




<https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2023-27-1-41-51>

EDN: NFBOVR

Research Article / Научная статья

The Concept of Consciousness in Vasily Sesemann's Manuscripts

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Abstract. Vasily Sesemann's manuscript *Self-Knowledge, Self-Consciousness and Objectification* explores the relationship of consciousness with self-consciousness and the subconscious, as well as various forms of objectification of consciousness. This manuscript can be attributed to a group of manuscript texts that discuss the origin of consciousness and the metaphysical relationship between matter and spirit. Sesemann studied consciousness, describing it as an intentional experience and rejecting its naturalistic explanations. Sesemann revealed the irreducibility of life to physiological chemical processes and, at the same time, rejected the dualistic opposition of spirit and matter, soul, and body. The article aims to show that the concept of consciousness formulated by Sesemann is phenomenological. The philosopher rejects naturalistic and objectivist explanations of consciousness. Consciousness must be explored as an experiential subjectivity, not as an object. Sesemann criticizes naturalistic psychology and argues that consciousness is an intentional activity in the world. Consciousness is embodied self-awareness and empathic connection with other living beings.

Keywords: self-knowledge, consciousness, self-consciousness, objectification, phenomenology, life, empathy

Article history:

The article was submitted on 25.05.2022

The article was accepted on 01.12.2022

For citation: Jonkus D. The Concept of Consciousness in Vasily Sesemann's Manuscripts. *RUDN Journal of Philosophy*. 2023;27(1):41—51. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2023-27-1-41-51>

Introduction

Vasily Sesemann is primarily known as a philosopher who created a transcendental system of critical realism. His philosophy emphasizes the primacy of direct intuitive experience of the world around. The intuitive aesthetic experience of the world serves as the basis of all logical and scientific constructions. Sesemann argues that the life of consciousness is impossible without various objectifications

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and embodied self-consciousness. Thus, the philosopher's theory of knowledge and aesthetics presupposes an original theory of consciousness. In manuscripts on the relationship between matter and spirit found in the manuscript archive of Vilnius University, as well as in *Self-Knowledge, Self-Consciousness, and Objectification*, Sesemann elaborates an ontology of consciousness, in which he scrutinizes the nature of consciousness, its objectification and the relationship with the subconscious, emotions, and volitional action. Researchers of Sesemann's philosophy often interpret his views as an extension of neo-Kantian philosophy [1—3], but I insist that Sesemann's theory of knowledge and aesthetics must be understood in the context of early phenomenology [4—6]. Sesemann, in his study on objectifying and non-objectifying knowledge, had already tried to show that consciousness is interconnected with self-consciousness, and this interconnection involves a dynamic process of interaction between consciousness and subconsciousness. I discussed these problems in an article in which I compared Sesemann's and Moritz Geiger's positions [7]. Manuscript studies on the nature of consciousness essentially complement this concept. Sesemann indicates the non-reducibility of the life of consciousness to physiological and chemical processes and simultaneously rejects the dualistic opposition of spirit and matter, soul, and body. The article aims to show that the concept of consciousness the philosopher elaborates is essentially phenomenological.

Sesemann's "Metaphysical-Anthropological" Manuscripts and the Philosophy of Nature

In Sesemann's heritage, there is a collection of manuscripts that can be conventionally called "metaphysical-anthropological." Presumably, most of these are fragments of the philosopher's last major work entitled *The Relationship of Spirit and Matter* which was written in a camp in Tayshet in 1950—1955 г. [9]. Fragments of this treatise also include the manuscripts *Self-Knowledge, Self-Consciousness and Objectification* [10] and *Subjective and Objective Attitudes of Consciousness, Their Difference and Relationship* [11]. The cross-cutting theme that unites all these texts is the problem of consciousness and its nature. The philosopher explores the biological roots of consciousness and exemplifies how spirit and matter are intertwined in embodied consciousness. Sesemann argues that the concepts of physical or physiological determinism do not allow us to understand the life of consciousness. To know consciousness, one must rethink the philosophical assumptions of biology. So Sesemann explores questions about the philosophy of nature and tries to show that nature must be understood as subjective life and that there is an expedient order in nature. The integrity of the laws of nature cannot be explained if nature is studied only as a subject of natural science. An understanding of nature requires a metaphysical knowledge of the relationship between spirit and matter. Sesemann was interested in the problems of the philosophy of nature as a university lecturer. There is a preserved typewritten Lithuanian version of his special course *Philosophy of Organic Nature* [12], which

