

# Consciousness and the Self – Excerpt

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## Week 1: Introduction

### Readings

*Kriegel: “Consciousness, Theories Of”*

**Phenomenal Consciousness:** A property of a mental state/event/etc. when their subject has a subjective experience of that thing

- E.g., “there is something it is like to smell coffee brewing.” p. 58. Smelling coffee is a “phenomenologically conscious state”

**Phenomenal Character:** The quality of a conscious experience/what it is like

**Physicalist Theories of Phenomenal Consciousness:** Account for consciousness with micro physical terms

**Anti-Physicalist Theories:** Say consciousness cannot be accounted for by physical properties

**Reductive Theories:** Consciousness accounted for in non-phenomenal terms

- This is generally then physical terms – i.e., physicalism

**Non-Reductive Theories:** Consciousness inherently phenomenal, non-physical

- Sees consciousness as a fundamental feature of the world
- Dualism: Two fundamental features of the world are phenomenal and physical

**Two features:** Functional, representational

- **Functionalism:** Accounts for phenomenological character in terms of their cause and effects
  - o E.g., Sadness: Its *functional role* constitutes its causes and effects.
- **Representationalism:** Accounts for phenomenological character in terms of its representation
  - o E.g., Sadness: Represented by the colour blue, by certain smells, memories, etc.
  - o Higher-Order Representationalism: Mental states are conscious by virtue of being represented
    - Self-Representationalism: We have representations of our own conscious states, and by virtue of this we experience consciousness

**Dualism**

- FOR: Argument from the conceivability of zombies

- If we can imagine someone physically identical to us but without consciousness, then we must see consciousness as something beyond physicality
- AGAINST: Argument from causal efficacy
  - A trustworthy assumption is that the physical realm can only have causal chains within the physical realm. If consciousness were non-physical, according to this assumption, it should have no causal consequence on our actions etc.

### Physicalism

- FOR
  - Science consistently finds new information that explains phenomena we previously thought unexplainable by physicality. Why is consciousness any different?
- AGAINST: Pretty much the same arguments *for* dualism

### Functionalism

- FOR: The argument from everything we always wanted
  - Complex, but essentially asserts that consciousness is more than the sum of its parts; its constituted of physical properties, but when put together, we get something 'more'
  - Maintains that there are no non-physical phenomena
- AGAINST
  - We can imagine functional roles without phenomenological character (e.g., there can be function without conscious experience), or with different phenomenological characters (e.g., people can have separate conscious experiences which play the same functional role)

### Representationalism

- FOR: Argument from transparency
  - How we experience the world is inherently tied to our representations of the world; suggests phenomenal character and our representations are the same thing
- AGAINST
  - Seems features/objects only exist if they can be represented

### Higher-Order Representationalism

- FOR
  - Conscious states are only those we are aware of having – we are aware of our representations, and that is what we typically conceptualize consciousness as
- AGAINST: Argument from targetless higher-order representations
  - Representations may misrepresent their target or the existence of a target → we may have a subjective experience of being conscious when we are not actually conscious
    - → there is no conscious state that one is in, but there is something it is like for the subject

### Self-Representationalism

- FOR
  - A conscious state can be represented by a higher-order representation, or by itself
  - If by itself, then it avoids the arguments against higher-order representations
- AGAINST
  - Something cannot have a causal relationship with itself; there is no distinction between the represented and the representing

*Boden: "Mind as Machine" pp. 1216-1220*

*14.x. Cartesian Correlations*

### a. Consciousness Comes in from the Cold

- Examples of breakdowns of consciousness

- Multiple personality disorder
- Hemi-neglect
- Qualia: conscious experience or sensation; raw feels; sense data
- Libet
  - Found that we subliminally perceive something → we have neural activity → *then* we have a conscious experience
    - Suggests qualia is caused by neural activity/constructed in the brain

## Lectures

### Lecture 1: Introduction

#### Outline

- Lectures 2h, released Saturday midday
- Tutorials/forum participation
- Readings
  - Quizzes based on readings
  - Weekly reading discussion guides based on readings
  - Must be done before class
- Must write and submit weekly reading discussion guide before tutorial

