

Markus Gabriel. *I am Not a Brain: Philosophy of Mind for the 21st Century.* Polity 2017. 240 pp. \$69.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781509514755); \$16.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781509538720).

The title in idiomatic English means—I am not very smart, not dumb, just of ordinary intelligence. The title could be misleading to the intended audience for the book, the general reader. A title more faithful to the main theme of the book could be: *The Identity-Thesis in the Philosophy of Mind is Wrong!* But that title would be puzzling to the general reader, or even the philosophical reader not immersed in technical and academic philosophy of mind. The *Identity-Thesis* comes in two varieties: firstly, *eliminative*, where there is only the brain and no mind; secondly, *reductive*, where mental processes are explained by neural processes and are located in various regions of the brain. Both varieties, according to Markus Gabriel, are wrong. Or, perhaps another title that uses both German and English, but less familiar to not only the intended audience of the book, the general reader, but also to most Anglo-American mainstream academic philosophers, could be: *The Geist in the Machine.* What is *Geist*? To be explained in the following.

That title echoes another main theme of the book: how the objects of the studies in the disciplines favoured by the German Idealist tradition in philosophy stemming from Kant and Hegel parallel the objects of the studies in disciplines in what Anglo-American universities usually term the Humanities, or sometimes, the Humanities and the Social Sciences. However, the German Idealist tradition treats the objects of their parallel version of the Humanities and Social Sciences, as literally *objects*, as real entities, that have their own historical laws of development or evolution, and that have an influence on not only the psychological world, but also on the physical or natural world. We might call, in terminology closer to the language used by Anglo-American philosophers, what in German Idealism is called *Geist*, or the object of the studies of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Anglo-American universities: *World 3*. This is the terminology and theory introduced into Anglo-American philosophy by Karl Popper, in his book with John Eccles, *The Self and its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism* (Springer 1977). *World 3* consists of the products of humans, and is a separate world with its own dynamics, and interacts directly with the psychological and social, and indirectly, through the social and psychological to the material or physical world. The term *World 3* conforms to what in German Idealism is called *Geist*.

Though Markus Gabriel does not mention the Popper-Eccles book, the first part of its title coincidentally echoes another theme of Gabriel's book: the Self and the Freedom of the Self. According to Gabriel, the Self and its Freedom are crucial for the philosophy of mind, but intentionally denied as even existing by *identity-thesis* philosophers who are *eliminative materialists*. Other identity-thesis philosophers, *reductive materialists* or *physicalists*, treat Mind, Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Self and Freedom as *epi-phenomena* that exist in parallel to the physical world as by-products of the brain. Self and Freedom, according to *reductive materialism*, as Gabriel argues, require *reductive explanation* to neural events. Furthermore, as Gabriel argues, the unintended by-products of a new uncritically developed ideology or myth going around are even worse for Self and Freedom. The ideology promulgated among pop philosophers of technology, public intellectuals or culture critics, and some high profile academic philosophers, involves what they call *post-humanism*, *trans-humanism* and the *singularity*. This futuristic, apocalyptic ideology carries with it the denial of the ultimate value of the survival, let alone perfection, of humans. Thus, the futuristic ideology, as Gabriel discusses, involves the denial of *humanism* where *self-development*, autonomy or *freedom*

are paramount. Furthermore, as Gabriel asserts, according to this futuristic ideology, the improvement of humans with the development of new technologies that supposedly *augment* human abilities, predicts the extinction of humans as such. The human species will be replaced by new creatures.

Another title comes to mind at this point: *The Open Self and Its Philosophical Enemies*. Gabriel concisely summarizes the main theme and point of his book straightforwardly in his plain-spoken manner: ‘one must criticize the ideologists who, as I have sketched in this book, are associated with ... dehumanization. The human being has not yet established a moral and political order in which all human beings are recognized for what they are: minded animals with a history which all share the capacity to lead a life in light of their conceptions of what it is to be a human being’ (216).

