IN DEFENSE OF THE CENTRAL ROLE OF CONSCIOUSNESS VERSUS THE PREVALENCE OF THE UNCONSCIOUS IN BARGH’S AND KAHNEMAN’S MODELS OF MIND

1. Introduction

A peculiar feature of psychological theorizing is the continuous appeal to dichotomies\(^1\) or binary oppositions\(^2\) in order to describe the nature of mental processes or functions and to explain the causes of human behavior. Very briefly, most psychologists conceive of the human mind as being composed of two grossly defined mental systems, consciousness and unconsciousness, serving specific aims and having distinctive features. Furthermore, they generally characterize these systems as reciprocally interacting, and sometimes overlapping, in spite of their separateness and their peculiarities. Thus, because of the widespread use of dichotomies, many psychological theories appear to be lists of attributes or features describing how each system works and influences behavior\(^3\). Among these features or attributes it is quite common to find «consciousness» as one system and «unconsciousness» as the other. In the literature of cognitive psychology (and not only in it) we can find this dichotomy in various forms such as implicit vs. explicit, intuitive vs. deliberate, automatic vs. controlled, etc. At the basis of all of these dichotomies there is the assumption that one system, i.e. consciousness, is accessible in some way by the subject, whereas the other, i.e. unconsciousness, is not. Drawing on cognitive psychology’s literature, we can underscore the following dichotomies\(^4\):

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• A mental process or state is conscious if it involves selective attention or working memory, that is, a cognitive process activated in a situation in which an individual is confronted with a certain number of stimuli and she has to select among them. In contrast, a mental process or state is unconscious if the stimuli impinge on perceptual receptors but fall outside of the focus of attention or are not retained by working memory\(^5\).

• A mental state or process is conscious if an individual is able to give a verbal account or description of it or make introspection on it. The state or process is unconscious if an individual cannot introspectively access it or verbally report on it\(^6\).

• A mental state or process is conscious if an individual can exercise some voluntary control over it, whereas it is unconscious if an individual cannot exercise any voluntary control over it\(^7\).

It is commonplace that a majority of psychologists will to some extent refer to the consciousness-unconscious dichotomy in their theories or explanations. It is an intuitive and quite convincing distinction that certainly appeals to supporters of both Freudian psychoanalysis and cognitive psychology.

Focusing on cognitive psychology, it is nevertheless clear that, in spite of its intuitiveness and wide use among psychologists, the consciousness-unconscious dichotomy is rather controversial. In essence, the various authors and research groups tend to conceive of it in somewhat different ways. That is to say, there are various characterizations of the dichotomy that appear to resemble each other in some respects but not in others. This in itself is problematic, in that in cognitive psychology the criticisms against the dichotomy rarely refer to specific theory or position but rather to a wide class of theories. Thus, essentially all the theories appealing to the dichotomy are treated in the same manner\(^8\).

In this paper we consider the plausibility of the consciousness-unconscious dichotomy and seek to avoid the above problem of treating all theories alike. We propose a comparison between the applications of this dichotomy in the work of two authors: Bargh, who mainly focuses on automatic information processing and its relations with deliberative processes, and Kahneman, whose distinction between System 1 and System 2 is relevant and popular in the study of judgments and choices.

The first aim of this paper consists in assessing the differences and the commonalities between Bargh’s and Kahneman’s proposals. The second consists in critically assessing how Bargh’s and Kahneman’s models of mind describe the relations between consciousness and unconscious. More specifically the paper will consider to what extent the two ways of mental functioning should be considered as distinguishable and separate and under which conditions the conscious mind can become unconscious and vice versa. Due to the specific focus of the paper, we do not deal directly with the popular debate regarding the plausibility of a distinction between the two sys-

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tems or of the dual-process or dual-system theories of mind⁹. Nonetheless, it is clear that the results of the present paper can be considered as arguments in such a debate.

