IS THERE A METAPHYSICS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS?

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Abstract: The fundamental assumption underlying our approach is that philosophy as ultimate form of human self-consciousness is not a mere theory but an essential leverage for understanding our own being and our sense in the world. In fact, philosophy is a subjective experience of great complexity, which helps us understand that the sense of human existence is to be found inwardly, in man's self-consciousness. All philosophers have acknowledged, either consciously or unconsciously, that the divine mysteries are hidden only in the feeling of the self, which is in man's self-consciousness. Thus, philosophy precedes and lies at the basis of psychoanalysis, being the royal path to explore the self integrated into the universal consciousness. Through philosophical knowledge man can accede to his very essence and, thereby, to the universal essence. Our research work aims to support somehow both the existence of metaphysics of the unconscious as invitation to self-knowledge, and the idea of a metaphysical unconscious as seat of transcendence within the human being.

Keywords: philosophy, metaphysics, psychoanalysis, unconscious, consciousness, being, self.

In order to answer such a difficult question it is necessary to refer to metaphysics as the *supreme science* – as Aristotle¹ used to consider it - *the prime mover science*, the prime philosophy that studies transcendence or what lies beyond nature, beyond the visible or the palpable.

The philosophical approach of the unconscious has gone through a multitude and diversity of viewpoints from antiquity to contemporary philosophy. The problem of the unconscious that made such a fuss in the early twentieth century, due to its systematic theorization by the psychoanalytic school is not at all new, having a longstanding status in the philosophical and

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bucharest, Iri Publishing House, 2004.

scientific thinking. After all, the elementary forms of psychism that Aristotle stated in his *De anima*²–'the vegetal soul' and 'the animal soul' are nothing but ways of organizing the unconscious or rather the subconscious. We can interpret 'the troubled' or 'unclear sensations' Democritus³ was talking about as features and moments of the same diffuse and less controllable organization of the unconscious.

The problem is not at all simple, the unconscious being an inter- and cross disciplinary research theme, focusing the main points of interest belonging to various areas – from the theory of biological regulation, of neuro and electrophysiology up to the psychology of creation, the art theory, the social psychology concepts and those of the theory of education culminating in a philosophy of the unconscious.⁴

THE MYSTERY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

Numerous concepts on the unconscious have been put forth, many of which contradictory and some of them difficult to accept in the light of the contemporary science⁵ because none of them elucidates the nature of this instance of the human soul.

Thus, the unconscious is, according to the authors, either God or devil; either the weak side, or the strong one; either ignorance, or habit; either unnoticed, or forgotten; either the center, or the periphery; either perennial, or ephemeral; either hereditary, or 'just received'; either organic, or functional; either the memory, or the processes. It has been argued that the unconscious is everything, as it can be argued that the unconscious is nothing.

There are *quantitative* conceptions that consider the unconscious a variety of intensity of the conscious (something weak, diminished, poor, reduced, blurred), both of them being of the same nature, homogeneous, continuing each other. On the other hand, there are *qualitative*, *animist* conceptions that conceive the unconscious as being of a very different nature and tonality, totally different from the consciousness and in discontinuity with it.

² Aristotle, *On the Soul*, Bucharest, The Scientific Publishing House, 1969, p.258.

³ Democritus, *The 9th Book*, chapter 7, in Diogenes Laertios, *On the Philosophers' Lives and Doctrines*, The Academy Publishing House, 1963, p.434-440.

⁴ The reference papers for such an approach are: N. Hartmann, *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* and V.D. Zamfirescu *The Philosophy of the Unconscious*, 3rd complete edition, Bucharest, Trei Publishing House, 2009.

⁵ St. Odobleja, *The Consonantist Psychology*, Bucharest, The Scientific and Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1982, p. 631-657.

Its functioning is conceived either as identical to that of the consciousness, or different and subject to other laws. In terms of their stages, they are conceived either as functioning simultaneously (simultaneity of action), or as functioning in turn and successively (alternation of action between the conscious and the unconscious).

As far as the relations with the consciousness are concerned, the unconscious is conceived either to be completely isolated from it (with no relation to it, incommunicable, independent from it), or incompletely isolated and, therefore, in cooperation, communication or relation to the consciousness. This cooperation is considered either complete, or partial; either permanent, or unwonted.