Such words may remind one of the following: ‘those who deny the existence of mental events ... of consciousness; ... and those who admit the existence of mental events, but assert that they are “epiphenomena” ... both must neglect ... the reality of human suffering, and the significance of the fight against unnecessary suffering. Thus I regard the doctrine that men are machines not only as mistaken, but as prone to undermine a humanist ethics.’ (John Eccles and Karl Popper, *The Self and Its Brain*, 5)

The short of it concerning Gabriel's book can be stated as follows: The philosophy of mind is no mere theoretical academic exercise isolated in the intellectual clouds from political and social concerns. I cannot state the point of the social and political importance of the philosophy of mind more forcefully than does Gabriel: ‘We must overcome materialism ... that seeks a conception of the mind that is able to reduce *Geist* to consciousness and then reduce consciousness to an electrical storming of neurons. We are citizens of many words, we move in the realm of ends. This provides us a series of conditions for freedom’ (219).

Discussing the title of Gabriel's book, and possible variations on and for the title, has taken me through the three main themes of the book:

1. Identifying and/or reductively explaining the mind, consciousness, self, and freedom with neural events is wrong.
2. When philosophers of mind ignore *Geist* (World 3) or the reality of theories, values, art, architecture, institutions, society, cities, villages, communities, culture, history, and other products of humans, they ignore an important dimension of mind, and the framework for consciousness, self-consciousness, self and freedom.
3. The denial, whether explicit or implicit, of mind and mindedness, and its products (*Geist*, if you will, or World 3, in Karl Popper's terminology) is the denial of humanism.

I think it is extremely important to note that Gabriel is not an interactionist. To think of mindedness terminology as referring to a *thing* that we call mind, or consciousness, is not only a semantic error (similar to Gilbert Ryle's *category mistake*) of mixing up references for terms that function as meta-linguistic terms, but also an ontological mistake, in referring to fictitious entities as if they were real. Furthermore, Gabriel avoids the pre-Kantian ontology and metaphysics of essences and substances, in moving forward with a view of reality as involving frames of reference. Gabriel refers to the *New Realism* where the real entities with which humans interact are relative to frames of reference. Since there is no frame of reference for the supposed totality in and of itself, that supposed totality is simply nothing (to us). Gabriel more fully discusses the thesis of the impossibility of the very existence of a totality in a previous book (*Why the World Does Not Exist, Polity*, 2015).

Also extremely important to note is that Gabriel's view of the physical or natural world is Newtonian. The frames of reference in the physical world involve causal chains of various clockwork

mechanisms. Hence, in order to save mindedness, consciousness, self-consciousness, self and freedom, Gabriel reduces them to a qualified existence, as a *compatible* framework and container for a Leibnizian *realm of sufficient reason*. Here is where and how an *interactionist* (as opposed to a *compatibilist*) might interact with Gabriel: humans can use their reason to impose their goals into the natural world, because the natural world in many areas, including the quantum level of nuclear energy, the macro-level of climate, and the bio-organic level of life, are open; and so, open to human intervention—mainly now it seems for the worse. Though I think Gabriel would agree with this interaction, why does Gabriel adopt *compatibilism*?

Why Gabriel, I think, settles for the weak concession of compatibilism rather than adopt the bold thesis of interactionism, is that interactionism seems spooky. On the Newtonian model, the natural clockwork world is closed, *Geist* and mindedness could only interact in a spooky, mysterious way with the mechanisms of the closed clockwork world. However, in compatibilism, both consciousness and *Geist* are functions of the human, and mindedness, or frameworks for relating human reasons, and human goal-oriented actions. But why must we assume that interaction among even material and natural things follows according to the clockwork Newtonian machine-universe, or not at all? As briefly mentioned above, Gabriel has argued, in *Why the World does Not Exist*, that we cannot describe the universe as a totality. Thus, I think Gabriel could accept a form of interactionism among different worlds or frames, where there are a plurality of entities, and entities do not act as things that form causal chains; but do interact in manifold ways.

I end with the open question for discussion: How do *Geist* (World 3) and mindedness exercise their reality, how can they matter at all, if they do not interact with each other and the physical world in an effective manner? This question for Markus Gabriel must be of extreme importance for his book whose point is that if mindedness and *Geist* matter not, their existence or not is irrelevant, putting humanity and humanism at risk.

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