2. Bargh’s automatic and controlled processing

Throughout his work Bargh gathered data from social psychology in favour of the automaticity (vs. control) of higher mental processes and was persuaded that «the notion that some basic-perceptual processes, such as impression formation and stereotyping, could have efficient and unintentional components (that is, influences that operate outside of one’s conscious awareness), has now become a staple and indispensable construct for the explanation and prediction of almost all psychological phenomena»¹⁰. In this sense, for Bargh automaticity is synonymous with unconscious.

According to Bargh’s view, cognitive processes that may be properly called automatic have to satisfy four criteria, «the four horsemen of automaticity», as his seminal paper is titled¹¹. Each criterion is grounded on a variety of empirical outcomes in the field of social psychology.

The first criterion is awareness. A subject may be unaware of mental process in three ways:

1. He or she may be unaware of the stimulus itself (see subliminal perception).
2. He or she may be unaware of the way the stimulus is interpreted or categorized.
3. He or she may be unaware of the way the stimulus influences judgment and/or subjective feeling states.

The second criterion of automaticity is intentionality, which is connected to controllability. This means that a subject has intentional control over a mental process when he or she has the possibility to instigate, to stifle, or to stop a process. The third criterion is efficiency: automatic processes are efficient, that is to say, are subjectively experienced as being made effortlessly. The fourth and final criterion is controllability: a subject exerts control over a process when he or she is able to counteract the stimulus’ influences. These four criteria define the automatic functioning of a process: in other words, when a process is not characterized by awareness, intentionality, controllability and is experienced as effortless, it can be deemed as unconscious.

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Automatic phenomena may be categorized into two forms, depending on when automaticity takes place. Preconscious automaticity involves an unconscious and effortless processing of a stimulus that serves as implicit and unappreciated input into conscious and deliberate processes. It is assumed that the unconscious processes always take place prior to deliberative ones\textsuperscript{12}. Post-conscious (or goal-dependent) automaticity requires conscious and intentional processes (such as decision-making processes) that, once put in motion, operate with minimal attention guidance. Pre-conscious automaticity involves the influence of unconscious processes before deliberative thought, whereas post-conscious (or goal-dependent) automaticity requires unconscious processes in order to accomplish a task after the task is consciously selected: «preconscious forms serve as unfelt automatic input into controlled process, […] whereas post-conscious forms are automatic, unintended consequences of conscious thought processes»\textsuperscript{13}.

According to Bargh’s proposal, automatic or unconscious processes can be defined as follows: the «information-processing events in the human nervous system that, although capable of influencing a person’s behaviours, emotions, cognitions, and motivations, “do not influence subjective experience in a way that [he or she] can directly detect, understand, or report the occurrence or nature of these events”»\textsuperscript{14}. Bargh maintains that unconscious perception is a reflexive reaction in that, for example, «we must exert wilful, conscious effort to put aside the unexplained and sometimes unwarranted negative feelings that we may harbor toward others»\textsuperscript{15}. In other words, unconscious reactions can be perceived as automatic and intuitive outcomes produced by our mind which have to be regulated by our conscious mind, whose goal is to «identify and try to overcome the automatic impulses and emotions that influence every aspect of our waking life»\textsuperscript{16}.

Notwithstanding the interest in automatic processes, Bargh acknowledges that «any process of sufficient complexity to be of interest to social psychologists involves a complex interplay between both controlled (conscious) and automatic process»\textsuperscript{17}. The question which is of interest here is how automatic and controlled processes can interact. Two aspects of this topic are worth considering here. Firstly, according to Morsella’s Supramodal Interaction Theory (SIT), which Bargh adopts as a general framework, a conflict may occur between two internal streams of information processing that are trying to influence skeletomotor action at the same time. This occurs when a person experiences a conscious conflict, for example when two information-processing systems (to breathe vs. to hold one’s breath) strive to activate competing action plans. From this standpoint, the conscious field is considered by Bargh as a sort of

\textsuperscript{12} Bargh - Schwader - Hailey - Dyer - Boothby, Automaticity in Social-Cognitive Processes.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibi, p. 600.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibi, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{17} Bargh - Schwader - Hailey - Dyer - Boothby, Automaticity in Social-Cognitive Processes, p. 601.
senate «in which representatives from different provinces are always in attendance, regardless of whether they should sit quietly or debate»\textsuperscript{18}.

