

Consciousness #10



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



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Foundation

newdirectionsproject.com

Notices

1. There will be no seminar on Wednesday 10 Feb

Seminar 10

1. Recap: beliefs, and conscious thinking
2. Conscious sensory experience and conscious thought
3. Conscious vs unconscious cognition

1. Recap: beliefs, events and states

Psychological reality

Psychological capacities and their manifestations or exercises

Some manifestations of these capacities are conscious, some are not

Belief

Belief is always unconscious; there is no conscious belief

But we can bring to mind what we believe

What does it mean to bring something to consciousness?

- (1) Knowledge of belief that is already there (what is known as 'self-knowledge')
- (2) Making up one's mind: judgement
- (3) Merely considering a proposition

Kent Bach on thinking and believing

‘Philosophers sometimes distinguish between occurrent and dispositional senses of “believe”, but I will use the term “believe” only for the dispositional sense and reserve the word “think” for the would-be occurrent sense. I say “would-be” because I deny that occurrent believing is believing at all, or in my terminology, that thinking that p is either necessary or sufficient for believing that p...

‘Unlike thoughts, beliefs are states, not occurrences.’

Kent Bach ‘An Analysis of Self-Deception’ (1981) 35-4

Thinking and believing

Conscious thinking is not the same as believing

One is an occurrence, the other a disposition

So what is conscious thinking?

The stream of consciousness

“Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as ‘chain’ or ‘train’ do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instant. It is nothing jointed: it flows. A ‘river’ or a ‘stream’ are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.”

William James, *The Principles of Psychology* 1890

The connotation of ‘stream’

- (1) Occurrence — not a ‘standing state’
- (2) Flow or continuity

2. Conscious sensory experience and conscious thought

Is consciousness a purely sensory phenomenon?

Sensory = pertaining to the senses, e.g. the senses of sight, touch, smell etc.; or to bodily sensation

Sensory consciousness is (perhaps) the dominant paradigm of consciousness

Are thoughts in the stream of consciousness?

Thoughts are event-like things ('occurrences' or 'occurents')

When a thought occurs in the stream of consciousness, is this because it is associated with sensory phenomena (e.g. images or words going through your head)?

Cognitive phenomenology

Is there a phenomenology of cognition?

If there is, is it reducible to sensory phenomenology?

If not, how should it be understood?

(See Tim Bayne and Michelle Montague (eds.)
Cognitive Phenomenology 2012)

Phenomenal intentionality

A different idea: there is some intentionality (mental representation) which derives from the phenomenal properties of mental states

Here 'phenomenal property' is understood independently of the idea of intentionality

(See Uriah Kriegel (ed.) Phenomenal Intentionality 2011)

The experience of understanding

Consider the difference between hearing a sentence which you understand and the very same sentence when you do not understand it

Surely there is a phenomenological difference

(See Galen Strawson, *Mental Reality* 1995)

3. Conscious and unconscious cognition

What is the difference between conscious and unconscious cognition?

For example, between conscious thought and unconscious belief?

The question of belief

What is a belief?

A standard view: beliefs are relations to propositions

Standard ascription: '**S** believes that **p**'

Exhibit A

Propositional attitude attributions 'appear to relate people to non-linguistic entities called propositions'. So any materialist who ... admits that beliefs and desires are relations between people and propositions must give a materialistically adequate account of believing, desiring, and so forth'

Hartry Field 'Mental Representation' (1978)

Exhibit B

‘Propositional attitudes should be analyzed as relations. ...
“Believes” **looks like a two-place relation**, and it would be nice if
our theory of belief permitted us to save the appearances’

Jerry Fodor ‘Propositional Attitudes’ (1986)

Individual beliefs as relations

For every belief you have, there is a proposition which is the content of that belief

The essence of the relational view

For any proposition, either you believe it or don't believe it

(ignore degrees of belief for simplicity)

How many beliefs?

Does every believer have a particular number of beliefs?

Or are some beliefs 'implicit', and some 'explicit'?

What does this mean?

Questions for the standard view

1. Trivial beliefs
2. Contradictory beliefs
3. Partially understood ideas
4. Delusions
5. Beliefs of animals and small children

But even in the simplest cases...

Did the ancient astronomers believe that Hesperus was not Phosphorus?

What proposition were they related to?

To be continued...

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