

Consciousness #14



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



John
Templeton
Foundation

newdirectionsproject.com

Next term

There will be three meetings of the seminar next term: 4, 11 and 18 May

New Directions workshop, 'Non-physicalist conceptions of consciousness' 24-26 May, Trinity Hall

Seminar 14

1. Recap: semantic and phenomenal content
2. Content and vehicle
3. An illustration: the content of pictures

1. Recap: phenomenal and semantic content

Semantic content = propositions model aspects of conscious or unconscious psychological reality

Phenomenal content = how things are actually represented to the subject in a particular conscious episode

The objects of intentional states

The object of an intentional state is what it is in the world (or not) that is represented by the state

Most intentional states have many objects

The content of an intentional state

= **how a mental state represents its objects** in a given psychological mode (e.g. belief, perception etc.)

this applies to semantic and phenomenal content, in my senses

Frege's distinction

reference (Bedeutung)

sense (Sinn)

idea (Vorstellung)





Sense, reference and idea

reference = the moon

sense = the image in the telescope

idea = image on the retina

‘the inner world of sense-impressions, of creations of [the] imagination, or sensations, of feelings and moods, a world of inclinations, wishes and decisions ... I want to collect all these, with the exception of decisions, under the word “idea”.’

Gottlob Frege ‘The Thought’ (1918-19)

NB The word translated here as ‘idea’ is *Vorstellung*, also translated as ‘representation’ (Kant) and ‘presentation’ (Brentano)

Some attributions (models) are better at describing how the subject's conscious mind is configured (the subject's **ideas**)

The facts about how the subject's conscious mind is configured are facts about what I call **phenomenal content**

2. Content and ‘vehicle’ ctd.

For semantic content, there is a distinction between the content (how the world is represented) and the vehicle of the content

Semantics: a reminder

The semantic content of a sentence = the sentence's **propositional content**, or **truth-conditions**

The semantic content of sub-sentential constituents = their **systematic contribution** to truth-conditions

(e.g. objects, functions, sets etc.)

Words and their meanings

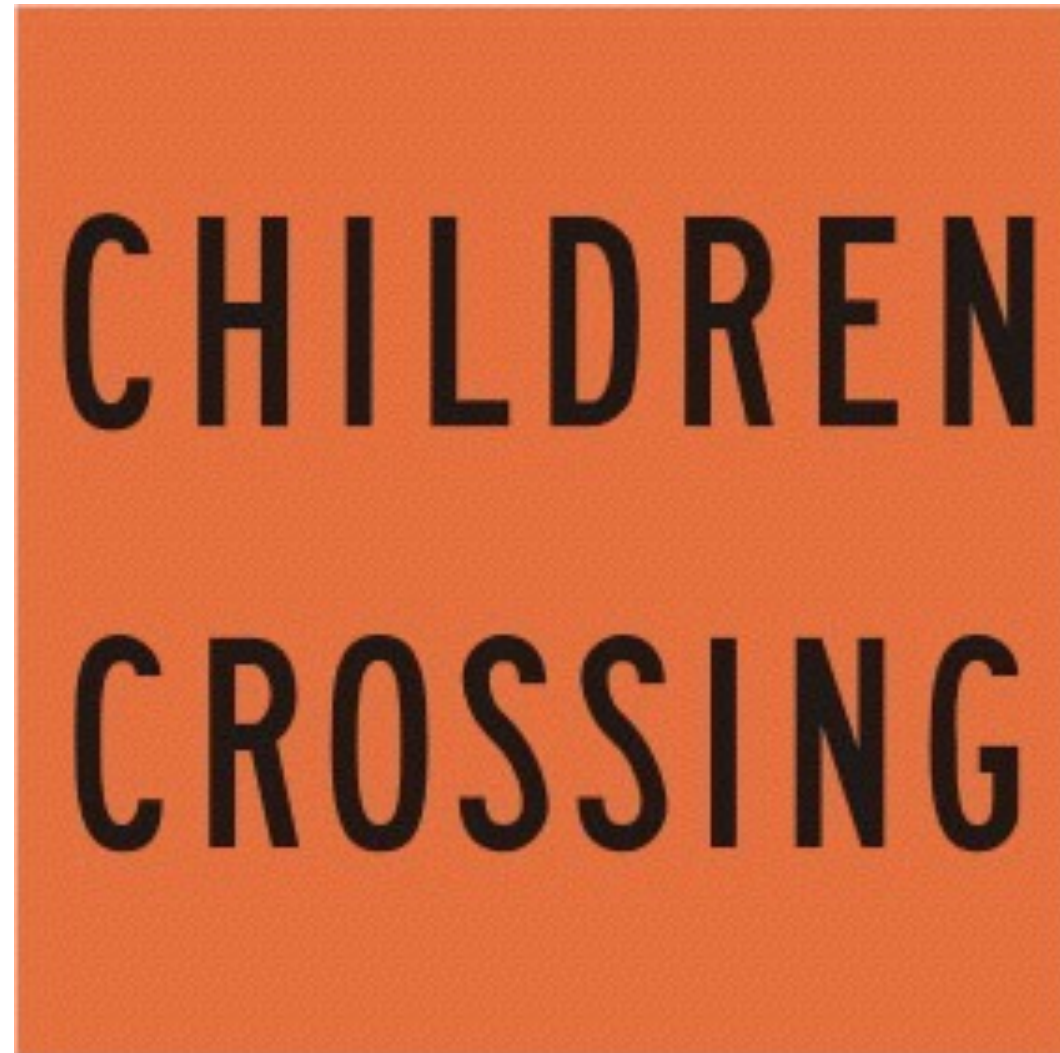
Words can be identified independently of their meanings