Thus, the experience of consciousness allows one to temporally suppress the action triggered by a stimulus (for example, lack of oxygen in the blood increases the need to breathe) in favor of goals that are more adapted to the circumstance (for example, holding the breath when one is under water). In similar conditions, thanks to the integrative action of consciousness, «inclinations can be behaviorally suppressed but not mentally suppressed»\textsuperscript{19}.

Secondly, for Bargh conscious and unconscious processes belong to a single psychological system, which can operate in both conscious and unconscious modalities. For example, he says, «researchers have found that whether or not we are conscious of a particular goal we have set for ourselves, the way we go about pursuing that goal is very similar»\textsuperscript{20}. This means that consciousness (or unconsciousness) is only a contingent property of cognitive processes, not a feature indicating a qualitatively different way of elaborating information. In principle, all information processes related to goal achievement may have conscious or unconscious features\textsuperscript{21}.

3. Kahneman’s two-system view

Kahneman’s two-system view can be considered as a version of the consciousness-unconscious distinction as we depicted it. Infact, System 1 (the intuitive system, or intuition), as described by the author, is composed of all those cognitive operations that are quick, automatic, effortless, implicit (that is, inaccessible through introspection), associative, often emotionally charged, and difficult to consciously and directly control or modify by the individual. System 2 (the reflective or deliberative system, or reasoning) is composed of cognitive operations that are slow, effortful, flexible, potentially rule-governed, and likely to be consciously monitored and deliberately or directly controlled by the individual\textsuperscript{22}.

It is worth noting that Kahneman does not specify or propose a list of the cognitive processes that can be classified in one system or in another. Rather, he suggests that it is possible to classify a certain cognitive operation according to the criterion of accessibility, that is, «the ease (or effort) to which particular mental contents come to mind»\textsuperscript{23}. That is to say, in a peculiar situation and under specific conditions or circumstances, a certain cognitive process can be classified in System 1 or 2 depending on the degree of accessibility of those contents it processes. Thus, in a decision-making process, System 1 quickly proposes intuitive answers to the judgment questions required in that specific situation, whereas System 2 monitors the quality of these answers by


\textsuperscript{19} Ibi, p. 190.

\textsuperscript{20} Bargh, Our Unconscious Mind, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{21} Huang - Bargh, The Selfish Goal.


\textsuperscript{23} Ibi, p. 699.
endorsing, correcting, or overriding them\textsuperscript{24}. In this sense, a certain evaluative behavior can be defined as intuitive in those cases in which System 2 does not intervene by applying its modifications to the different courses of action which System 1 triggers and proposes. On the contrary, a certain evaluative behavior can be defined as deliberative in those cases in which System 2 intervenes in such a modification. System 1 and System 2 are equally important in the decision-making processes: «a comprehensive psychology of intuitive judgment cannot ignore such controlled thinking, because intuition can be overridden or corrected by self-critical operations, and because intuitive answers are not always available»\textsuperscript{25}. Nonetheless, it seems that System 1 has priority over System 2 and can be considered the ‘default-mode’ of functioning of our mind: «System 1 runs automatically and System 2 is normally in a comfortable low-effort mode, in which only a fraction of its capacity is engaged. System 1 continuously generates suggestions for System 2: impressions, intuitions, intentions, and feelings. If endorsed by System 2, impressions and intuitions turn into beliefs, and impulses turn into voluntary actions. When all goes smoothly, which is most of the time, System 2 adopts the suggestions of System 1 with little or no modifications»\textsuperscript{26}.