was delivered at Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas) even before World War II. Sesemann states that the natural sciences divide complex phenomena into separate elements and establish the principles of these elementary processes. Yet, we must also focus on those facts that testify to the presence in nature of structural regularities and peculiar *gestalts*, which do not depend on the quantitative side of these processes. Sesemann suggests that in inanimate and living natures the laws of structurally organized integrity are active [12. P. 84].

Sesemann, evidently, was familiar with the latest achievements of 20th-century science. In his manuscripts, the philosopher often cites examples from the latest theories of biology, physiology, physics, and cosmology. Sesemann interprets these concepts and critically reevaluates the metaphysical assumptions of the natural scientific approach. He tries to avoid the limitations of the object approach and understands nature not as the sum of individual elements but as a structured whole. Sesemann adopts the view that nature is rational and that the human mind is just one form of this rationality.

Biological Foundations of Consciousness

In the first half of the 20th century, numerous philosophers paid particular attention to the philosophy of life and to the studies of the philosophical problems of biology. A conviction formed that positivist materialism and a mechanical explanation of life were incapable of revealing the essence of vitality. Henri Bergson and Wilhelm Dilthey proposed that life be studied not by natural scientific methods, but by methods that could reveal the non-reducible specificity of life. The relationship between nature and spirit was explored not only by philosophers of life but also by phenomenologists.

Edmund Husserl, after his discussions with Dilthey at the beginning of the 20th century, devoted several lecture courses to the topic “Nature and Spirit” [13; 14]. Building on the ideas of Bergson, Dilthey, and Husserl, philosophers such as Nicolai Hartmann, Max Scheler, and Helmuth Plessner developed a philosophical anthropology that combined human knowledge with a critical understanding of the philosophical foundations of biology. Plessner, e.g., was convinced that the question of life was the central question of 20th-century philosophy. The thinker argued that anthropology should make use of the achievements of empirical research in biology since man is the most evolutionarily developed organic being, whose vital expression of the spirit is inextricably linked to his bodily nature. Biology and the philosophy of nature must be understood when rejecting the naturalistic interpretations that characterize the natural scientific approach. The task of philosophy is to use the accumulated experience of understanding life in the sciences of spirit [15. P. 76—77].

Sesemann’s studies of consciousness echo the ideas of Bergson, Scheler, and Plessner. Sesemann published in 1930 an extensive review in the Lithuanian language of Plessner’s major work *Steps of the Organic and Man: Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology* [16]. In the review, the Lithuanian philosopher

specifically emphasized the unified basis of biology and anthropology, as well as the criticism of naturalistic positivism. This review can be considered an introduction to later studies of the relationship between matter and spirit. Sesemann argued it is most important to study the living organism and how the relationship between body and soul is realized in it. The philosopher criticized the dualism of body and spirit and called for a reliance on the direct experience of life. Sesemann agreed with those philosophers of life who rejected Cartesian dualism and defended the non-reducibility of life to material processes. Life cannot be understood from the dualistic division of body and soul. Life cannot be explained by physics, chemistry or solely based on physiology and anatomy. Life must be understood as intensely interconnected with the surrounding world [16. P. 75]. The organism must be able to orient itself in space and feel the dynamic change of its body position. This wouldn't be possible without the experience of one's body. Sesemann states that the ability to experience one's own body in connection with the surrounding world and to distinguish one's own body from other bodies distinguishes a living organism from a machine mechanism [16. P. 76].