Finally, in terms of their hierarchy, the unconscious is considered either coordinated with the consciousness (peer relationships), or subordinate or subject to the consciousness. Undoubtedly, Freud's theory⁶ is the most cohesive and important of all the attempts made by the "traditional" (classical) philosophical and psychological thinking. In the classical Freudian model, the unconscious appears in a triple stance: 1) as attribute of the mental content located outside the field of consciousness; 2) as a compartment or instance of the psyche, with special features and exerting an important role in determining (adjusting) behaviors; 3) as a specific way of existence of the self and as part of the ego and superego. Although he opinionates that the whole mental life is a battle field and a field of contradictory couples, Freud, however, considers that the consciousness is quasi absolutely dependent on the forces of the 'unconscious', asserting the illusory character of the autonomy and its imperative. Moreover, apart from the current unconscious, Freud isolated an infantile unconscious, consisting of childhood memories, forgotten today, but which are still kept in memory and can be resuscitated. Freud goes further, assigning the conflicts and complexes fixed in the unconscious during childhood an important place in the adult personality structures. In this regard, the Austrian thinker points out: "man bears the burden of unconscious" in the sense that human behavior is deeply motivated. Freud also suggested the existence of an intrauterine unconscious containing the log book of memories during pregnancy. The unconscious content absolutized in an abysmal way consists of a core of "inherited mental formations", similar to the animals' instincts, plus the repression products, that

⁶ Sg. Freud, *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Bucharest, The Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, 1980.

is the unusable residues eliminated during the child's development⁷. Being biologically and subjectivistly oriented, Freud formulated a theory of the psychic determinism in which he wrongly granted the unconscious a decisive role8. The unconscious was considered to be the essential reality of the psyche, even the psyche itself. "The unconscious is like a big circle that includes the consciousness as a smaller circle. There can be no fact of consciousness without an unconscious preparation whereas the unconscious can do without the conscious stage, still having a psychic value. The unconscious is the psyche itself in its essential reality. Its intimate nature is as unknown as that of the external reality, and the consciousness gets informed about it in a way just as incomplete as our bodies feel about the outside world⁹. Freud is a finalist metaphysician. For him everything is purpose: everything that happens in this world has a precise purpose, depending on and because of this purpose. For him the unconscious aims (as a perverse role) to hide and preserve the ideas banished from the conscious. It is amazing how Freud absolutized the role of the unconscious to such an extent that he considered it the central axis of the personality structure and the fundamental mechanism of human behavior, regardless of its forms of expression. Starting from this primary, instinctive tensional-energetic beginning, by successive derivations, he oversized the psychoanalytic doctrine, transforming it into a sort of panacea underlying all the phenomena of psychic and social life. Psychoanalysis turns into a 'metapsychology', a 'philosophical' theory claiming to explain the ultimate cause of the sociological, artistic, psychosocial phenomena and problems.

By analyzing the various alternatives and dissidents classical psychoanalysis went through, Denise Saada in his work *L'Héritage de Freud* shows that "it is difficult or even impossible to determine and discern among the current researchers who are those who are part of psychoanalysis and who are those who need to be excluded. The "examination of Freud's legacy" leads to the conclusion of an obvious etrogenity and dispersion among the descendants, some of them trying to overcome the Freudian instincts by resorting to factors related to the sphere of culture and society.

⁷ Sg. Freud, *Metapsychology*, p. 510, apud. Leonard Gavriliu, in *Introductory Study to* Sg. Freud, *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Bucharest, The Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, 1980, p.17.

⁸ P.P. Neveanu, *Dictionary of Psychology*, Bucharest, Albatros Publishing House, 1978, 3 43.

⁹ Sg. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung, in Gesammelte Scriften*, II, Band, 1925, p.529, about Leonard Gavriliu, cited works, p.23.