Although it does not seem to be one of the most discussed features of Kahneman’s work, the consciousness-unconscious distinction is certainly a fundamental tenet of it since it provides the explanatory framework in which the author integrates the experimental results and the behavioral observations gathered. In this sense, it is not by chance that at the beginning of his Nobel Prize lecture Kahneman dedicates several pages to the description of this distinction: «the differences between the two modes of thought have been invoked in attempts to organize seemingly contradictory results in studies of judgment under uncertainty»\textsuperscript{27}. Thus, the distinction may be said to work as a sort of theoretical compass in the interpretation of empirical results. For example, let us consider the data of the famous problem of Linda, in which the experimental subjects are given a description of a woman named Linda and a list of possible outcomes describing her present employment and activities. They are asked to rank the possible outcomes by the similarity of Linda to the category prototypes or by the probability to pertain to a certain category\textsuperscript{28}. More precisely, experimental subjects are presented with the following problem and have to choose one of the 6 options at disposal\textsuperscript{29}:

Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations.

1. Linda is a teacher in elementary school.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibi}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Id.}, \textit{A Perspective on Judgment and Choice}, p. 709.
2. Linda works in a bookstore and takes Yoga classes. Linda is active in the feminist movement. (F)
3. Linda is a psychiatric social worker.
4. Linda is a member of the League of Women Voters. Linda is a bank teller. (T)
5. Linda is an insurance salesperson.
6. Linda is a bank teller and is active in the feminist movement. (T&F)

It is clear that Linda’s description is construed to provide a representation of an active feminist (F) and not of a bank teller (T). Thus, it is not surprising that subjects tend to choose option 3: what is surprising is that they tend to prefer option 6 to option 4 (F > T&F > T). Kahneman’s explanation for this is that experimental subjects automatically (that is, through System 1) appeal to a representativeness heuristic «according to which the subjective probability of an event, or a sample, is determined by the degree to which it: (i) is similar in essential characteristics to its parent population; and (ii) reflects the salient features of the process by which it is generated» 30. Nonetheless, when stimulated by the researchers with questions, clarifications, and more information about Linda, they tend to consciously and deliberately (that is, through System 2) revise their response and to understand the fallacy of the connection between active feminist and bank teller (T&F) prosed by option 6 31.

The interpretation of the results of this study through the application of the two-system view shows that, in those cases in which the experimental design permits System 2 to intervene (for example, through the presence of primes and reminders by the experimenters), experimental subjects are less prone to expose their judgments to the biases and errors to which System 1 can lead (see, for example, the so-called conjunction fallacy) 32.

Now, it is worth noting that, although Kahneman’s studies do not aim at testing the consciousness-unconscious distinction, their results appear to provide some empirical evidence in favor of it at least indirectly. In fact, if we re-consider the problem of Linda, it is clear that System 1 alone cannot guarantee a satisfying solution and thus System 2 has to intervene. However, Kahneman does not appear to be interested in dealing with this issue. Rather, he uses the dichotomy as a valuable tool for interpreting a great deal of data. In other words, although the author attributes a crucial relevance to the conscious-unconscious distinction for explanatory reasons, he is not interested in assessing its validity at the empirical level and the evidence provided in its favor are indirect, that is, the dichotomy and its features are taken from the vast literature of cognitive psychology on dual-processes. In other words, he seems to consider the plausibility of the distinction as a matter of fact of cognitive psychology. However, at a certain point in his lecture, Kahneman describes the distinction as a sort of fiction or useful metaphor: «System 1 and System 2 […] are fictitious characters. System 1 and System 2 are not systems in the standard sense of entities with interacting aspects or parts. And there is no part of the brain that either of the systems would call home. […] The characters are useful because of some quirks of our minds, yours

31 TVERSKY, D. KAHNEMAN, Extensional Versus Intuitive Reasoning, p. 313.
32 KAHNEMAN, A Perspective on Judgment and Choice, p. 711.
and mine. […] The fictitious systems make it easier for me to think about judgment and choice, and will make it easier for you to understand what I say»33.