Life as an Interconnection of Matter and Spirit

Sesemann, analyzing the relationship between matter and spirit, tries to show that in matter there is already a desire for consciousness and a desire for perfection. The philosopher is convinced that the study of the vital foundations of anthropology is impossible without posing metaphysical questions. The latter should indicate possible answers about the meaning and values of human existence. The study of the unity of matter and spirit, according to Sesemann, presupposes two metaphysical foundations. First, the structure of the universe and all the processes occurring in it are rational in the sense that they are governed by the laws of a single system in the world. The general laws of the system are specified and manifest in certain areas. The organization of cosmic rationality is manifested because the individual parts or elements are subordinated to the whole by their structures and dynamics, and the individual laws gain purposefulness. Second, Sesemann argues that the individual domains of being are coordinated with each other and that the higher layers are based on the lower ones. Plants are grounded in inanimate nature, and the animal world is grounded in the plant world. Some argue there is a historical-evolutionary relationship between the lower, simpler forms of being and the higher, more complexly organized ones. Thus, the ability of matter to evolve and move from lower forms of organization to higher ones is recognized. It is a process of differentiation in which the spiritual beginning manifests itself [9. P. 26].

Sesemann's metaphysical manuscripts in the Vilnius manuscript archive are sometimes difficult to understand because they are fragmentary. Some of them are untitled, and the order is difficult to determine. However, it can be stated that the main thoughts repeat the aspects of the philosophy of nature already mentioned. In them, Sesemann concludes about the fundamental unity of spirit and matter. First, spirit and matter cannot be juxtaposed and dualistically opposed to one another as

independent of one another; their distinction and opposition are secondary, derivative, and can only be understood based on their fundamental unity. Sesemann states that the material can only be material in the sense of modern science by encapsulating the spiritual; the spiritual cannot otherwise manifest and operate as in the material and through the material. Distinction and opposition between spirit and matter are possible only based on their synthesis and interrelation. Second, the unity and interrelation of the spiritual and the material manifest itself above all in the field of knowledge and scientific knowledge. Sesemann believes the spiritual is cognized only in and through the sensuous material. Third, the connection and unity of the spiritual and the material in human existence itself also determines the two basic attitudes of human knowledge: the object or objective attitude and the subject or subjective attitude, and the relationship between these two attitudes. This relationship is revealed in the basic cognitive correlation between subject and object. Despite all the positivistic attempts to investigate psychic life based on the “objective” method, to subordinate psychology to physiology, to explain the spiritual from the material, Sesemann confesses that knowledge is not exhausted by the subject aspect alone, behind it there is always the subject aspect hidden in the unconscious, revealing itself only in the self-conscious, reflective consciousness of itself [9. P. 26].

The knowledge of the unity of spirit and matter is fundamental to Sesemann’s entire system of philosophy. The ontological monism of spirit and matter substantiates the materially sensual phenomenality of the spiritual (theory of knowledge, aesthetics, philosophy of culture). Spirit must be expressed sensually and embodied materially. Finally, the corporeal embodiment of a spiritual being cannot be reduced to objectivity. Human and natural beings must be cognized through a subjective attitude. The pinnacle of the knowledge of consciousness and its nature is the consciousness of the self as a subject, in its non-objective being. Thus, we can affirm that the correlation between object and subject turns into a correlation between objective and subjective existence. These correlations are grounded in the unity of spirit and matter.

Consciousness and Self-Consciousness

Sesemann understands consciousness as a dynamically developing whole in which self-consciousness is implicitly present. This self-consciousness is the basis of self-knowledge. The development and deepening of consciousness are based on the ability to recount self and to be aware of self without turning consciousness into an alienated object. Sesemann revealed the relationship between consciousness and self-consciousness in his works *On the Problem of Pure Knowledge* [17], *Subject and Non-subject Knowledge* [18], and *The Rational and the Irrational* [19]. The philosopher argued that the main feature of self-consciousness is the direct and pre-reflexive awareness of self. Pre-reflexive self-consciousness is the basis of objectified self-consciousness. Consciousness and self-consciousness are not two separate acts, but coexist in unity, complementing each other. Consciousness and self-consciousness coexist in every activity, be it thinking, perceiving, imagining,

or remembering. Sesemann also returns to the relationship between consciousness and self-consciousness in his text *Self-Consciousness, Self-Consciousness and Objectification*.