The first dissident disciple of Freud was A. Adler who set up his own system of 'individual psychology' 10. Alder no longer lays the innate tendencies and temptations at the basis of the human behavior origin, but the relationships linking the human personality with its social environment and 'self-assertion' process. In 1912 C.G. Jung also separated, attempting to create an original orientation – 'the psychoanalytical psychology'. He tried to substantiate the basic ideas of psychoanalysis experimentally and developed the typology problems. He tried to approach the problem of the "unconscious" from the point of view of the global manifestations of the collective spirituality – art, mythology, introducing the concept of 'archetype' and 'collective unconscious'. Jung argued the existence of an ancestral and hereditary unconscious, totally separated from the individual unconscious. According to this author, our brain is in possession of ideas and feelings of our ancestors, that, in our turn, we will pass down to our descendants.

For a philosophy of the unconscious¹¹ based on psychoanalysis, the physiological unconscious is deprived of any interest whatsoever, as psychoanalysis is limited to the sphere of the psyche, the psychic ('relative') unconscious appears to be conceived as a second subliminal consciousness, which coincides with the psychoanalysis preconscious and does not have major implications for the life of the spirit. Instead, *the metaphysical unconscious*, although regarded by Freud as a symptom of "awareness" of the dominant philosophy that assumes as tacit prerequisite the equivalence of the psyche with the consciousness, epitomizing the unconscious in the transcendent plan, may involve an ontology that takes into account Jung's theory of archetypes. He left open, in the last part of his life, the question of whether beyond the archetypes - structuring elements of the collective unconscious - there is anything metaphysical or metabiotic.

There are philosophers like Fichte, Schelling, Carol Gustav Carus, Schopenhauer who support the existence of both a psychological unconscious and a metaphysical one. The metaphysical unconscious, called by E. von Hartmann the absolute unconscious, is "the unitary metaphysical being of the cosmos with attributes of the unconscious will and of the unconscious

¹⁰ A. Dicu, *Consciousness and Behaviour*, Facla Publishing House, 1977, p.56.

¹¹ V. Dem. Zamfirescu, cited works, p. 53.

representation"¹². Eduard von Hartmann was he himself concerned with the relevance at the metaphysical level of the phenomena that elude the consciousness sphere, such as early theories on dreams, the Cartesian conception regarding the innate ideas or Leibniz's argument about the consciousness formation out of a multitude of 'small perceptions' which, taken by themselves, are not conscious. Bergson himself based his theory of knowledge on the 'irrationality' of the intuitive method, having as a precursor Pascal with his *logique du coeur*, a form of knowledge entirely different from the rational approach, but with a greater acumen in the intimate background of reality.

Despite all the theories about the unconscious, it remains a mystery as long as man's inner experience remains a mystery. Big events happen in human interiority, the exterior is irrelevant. The exterior experience is a mere pretext to understand ourselves better. Thus, the absolute existence is to be found inside and not outside. The unconscious is the deepest area of our soul, it is our inner being. In our view, the psychological unconscious is hereditary, it is related to the human nature and lies in instincts, powerful feelings, hidden thoughts, emotional throbs, repressions, pleasure, which can be controlled by self-adjustment, while the metaphysical unconscious is beyond us, it is a source of creation, it can somehow identify with the need for Absolute, of transcendence that lies within each of us and which cannot be controlled, not even by the most rational spirits. Therefore, man needs self-knowledge to discover that Truth, Freedom, Happiness lie inwardly, not outwardly. Although man has the privilege of self-discovery, man refuses self-knowledge because it raises insurmountable difficulties for him; it is not a passive reflection, it is a struggle that requires a synergistic action at the level of the human being's intelligence, faith and will.

THE UNCONSCIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

Culture brings about consciousness awakening¹³

The consciousness research, psychologically but, especially, philosophically, claims its approach in relation to the unconscious. We could say that philosophy means, from this

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ C. Rădulescu-Motru, Course in Psychology, Bucharest, Esotera Publishing House, Vox Publishing House, 1996, p.42.

