Consciousness #11

NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

Notices

There will be no seminar next Wednesday 10 Feb

Seminar 11

1. Recap: unconscious belief

2. What is a propositional attitude?

3. The subject's 'world view'

1. Recap: unconscious belief

Distinction between unconscious belief and conscious thought

Different ontological categories: states and events

Events and processes = occurrences

Beliefs

Beliefs as relations to a propositions

If we take this literally, then there must be a fixed number of beliefs

How plausible is it that we have a fixed number of beliefs?

Trivial beliefs: do we have individual dispositions to answer questions with yes or no?

Delusions, children and animals: unclear what the proposition is which is believed

Hesperus and Phosphorus

The ancient astronomers believed that Hesperus was not Phosphorus

Did theie belief involve a relation to the modes of presentation *Hesperus* and *Phosphorus*?

Or did it involve a relation to the planet itself?

Or to some set of possible worlds?

Or all of these?

2. What is a propositional attitude?

Standard view: not just beliefs

Any state of mind attributed in the '**S** Vs that **p**' mode

Propositional attitudes

S desires that p

S hopes that p

S fears that p

S intends that p

S wishes that p

etc.

Origin of terminology

'Belief is a certain attitude towards propositions, which is called knowledge when they are true, error when they are false'

Bertrand Russell, 'Meinong's theory of complexes and assumptions' *Mind* 1904: 523

'Propositional attitude' from Russell, *Analysis of Mind*, 1921

What are propositions?

Russell: propositions are made of worldly objects and properties

Frege: propositions ('thoughts' *Gedanken*) are made up of senses or 'modes of presentation'

Lewis/Stalnaker: propositions are sets of possible worlds

Which proposition were the ancient astronomers related to?

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Chalmers on content pluralism

'One should be a pluralist about representational content. It may be that experiences can be associated with contents of many different sorts by different relations: we can call such relations content relations. For example, there may be one content relation that associates experiences with object-involving contents, and another which associates experiences with existential contents. … On this view, there may not be such a thing as the representational content of a perceptual experience. Instead, a given experience may be associated with multiple representational contents via different content relations.'

David Chalmers 'Perception and the Fall from Eden' (2006)

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So what distinguishes individual beliefs, if not the unique proposition they are related to?

Propositions as models

Field's 1978 project: to give 'a materialistically adequate account of the relation between a person and a proposition'

Content pluralism suggests that this gets things the wrong way around

'there is little mileage in discussing whether *Gedanken* or Russellian propositions best match our pre-theoretic notions of saying or believing the same thing. These entities are better conceived as constructs, postulated for various theoretical purposes in philosophy, linguistics and psychology. The proper topic of debate, then, is whether a given construct serves a specified theoretical purpose. It is entirely possible that Fregean *Gedanken* might best serve one such purpose, Russellian propositions another, and indeed Stalnakerian propositions (i.e. sets of possible words) a third.'

Ian Rumfitt, 'Truth and Meaning' (2014)

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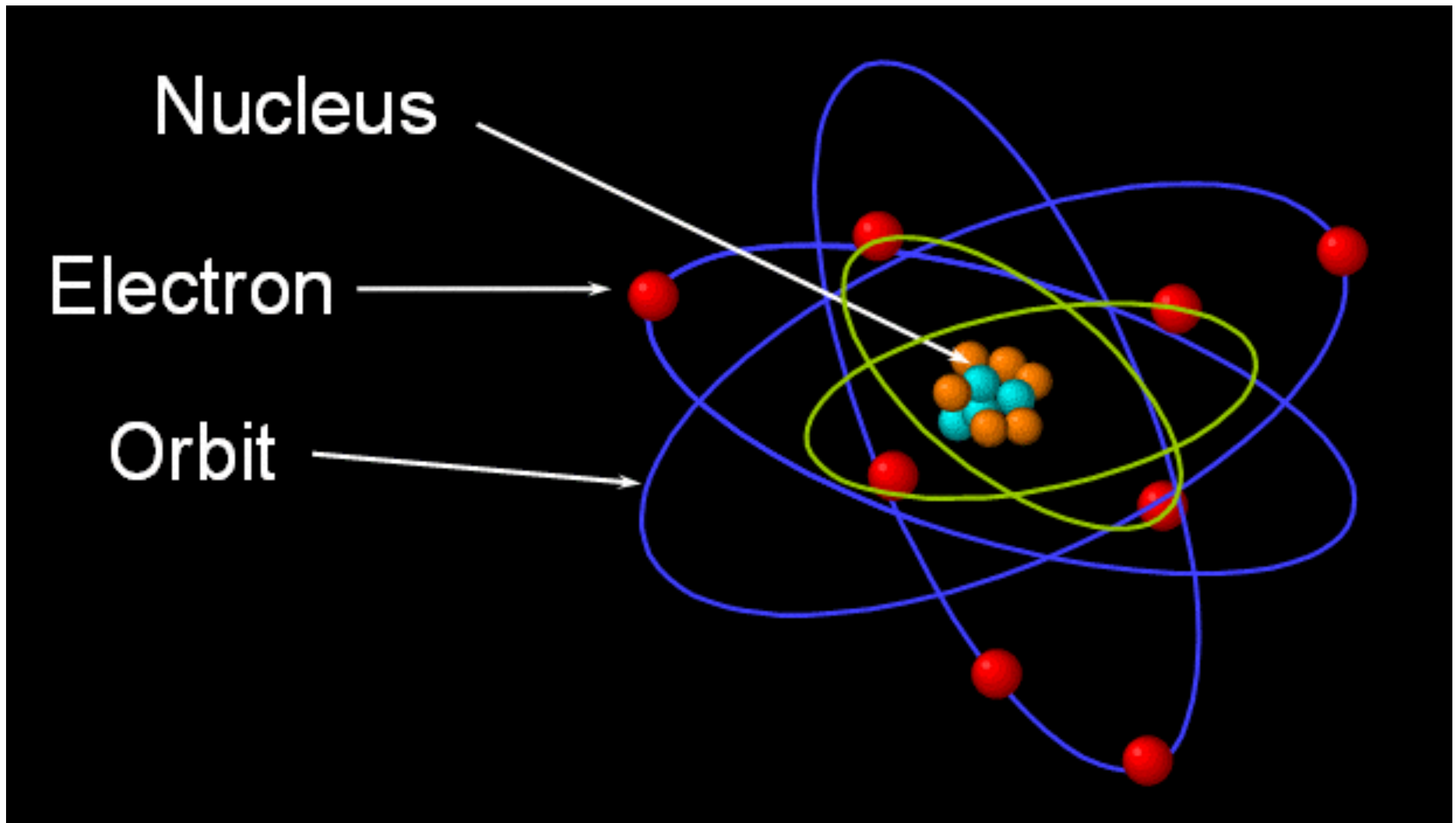So what theoretical purpose does belief ascription serve?