Words are the vehicles of meaning

Other kinds of vehicle



Same message, different vehicle



Vehicle and medium

The difference between (e.g.) words and images = a difference in 'vehicle'

The difference between (e.g.) neural structures and silicon-based structures in a computer = a difference in 'medium'

See Tim Crane, *The Mechanical Mind* 3rd edition 2016, chapter 8

The message and the medium

The same content can be represented in different vehicles (e.g. sentences and pictures)

The same content in the same vehicle can be realised in different media (e.g. brain and computer)

Unconscious content

Unconscious mental representations may have vehicles

Fodor's 'language of thought' hypothesis is a view about the structure of vehicles

The connectionist hypothesis is a different view

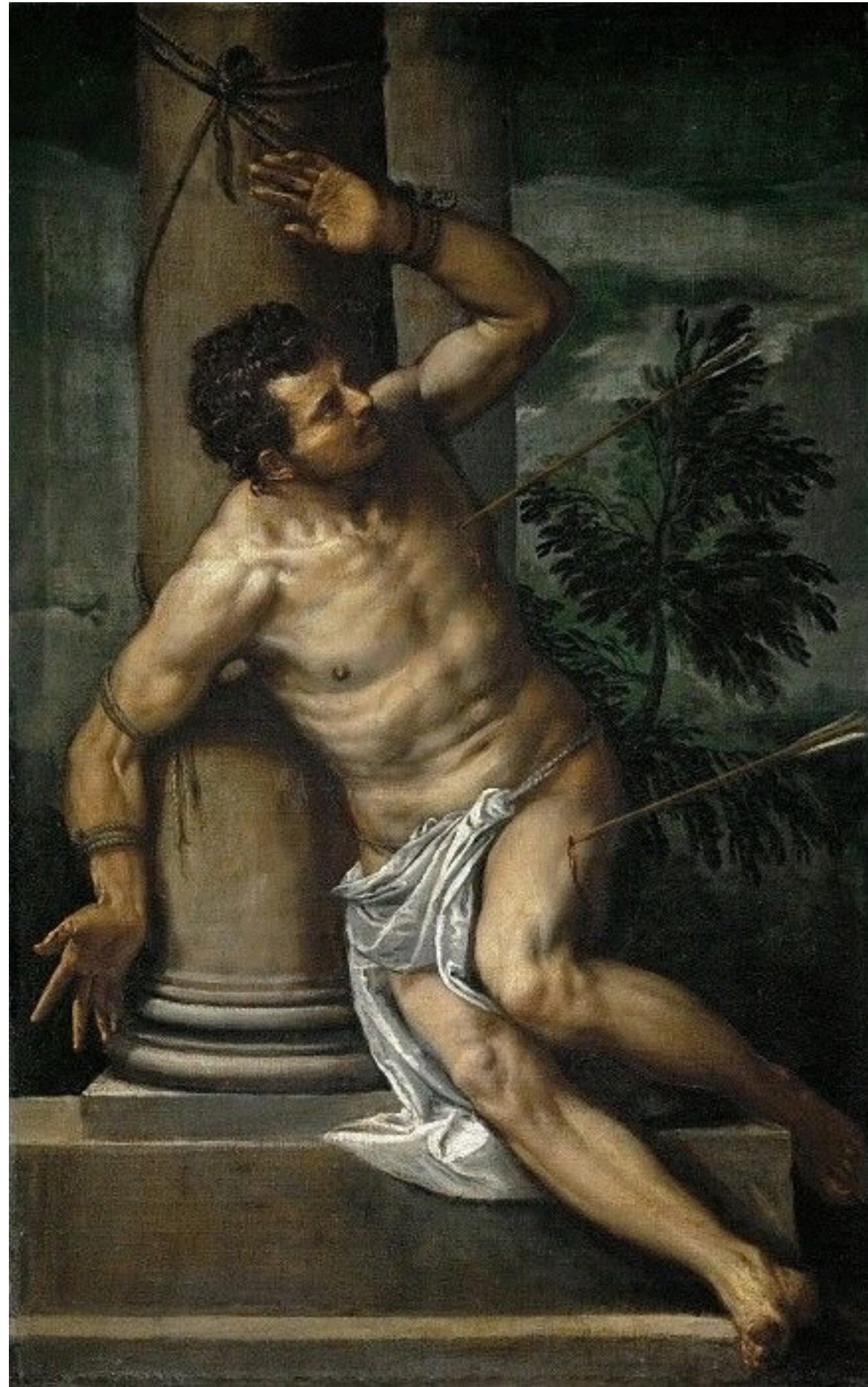
Conscious content: a hypothesis

For a conscious mental episode, there is no distinction between the vehicle and the content

Words going through your mind, images, associations etc. are part of the content

3. An illustration: the content of pictures

Different particular pictures can have the same semantic content







Semantic content of pictures

The proposition associated with the picture by an act of interpretation

Different pictorial vehicles can be associated with the content: *St Sebastian was martyred by being shot by arrows*

Phenomenal content of pictures

The phenomenal content of pictures is the total way the picture represents its objects

The different pictures represent the same object in different ways



Conscious thought

Does this have an analogy with conscious thinking?

Forthcoming attractions

Pictures and Propositions

Institute of Philosophy, University of London

June 13-14, 2016

To be continued...

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