

Consciousness #12



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



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Templeton
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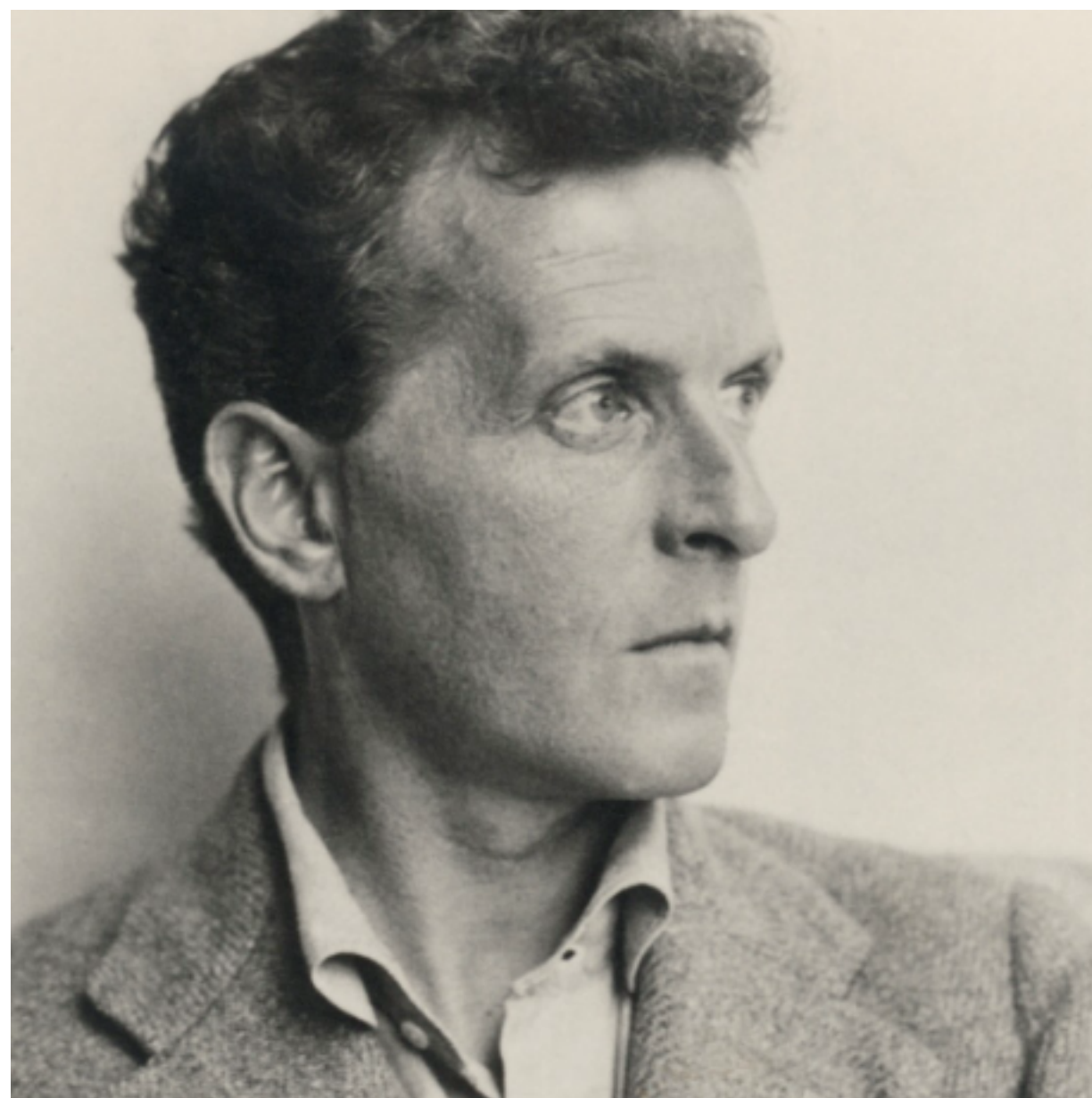
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Seminar 12

1. Recap: unconscious beliefs, models, and the subject's 'world view'
2. Phenomenal and access consciousness
3. The reality of conscious content

1. Recap: unconscious belief, models, and the subject's 'world view'

- (i) Beliefs and many intentional states are unconscious
- (ii) The propositional content of a belief is a model, in the sense of the philosophy of science
- (iii) What is being modelled is the subject's unconscious 'world view'



Wittgenstein

‘Believing is not thinking. (A grammatical remark).’

