ROCZNIKI FILOZOFICZNE
Tom LXIX, numer 2 – 2021

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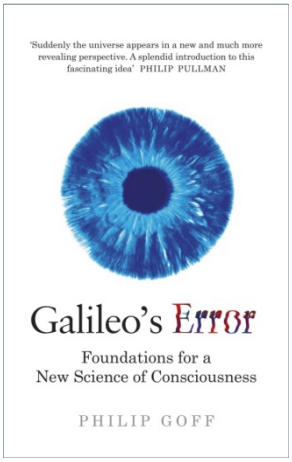
MIND-BODY PROBLEM REVISITED

Philip GOFF. *Galileo's Error: Foundations for the New Science of Consciousness.* London: Rider, 2019, 256 pp. ISBN: 978-1-84604-601-8.
DOI: http://doi.org/10.18290/rf21692-15



For anyone who does not follow recent debates on philosophy of mind, a revival of panpsychism may be quite surprising. A view, which thirty years ago seemed to be stone dead, is now heatedly discussed by prominent academics. It has become clear that the idea that the basic stuff of the Universe is mental not only should be taken seriously but may also pose a serious challenge to standard physicalism. Over the last couple of years, we have been given numerous handbooks that have considerably enriched our knowledge of the history, nature, and problems of panpsychism. Despite their indisputable importance, these publications were primarily directed at professional philosophers. For that reason, *Galileo's Error*, written by Philip Goff, is a remarkable book. Even if it is not a breakthrough study of panpsychism, it is the first introduction for non-specialists, discussing the view at length.

The book consists of five chapters. The first ("How Galileo Created the Problem of Consciousness," p. 3) answers the implied title question. At the very beginning, Goff defines the main subject of his work—consciousness—as qualitative states or

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"what is it like." He also declares himself a proponent of the Cartesian claim that such "consciousness is the only thing we know for certain is real" (p. 4). But the purpose of the chapter is to depict a revolution carried out by Galileo. Goff sees the Italian astronomer as someone who—by challenging Aristotelian physics—laid the foundation stone of modern science; but who, at the same time, "divided up [the Universe] into two radically different kinds of entity" (p. 18). The first kind of entities are these that exist objectively in the world, namely material things; the second kind, the entities belonging to the realm of our minds. According to Goff, it was Galileo who introduced a radical dualism of (mathematically graspable) matter and (purely qualitative) mind. By making this step the father of modern science made a fatal mistake, the consequences of which we can still observe in contemporary philosophy of mind: an endless quarrel between materialists and dualists. Even if Galileo was able to avoid what we know of today as the mind-body problem—he simply excluded consciousness from the range of phenomena that may be scientifically investigated—most modern and contemporary philosophers have been trying to tackle the problem rather than ignore it.

The next three chapters are devoted to reconstructing the most popular theories that throughout the history of philosophy have been proposed as adequate answers to the dilemma caused by Galileo's (erroneous) distinction. The second chapter ("Is the Ghost in the Machine?" p. 25) deals with dualism. Interestingly, Goff is sympathetic to the idea of immaterial minds and devotes some space to answering the most common criticism of the view. He observes, for example, that postulated laws, such as causal relations between minds and bodies, which have always posed a great problem to dualists, also appear in science. A dualist may, then, rightly hold that the interaction is indeed a brute fact, but so is the fact of generating gravity by an object having a mass. Another common charge is that dualism is religiously motivated. However, Goff proves that contemporary proponents of dualism are mostly naturalists lacking any religious inclinations. On the other hand, Goff is aware of the difficulties haunting dualism, such as—for example—violation of causal closure of the physical domain. Still, he takes it as a challenge to be faced and even proposes a solution, which might be called "quantum dualism" (p. 46), even though he concludes that "we shouldn't believe in immaterial minds unless we really have to" (p. 51).

