

PRESENTATION AND THE ONTOLOGY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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Broader project:

Consciousness and Presence

- On classical phenomenological treatments, consciousness is **presentational** – it presents something as something – and also **self-presentational** – in doing so, it presents itself.
- As classical phenomenology has also emphasized, the presentational and self-presentational aspects of consciousness are plausibly intimately related to the **ontology and phenomenology** of the **world** as such.
- Can the logical and phenomenological structure of conscious intentionality be clarified in terms of this **presence** and **reflexivity**, and its apparent **irreducibility** thereby explained? If so, then consciousness and conscious intentionality cannot be accounted for by means of physical, causal, behavioral, or functional explanations alone. On the other hand, the clarification of its presentational and self-presentational structure also indicates its proper place within, *or in relation to*, **the world** as described completely from a **third-person point of view**.

Presentation and the Ontology of Consciousness

- if considered in the context of recent modal and two-dimensional arguments for the falsity or limitations of physicalism, the presentational character of consciousness motivates a novel kind of ontological option for its placement in the world. This option vindicates the irreducibility of consciousness (in one sense of “irreducible”) to description or explanation in terms only of physical facts, and clarifies this irreducibility as resulting ultimately from broadly modal/semantic features of the presentation and individuation of entities across possible worlds. At the same time, it does not thereby require or invite anything like a substance or property dualism, since the features of consciousness that make for its irreducibility can also (as I shall argue) be accounted for by means of a global *monism* of substances and properties.

The presentational character of consciousness

- Minimally, conscious states present or ‘give’ something *as* something (or as being some way)
- Near-synonym to “intentional content” of consciousness, but more “active” (cf. Brentano)
- Precedents:
 - Husserl: Noematic Sense
 - Sartre: Givenness of object through adumbrations
 - Heidegger: ‘Hermeneutic’ as-structure: something presented as something
 - Frege: Mode of Presentation [Art des Gegebenseins]

Husserl: The “principle of all principles”

- “No conceivable theory can make us err with respect to the *principle of all principles: that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originarily (so to speak, in its ‘personal’ actuality) offered to us in ‘intuition’ is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there.*” (Husserl 1913[1983]: 43-44).

Two qualifications

- Presentation (in this sense) **need not depend on internal *representation*** -- it may give the object 'directly' and without mediation of cognitive, symbolic, etc. representations
- **Not necessary that either *all* or *only* conscious states have a presentational character** in this sense. Some conscious states may not present anything other than themselves; and other kinds of non-conscious intentional entities (spoken/written words, sentences, signs, pictures, etc.) may also have presentational character (in a suitably broad sense)

Consciousness and Possible Worlds

Semantics

- In its most prominent developments, reasoning about possible worlds has been used to establish conclusions about the metaphysics of modality, reference, and propositions.
- But another important line of analysis, leading to (what is today called) “two-dimensional” semantics, suggests understanding the content of consciousness in terms of possible worlds.
- Although most typically couched as a matter of “epistemic” possibilities or modalities as distinct from “metaphysical” ones, this line is actually motivated by considering the *presentational* aspects of consciousness.

Non-extensional ‘de re’ attitudes: Hintikka and ‘quantifying in’

J. Hintikka: “On the Logic of Perception” (1967)

“Semantics for Propositional Attitudes” (1969)

- Locutions such as: “knows who”, “sees what”, “has an opinion as to the identity of,” etc. are apparently *de re*: i.e., directed toward an (intentional object)
- But they may (and often do) fail to preserve truth-value under substitution of co-referring terms; so we cannot quantify over these ‘objects’ unrestrictedly
- Suggestion: we can after all handle these cases quantificationally, *if we drop the assumption that* the subject’s attitude (of knowing, seeing, etc.) be directed (only) toward a specific *real-world* individual
- Instead we require only that it be directed toward the ‘same’ individual in each of the words or situations *compatible with* the subject’s attitude

Individuating functions

- But what does ‘same’ mean here? How do we speak of individuals across different possible situations as being (perceptually or presentationally) identical?
- Answer: assume a set, \mathbf{F} , of “individuating functions” defined over the possible worlds or situations we are considering. Each of these functions \mathbf{f} will pick out, for each situation or world μ , at most one individual from that world’s domain of individuals $\mathbf{I}(\mu)$.
- The functions may be partial: at some worlds (including the actual one) there may be no individual designated.
- The individuating functions now take the role of the “individuals” previously imagined as the objects of the relevant propositional attitudes.