perspective, an activity of the consciousness on the unconscious. Incidentally, the original meaning of philosophy is that of **self-knowledge**; it is the ultimate form of self-awareness. Through this, philosophy raises our awareness as to the limits of human consciousness, as to the inability of reason to go beyond the visible reality and to investigate its basis. From this perspective, we can talk about the drama of metaphysical knowledge of the human spirit, implicitly about the drama of the human consciousness that cannot penetrate the unknown, the infinite, the absolute. The subject of philosophy as "Science about the Absolute" is transcendence, and the unconscious is the seat of transcendence within ourselves. Not coincidentally, outstanding philosophers, metaphysicians have developed in their works ideas, theories about consciousness, about the finitude of human consciousness (Pascal, Kant, Sartre and so on), as well as theories about the unconscious, both psychologically and, especially, metaphysically, starting with Leibniz, then, Schopenhauer, Kant, Nietzsche, Bergson, their discoveries generating famous theories about the unconscious, such as Hartmann's philosophical theory (1869) or Freud's psychoanalysis (1911). One of the philosophers concerned with probing the unconscious, envisioning psychoanalysis, was Leibniz. "We are not concerned with the concept of unconscious, but only with the idea of conscious. Consciousness is born, according to the philosopher, from "small perceptions" which, taken alone, are not conscious. These subliminal perceptions give birth to consciousness through mutual stimulation" 15. But he distinguishes different levels of consciousness: "There are apperceptions and perceptions; there are, also, distinct thoughts, entirely transparent and confused thoughts, encompassing an infinite number of elements that are not distinguished as such within ourselves. Leibniz is, therefore, the creator of the psychology of the unconscious" ¹⁶.

I do not intend to make a review of the philosophers who probed the unconscious, because it is not the aim of this article. The idea we started from is that the unconscious is not a mere psychological notion, but also a metaphysical one. The philosophical path towards the unconscious is through the consciousness. Therefore, we cannot speak about the unconscious

¹⁴ G.W. Fr. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2004, p.16.

¹⁵ G.W. Leibniz, *Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement humain* 1765, postum, R.E. Raspe, Amsterdam, Leiozig), Jacques Brunschwig, Paris, Flamarion, 1990.

¹⁶ P. Archambault, G.W. Leibniz, *Sa vie et ses écrits*, in: Leibniz. Choix des Textes avec *Études du Système philosophique*, Paris, Louis-Michud, p.14

without consciousness, as we cannot talk about freedom without determinism. Consciousness means life, and it is dominated mainly by irrational, unconscious events. Here is a paradox: how could we explain this, when man is the only rational being in the universe we know? Why man, who is endowed with reason, acts preponderantly instinctively, first acts and only afterwards thinks about it? Where does consciousness come from and how many of our actions are performed on a background of awareness? It is obvious that man does not think all the time, but only in extreme situations, which he cannot overcome or transform. We put forward the existence of evil in the world as an argument in support of the above mentioned idea. All the history of mankind demonstrates that all the monstrosities committed in wars have no rational justification. Man has not learned the "lesson of history" because the evil proliferates independently of the human being's intellective evolution. The human nature is ambivalent, an aspect which throughout the human society development has embraced forms hard to accept. This is the reason why in 1788 Rousseau¹⁷ emphasized that "the human reason developed within society will be able to stifle nature or that civilization has corrupted man". Within the human relationships, the modern man has not reached the level of Rousseau's 'social contract' 18. The human consciousness does not manifest itself by means of moral, virtuous acts. We have many schools, but very few virtuous people.

Today's man has remained only at the level of psychological, intentional consciousness, oriented only outwardly. It is a fact that the self-conscious man cannot be a victim of chaos. In all the human existence determinations, from birth till death, understanding the functionality of the relationship between consciousness and unconscious is somehow unraveling the enigma of human nature mystery. Thus, deciphering the mystery of man means deciphering the mystery of existence, emphasized Berdyaev. Therefore, the Russian philosopher argues that "the anthropological path is the only path of getting to know the universe and this path requires man's exceptional self-consciousness". It is only in man's self-consciousness and in the feeling of the self that the divine mysteries are revealed". Inside the human being the absolute existence is revealed, outside only the relative one. The secret of the

¹⁷ J.J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, GF Flamamarion, Paris, 1992.

¹⁸ Idem, *Du contract social*, GF. Flammarion, Paris, 2001.

¹⁹ N. Berdyaev, *The Sense of Creation*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1992.

world is hidden in the human consciousness; this exceptional human self-consciousness is one of the truths acquired as a result of philosophizing, it is the truth that precedes any creative act of philosophical knowledge.