Philosophical Investigations §574

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

Unconscious belief and the 'world view'

Belief ascriptions model aspects of the subject's world view

The world view is unconscious

The world view approach is proposed as more **realistic** picture of psychological reality than the standard picture of individual belief states (e.g. Fodor's 'language of thought')

Modelling also explains why we are inclined to attribute **unrealistic** features to beliefs; this is a feature of models in general

Idealisation and **simplification**

An example: Sam the art critic

‘Sam the reputable art critic extols, buys, and promotes mediocre paintings by his son. Two different hypotheses are advanced: (a) Sam does not believe the paintings are any good, but out of loyalty and love he does this to help his son, or (b) Sam’s love for his son has blinded him to the faults of the paintings, and he actually believes they are good.’

Daniel C. Dennett, ‘Brain Writing and Mind Reading’ (1975)

Sam the art critic ctd.

‘if our neurocryptographer were able to determine that Sam’s last judgement on his deathbed was “My consolation is that I fathered a great artist”, we could still hold that the issue between the warring hypotheses was undecided, for this judgement may have been a self-deception...

‘If discovering a man’s judgements still leaves the matter of belief ascription undecided ... are we so sure that Sam determinately had one belief or the other? Are sure that there is a difference between his really and truly believing his son is a good artist, and his deceiving himself out of love while knowing the truth in his heart of hearts?’

Dennett, ‘Brain Writing and Mind Reading’ (1975)

Brief contrast with some other views

1. Only consciousness is mental

Brie Gertler, 'Overextending the mind' (2007)

Galen Strawson, *Mental Reality* (1995)

John Searle, *The Rediscovery of Mind* (1993)

2. Reduction of propositional content

Peter Hanks, *Propositional Content* (2015)

Scott Soames, *Re-thinking Language, Mind and Meaning* (2014)

2. Phenomenal and access consciousness

How is the phenomenon I am talking about related to Ned Block's famous distinction between phenomenal and access consciousness?

Ned Block, 'On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness' *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 1995

Ned Block, 'Consciousness, Accessibility and the mesh between psychology and neuroscience' *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 2007

A conscious thought is not a belief, but it brings what you believe to consciousness

‘Bringing what you believe to consciousness’ can cover many things:

judgement

self-knowledge

psychotherapy

Some of these seem like cases of **accessing** your state of mind

Is this the notion we need for understanding conscious thought?

Phenomenal and access consciousness

‘**Phenomenal consciousness** is experience; the phenomenally conscious aspect of a state is what it is like to be in that state.’

‘The mark of **access-consciousness**, by contrast, is availability for use in reasoning and rationally guiding speech and action.’

Ned Block, ‘On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness’
Behavioral and Brain Sciences 1995

What is accessibility?

It seems to be a dispositional notion

So what are the manifestations of this disposition?

Is access or broadcast

‘Dispositional notions like accessibility are notoriously flexible, depending on context ... I will require not just potential broadcasting for accessibility but actual global broadcasting.

‘Actual global broadcasting does not itself require that any ‘consuming’ machinery actually process the broadcast representation, so it is a notion involving potentiality.’

Ned Block, ‘Consciousness and Cognitive Access’ (2008)

The manifestations of access consciousness

1. Suppose consciousness is accessibility
2. 'Accessing' is an occurrence or event
3. But something can be accessible even if it is not being accessed
4. Conscious occurrences of accessing must therefore be conscious in a different sense
5. This is the phenomenal sense of consciousness

A simpler approach

A mental state is access consciousness when it can manifest itself in phenomenal consciousness

Access consciousness presupposes phenomenal consciousness

There aren't really two kinds of consciousness

3. The reality of conscious thinking

What is it to think something consciously?

Making explicit some aspect of your world view

Terminology: Content, object and mode

Intentional mental states represent aspects of the world

Types of intentional states (belief, desire etc.) are **modes**

The **object** of a mental state is what a state represents

The **content** of a mental state is the way it is represented, given its mode

See Tim Crane, *The Objects of Thought* (2013) chapter 4

Unconscious content is the content of the subject's world view

What about conscious content?

Is the content of conscious thought just a model, like propositional content?

Conscious states (perceptions, thoughts etc.) can be modelled too

But where conscious states are concerned, **modelling is not the whole truth about their representational content — that is, about how they represent the world**

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

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

To be continued...

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