

Aqsa Maheen

CONSCIOUSNESS, SELF-AWARENESS, AND THE ENIGMA OF “I”

Tutor: PhD, associate professor, Poznjakova O.L.

Department of Philosophy and Political Studies

Belarusian State Medical University, Minsk

This paper ventures into one of philosophy’s deepest enigmas: the nature of “I.” What does it truly mean to say “I am”? Who, or what, is the self that utters these words – and can it ever be fully known? At the heart of this inquiry lies a paradox: the conscious subject, attempting to turn its gaze inward, only to find that the more it examines itself, the more elusive it gets.

Tracing a lineage from Descartes’ cogito to contemporary neurophilosophy, this work interrogates the foundations of self-awareness and its unsettling implications. Engaging with thinkers such as Kant, Metzinger, Damasio, and Dennett, it explores whether the self is a metaphysical core, a narrative fiction, or a byproduct of neural recursion. Recent advances in cognitive science and psychophilosophy are examined to question whether consciousness creates the self – or merely stages its performance. However, the “I” problem is more than a cognitive puzzle; it is an existential challenge. Does self-awareness isolate us within ourselves, or open a path to authentic freedom? Is the self a refuge of meaning – or an illusion we cannot live without? This paper argues that the self is not a singular essence but a shifting constellation of memory, embodiment, and language – a structure that reflects and distorts itself in the same moment.

To confront the “I” is to stand at the threshold between presence and absence, certainty and mystery. In trying to grasp what we are, we reveal what we can never fully know. Perhaps, it is in this endless pursuit that the human spirit finds its depth.