

PHILOSOPHY 101

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CONFUSION (PART III)

THE DISTINCTNESS OF PHENOMENAL & ACCESS CONSCIOUSNESS

- Phenomenal & Access consciousness are at least *conceptually* distinct
 - We can conceive of cases of access with phenomenal consciousness (super-blindsight)
 - We can conceive of cases of phenomenal without access consciousness (attention)
- P & A consciousness might be conceptually distinct even if not *biologically* or *evolutionarily* distinct

CRITICIZING THE "TARGET REASONING"

'ABSENT' SEIZURES

- In some cases of epileptic seizure, a subject loses consciousness but retains the ability to perform complex goal-directed behavior
 - driving a car
 - playing a musical instrument

BLOCK'S OBJECTION

- Why suppose that P-consciousness is missing in 'Absent' seizure cases?

For example, Searle, quoting Penfield, describes the epileptic walker as "thread[ing] his way" through the crowd. Doesn't he see the obstacles he avoids? Suppose he gets home by turning right at a red wall. Isn't there something it is like for him to see the red wall—and isn't it different from what it is like for him to see a green wall? (Block, 188)

1. In the absence seizure cases it is the subject's thought processes that are most obviously deficient, including a clear lack of A-consciousness

2. P-consciousness is a feature of mental *states* not *subjects*

3. There is no reason to think that the states which occur in the subjects of absence seizure cases lack P-consciousness

4. \therefore

There is no reason to think that a function of P-consciousness is to make possible flexible and creative complex behavior

BLINDSIGHT

- 'Blindsighted' patients lack consciousness (in some sense) of regions of their visual field but have a better than chance ability to discriminate objects in those "blind" parts of the visual field

THE BLINDSIGHT CASE:

Conscious awareness of a water fountain to my right will lead me to drink from it if I am thirsty. But the thirsty blindsighted person will make no move towards the fountain unless pressed to do so. The inference to the best explanation is that conscious awareness of the environment facilitates semantic comprehension and adaptive motor actions in creatures like us (Flanagan, quoted in Block, pp. 192-3)

BLOCK'S OBJECTION

1. Assume that, in blindsighted subjects, *both* A and P-consciousness are missing
2. The explanation of the blindsighter's degraded behavior only requires an appeal to A-consciousness and its absence
3. A-consciousness and P-consciousness are at least conceptually distinct
4. \therefore
Nothing can be inferred in the blindsight case concerning the function of P-consciousness

IS P-CONSCIOUSNESS NECESSARY FOR A-CONSCIOUSNESS?

- It is possible that P-consciousness is necessary for A-consciousness, and that it is a necessary condition for creative flexible behavior
 - But analysis of abnormal psych cases cannot show this
- P and A-consciousness may be closely linked biologically
 - evidential support for this based on no recorded cases of "super"-blindsight

- We need to distinguish the cognitive/information processing aspects of our mental life from the less obviously cognitive, and more explicitly phenomenal aspects