In conclusion, Kahneman appears to hold a rather broad and vague definition of the consciousness-unconscious distinction, that is, a definition that does not deal with its controversial features and that does not consider the contrasting formulations of it. These considerations, together with the fact that this model does not provide a taxonomy of conscious and unconscious processes, lead to a rather unitary image of cognition: in principle and under favorable conditions or circumstances every mental state controlled by System 1 can be accessed by System 2 (and vice versa). In other words, cognitive processes may acquire conscious or unconscious features depending on contingent conditions of accessibility. In this sense, consciousness or the unconscious do not appear as features which enable us to discriminate between qualitatively different mental systems or processes but rather as different characteristics of a same cognitive system or process.

4. A comparison between Bargh’s and Kahneman’s proposals

According to our analysis, Bargh and Kahneman seem to define the unconscious in roughly the same manner. In fact, automatic processes and the System 1 are implicit, intuitive, effortless, inaccessible by introspection or conscious awareness, and work in a similar way as does perception. Furthermore, both authors appear to conceive their notions of unconscious as empirically founded assumptions, that is, assumptions able to provide an account of a large number of behavioral displays gathered from empirical research. As we can see, the notion of unconscious is for Bargh and Kahneman a crucial concept for the explanation of psychological and behavioral phenomena.

In contrast, Bargh and Kahneman seem to provide quite different accounts of consciousness. However, this difference must not be seen as an incompatibility between them, but rather as a difference in articulation and specification. As shown above, Kahneman’s theoretical framework does not appear to be spelled out in detail, that is, it is not thoroughly articulated in order to define the function of consciousness and its relationships with the unconscious. It seems that the individual may become conscious of her or his own mental processes only in those cases in which she or he is able to access information from the environment or from memory. For example, in the case of the problem of Linda and similar ones, «in the absence of strong cues to remind them of their statistical knowledge»34 people having an expertise in statistics tend to make the same errors of laymen. This seems to suggest that System 2 requires a certain kind of information in order to be triggered, thus modifying the courses of action proposed by System 135.

As opposed to Kahneman, Bargh proposes an articulated model of consciousness. In fact, the Selfish Goal model and the SIT framework briefly described above indicate that consciousness evolved from, and is built upon, pre-existing unconscious processes. These processes developed to promote adaptation to the environment36; as the complexity of human behavioral system increased, conscious processes evolved in order to coor-

33 Id., Thinking Fast and Slow, pp. 29-30.
34 KahNemaN, A Perspective on Judgment and Choice, p. 711.
35 Id. - FredEriCk, Representativeness Revisited, p. 65.
36 huang - barGh, The Selfish Goal.
dinate and integrate conflicting streams of information processing striving to activate competing action plans. In other words, since conscious and unconscious goals are multiple and each programs particular sets of behaviors to be enacted, a need for a «full system» behavioral orientation (i.e., a single behavior involving the individual) emerged. According to Bargh, this system aimed at orienting behaviors is consciousness.

Furthermore, Bargh and Kahneman seem to agree that both consciousness and the unconscious are equally relevant in important and complex decision-making tasks. In fact, on the one hand Bargh explicitly argues that «a single psychological system that we all possess»\(^{37}\) exists and can operate both consciously or unconsciously depending on the circumstances. On the other, in spite of his postulation of a two-system view, through the notion of accessibility Kahneman seems to suggest that every mental state or process can operate both consciously or unconsciously under different and specific conditions. In this sense, System 1 and System 2 describe features of processes or states under different conditions of accessibility; such processes or events are not structurally conscious or unconscious, that is, they do not describe qualitatively different ways of information processing. For Kahneman, two systems exist (or it is useful to postulate their existence) within which every kind of cognitive processes or events may operate: a process or state may acquire conscious or unconscious features depending on the contingent conditions of accessibility.

