

Introducing Consciousness

PHIL340 – Philosophy of Mind

Readings

- Selections from Uriah Kriegel's *Subjective Consciousness: A Self-Representational Theory*
 - Chapters 1 and 3 (though Chapters 2 and 4 are also useful)

Concepts of consciousness: creature consciousness, state consciousness, and levels

- Creature consciousness: consciousness as a property of a creature/organism/person. E.g., Mary is conscious. So is her dog.
- State consciousness: consciousness as a property of a mental state. E.g., Mary's experience of her dog is conscious.

(Note: for some theorists, this is a merely conceptual distinction, with state consciousness being explanatorily prior to creature consciousness (see Kriegel Ch.2). On this way of thinking, Mary is creature conscious just in case she is having some conscious state or other. Others use 'creature consciousness' to denote a distinct aspect or dimension of a conscious experience pertaining to its *global* character rather than its specific 'content.' For example, in saying that Mary is conscious, we may imply that she is awake or alert as opposed to asleep and dreaming, delirious, hypnotized, in a psychedelic state, etc. Such 'global' differences are sometimes marked with the terminology of 'levels' or 'modes' of consciousness)

Concepts of consciousness: Varieties of state consciousness

access consciousness: a mental state available for free use in the global control of action (explicit reasoning, verbal report, intentional action, etc.).

self-consciousness: a mental state that represents oneself as such (e.g., tokens of the first-person indexical 'I')

monitoring consciousness: a mental state one is conscious of (consciousness of a mental state *as such*)

affective consciousness: a mental state that possesses a hedonic tone or affective 'valence' (positive, negative, neutral); cf. sentience

phenomenal consciousness: a mental state there is something it is like for the subject to have/be in. The phenomenal character of such a state is how it 'feels' or 'what it is like.'

Concepts of consciousness: Phenomenal consciousness

- primary locus of philosophical puzzlement and controversy (of the ‘mystery’ and ‘hard problem’ of consciousness)
 - see Nagel’s ‘What is it like to be a bat?’ for a classic exposition;
 - See Kriegel p. 3 ff.
- Phenomenal character can be subdivided into two dimensions/components: qualitative character (the ‘what it is like’) and subjective character (the ‘for-me-ness’ or the fact that there something is like *to be you* at all).
 - E.g., a phenomenally bluish experience versus a phenomenally greenish experience (distinctive qualitative character)
 - E.g., a phenomenally conscious experience versus an unconscious mental representation (that occurs ‘in’ you but is not ‘for’ you)

Concepts of consciousness: Distinguishing phenomenal and access consciousness?

- Putative cases of phenomenal consciousness without access consciousness
 - Peripherally hearing a jackhammer while having an engrossing conversation
 - Phenomenal overflow (e.g., Sperling partial report paradigm)
- Putative cases of access consciousness without phenomenal consciousness
 - ‘super-blindsight’ (blindsight + unprompted use)
- Block’s ‘methodological challenge’ for a scientific theory of consciousness: how to scientifically investigate phenomenal consciousness when our canonical methods for detecting consciousness seem to target access consciousness (e.g., verbal report and voluntary action).

Linking phenomenal character and representational content?

- Some philosophers – ‘reductive representationalists’ – aim to provide a broadly ‘reductive’ account of phenomenal character in terms of representational content. In particular, such philosophers claim to give a two-step reductive explanation of phenomenal consciousness:
 - Step #1: reductively explain the phenomenal character of a conscious state in terms of a certain kind of representational content;
 - Step #2: reductively explain the representational content of a mental state in terms of some unproblematically causal notion (e.g., tracking relations).