#### Assessments

- Participation: 20%
  - Weekly engagement in tutorials and/or forums: 11%
  - Watching essay writing/research workshop video: 1%
    - Watch prior to submitting final essay
  - Essay plan activity: 2%
    - 500-word essay plan with structure, arguments, references submitted to TurnItIn
    - Engage in peer review exercise – submit plan to forum and comment on another student’s plan constructively (at least one plan)
  - Reading guides: 6%
    - Due weeks 2-12
    - Only top 10 count
    - Full marks if submitted on time
- Online quizzes: 25%
  - Due fortnightly
- Reflective blogs: 20%
- Research essay: 35%
  - 3k words

#### Part 1: Consciousness

- The nature of consciousness
- The hard problem
- Relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness
- Questioning whether a science of consciousness is possible
- Consciousness as predictive processing

#### Part 2: Selves

- Theories of self
- The self’s construction and distribution

#### Part 3: Others

- Other’s minds
- Origin of consciousness

- Nature of self and consciousness of other animals

## Lecture 2: Introduction II

### Overview

- What is philosophy?
- History of ideas, questions
- Rival methods

### Philosophy

- **Philosophy:** Making/developing claims and analysing them critically and deeply

### Major Branches

- Metaphysics/Ontology
  - o What we think is real/exists
  - o What is the nature of reality, or the structure of reality?
  - o In relation to the self:
    - Do we exist?
    - What is the nature of consciousness?
- Epistemology
  - o What is true?
  - o What do we/can we know?
  - o In relation to the self:
    - We don't have access to other's consciousness, so how do we know that it exists?
    - Should we consider our knowledge of our own selves and consciousness as reliable?
    - Is the 'self' an illusion?
- Ethics
  - o What is good/right/just?
  - o How do we be good people?
  - o In relation to the self:
    - Do we have different moral obligations to that which/who possess consciousness?
- Logic
  - o Rules surrounding good inferences/arguments
  - o Types of arguments
  - o Systems of thought/logic

### Philosophy of X (e.g., film, psychology, etc.)

- Descriptive questions, e.g., what is science? What is psychology? What is technology?
- Normative questions, e.g., what should science focus on? How should technology be used?

### History of the Ideas and Questions

- Common view: Original questions about consciousness arose when humans became aware of themselves as selves
- Modern argument: Perhaps consciousness is directly tied to the capacity for language; inner monologue. In this case, questioning one's own consciousness may not have existed until recently
  - o Jillian James: Idea that united consciousness may only be as recent as 4000 years old

### Ancient Greeks

- Theories about the self, but more focus on a soul rather than consciousness
- Plato: The soul is tripartite: Reason, anger, passion
- Aristotle: Ethical theories of the 'good' person or 'virtuous' person – a mean between vices
- Emphasise importance of being involved with others

### The Reformation and the Modern Era

- Appearance of philosophical questioning on consciousness
- Emphasis on inner source of truth (dovetailing of conscience and consciousness)
- **Descartes** (1640): Thought is reflexive consciousness, self-awareness
  - o Didn't believe animals had consciousness
  - o Minds are non-physical substances
- **Locke** (1688): To think is to be sensible (i.e., to be aware)
  - o Associationism/British empiricism attempted to map how ideas work together to become a mind
  - o Believed consciousness and memories linked together
- **Kant** (1787): Consciousness requires transcendental structures – space, time, causation. Space, time, causation are necessary experiences for consciousness to occur
  - o Believes we have moral obligations to others as reasoning beings

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century

- Early 20th century looked at analysing conscious and unconscious processes (psychoanalytic tradition)
  - o Introspective tests – Rorschach tests, free associations, etc. aim at uncovering the unconscious
- Rise of behaviourism – Ignoring consciousness
- Cognitive science – Determining mental processes from behaviour
  - o Mind as an information processor
    - Consciousness still off the table!
- Late 80s/early 90s saw rise of interest in consciousness

## Core Concepts

### Important Kinds of Consciousness

- Sentience: Being aware of environment and responding to it
- Wakefulness: Active responding
- Unconscious: Parts of the mind we do not have access to
- Self-consciousness: Self-awareness – being aware that we are aware
- Qualitative states
  - o Phenomenal states/what-it-is-likeness
    - The subjective experience of being conscious
- Access consciousness: The parts of our mind we are aware of

### Important Questions

- Consciousness
  - o What is consciousness? (Descriptive)
  - o How does consciousness take place? (Explanatory)
  - o Why does consciousness occur? (Functional)
- Self
  - o What is the self?
  - o Does it persist over time? If so, how?
  - o Can the self fracture? Or is it unitary?
  - o What does this mean for ethics?