We cannot speak about a clear boundary between consciousness and unconscious because they are inter conditioned. The whole human creation illustrates this idea. But, perhaps, we can find the most admirable explanation in our specialized literature, in the work of the greatest Romanian philosopher from the interwar period. We refer to Lucian Blaga²⁰, who explained the stylistic matrix of a people's spiritual creation through unconscious abysmal factors. In their spiritual substance, the two instances of the human soul can be regarded analogically, but not in terms of their structure and content. Only in this way does the 'unconscious' acquire an effective explanatory potency in relation to the phenomena of the consciousness.

The polemics on the unconscious reveal the acuteness of the problem concerning the need for understanding human nature. The entire organization of our mental life is nothing but the process of this permanent opposition, harmonization and articulation of the unconscious and the conscious. The approach of the unconscious makes sense only to the extent that it involves the thesis according to which consciousness is a fundamental structure of our being's organization, a being that naturally is not unconscious, but through its organization is endowed with an unconscious. This means that "without our being's conscious organization there is no unconscious. Without this constitution, man would remain a child or a newborn baby"²¹.

The vertically hierarchical architectural structure of the psyche accepted today differs fundamentally from the one formulated by Freud, which, at the same time, he continues through the idea of level organization, which can be found in the Austrian thinker's work as the notion of psychic apparatus. The idea of the sovereignty of one level on top of the other and the net separation between conscious and unconscious, between the normal and the pathological thinking are ruled out. Consciousness is no longer conceived as being built upon an unconscious, but coexisting with the unconscious and expressing itself along with it. Any mental function

²⁰ Lucian Blaga, *The Trilogy of Culture*, Bucharest, The Publishing House for Universal Literature, 1969.

²¹ H. Ey, *Consciousness*, Bucharest, The Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1983. 23. In fact, Ey's whole work demonstrates the natural subordination of the unconscious to the conscious being's structures by their repression and framing.

appears, articulates and manifests itself with an unconscious field, with tendencies, forming activities etc. The content of the consciousness itself presupposes the area it is emerging from and along with which the unconscious manifests itself. The approach of the unconscious makes sense only to the extent to which man's development as a conscious being is involved. The meaning and purpose of the consciousness development is getting free from the unconscious determinations, a movement of defeating and assimilating it in a part of the world model that the subject masters. Therefore, the unconscious remains as "the shadow of the subject's own body, a co-substantial structure of its being. The conscious must work along with the unconscious as a requirement, as what has to become". 22 The consciousness establishes itself according to the order of reality, it agrees with it, unlike the unconscious that has complete freedom in shaping its fantasies, in organizing the desires that obey only the impulses. The word consciousness (cum scientia) etymologically means knowing together. Consciousness is this light that brings together and unifies my entire experience. On the other hand, consciousness 'means choice', Bergson said.²³ Consciousness moves towards a new and complicated task. The behavioral automatisms, the long embedded skills tend to unconsciously exercise. Incidentally, all the past is preserved in the unconscious, and the consciousness allows only those elements useful for the present to pass into its field. Consciousness is somehow a kind of axiological triage, is linked to the present, to reality, to action. Although the behavior may be conscious, its deep meaning can be unconscious. Charles Baudouin said that the "unconscious" is "the edge where behavior outruns consciousness"24.

Does the concept of unconscious introduce fatality in human life?

It is an undeniable truth that, despite the human capacity for self-knowledge, we will not know and we will never be able to know more than an insignificant portion of the soul as the most important part is hidden in the unconscious, which is unapproachable. We learn all our life,

²² Ibidem, p.23.

²³ H. Bergson, *L'énergie spirituelle*, Alcan, apud. Andre Vergez & Denis Huisman, *Course of Philosophy*, Humanitas Printing House, 1995, p.43.

²⁴ Ch. Baudouin, *L'âme et l'action*, p. 26, Editions du Mont Blanc, Geneve, apud. Ibidem, p.28.

we get educated, we struggle to awaken our consciousness through culture²⁵, but the unconscious is the one that determines our behaviours, having a spontaneous, automatic and occult action.