The relationship between consciousness and self-consciousness is evident in all experiences and is the basis of a person's identity. The presence of self-consciousness in consciousness is the basis of the unity of the self (I). The human self is a sedimentation of the activity of self-consciousness. Sesemann argues that in self-consciousness, there is no separation into subject and object. Self-consciousness creates the possibility of self-knowledge by direct and pre-reflexive self-perception. Just as importantly, self-consciousness is corporeal — it is not simply embedded in the human body. Self-consciousness is an integral part of experiencing one's own body. Experiencing one's own body is radically different from experiencing someone else's body. Self-consciousness in this sense is bodily self-awareness. It should be noted that Sesemann has described the experience of living one's own body in a variety of his studies. For instance, in *Gnoseology*, published in Lithuanian in 1931, the philosopher separated two approaches to corporeality: "We can unravel our body in two ways: either in the same way as other bodies, i.e., by examining or touching; or in a way in which other bodies are not available to us, namely, we realize our body by inner organic sensations; and only these inner organic sensations allow us to separate our body from any other one" [20. P. 296]. Sesemann also studied the problems of embodied consciousness and the objectified body in his *Time, Culture and Body. To the Knowledge of the Cultural Tasks of Our Time* [21]. He developed the phenomenology of corporeality under the influence of Scheler and Plessner [9]. Husserl's research at the moment was not yet widely available. The corporeality of consciousness and its relationship to biological reflexes and instincts is an important topic of reflection in many of Sesemann's camp manuscripts.

The Objectification of Consciousness

Sesemann is continually turning to subject and non-subject (objectifying and non-objectifying) knowledge. In *Self-Knowledge, Self-Consciousness, and Objectification*, he critiques various forms of objectification of consciousness. Sesemann believes that the natural-scientific approach simplifies consciousness and fails to grasp the specifics of subjective being. Consciousness is most often reduced to material processes and substance. The same is true of corporeality. The living body is investigated the same way as any other body. Thus, consciousness is removed from corporeality. Reduction of the living body to physical and chemical elements leads to complete desubjectification of corporeality. The natural-scientific approach seeks to remove any manifestation of anthropomorphism, yet it simplifies the embodiment of a living nature. The phenomenon of psychic subjectivity should be investigated by psychology. After all, in the experience of the world, not only the properties of objects are given but also the experiences of the particular subject. However, in psychology, especially in its naturalistic version, the subjectivity of consciousness is not the main topic of research. Sesemann emphasizes that

psychology assumes a parallelism of mental and physiological phenomena but reduces mental phenomena to physiological ones. Psychology, influenced by positivism, understands the psyche as dependent on its material beginnings. Consciousness becomes an epiphenomenon of physical phenomena [10].

From Sesemann's standpoint, we should not speak of the causal determination of the psyche, but of the interaction of physical and mental phenomena. If the psyche is understood as a determinate object, then the subjective aspect is definitively removed from it. Any self-observation turns into the knowledge of an external object. An opposition between the observer and the observed is asserted. The objectification of self-observation leads to a distancing from the self and undermines the direct connection with the self. Sesemann argues with behaviorism, which insists on objectifying the relationship with the self and rejecting self-observation as a method of psychology. He believes that even the denial of self-observation does not mean a complete rejection of implicit self-consciousness, which is assumed in any form of psychological knowledge grasping at comprehending the meaning of mental experiences [10]. Indicatively, this critique of objectivism and the denial of the naturalistic approach to the study of consciousness are entirely consistent with the phenomenological approach as represented in the works of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.

