

Consciousness and the Pseudonoumenal

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Abstract

We define the pseudonoumenal world as our best current phenomenal model of the unknowable noumenal world (cf. Kant, 1781). We argue that unlike other scientific objects, consciousness must logically be noumenal. Noumena are unknowable but pragmatically we should believe our best pseudonoumenal model to be true. Consciousness may therefore be identified with an element of our pseudonoumenal model. Parsimony suggests that identity with an already-postulated pseudonoumenon (property dualism) is more likely than an identity with a newly-postulated pseudonoumenon (substance dualism) if and only if we can empirically observe a correlation. This lends philosophical support to pseudonoumenal identity theories such as Orch-OR (Hameroff & Penrose, 1996) and physical information identities.

This is a condensed presentation of (Fox, 2001).

Consciousness

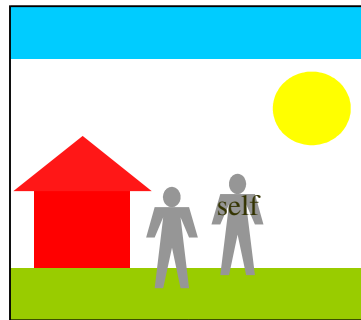
I define ‘my consciousness’ as the first-person feeling that is common to the experiences that I have when I am awake or dreaming. I assume that others have similar feelings so are able to understand this definition. Once one possesses the concept ‘my consciousness’, one may then draw an analogy between oneself and others in order to construct concepts of their consciousness. By generalizing all these concepts of other people’s consciousnesses, we define the concept ‘consciousness’.

This definition is based *purely* on first-person experience. Consciousness, under this definition, has *no function*. Empirically, consciousness may turn out to correlate with functions, or with behaviors or with objects, but that is incidental to the definition.

Phenomena

The experience of consciousness is that of a self and other objects in a world, e.g. as

shown below. These objects are *phenomena* and the world is one's *phenomenal world*. Different people may have different phenomenal worlds and construct different phenomenal objects in them.

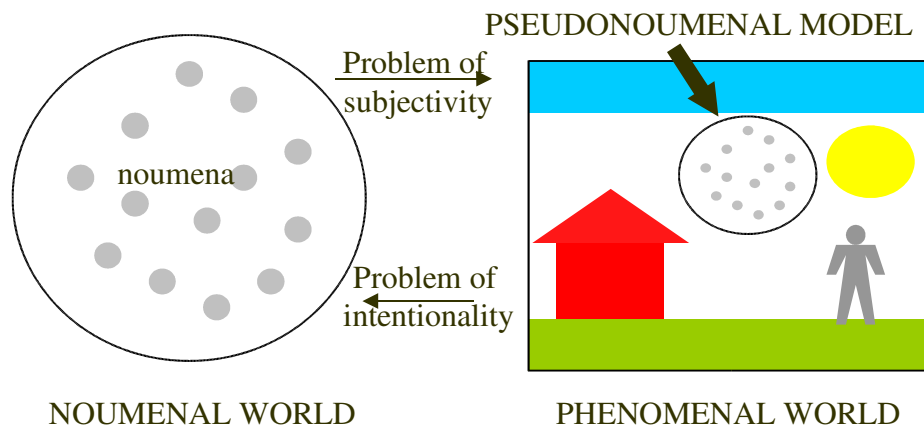


PHENOMENAL WORLD

We construct phenomena that are useful to us. Examples of phenomena include houses, cups, tables, molecules, atoms, love and the self. Everything we perceive is a phenomenon.

Noumena and phenomenal pseudonoumena

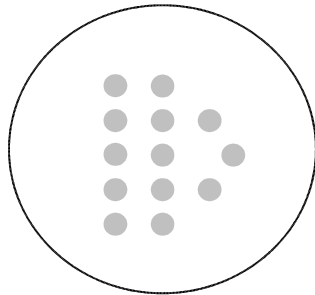
In addition to our individual phenomenal worlds, we find it useful to believe in the existence of an observer-independent world called the *noumenal* world, populated by entities called noumena. By definition, noumena are not perceivable as they exist outside of any phenomenology. Pragmatically, at any point in time we have a best phenomenal model of what we think is noumenal. We call such models *pseudonoumenal* models. Historical pseudonoumenal models have included the four Greek elements, atoms, the Mind of God, quarks, the Orch-OR process and superstrings.



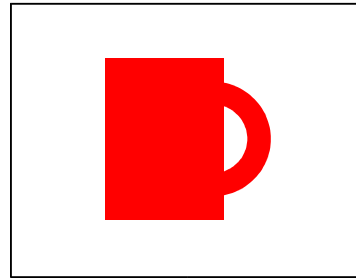
Building on (Velmans, 2000) the above figure shows the relationships between the noumenal, phenomenal and pseudonoumenal worlds. The noumenal world exists independently of any observer. A phenomenal world exists in the mind of an observer, and may contain a pseudonoumenal model of the noumenal world.