The usual answer: explaining a subject's behaviour

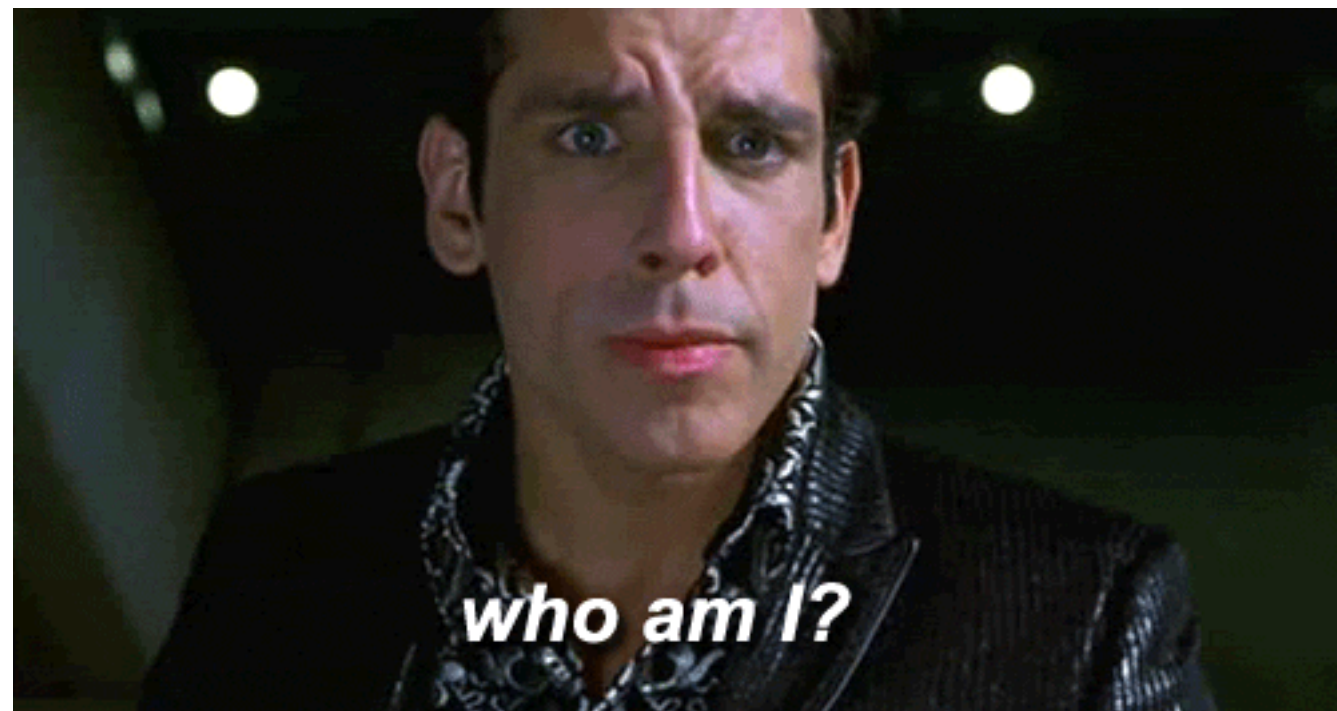Another answer: to describe their state of mind

Belief ascriptions **model** unconscious psychological reality

'Model' in the philosophy of science sense

Like this, for example…

…rather than this

Lewis's analogy

Believing that p

Weighing 2 kilos

'an indirect theoretical investigation of a real-world phenomenon'

Michael Weisberg 'Who is a Modeler?' (2007)

But what is the real-world phenomenon modelled by belief-ascriptions?

What is the psychological reality?

3. The subject's 'world view'

Countable individual beliefs

vs.

The subject's total unconscious psychological orientation towards the world

= the subject's 'world view'

A world view may be:

incomplete

indeterminate

unspecific

contradictory

confused

A more realistic picture of psychological reality than the standard picture of individual belief states

Modelling also explains why we are inclined to attribute unrealistic features to beliefs

Is the world view a 'belief **set**'?

Or is its content a **set** of possible worlds?

Unconscious content is the content of the subject's world view

What about conscious content?

Conclusions

(1) Propositions are used to model aspects of psychological reality ('semantic content')

(2) Psychological reality consists of the subject's unconscious world view and episodes in the stream of consciousness

(3) The content of a world view is the totality of your unconscious mental representation

to be continued….

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