes them appear otherwise. The samvriti allows differences and degrees. Here there is also the distinction between the higher and lower. Nagarjuna says that words like, "I", "mind", "self" or "consciousness does not exist. They all are empty terms. However, one can use these words at the conventional truth level. They are only used to illustrate our speech. Negation is used in Madhyamika philosophy as a weapon to deny their opponent’s philosophy and reduce it to an absurdity. Normally we support the conventional truth and misunderstand it as ultimate problem. The problem comes arises here. The Buddha says: "No real thing is of such a nature that it passes away: A thing that is not does not exist at all. He who imagines that things exist and exist not will never make pain to cease. Nagarjuna uses the concept of emptiness as a powerful weapon to strike and undermine all concepts which are felt to have essence. He warns people not to look for essence but for their emptiness. He says: "Those who perceive self-essence as well as other essence, existence as well as non-existence, they do not perceive the truth embodied in the Buddha’s message".
In the west, different theories like causal interactionism, occasionalism, double-aspect theory, epiphenomenalism and the mind-body identity theory are important in the context of mind-consciousness relation. The theory of functionalism plays a role in cognitive science and psychology. It offers a perspective on the mind that suits the needs of many empirical scientists, one that offers solutions to a host of long standing philosophical puzzles about minds and their relation to material bodies. Generally the theory means that mind or that any given mental phenomenon is what it does or is to be defined in terms of how it functions. Shoemaker, one of the leading supporters of functionalism in Identity, Cause and Mind contends that it is the view that mental states are definable in terms of their causal relations to sensory inputs, behavioral outputs and other mental states. Functionalism explains our feeling that though mental phenomena ought to be closely tied to what goes on in the brain or central nervous system, precisely what goes on there, is in one sense irrelevant. It is because though we may think that, say, a desire has a physiological basis, and we could not desire if we had no physiology, if the physiologists came up, as they well might, with a radically new view about what did happen in our brains when we desired something, this would not make us think we had to alter our concept of what a desire is. Similarly if it were suddenly discovered that the Japanese had a quite different evolutionary history from the rest of us, and that quite different physiological things happened inside them when they desired things, provided their apparent desires were caused by roughly the same situations and had roughly the same effects. Thus in short, it may be said that functionalism explains the variable realizability of mental states.

There is also another theory, i.e., ontological behaviorism. If logical behaviorism is a claim about the meanings of psychological expressions, the claim that the meaning of every psychological term is definable by the use of behavioral or physical terms, then ontological behaviorism is about the states or phenomena as such, independently of the language in which they are described. Thus in logical behaviorism, behaviorism is a philosophical doctrine concerning the meanings of mental states and the ontological is concerned with the nature of mental states. There is also the methodological behaviorism, which means that the only admissible data for the science of psychology are behavioral data, that is, data concerning the observable behavior of organisms.

Functionalism and behaviorism both speak of sensory input and behavioral output as the basic concept in the notion of mentality. For this reason functionalism is sometimes considered as a part of behaviorism. But there are differences. For example, in functionalism, the mental states are taken to be real internal states of an organism which cause processes which mean for an organism to be in pain is for it to be in an internal state, whereas the behaviorism considers internal states in connection with mental states, identifying them with actual or possible behavior. Secondly for the behaviorist, input and output consist entirely of observable physical stimulus conditions and observable behavioral responses. The functionalist on the other hand will include reference to other mental states in the characterization of a given mental state. The uniqueness of Functionalism is that it is considered to be a sophisticated theory of mind, identifying the states of mind not with states of brain, but with functional roles. Functionalists hold the view that the states of mind are "multiply realizable." This means that to be in a
particular mental state, is to be in a state that has a certain characteristic role. Here the mind is a device capable of performing particular sort of operation. States of mind resemble computational states, at least to the extent that they are sharable in principle, any number of material systems.

What is important in the context of the analogy of computing machine used for the functionalist approach of mind is that it has two implications. One is the explanatory implication and the other, the ontological implication. The functional explanation can be explained with an example. Imagine a scientist who is confronted with a computing machine deposited on Earth by an alien starship. The scientist wants to know how the device is programmed. But this involves a measure of "reverse engineering". In other words, he has to work backwards by observing inputs and outputs, hypothesizing computational operations linking inputs to outputs, testing these hypotheses with new inputs and outputs, which soon make the scientist to understand the alien starship's programme. The functionalists think that scientific investigation is similar to this. The functionalists appeal to levels of explanations of the operation of computing machines. At the ontological level, it is not merely that the talk of minds and their operation in a higher-level way of talking about what is, at bottom, a purely material system. On the other hand, the higher-level mental terms designate properties taken to be distinct from properties designated by lower-level terms deployed by scientists concerned with the materiel composition of the world. Though mental states are properties realized by material states and properties, mental states and properties are not identifiable with those material states and properties. For example, pains are realized in the nervous system, according to the functionalists. But the property of being in pain is not a material property. By saying that the mental properties (or computational properties) are not material properties, functionalism does not claim that mental properties are immaterial properties, i.e., properties of non-material substances. The possession of a mental property might require a material base, i.e., the possession of some material property or other, which realizes the mental property. The functionalists would say that higher level properties like being in pain or computing the sum of 7 and 5, are not to be identified with reductionism.