Compound objects are phenomenal

Roughly, the noumenal world is the set of all entities which are *fundamental*. For example, cups do not noumenally exist. We can perceive a cup as a single phenomenal object, but we know that noumenally, there is nothing more to the cup than its noumenal parts. If we think, for example, that quarks are fundamental, then we accept that we are noumenally just looking at a bunch of quarks – there is no additional cup entity in the noumenal world. The cup object exists only phenomenally:



NOUMENAL WORLD



PHENOMENAL WORLD

Anything which is not fundamental does not exist noumenally. For, like the cup, if there is a way of breaking it into subcomponents, then we see that nothing more than the subcomponents is needed in the noumenal world. We know that phenomena that are not pseudonoumenal are just useful fictions. Cups, handles, brains, neurons, functions and behaviours are all useful fictions – we construct them as phenomena because they enable us to make useful predictions.

Consciousness is noumenal

Unlike cups, brains and functions, **consciousness noumenally exists**. It is not just a phenomenal predictive fiction. Like Descartes, I know that it exists non-fictitiously because I *am* it. **I am not a fiction!** (Furthermore, even if I was a fiction, consciousness could still not be phenomenal, because phenomena exist *inside* consciousness, and an entity logically cannot be identical to something inside itself.) Consciousness is therefore a noumenon – the *only* noumenon that we know directly.

Pseudonoumenal identity

The ‘hard problem’ (Chalmers, 1995) of subjectivity is to account for the existence of the phenomenal world *within* the noumenal world. (Conversely, the problem of ‘intentionality’ is sometimes conceived of as accounting for referential links the other way.) As we may never know the noumenal directly, the hard problem in practice is to account for the existence of the phenomenal world within the *pseudonoumenal* model. We must have something in the pseudonoumenal world which is identical to consciousness, and the goal of the science of consciousness is to find that identity.

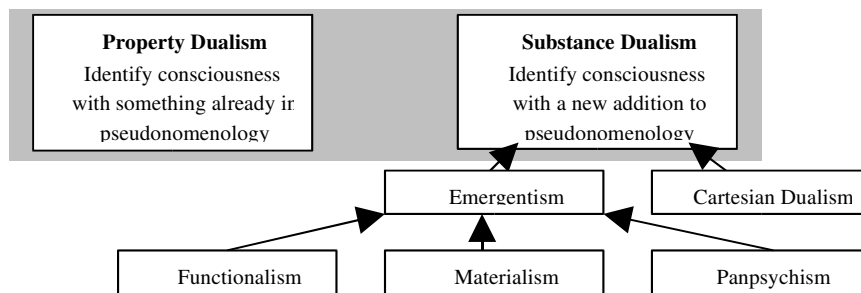
There are two ways to make an identity:

1. Property dualism: Identify consciousness with an existing pseudonoumenon
2. Substance dualism: Postulate the existence of a new pseudonoumenon, identify consciousness with it, and provide bridging laws to connect existing pseudonoumena to it.

As in any other science, parsimony favors the former if and only if an empirical correlation can be found to base the identity upon. The content of contemporary pseudonoumenology is debatable but for example, the Orch-OR model hypothesizes a correlation between a pseudonoumenon (objective state reduction) and consciousness, which may be testable using anaesthetic experiments. If such a correlation could be found, this would provide a highly plausible pseudonoumenal identity.

Reducing the ‘isms’

We now demonstrate how some popular identity positions all reduce to substance dualism in the pseudonoumenalist view. Whilst this does not rule out these theories, it renders them less parsimonious than a well-correlated property dualist theory, because they need to postulate additional entities in the pseudonoumenal world.



Recall that we cannot identify consciousness with a phenomenon because phenomena are fictions and I am not a fiction.

Emergentism is the view that ‘something extra’ comes into existence when a group of parts are brought together, and that something is identified with consciousness. However emergent entities are only phenomena, not noumena: for example the body and the handle of a cup are perceived phenomenally as a new cup object. There is no new observer-independent noumenon that appears – unless one constructs ‘strong emergent’ laws of physics to postulate the creation of such a noumenon at certain conditions. However this would be a new substance and so strong emergentism reduces to substance dualism.

Similarly, *macroscopic materialist* theories (e.g. identifying consciousness with whole brains, neurons, or coffee cups) are incoherent to the pseudonoumenalist because they try to identity a fictional phenomenon with a noumenon. (Recall, consciousness is noumenal because I exist and I am not a fiction.) Such theories can be rescued by extending them into strong emergent theories (e.g. whenever a brain exists in such a configuration, then a new physical law brings a dualist substance into noumenal existence) but that leads back to substance dualism.

Panpsychism claims that some or all groups of noumena are consciousness. However the concept of ‘group of noumena’ is a phenomenal construct (otherwise the ‘group’ part would be redundant as the group would be noumenal already). Again panpsychism can be rescued by postulating new noumena corresponding to such groups, and again this leads back to substance dualism.

Pseudonoumenalism and the ‘Hard Problem’

Pseudonoumenalism accepts that we can never make completely certain links between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds. However it replaces that task with the easier task of making an identity *within* the phenomenal world: between a pseudonoumenon and the presence of the phenomenal world itself. This is no worse than identities achieved by other sciences, for example, the pseudonoumenal identity of inertial and relativistic mass. As in any science, it is possible for the pseudonoumenal model and identities to be falsified and improved; but as in any other science we should pragmatically believe in

our current best theory. For example, if experiments with anaesthetics suggest an identity between a pseudonoumenon and consciousness, then we should have confidence in using new anaesthetics designed on the basis of that theory. The pseudonoumenalist is as happy to use consciousness-affecting technology – based on his best model of the pseudonoumenal – as he is to use aeroplanes based on his best theory of aeronautics.

Acknowledgments

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