No matter how much we may evolve on the consciousness event plan, we realize that something always eludes our knowledge. The fact that our consciousness is limited makes us realize, without restraint, that we cannot control everything. There are aspects that have led to skeptical, fatalistic appreciations as to the approach of the unconscious. The theory of the unconscious is an aspect of pessimistic fatalism: "The powers of the conscious ego do not matter faced with the considerable, overwhelming and supernatural forces of the unconscious. Trying to fight or oppose these forces is, therefore, useless: the fight is unequal, we will always be defeated. It is best to submit ourselves, to let ourselves be driven away by the trend of unconscious tendencies"26. Man "bears the burden of the unconscious"27 as Freud said in the sense that we cannot ignore a certain psychic determinism: human behavior is deeply motivated, in the mental life there is nothing arbitrary, nothing random and indeterminate, everything down to the most insignificant gestures, words, emotions has either a conscious cause or, more often than not, there is a hidden cause in the deep structures of the unconscious. In this first stage of drawing up his deterministic conception, he denied both the existence of the "free will" and that of "haphazard" in the development of the psychic phenomena: "I believe in the external haphazard (real), but I do not believe in the inner one (mental). Freud called this conception of his absolute psychological determinism.²⁹ Such an approach generates indisputably a fatalistic vision of human existence, because it cancels human freedom. It is difficult to accept such a perspective, because it somehow cancels the size of rationality and human intelligibility. There are authors who do not assign any role to the unconscious, even denying its existence: "it is an

²⁵ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *cited works*, p.42-50.

²⁶ St. Odobleja, *The Critique of the Unconscious* in *The Consonantist Psychology*, Bucharest, The Scientific and Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1982, p.637.

²⁷ Sg. Freud, *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, The Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, 1980, pp.256-257.

²⁸ "Determinism - Robert S. Woodworth and Mary R. Sheenan write - is the belief or scientific postulate that all events in nature have their sufficient. As applied to the human organism determinism means that every act or thought or emotion has its sufficient causes, though these may be very complex and difficult o disentangle because of the complexity of the organism and of the environment. Freud believed heartly in determinism. He would not admit that any act "just happened" or that it was due to "free will"... Where there in no conscious motive there must be an unconscious one" (Contemporary Schools of Psychology, Methuen & co.Ltd., London, 1965, p.274), apud. Ibidem, p.30.

²⁹ Ibidem, p.30.

absurd fiction and unacceptable fiction, having no reason to be present in psychology; it has never been studied seriously: it has always been studied entirely superficially"³⁰. But analyzing the human behaviors, we can notice that man does not think all the time, but only in extreme situations that he cannot change or transform. Very often, man instinctively acts contrary to his intelligent nature, without thinking enough and without weighing the consequences of its acts. Very few people, in this diversity of life situations, pass the consciousness and morality test.

Instead of conclusions

The great rationalist philosophers, starting with Pascal, who envisioned the Cartesian rationalism, culminating with Imm. Kant investigated the limits of human consciousness and found out that the vast drama of metaphysical knowledge of the human spirit is that reason cannot penetrate beyond the visible reality and investigate thereunder. There is in each of us a longing for the Absolute, a longing for perfection that comes from the depth of our soul, hence the need for metaphysics. Through self-examination we can "discover consciousness" which is meant to fulfill a great work, operating an "ontological mutation" of man towards his transcendence, and the seat of transcendence in ourselves lies in the unconscious. Human aspiration towards the Absolute, towards divinity, the need to search, the need for introspection emerge from human interiority, which entitles us to support both the idea of a metaphysics of the unconscious, and that of a metaphysical unconscious.

The philosophical way towards the unconscious is through the consciousness where we can accede only through self-knowledge. The consciousness shows us the limits of human cognoscibility, as well as the fact that there is something deeper within us than ourselves. It is the idea we rely upon when we argue that philosophy precedes psychoanalysis.

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³⁰ St. Odobleja, cited works, p.641.

³¹ G. Pohoață, *Descovering the Consciousness*, Cogito no.2, Vol. 6/June 2014, Bucharest, Pro Universitaria Publishing House, p. 45-51.

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