The next chapter ("Can Physical Science Explain Consciousness?" p. 53) aims to show that we do need some kind of non-reductive approach, for materialism fails to provide an adequate theory of consciousness. Goff starts by discussing the view that armchair metaphysics is futile in debates on the nature of mind. It is wrong, he argues, because we can give some *a priori* proofs for the incoherence of materialism. Next, he reconstructs classical arguments against materialism, such as Nagel's bat argument, the Mary argument, and the argument for the logical possibility of zombies. He also presents (and rejects) illusionism, the view that consciousness is "a trick played on us by our brains" (p. 97). Goff concludes that materialism is unable to explain the occurrence of mental phenomena.

Chapter four ("How to Solve the Problem of Consciousness," p. 111) presents a possible account of the problem of consciousness: namely, panpsychism. Goff begins with the thesis—defended by, amongst others, Bertrand Russell and Arthur Eddington—that science does not tell us about the nature of the basic stuff of which reality is made. In that case, having two mysteries—the mystery of intrinsic properties of matter and the mystery of consciousness—the most parsimonious route is to solve them together: by holding that conscious experiences are intrinsic properties of matter. By doing so, we reach panpsychism. However, even if panpsychism has some theoretical advantage over materialism, it is beset by the so-called combination problem: an unanswerable (at least for now) question of how a sum of very simple experiences gives rise to a smooth, complicated experience like our own. This does not discourage Goff, however, from proposing "The Post-Galilean Manifesto" (p. 174), i.e., rules that are supposed to be a new foundation for the science of consciousness. These involve: (1) realism about consciousness; (2) empiricism; (3) anti-dualism; and (4) panpsychist methodology.

The last chapter ("Consciousness and the Meaning of Life," p. 183) is a departure from ontology towards ethics. Goff observes that philosophy teaches us to deal with uncertainty because it suggests that conclusive proofs are extremely rare. He then uses this claim in his consideration of global warming. Goff interestingly links reluctance to act against climate change with dualism and holds that the latter "creates the sense of separation" (p. 190) from nature that can lead to indifference. Panpsychism, by contrast, appears to re-attach us to the world of nature—that is, to the world where everything is sentient. Next, Goff makes preliminary remarks on the problem of free will: contrary to materialists, he does not find free will to be sheer illusion. He finishes the book with a curious attempt to merge panpsychism and mysticism, which pushes him towards the philosophy of religion[1].

At first glance, *Galileo's Error* appears to rephrase most of the key ideas that have appeared in philosophy of mind over the last decades. This impression is mostly justified. Goff enumerates the most significant arguments, rephrases the hard problem of consciousness, widely discusses popular thought experiments, and scrutinizes commonly accepted views. However, the book is certainly more than that. First, it introduces new and interesting ideas, or at least provides original arguments for familiar views. The latter is best seen in those parts where Goff refers to physical discoveries. He is clearly fascinated by quantum mechanics, which is perhaps one of the greatest inspirations for his panpsychism. Second, Goff is not afraid to express his own

[1] It is hardly surprising, though, because Goff is one of the proponents of so-called cosmopsychism. Standard panpsychism holds that at least some of the fundamental stuff that reality is made up of is conscious. By this definition, the "fundamental stuff" is understood more or less as being the same as "fundamental particles," that is, as some kind of the smallest bricks of reality. Goff reverses this claim and holds that it is the whole Universe that is the fundamental stuff—a big, single, conscious thing—and that planets, people, and atoms are, in fact, just its parts.

convictions. (One can already find them in his academic book, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*, published in 2017 by Oxford University Press.) Last but not least, he provides a very good review of the state-of-the-art literature on panpsychism. Even a professional scholar working in a different area of philosophy could undoubtedly benefit from *Galileo's Error*. For these three reasons, the book is something more than just a popular introduction to contemporary philosophy of consciousness.