Failure of substitutivity of identity

- Now we can readily explain failure of substitutivity of identity (even when singular terms rather than descriptions are involved); e.g. Smith may know who Jones is (by means of identifying information, perceptual acquaintance, etc.) and trivially that Jones is Jones, without knowing that Jones is the spy (when in fact he is). This is just because in some of the worlds compatible with what Smith knows, Jones is not the spy.
- More generally, if there are there are two distinct individuating functions f_1 and f_2 , relevant to a 's attitudes involving singular terms, such that $f_1(\lambda)=f_2(\lambda)$ but not $f_1(\mu)=f_2(\mu)$, the general rule of substitutivity

$$(\forall x)(\forall y)(x=y \rightarrow (Q(x) \rightarrow Q(y)))$$

will fail with respect to a 's attitudes Q .

Individuating functions and cross-individuation

- Given this, individuating functions will often cross-identify, across possible worlds, with respect to “metaphysical” identities: e.g. when Smith perceives a man before him, but does not know who he is, the content of his perception picks out many (materially) distinct individuals.
- It is also possible that two of Smith’s attitudes cross-identify with respect to each other

Functions, 'reification', and sense data

- For some purposes we can “reify” and talk of “the” object presented in the attitude
- But this is also misleading, since the individuating functions are just functions, and may cross-cut “metaphysical” identities
- This tendency to “reify” is at the root of traditional accounts of “sense-data” and other distinctive “intentional objects”
- E.g. I perceptually identify a piece of chalk, *c*, as white; but do not recognize that it is the smallest object on the table (*s*); thus I do not recognize that *s* is white, even though $c=s$ and I (perceptually) identify *c*.
- Thus it is easy (but misleading) to conclude that there is a distinctive “object of perception” which is white but does not have the properties of the physical object

Ontological implications: no ‘intentional objects’

- Given that the perceptual (or other presentational) individuating function is just a function from worlds to objects, there is no need to suppose a distinct *kind* of entity as the “perceptual” or “intentional” one.
- To the extent that there is any reason to speak of such entities, they are just the “reified” forms of the relevant individuating functions.
- But since the ranges of these functions are just ordinary entities in the various possible worlds, there is no need for an *ontological* distinction, among entities, between “intentional” and “non-intentional” (e.g. “physical” or “material”) objects.

Presentational individuation and points of view

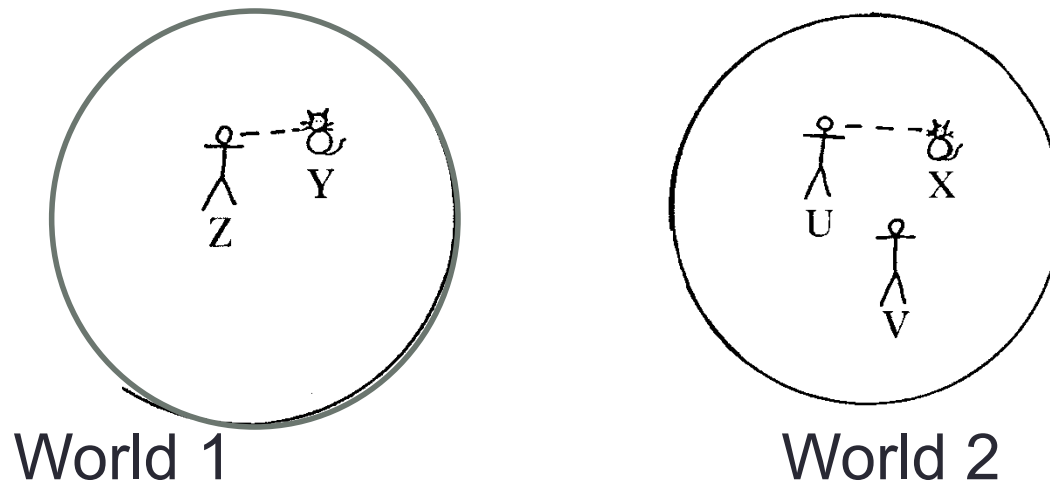
- Hintikka's analysis allows us to characterize, using the possible worlds framework, types of 'content' (including perceptual and other non-linguistic content) that are distinctively given *only* from a specific point of view (and which may be *inaccessible* from a completely objective standpoint abstracting from all specific points of view).
- Partial analogy to "indexical" characters or "modes of presentation": "*Here* it is warm"; "*Now* it is 3 o'clock".
- But by contrast with the indexical cases, the content available by means of presentational individuation is highly complex and determinate (rather than just a general rule for picking out individuals given contexts)