As we can see, for both authors consciousness and the unconscious seem to be features that can be attributed to different kinds of cognitive processes: they do not refer to specific, qualitatively different ways of processing information. The authors seem to exclude the existence of constitutively conscious or constitutively unconscious states or processes indicating specific, qualitatively different ways of information processing. Thus, we can say that for both authors there is not a clear distinction between consciousness and the unconscious: every cognitive process appears to be potentially and equally classifiable as conscious or unconscious, depending on the automaticity criteria (Bargh) or on the degree of accessibility of the process (Kahneman). This seems to suggest that Bargh’s and Kahneman’s models convey a picture of cognitive science in which both the notion of unconscious and of consciousness are necessary in the explanation of psychological and behavioural phenomena.

5. Critical remarks

The above discussion attempts to show that, despite differences in language and aims, both Bargh’s and Kahneman’s proposals characterize the distinction between consciousness and the unconscious in a somewhat similar manner. This is far from surprising since, as it was pointed out at the beginning of the paper, such a distinction is one of the commonest dichotomies in cognitive psychology’s explanations and the main features characterizing the two systems are widely shared. The theoretically relevant point that emerges from the two authors’ proposals is that they do not postulate a neat division between consciousness and the unconscious: apparently, each mental process or operation may potentially work and be classified as conscious or unconscious (automatic/controlled for Bargh and pertaining to System 1/pertaining

to System 2 for Kahneman). In the dual-process debate’s terms, consciousness and unconscious appear as «simply correlates that occur under well-defined conditions and are neither necessary nor defining features (of the two processes or systems)»38. This suggests that Bargh and Kahneman conceive consciousness and the unconscious as features that can be attributed to different kinds of cognitive processes or operations, but that are not decisive for distinguishing between them. In other words, they do not conceive consciousness and the unconscious either as attributes typical of a specific way of information processing or as permanent patterns of functioning whose typical features permit to differentiate them substantially. Rather, they conceive them as mere ways of functioning, or at best as levels of organization39, of the same cognitive processes, depending on the conditions under which they take place.

Our interpretation of Kahneman and Bargh is that the authors convey an image of cognitive science where the unconscious has a primary role both in the determination and in the explanation of behavior: this can be deduced by their common focus on the evolutionary and functional primacy of unconscious processes in determining behaviors. As Bargh and Chartrand clearly state, «nonconscious mental systems perform the lion’s share of the self-regulatory burden, beneficently keeping the individual grounded in his or her current environment»40. Although it seems to be undisputable to assume that the unconscious has a role in influencing behavior, it is matter of debate whether it actually performs the lion’s share in such a task. In fact, in spite of Bargh’s and Kahneman’s remarks that most of our cognition operates at an unconscious level, their proposals seem to suggest that the role of consciousness is somehow underrated.

We suggest, in contrast to the above, that consciousness plays a decisive role not only because it is the counterpart of unconscious processes, but because it is strictly connected to the power to deliberate, even in case different streams of unconscious information processing compete to determine behavior. In fact, the deliberative role of consciousness is achieved both in preconscious and post-conscious processes41. In the first case, deliberative processes realize a sort of modulation or integration of the outcomes of different unconscious processes. In the second case, deliberative processes serve as stimuli for cognitive processes that, once activated, work in unconscious ways. In both cases, the action of deliberative processes is crucial, in that without them unconscious processes would not be founded and organized in a proper way. As a matter of fact, consciousness is both the final organizer of cognitive activity, aimed at emitting a unitary behavior (preconscious processing), or the first source of a stream of information processing which leads to action (post-conscious processing).

We wish to argue that the deliberative power of consciousness does not appear to be adequately spelled out in the authors’ proposals, even if both somehow appeal to it. If, according to Kahneman, the aim of the consciousness-unconscious distinction

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38 Evans - Stanovich, Dual-Process Theories of Higher Cognition, p. 226. See also Table 1, p. 225.
39 K. Frankish, Systems and Levels: Dual-System Theories and the Personal-Subpersonal Distinction, in Evans - Frankish, In Two Minds: Dual Processes and Beyond, pp. 89-107.
is to provide a framework for explaining behavior, consciousness and the unconscious cannot be interpreted as mere fictions aimed at simplifying the description of the workings of the mind. Rather, consciousness and the unconscious must be conceived as two distinguished qualitative systems having different aims and functions and genuinely interacting between them. More precisely, in order to give an account of consciousness as a system having the function to modulate and trigger the unconscious processes and exert an ultimate and crucial role in the determination of behavior, we must conceive of it as a system that is qualitatively different from the unconscious and is irreducible to it. In this sense, unconsciousness is surely relevant in influencing behavior, for example through the action of different streams of unconscious information processing, but consciousness is necessarily responsible in giving behavior a unitary, final form.

