The Nature of Consciousness

In *The Nature of Consciousness*, Mark Rowlands develops an innovative and radical account of the nature of phenomenal consciousness, one that has significant consequences for attempts to find a place for it in the natural order. The most significant feature of consciousness is its dual nature: consciousness can be both the directing of awareness and that upon which awareness is directed. Rowlands offers a clear and philosophically insightful discussion of the main positions in this fast-moving debate, and argues that the phenomenal aspects of conscious experience are aspects that exist only in the directing of experience towards non-phenomenal objects, a theory that undermines reductive attempts to explain consciousness in terms of what is not conscious. His book will be of interest to a wide range of readers in the philosophy of mind and language, psychology, and cognitive science.

The Nature of Consciousness

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Contents

Preface

1 The problem of phenomenal consciousness
   1 What is phenomenal consciousness? 1
   2 The scope of ‘There is . . .’ 4
   3 What is the problem of phenomenal consciousness? 8
   4 Explaining consciousness 13
   5 Vertical strategies I: the mind–body problem 14
   6 Vertical Strategies II: the mind–mind problem 16
   7 Horizontal strategies 22
   8 The shape of things to come 23

2 Consciousness and supervenience
   1 Logical supervenience: ontological and epistemological
      interpretations 27
   2 (Merely) natural supervenience 28
   3 The incoherence of (Chalmers’ versions of) supervenience 29
   4 Natural supervenience and weak supervenience 35
   5 Natural supervenience as an epistemological concept 37
   6 More on ‘reading off’ 41
   7 Logical supervenience and reductive explanation 48

3 The explanatory gap
   1 Intuitions and arguments 52
   2 Analysing the intuition 57
   3 Truth and adequacy 58
   4 Explanatory adequacy and epistemic satisfaction 59
   5 Proto-epistemic satisfaction 64
   6 Mechanistic explanations and correlations 68
   7 Explaining consciousness 70

4 Consciousness and higher-order experience
   1 HOR models of consciousness 75
   2 The structure of HOP theories 79
   3 Presuppositions of the HOP model 81
   4 The independence condition 83
   5 The explanatory primacy of vehicles 94

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vi Contents

6 The primacy of transitive consciousness 97
7 What has gone wrong? 98

5 Consciousness and higher-order thoughts 101
1 HOT models 103
2 The problem of circularity 105
3 The problem of regress 113

6 The structure of consciousness 122
1 Introduction 122
2 Consciousness as object of consciousness: empirical
apperception 123
3 Transcendental apperception 126
4 Consciousness as experiential act 133
5 What it is like 136
6 The ubiquity of objectualism 141
7 Summary 147

7 What it is like 148
1 Against objectualism 149
2 What it is like as a phenomenal particular 150
3 What it is like as a phenomenal property 152
4 What it is like as a representational property 157
5 For actualism 166
6 Phenomenology by proxy 168
7 Objections and replies 173
8 Summary 176

8 Against objectualism II: mistakes about the way things seem 178
1 Introduction 178
2 Three mistakes about experience 179
3 The objectualist gloss: qualia 181
4 Perceptual completion and neural filling in 183
5 Dennett's criticism of filling in 186
6 Change blindness and the richness of experience 187
7 Category (2) mistakes: how an experience seems and
how it really is 189
8 Mistakes of category (3) 191
9 Why the way an experience seems cannot be explained
as awareness of qualia 194

9 Consciousness and representation 197
1 Brentano's thesis 198
2 Consciousness as revealing and as revealed 201
3 Phenomenal revealing 204
4 Consciousness of and consciousness that 208
5 Representationalism 209
6 Object representationism 211
7 Mode representationism 213
8 Actualism and representationism 214
Contents

10 Consciousness and the natural order 216
   1 What it is like and reductive explanation 216
   2 Consciousness and materialism 219
   3 Consciousness and causality 221
   4 The epiphenomenalist suspicion 222
   5 The standard problem of epiphenomenalism 226
   6 The epiphenomenalist suspicion allayed 232

Bibliography 236

Index 242
Colin McGinn first got me thinking about consciousness. I was finishing up a D.Phil. at Oxford, where Colin was my supervisor. He had just thought up the basic line of argument behind ‘Can we solve the mind–body problem?’, and I may have been one of the first people he explained it to. I thought he was mad! A decade or so later, when I returned to look at his work, I was struck by how sane the old man had become in the intervening years. Also, much to my chagrin, I was struck by how much my own developing position owed to his. Somewhat in this spirit of chagrin, then, I did my best to distinguish my view from his, and this resulted in chapter 3.

My thinking on the nature of supervenience, and, in particular, on the distinction between ontological and epistemological interpretations, has been profoundly influenced by the work of John Post, as anyone who has read his Faces of Existence – a work of the highest quality – will know. The influence of Sydney Shoemaker will also be evident in many of the pages that follow.

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