With this background, one can analyze the representational theory of mind. The representational conception of mind was supported by Jerry Fodor. It requires the postulation of a system of symbols that function as "mental representations". These symbols make up a language of thought, a biologically fixed code analogous to the machine code hardwired into an ordinary computing machine. When we form a belief that the window is open, it is a matter of sentence in the language of thought, which corresponds to the sentence namely, "The window is open". Let us examine this further to understand the problem involved in this issue. We use two boxes, namely, the "belief box" and "desire box" which are included in mind. The idea that your forming a belief that the window is open is a matter of a symbol expressing the proposition that the window is open being deposited in your belief box. In the same way, your wanting the window to be open is your having such a symbol in your desire box. Thus the representationalist theory provides a way of understanding how minds, higher-level entities could systematically affect and be affected by the bodily goings on.
Fodor develops the computer model of mind. Mental operations are operations performed over symbols, sentences in the language of thought. This view enables us to see how minds might fit into the material world, and how minds are related to brains. Minds relation to brains is something like the way computer programmers are related to the hardware. Minds are not identifiable with or reducible to brains for just the reasons that programmes or computational operations are not identifiable with or reducible to the hardware on which they run. Brain realizes minds, much as computing machines realize particular programmes. And just as, in describing the operation of a computing machine at the programme level, we are describing its causal structure in abstraction from its hardware. Hence in describing mental operations, we are describing the causal structure of intelligent agents in abstraction from their biological hardware.

Consciousness according to Searle is a causally emergent property of systems. It is an emergent feature of certain systems of neurons aiming the same way that solidity and liquidity are emerged features of systems of molecules. This means that consciousness is a higher level feature of the biological properties of the brain. With regard to the structural features of consciousness, Searle gives a list, some of which are cited as follows: finite modalities, unity, intentionality, subjective feeling, the connection between consciousness and unconsciousness, consciousness and intentionality, the aspect of familiarity etc. But here, it may be objected, why consciousness should be limited to the number of modalities. For example, we have bodily sensation and the stream of thought in addition to the five senses. According to Searle, there is unity in consciousness. Unity exists in two dimensions i.e., they are the horizontal and vertical. Searle claims that the horizontal unity is the organization of conscious experiences through short span of time. Here it may be noted that it is time that is given importance. Vertical unity is a matter of the simultaneous awareness. Searle gives examples for both. While speaking a sentence, the meaning of the spoken part is continuous with the unspoken part of the sentence. This is otherwise known as "iconic memory". This is essential to the unity of consciousness.

Another important aspect of Searle's theory is the phenomenal aspect of consciousness, which states that conscious states have subjective feeling. In addition to this, there is also the connection between consciousness and intentionality. The connection is exhibited in this way. One who has conscious intentional states alone has intentional states. This is maintained by Searle. Another factor connected to this is that every conscious intentional state is potentially conscious. The aspect of familiarity also plays an important role in the structure of consciousness. This is important because it organizes the order of conscious experiences. Though it varies in degrees, it is essential, claims Searle. For example, the objects that we see, people around us, and all that we see in our life are part of conscious experiences. Without this, conscious experience is incomplete. In other words, what we see represent the consciousness. For example, strange things that we “see” around us are not recorded in our mind always. The phenomenon, according to Searle, is the "overflow". This is also another important aspect in the structure of consciousness. Conscious states in general refer beyond their immediate content. The immediate content always spills over, and in this way it is connected to other thoughts. Also
there is the distinction between the centre and the periphery. We are, in our life, conscious of a very large number of things that we are not attending to. These things do not draw our attention. For example, different levels of attention are needed for different works. Searle claims that the boundary is also important for structure of consciousness. This condition means that any consciousness state must be located somewhere. In addition to this, Searle thinks of mood, which characterizes the whole of a conscious state or sequence of conscious states.

What is the relation between consciousness and unconsciousness? This issue is discussed in detail by Searle. He says that the notion of an unconscious mental state implies accessibility to consciousness. "We have no notion of the unconscious except as that which is potentially conscious." To show the relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness, he uses what is known as the "connectionist principle." Mental phenomena are higher-level features of the brain. The unconscious mental states are those features of the brain that are capable of causing the state in a conscious form. Searle says that the ontology of the unconscious is strictly the ontology of a neurophysiology capable of generating the conscious.

**Sub-title or allied aspects of the theme/area in which papers from contributors will be invited:**

The following sub-themes will be discussed:

1. The inter-relation between mind and consciousness
2. The significance of mind in Indian philosophical tradition
3. Buddhist understanding of mind
4. Advaita: Functional and foundational consciousness
5. Analysis of consciousness as discussed in Mandukya Upanisad
6. Husserl’s intentionality of consciousness
7. Mind-Body problem from the western as well Indian perspective
8. Computational theory of mind
9. Mind in Neuroscience
10. Sri Aurobindo and Consciousness
11. De-centering the mind: Postmodern perspective
12. Consciousness and cognitive science
13. Conscious Mind
14. Conscious and Unconscious Nature
15. Searle’s Biological Naturalism in understanding Consciousness