Another, no less important feature of objectification, according to Sesemann, is that the scientific knowledge of thinking is impossible without logical objectification. The philosopher argues that the fixation of thinking structures by logical forms requires unambiguous definitions. Thinking is subject to logical laws. Living thought is objectified and takes the form of concepts, judgements, and deductions. The objectification of thought, according to Sesemann, takes place in logic and through language or other forms of sensual symbolization. We can say that Sesemann understands symbolization as the essence of any — not only scientific but also cultural or artistic — objectification.

Symbolism is inherent in any knowledge or aesthetic experience, which begins with direct intuition and transforms into objectified forms of formalized knowledge. Sesemann strives to highlight the compatibility of forms of direct intuitive knowledge with forms of objectified symbolic knowledge. Knowledge is primarily directed toward knowledge of the external world and only incidentally comes to an understanding of subjective being.

Sesemann understands consciousness as a practical interaction with the environment. Consciousness, as a volitional action, is inherently rational because consciousness considers and evaluates the circumstances in which we must act. This rationality and adaptability of action are objectified in habits. Habit is a kind of sedimentation of behavioral schemes. The philosopher believes habits are not the basis of rationality, but, on the contrary, habit as a scheme of action is possible to the extent that it is rationally grounded.

To summarize, it can be argued that Sesemann understands objectification as a twofold process. On the one hand, objectification destroys the subjectivity of consciousness and objectifies its living nature. Objectification, like symbolization,

is necessary for the development of consciousness, the acquisition of formalized knowledge, and the achievement of aesthetic expression. We can speak of a peculiar dialectical correlation between the objective and the subjective in Sesemann's philosophy. Ontologically, subjectivity is not only justified by objectivity but also justifies objectivity itself. Subjectivity becomes a necessary part of the dynamic development of objectivity.

Emotional Core of Psyche and Sub-Consciousness

Sesemann argues that subjective feelings and moods are revealed, developed, differentiated, and realized through objectification and symbolization. Without this, feelings remain indefinite. This is important because the psyche is intrinsically connected to feelings and affects. They produce positive or negative effects on the subject's life; they are, therefore, the basis of values and evaluation. First, feelings and their positive or negative intensity are related to the orientation of feelings toward objects. Feelings change depending on the quality of the content of the object. Feelings are characterized by a correlation between the experience of feeling and the content of the object of experience. The philosopher emphasizes that feelings manifest themselves as an intentional relationship with the world around them. Intentional feelings are directed toward specific objects that motivate them as a goal and cause. These are feelings such as sympathy, love, hatred, envy, anger, fear. The second group of feelings is state feelings in which there is no explicit intentionality. They are not directed toward specific objects. State feelings are the awareness of some subjective states motivated by the situation experienced. Such states are neither purely bodily nor purely mental. They are most often associated with moods and feelings of self [10]. Sesemann argues that these states, despite their objectlessness, do not cease to be intentional. They do not have an object, but they seek it, and upon finding it, they discharge, revealing themselves. Most importantly, these moods have intrinsic meaning, and they are meaningful to the subject. Thus, Sesemann understands moods as a person's incompletely realized relationship with the world around and with themselves.

Sesemann argues the senses arise as an extension of embodied instinctive action in the world. Instinctive reflexes and bodily localized sensations become more or less conscious feelings. But being subjective, the senses remain objectively indeterminate and are therefore most often considered subconscious. Sesemann states that conscious life must be understood as a stream of consciousness in which each moment and element is defined through its relationship to other moments and the personality of the experiencer. Consciousness is one, but it is a dynamic unity of different layers. Just as importantly, consciousness is dynamically interconnected with the subconscious, with instincts and cravings. Sesemann understands the correlation of intuitive and logical knowledge as different levels of consciousness — it is the interaction of hot and cold knowledge. There is no clearly defined boundary between them. Therefore, the subconscious might encompass the whole consciousness when it goes into unconsciousness mode. In another vein, the subconscious itself also has different levels of consciousness [10].

