

Consciousness #6



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



John
Templeton
Foundation

newdirectionsproject.com

Seminar 6

1. Recap: Consciousness, what it's like and the phenomenal
2. Phenomenology and metaphysics
3. What about 'qualia'?

Some familiar philosophical definitions

- 'What it's like'
- The phenomenal
- Awareness
- The qualitative
- Qualia

1. Consciousness, what it's like and the phenomenal

What are the central concepts that we need in order to describe consciousness?

‘What it's like’ — good but uninformative

The phenomenal — not just the sensory, if we take ‘phenomenal’ in the etymological sense

2. Phenomenology and metaphysics

A phenomenology may involve metaphysical distinctions (e.g. the distinction between events and states)

A phenomenology may also incorporate psychological discoveries (e.g. blindsight, neglect, inattentional blindness etc.)

Phenomenology is not 'first-person introspection' (see Dennett's idea of *heterophenomenology*)

What phenomenology does not involve

- Phenomenology should be neutral on physicalism and dualism
- If physicalism and dualism are talking about the same thing, then there must be a common ground in their conception of the mental

Physicalism and dualism: a real issue?

- John Searle: the dispute between physicalism cannot be properly formulated, because the mental is typically 'defined' as something non-physical, and the physical as something non-mental
- Reply: this is not how physicalists define their views (see Lewis, 'Reduction of Mind')

How physicalists and dualists actually argue

- NOT from the phenomenology of mind to the truth of physicalism or dualism
- Consider: the conceivability arguments, the knowledge argument, the explanatory gap

The knowledge argument

- (i) Mary knows all the physical facts about colour in the room
 - (ii) Mary comes to learn something new when she sees red for the first time
 - (iii) What Mary learns is a fact
- CONCLUSION: Not all facts are physical facts

Does this beg the question?

- What does the knowledge argument assume about consciousness?

The conceivability argument

- The conceivability argument is a development of Descartes's argument in the 6th Meditation, for the 'real distinction' between mind and body. Descartes argued that because he could conceive of his mind and his body existing separately, then they are 'really distinct'.
- The contemporary version of the argument, well formulated by David Chalmers (though not original to him) relies on the idea of a zombie, a creature physically indistinguishable from you or me but lacking consciousness.

The argument

- (i) Zombies are conceivable
 - (ii) What is conceivable is possible
 - (iii) Zombies are possible
 - (iv) If Zombies are possible, physicalism is false
- CONCLUSION: physicalism is false

Non-phenomenological premises

- What is conceivable is possible

3. What about qualia?

- Where does the concept of qualia fit in?
- 'Qualia' = plural of 'quale', *quality* in Latin

Block on qualia

“The greatest chasm in the philosophy of mind — maybe even all of philosophy — divides two perspectives on consciousness. The two perspectives differ on whether there is anything in the phenomenal character of conscious experience that goes beyond the intentional, the cognitive and the functional. A convenient terminological handle on the dispute is whether there are ‘qualia’, or qualitative properties of conscious experience. Those who think that the phenomenal character of conscious experience goes beyond the intentional, the cognitive and the functional believe in qualia.”

Ned Block “Mental Paint” (2003)

Qualia: the dispute

- Some philosophers think what Block says is obvious
- Some think it is easily refutable: Tye, Dennett think there are no qualia
- What is going on?

Disagreement about the obvious

- How can there be such disagreement about the obvious?
- One possibility: the inner lives of philosophers are very different from one another
- Another possibility: they mean something different!

But don't the arguments assume qualia?

- The knowledge argument?
- The conceivability arguments?
- The explanatory gap?



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