Accounting for subjective character reductively

- A basic fault-line between representationalist theories:
- First-order (FO) theories
 - Reduction of phenomenal consciousness to access consciousness
 - PANIC theory of consciousness (Tye)
 - (poised, abstract, nonconceptual intentional content)
 - Global Workspace Theory (Baars; Dehaene & Naccache)
- Higher-order (HO) theories (e.g., Higher Order Thought Theory)
 - Reduction of phenomenal consciousness to monitoring consciousness (e.g., meta-representation)

Accounting for subjective character reductively

- A major disagreement between FO and HO theories concerns the basic phenomenological and metaphysical structure of consciousness. In particular, these two camps differ in the theoretical weight they give to the following introspective theses:
 - transparency (world-directedness or outer awareness)
 - transitivity (self-directedness or inner awareness)
- Note: these introspective-phenomenological theses predate the debate between reductive representationalists



Transparency (‘Diaphanousness’)

“[T]hough philosophers have recognised that something distinct is meant by consciousness, they have never yet had a clear conception of what that something is ... [T]he moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see what, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous.” (Moore 1903).

Transparency

“I see the red light of the setting sun filtering through the black and thickly clustered branches of the elms; I see the dappled deer grazing in groups on the vivid green grass...

Mature sensible experience (in general) presents itself as, in Kantian phrase, an immediate consciousness of the existence of things outside us” (Strawson, *Perception and its Objects*).

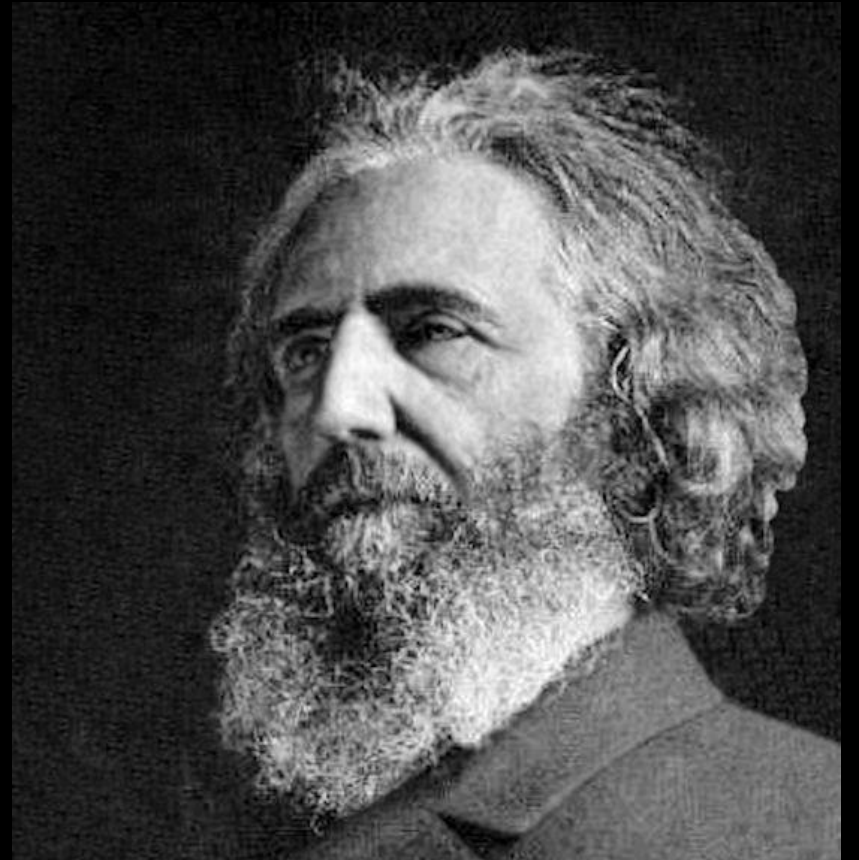


Transitivity

- A conscious state *just is* a mental state that one is conscious *of*

“[Every conscious act] includes within it a consciousness of itself. Therefore, every [conscious] act, no matter how simple, has a double object, a primary and a secondary object. The simplest act, for example the act of hearing, has as its primary object the sound, and for its secondary object, itself, the mental phenomenon in which the sound is heard” (Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, 1874, pp. 153-4).

- ‘pre-reflective self-awareness’ (cf. Husserl, Sartre, Merleau Ponty)
- ‘peripheral inner awareness’ (cf. Kriegel)



- As we turn to arguments for anti-physicalism, these questions about the structure of consciousness will remain in the background.