Inaccessibility from third-person standpoint

- Presentationally individuated content will be **essentially** presented from a **first-person point of view**, if there is no (determinate) way to present *the same* content from a third-person point of view
- Given that Hintikka's individuating functions capture the content *presented to* a subject, these contents will plausibly be inaccessible from a completely third-person point of view

Lewis's question

D. Lewis: "Individuation by Acquaintance and by Stipulation" (1983)



Two otherwise similar objects, Y and X, are objects of acquaintance (e.g. perception) for subjects Z (in W1) and U (in W2).

Are X and Y counterparts by acquaintance ("the same" object of acquaintance) for Z?

Lewis' answer

- The answer to this depends on how the subject is identified across possible worlds: is U “the same” subject (or the closest counterpart) of Z?
- But there is no general way to identify the subject across possible worlds.
 - We cannot do so by subject's ***self-acquaintance***; every subject (in a world) is plausibly acquainted with herself, but we cannot assume trans-world self-acquaintance without begging the question
 - We cannot do so by the subject's ***self-description***; her self-description may be very badly mistaken, so that she does not exist at some of her belief (presentational) worlds
 - **More generally, for any attempt to cross-identify the subject by providing any objective information about it, we would first have to show that the information is really about *that* subject (across possible worlds), and for this we need to presuppose the cross-identity we are trying to establish**

- Lewis concludes that the acquaintance relationship between subjects and objects must be relativized to worlds: We should not ask whether X and Y are (presentationally) identified for subject Z, but only whether an acquaintance relationship in W2 is a suitable counterpart of an acquaintance relationship in W1
- **But this is no solution.** For if it is correct, the acquaintance relationship in a world doesn't relate me to other possible-world objects, and perceptual individuation in Hintikka's sense doesn't exist.
- On the other hand, if individuation by acquaintance *is* possible, I can identify *which* object I am related to across possible worlds. To do this I **need not** (and plausibly **cannot**) first cross-identify myself.
- Lewis' "solution" is, rather, a denial of the phenomenon, caused by his adoption of the third-person point of view.

Irreducibility arguments and 2-D semantics

D. Chalmers: “The Two-Dimensional Argument Against Materialism” (2010)
“Consciousness and its Place in Nature” (2002)

- Following Chalmers, we may distinguish *primary* from *secondary* intensions of concepts, according to how they are evaluated at possible worlds.
- For secondary (“metaphysical”) intensions, actual reference of the concept is held fixed and what is evaluated at each world is *this referent* (example: Water=H₂O)
- For primary (“epistemic”) intensions, what is held fixed is the *initial profile* or *presentation* associated with a concept, and worlds are evaluated *as if* actual in order to assess *which* referent the concept would have (if that world turned out to be actual) (example: water= (roughly) the clear liquid stuff in our environment)

Primary Intensions, concepts, and explanation

- When we are looking for the *explanation* of a phenomenon, we are typically looking for an explanation of the primary intension (e.g. we are looking for an explanation of ‘the clear watery stuff in our environment’ rather than an explanation of H₂O).
- How primary intensions are evaluated across worlds is closely linked to their *presentational* aspects. That is, what we evaluate is the concept *as given to us*, or as we would use it across possibilities.
- In so doing (e.g. in evaluating “the watery stuff in *our* environment) we make essential use of our *own* presentation (of the stuff around us)