### Proposals

- Animalism: The self is just an animal
- The self is an immaterial being (i.e., we have a soul)
- Material beings
  - o Temporal parts
  - o Material parts: Ourselves are our brains
- The self is a bundle of sense perceptions/narratives

- The self does not exist

## Rival Methods

### Metaphysical Debate

- **Monistic Views:** There is only one kind of fundamental substance
  - o **Physicalism:** All that exists is physical or is dependent on physicality for existence
  - o **Idealism:** All that exists is phenomenological, or is dependent on phenomenological substance for its existence
- **Dualism**
  - o **Substance dualism:** Two kinds of substances – physical and non-physical
    - Not popular due to causation
      - Causation within the physical realm seems to explain a lot
      - Having mental causation may double up causation – how can something be caused both physically and mentally
  - o **Property dualism:** There is only one substance, but that substance can have different properties (physical and non-physical)
- **Reductivism vs. Non-Reductivism**
  - o **Reductive:** The phenomenal character of consciousness can be reduced to non-phenomenal (physical) terms/systems
  - o **Non-Reductive:** Reject idea that the phenomenal character of consciousness can be reduced to physical terms and systems, e.g., dualism, idealism

### Methodological Debate

- **Foundationalism:** Philosophy first
  - o Philosophy can address questions without looking at evidence/science
- **Naturalism:** Science first
  - o Philosophy must be informed by scientific findings
  - o Independent inquiry is ineffective without science

### Naturalism

- **Ontological Naturalism:** Rejection of supernatural things – all that exists is natural
  - o This may include non-physical things, but does not include theological beliefs
- **Methodological Naturalism:** Concerned with how one should investigate reality – importance of science
  - o Charged with scientism, i.e., ‘science solves everything’ perspective
- **Against Foundationalism**
  - o Philosophy shouldn’t be separated from other fields
  - o Vicious circle: Using science to theorise about science
    - To escape this circle, can endorse foundationalism
      - Descartes: Doubts all in existence, but can’t doubt his own consciousness. “I think, therefore I am”

### Problems with Naturalism

- Naturalised Epistemology and Scientism
  - o Can all questions be reduced to sciences?
  - o Some naturalists think science is a resource for philosophy, not a replacement
  - o Psychology doesn’t tell us *how* to handle evidence
  - o Godfrey-Smith and Dewey: There are good and bad ways to approach epistemology
    - Naturalism requires we begin theorising from a basis of evidence
- Realism vs. Instrumentalism: The Problem of Theory Change
  - o Realism: Science aims to accurately describe a world, independent of our existence
    - E.g., science can tell us what consciousness really is

- Anti-realism/Instrumentalism: Best theories aren't true and can't capture the 'Real World Out There' (RWOT; the furniture of the world)

### Scientific Realism (Ladyman, 2002, pp. 158-159)

- Metaphysical Requirements
  - Entities described in a theory or model (S) exist
  - Existence of X is mind-independent
- Semantic Requirements
  - Statements about S are genuinely truthful, have factual essence
  - Statements on S are objective and can be determined by the conditions of the world
- Epistemic Requirements
  - Truths about S are knowable and we know some of them

### Two Strongest Arguments

- For Realism: "No Miracles Argument"
  - Scientific predictions have very small chances of error
  - → Either our theories are true in some sense, or there are miracle coincidences
  - → Unlikely to be a miracle as science is more effective than other methodological approaches
  - → Scientific theories are accurate to an extent
- Anti-Realism: "Pessimistic Meta-Induction" ; "The Problem of Theory Change"
  - Many old theories proven to be false, although at the time we thought they were true
  - → Likely that current theories may also be proven false
  - → Likely that our theories are not true descriptions of the world

**Structural Realism:** The best of both worlds – realism and anti-realism held together

### Complexities in Understanding Scientific Theories

- **Quine-Duhem Thesis:** Difficult to assess truthfulness of a hypothesis as we can't fully make inferences from findings of experimental observations to a wider context
- **Representation:** Models can be helpful when they aren't true – can help us test theories
  - E.g., a simplified model of ecology can help us make predictions but not be entirely true due to its simplicity
- **Interpretation:** Interpretation of objective experimental instrument output requires training and may be interpreted subjectively

### Summary

**Metaphysics:** Dualism, physicalism

**Methodological:** Foundationalism, naturalism

**Philosophy:** Ontology, epistemology, ethics, logic