In summary, in our view, unconscious processes cannot be considered the main determinants of behavior because they require the triggering or the mediating function of consciousness. If we assume that consciousness is a sort of senate able to exert control over the subject’s behavior (as Bargh postulates) or as a system able to intervene for modifying a certain output expressed in form of a judgment or a behavior (as Kahneman proposes), we must acknowledge that consciousness has a primary role in the determination of behavior. In fact, both the senate and System 2 have the last word on effectively determining behavior. Our opinion is that a comprehensive account of higher cognitive processes is required in order to explore the fundamental role of consciousness and its connections with the unconscious, emphasizing those aspects which differentiate the unconscious from conscious information processing. This is crucial for us, since this outlook would involve the inclusion of central, but still neglected, aspects of human information processing in the domain of cognitive sciences, namely those connected to subjectivity. Bargh’s and Kahneman’s theoretical attempts to provide an explanatory account in full third-person terms appear nevertheless unable to clarify how consciousness intervene on the unconscious and how it determines the observable behavior. Indeed, the deliberative and coordinative role we attribute to consciousness cannot be adequately accountable by assuming a third-person perspective, but involves taking a specific perspective accountable in first-person. According to this view, a person must be conceived of as having a peculiar point of view towards the world and his or her mind that belongs only to himself or herself. This involves that the knowledge concerning the level of subjectivity (characterized by perspective taking) is not reducible to the knowledge concerning unconscious mechanisms. We argue, moreover, that subjectivity deserves more attention from scholars interested in human mental processes. Although we think that interpreting Bargh’s and Kahneman’s models in this light should permit to make their proposals more consistent, it is clear that this implies a detachment from an ideal of cognitive science or psychology as a natural science, an ideal that most cognitive psychologists appear to be enthusiastic to accept. As the psychologist Evans clearly points out, «it borders in the mystical (or at least Cartesian dualism) to think consciousness as some kind of “mind stuff” that has powers of causation» and «the only basis for […] [postulating conscious-
ness as having a deliberative power] is common sense or folk psychology»⁴². Our assessment of Bargh’s and Kahneman’s models of mind has shown that the attempts to exclude or underestimate the role of consciousness are far from satisfying in that they lead to incomplete explanations of behavioral and mental phenomena. Thus, the issue at stake here is whether the exclusion or underestimation of consciousness, as an entity distinct from unconsciousness, can actually lead to a solid psychological science: we believe this is not the case. In conclusion, we argue that cognitive sciences need to further expand the study of consciousness and, consequently, subjectivity, in order to adequately account for a full explanation of human behavior.

Abstract

One of the most common dichotomies in psychology is that of consciousness and unconsciousness. Various theoretical proposals dealing with this dichotomy are available and this diversity reflects a certain elusiveness of these concepts. Such a situation turns out to be problematic, in that critical analyses of this dichotomy rarely progress towards a specific theory or position but, instead, refer to a wide class of theories which in essence deal to the dichotomy in the same manner. In order to avoid this problem, this paper addresses Bargh’s and Kahneman’s proposals on the conscious-unconsciousness distinction and their relations. On the basis of such an analysis, our aim is to assess how conscious processes are influential in explaining human behaviour, despite the emphasis placed on the unconscious dimension. This paper proposes to closely examine consciousness and subjectivity, in that they are fundamental dimensions for explaining the unitary nature of human behaviour.

Keywords: Philosophy of Psychology, Consciousness-Unconsciousness, Subjectivity