According to Sesemann, most people experience relationships with other people and living beings as empathic knowledge. Empathy is not just sensory perception; it is the sensory experience of expressions of another's life. To empathize with another is not to experience subjectively. Empathy is an objective experience because it is guided by the immediate expression of living beings. Sesemann obviously borrows his concept of empathy from early phenomenology. The philosopher refers to the research of Scheler, who argued that the possibility of understanding another's life through bodily expressions proves the general unity of life in its various manifestations. The topic of empathy was particularly popular among early phenomenologists. One may recall the works of Edith Stein and Moritz Geiger. Geiger, following Scheler, argued that man experiences nature primarily empathically. Man lives not only in nature but also experiences an essential unity with it. In nature, therefore, what matters most is life and sensitivity to its expressions [22]. For Sesemann, the ability to understand the expressions of life and empathically empathize with other life is nothing less than an openness of consciousness. It is the transcending of immanence and the knowledge of being independent of the subject. To summarize, Sesemann rejects the traditional opposition between objectivity and subjectivity. There is no need to eliminate subjectivity to achieve objectivity in the knowledge of the life of consciousness. Objectivity is attainable through the intersubjective confirmation of the validity of one or another subjective experience.

Conclusions

Vasily Sesemann's manuscript *Self-Knowledge, Self-Consciousness, and Objectification* belongs to a group of texts written in 1950—1955 in which the philosopher discusses the nature of consciousness and the metaphysical correlation of spirit and matter. In these manuscripts, the author analyzes the integrity and wholeness of the natural world and the embodied unity of spirit and matter that manifests itself as the existence of life in the world. Sesemann insists that, on the one hand, consciousness cannot be explained materialistically when it is reduced to physiological or physical processes; on the other hand, it cannot be explained idealistically when consciousness is opposed to the body and embodied existence in the world. Sesemann elaborates on a phenomenological conception of consciousness. The philosopher argues that consciousness should be studied using a subjective rather than an objective approach. He understands consciousness as an intentional relationship to the world and ourselves. Consciousness is as a structured totality of experiences in which all experiences are linked by semantic connections. Consciousness is embodied bodily. Consciousness is always accompanied by self-consciousness and subconsciousness. Self-consciousness may be pre-reflective or reflexive. Consciousness can be more conscious or less conscious. Sesemann asserts that consciousness is an activity in the world and an openness to the world. Consciousness is empathetically connected to other consciousnesses and life forms. Consciousness is a living corporeality, so it reacts emotionally and evaluates the world around it.

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Концепция сознания в рукописях Василия Сеземана

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Аннотация. В рукописном тексте Василия Сеземана «Самопознание, самосознание и объективация» исследуются отношения сознания с самосознанием и бессознательным, а также различные формы объективации сознания. Эту рукопись можно отнести к группе рукописных текстов, в которых обсуждается происхождение сознания и метафизическая взаимосвязь между материей и духом. Сеземан изучал сознание, описывая его как интенциональный опыт и отвергая его натуралистические объяснения. Сеземан раскрыл несводимость жизни к физиологическим и химическим процессам и в то же время отверг дуалистическую противоположность духа и материи, души и тела. Цель статьи — показать, что Сеземан сформулировал феноменологическую концепцию сознания. Философ отверг натуралистические и объективистские объяснения сознания и утверждал, что сознание следует исследовать как субъективный опыт, а не как объект. Сеземан критиковал натуралистическую психологию и утверждал, что сознание есть интенциональная деятельность в мире. Сознание — это воплощенное самосознание и эмпатическая связь с другими живыми существами.

Ключевые слова: самопознание, сознание, самосознание, объективация, феноменология, жизнь, эмпатия

История статьи:

Статья поступила 25.05.2022

Статья принята к публикации 01.12.2022

Для цитирования: *Jonkus D.* The Concept of Consciousness in Vasily Sesemann's Manuscripts // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Философия. 2023. Т. 27. № 1. С. 41—51. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2023-27-1-41-51>

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