Primary intensions and irreducibility

- Primary intensions are thus plausibly grounded, in part, in the presentational character of consciousness itself.
- For objects that have their modes of presentation contingently, the conceivability of cases in which those modes of presentation come apart from each other does not imply a failure of metaphysical identity or supervenience (e.g. the conceivability of the case in which water fails to be H₂O does not establish that water is not H₂O)
- However, it is plausible that **phenomenal consciousness has its mode of presentation necessarily (so that its primary and secondary intensions necessarily coincide)**

Chalmers' 2-D argument for the irreducibility of consciousness

- Where P is the conjunction of microphysical truths about the universe, and Q is an arbitrary fact about consciousness:
 1. $P \& \sim Q$ is *conceivable* or 1-possible
 2. If $P \& \sim Q$ is *conceivable* or 1-possible, it is 2-possible OR there is a world that verifies P but does not satisfy P (i.e. 'Type-F' monism)
 3. If $P \& \sim Q$ is 2-possible, materialism is false---

Materialism is false or 'Type-F' monism is true

Presentation and (“type F”) monism

- Primary and secondary intensions plausibly coincide in the case of Q: a conscious state has its own mode of presentation necessarily, so that it could not be presented under a different primary intension.
- But they may come apart with respect to P: in this case, a world *W* *verifies* P (i.e. “looks as if P”) but does not *satisfy* P
- One way this might be the case is if *W* is identical to the actual world *structurally* but underlying intrinsic properties (or categorial basis for structural properties) differ. These intrinsic properties might then be identified with consciousness.

Another alternative: “Presentational” monism

- As stated, type-F monism makes the actual nature and ontology of the “intrinsic” properties mysterious. What should we conclude about the ontological nature of a world in which they vary from (how they are in) ours?
- However, we might alternatively conceive of the variation between our world and W as **turning on the presence or absence of the *presentational* aspect of consciousness itself.**
- We might further see these as turning on the **total presentational individuating functions**, rather than on any properties of the individual entities themselves.
- Then the existence or non-existence of presentational consciousness in a world would depend **on global aspects of that world itself** rather than properties of the entities within it.

Implications for metaphysics of world

- This position is not a variety of **dualism**: as we have seen, it does not require a duality of substances or properties within the world, but is consistent with a global **monist** ontology.
- This position is not a variety of **panpsychism** or “**intrinsic**” monism: as we have seen, it is not the intrinsic properties of entities or of matter, but rather the variation in the total presentational character of a world, that accounts for the irreducibility of presentation.
- In thus considering the global features of worlds as wholes, the position is closer to **transcendental idealism** – but there is no suggestion that the world is created or produced by a “transcendental subject”.

Explaining irreducibility: individuating functions and the failure of extensionality

- Why should the individuating functions be irreducible to anything that *could* be given extensionally from a third-person point of view? (After all, they are just functions from worlds to individuals). Two possibilities:
 - 1. Davidson (1970): Analogy to irreducibility semantics of truth to syntax (as motivating anomalous monism): if truth is presentational, this might be an instance of a broader phenomenon of presentational irreducibility
 - 2. “Kripke/Wittgenstein” considerations: our (first-person) presentations give us “ways of going on” that depend on repeated reference to “what we do” and are not reducible to rules that could be given independently of that reference

Conclusions: presentational (and phenomenal) realism without dualism

- If we see the ontological question of the reducibility of consciousness in terms of its presentational character, we can consider its irreducibility as a matter of the irreducibility of the presentational individuating functions which “give” content from a first-person point of view.
- This accounts for the familiar failure of substitution in intensional (presentational) contexts; and metaphysically requires nothing more than the possible-worlds framework itself
- It also does not require any special “intentional” entities, or a dualist ontology of “intrinsic” properties
- However, since the individuating functions and the content they present are themselves plausibly inaccessible from a third-person point of view, it also explains the irreducibility of consciousness to explanations (e.g. physicalist, functionalist, etc.) given from such a point of view.