



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



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Foundation

newdirectionsproject.com

Seminar 9

1. The story so far, and what is to come
2. What is a non-physicalist theory of consciousness?
3. Consciousness and the varieties of mental states

1. The story so far

Physicalism and reductionism

The role of qualia in understanding consciousness

Physicalism

Physicalism in the proper sense is reductive — either ontologically or explanatorily

Consciousness

Consciousness should not be understood in terms of
'qualia'

This term

The general form of a non-physicalist theory of consciousness

The varieties of consciousness I: thought, perception and sensation

The varieties of consciousness II: consciousness and self-consciousness

2. What is a non-physicalist theory of consciousness?

What is a *physicalist* theory of consciousness?

One that assumes ontological reduction or reductive explanation

Non-physicalism about consciousness

Reject ontological reduction: consciousness is a genuinely distinct real feature of certain beings

Do not assume explanatory reduction: maybe there can be an explanatory reduction, but this is not a requirement for a theory of consciousness

Genuinely distinct reality

When the mind evolved, something genuinely new came into existence

What kind of thing is this?

Psychological reality

Organisms

Psychological capacities or faculties: perception, memory, thought, reasoning, imagination, emotion etc.

Consciousness is not *itself* a capacity or faculty

Contrast Humean supervenience

Human supervenience ... is the doctrine that all there is to the world is a vast mosaic of local matters of particular fact, just one little thing after another. ... We have geometry: a system of external relations of spatiotemporal distances between points ... And at those points we have local qualitiesL perfectly natural intrinsic properties which need nothing bigger than a point at which to be instantiated. For short: we have an arrangement of qualities. And that is all, There is no difference without difference in the arrangement of qualities. All else supervenes on that.

David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers Volume II* (1986)

Psychological capacities

Psychological capacities and their exercises

The exercises of capacities can be events — e.g. the event of listening to something

They can also be states — e.g. a belief can be the product of reasoning

What ontological category is consciousness?

Consciousness is not a capacity, nor the upshot or exercise of a capacity

But some exercises of psychological capacities result in states or events some of which are conscious

Consciousness is a property of mental states or events

‘Creature consciousness’

A creature is conscious when they are in states, or are the subject of events, which are conscious

3. Consciousness and the varieties of mental state

One misleading connotation of 'qualia' talk:
consciousness is a single kind of property

But is consciousness the same thing in the case of
sensation, as in the case of thought?

Divide and rule

Mellor: conscious sensations have qualia; conscious belief is second-order belief

(‘Conscious Belief’ *PAS* 1977)

What is conscious belief?

‘A relational conception R is that of belief only if the following condition is met:

‘(F) The thinker finds the first-person content that he stands in R to the content p primitively compelling whenever he has the conscious belief that p, and he finds it compelling because he has that conscious belief.’

Christopher Peacocke *A Study of Concepts* 1993:
163

What is conscious belief?

What is belief?

A persisting commitment to the truth of a proposition

Persisting throughout changes in consciousness

Belief and conscious belief

If belief is essentially a persisting commitment to the truth of a proposition, then how can belief ever be conscious?

This applies as much to 'second-order' as to 'first-order' belief

The right conclusion

Belief is never conscious

But we can bring what we believe to consciousness

Conscious thought

Thinking is not the same as believing

The conscious thought that p is not the conscious belief that p

Consciously thinking that p can be bringing what you believe to consciousness

What does it mean to bring something to consciousness?

(1) 'Self-knowledge'

(2) Making up one's mind: judgement

(3) Merely considering a proposition

Events and states again

Conscious thinking is an event

Are all conscious mental phenomena events?

To be continued

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