Despite this overwhelmingly positive impression, there are three aspects of the book that are open to criticism. I would like to note, however, that the criticisms I have are minor and in no way touch upon the central issues. The first regards the last chapter of the book. While a well-disposed reader would probably agree with most of the arguments, which—aptly put by Goff—sound more powerful than ever, she may be unimpressed by the part titled "Consciousness and the Meaning of Life." There, Goff takes on the problem of climate change. One of his theses is that achieving a 97% consensus among scientists conceding that such change has mainly been caused by man is strong evidence that the remaining 3% are epistemically wrong. (Perhaps the latter accept a standard of proof that is way too demanding to prove anything.) However, the same charge could be brought against panpsychism. Between 1960 and 1980, the number of panpsychists was probably very low, which should have been strong evidence that the view is wrong. In fact, climate change skeptics and panpsychists formulate their crucial statements in a very similar manner. The former may say, "I don't know what produces global warming but it is certainly not man," while the latter may say "I don't know what produces our mental states but it is certainly not matter." (An honest panpsychist has to say that. One of the greatest problems for her is to answer the question: What are the tiniest pieces of experience? She has no clue.) My point is simply this: a common consensus argument usually does not work, especially if you defend a view that used to be almost universally rejected.

I am also unconvinced by Goff's (or rather Naomi Klein's) thesis that dualism has something to do with our reluctance towards climate protection. In fact, I think this is false. Some—perhaps most—dualists, like Peter Van Inwagen or Richard Swinburne, accept the view due to religious commitments. Religion, however, provides the dualists with two powerful convictions: that the natural world has been created by God, so it should not be destroyed; and, that they need to live well—e.g. care for succeeding generations—because otherwise the dualists will be damned for not caring for them. Perhaps, for that reason, an honest, religious dualist may be much more disposed to protect our planet than would someone who sees it simply as a potential source of his wealth and is aware that it is not him who will face the consequences of his acts.

The second potential source of criticism are some controversial historical claims made by Goff. For example, he writes that "before Galileo philosophers took the

world to be full of what philosophers call *sensory qualities*, things like colors, smells, tastes and sounds" (p. 16; Goff's emphasis.) However, for this claim to be true it has to be watered down. The first philosopher who relegated sensory qualities to the world of our mind, was Democritus in 4 BC. A very similar argument was also later used by the skeptics (which is not surprising, for Pyrrho of Elis—the originator of the school—studied Democritus's writings.) The distinction between primary and secondary qualities was, thus, well known in antiquity; so too, the idea that the latter may not exist in the world outside our minds.

Another debatable claim is that "the observations of Copernicus proved […], that the earth was not, as Aristotle had supposed, in the center of the universe" (p. 62.) As Thomas Kuhn already observed, at the time of publication of *De Revolutionibus* (1543) there was not a single empirical proof confirming Copernicus's theory. What is more, his critics, e.g., Tycho de Brahe, observed that it was falsified by observation; for if the Earth circled around the Sun, then one should be able to observe a parallax. However, this phenomenon was unobservable, which provided a very good reason *against* heliocentrism.

Finally, the structure of some parts of the book is debatable. A reader may sometimes get the impression that Goff is in a rush. For example, the first chapter introduces many important ideas at once. I guess it was intended to play the role of preparing the battlefield; but instead, we get some loosely connected, undeveloped reflections. The third chapter, by contrast, is untypically structured: discussing the zombie argument, Goff takes a detour through illusionism, the Turing test, and the Chinese room argument. What is worse, it is not easy to say how these things work together. As a result, while a philosopher would have no problem following the arguments, it is perhaps way too demanding for a high-school student.

Despite all these critical remarks, *Galileo's Error* is in every other respect a brilliant book. Goff is not afraid to formulate bold metaphysical theses that forty years ago would be seen as wild speculation. He does it with a clarity and passion that makes this book even more inspiring. What is more, Goff sometimes makes a confession about himself or his fellow philosophers. These parts prove that philosophizing can be a personal activity and that all these abstract ideas hide living people. All in all, it is difficult to find a book so funny and enjoyable and—at the same time—so competently written. If one is looking for a comprehensive, yet instructive, introduction to contemporary arguments in philosophy of mind, *Galileo's Error* appears to be a perfect choice.