

Perceptual, Reflective and Affective Consciousness as Existence

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1. Criteria of Adequacy for Analyses of Consciousness

One criterion of an adequate analysis of the nature of consciousness has to do with its three parts, sides or elements. These are seeing and the like, thinking and the like, and desiring and the like. The seeming natures of the perceptual, reflective and affective parts or whatever of consciousness are different despite similarity. An adequate analysis of consciousness, even if general, will preserve the differences. It will pass the test of what you can call differential phenomenology.

A second criterion is making consciousness something that exists in the ordinary way, a reality. Certainly we suppose it to be such. Yours came into existence at some stage of your embryonic development and goes out of existence and comes back into existence when you fall into and come out of dreamless sleep. What is it for anything to exist in the ordinary way? To my mind it is for the thing to be physical or of the *same sort* as the physical. What it is to be of the same sort as the physical, and hence what a tolerant naturalism or physicalism comes to, will be clearer later.

As for physical things themselves, they come in two lots. (1) Things that take up space and time and are perceived by all, or maybe all the experts—this truistic point about their being public will be relevant to much that follows. (2) Unperceived things that take up space and time and are in causal or other nomic connection with the first lot of things, the perceived ones. So physical things consist in chairs and the rest of the perceived physical world, and also atoms and the rest of the unperceived physical world.¹

Thirdly, consciousness is subjective. This third criterion of an adequate analysis of its nature is the most uncertain, obscure and fundamental. All the consciousness we know about—forget the speculative talk about computers and Martians—divides up into sequences such that each of them is different at least in being in a special relation to one organism or subject. Somehow consciousness is not objective.

¹ Cf. Anthony Quinton, *The Nature of Things* (London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

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A too weak version of this condition is simply that facts of consciousness have some *dependency* on only one organism or brain.² The version fails, if you do not get immaterialist or spiritual about an organism or brain, because other things than consciousness have such a dependency. Others say about subjectivity that it involves privacy, or, more mysteriously, that neural processes have an 'inside', or that talk of them connotes more than it denotes or has a special sense as well as a reference.³ The strongest version of subjectivity is that facts of consciousness are out of space and come in sequences that are attached to or are episodes of a subject in the sense of a self or ego out of space. This is an idea of folk psychology, so-called, and maybe of many philosophers not actually struggling with the subject of consciousness. The idea is commonly assigned to Descartes.

Fourthly, an analysis of consciousness must allow for causal relations between events of consciousness, whatever their intrinsic nature, and physical events that precede and follow them. This is the input-output or body-mind criterion. Locations of croquet balls cause ideas and vice versa. Like other criteria, this one has its own implications. One is that an analysis of consciousness with the upshot that there is no mind-body problem at all, that it has all been just an illusion, will be at least suspect.

Can all else worth attention as a criterion be put into these four categories having to do with differential phenomenology, reality or physicality, subjectivity, and input-output? That has been my inclination. It is a mistake to suppose that anything needs to go in about certain doctrines of philosophers having to do with aboutness or intentionality—that is, we do not have to suppose that an adequate account must be in line with any such philosophical doctrine as Franz Brentano's.⁴

² E.g. John Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (London & Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1992).

³ E.g. Edgar Wilson, *The Mental as Physical* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

⁴ Franz Brentano, *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint*, ed. Oskar Kraus, Linda L. McAlister (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 88. For interpretation see David Bell, *Husserl* (London: Routledge, 1990), Ch. 1. For my rejection of intentionality as a criterion of consciousness, see 'Consciousness as Existence, and the End of Intentionality', in Anthony O'Hear, (ed.), *Philosophy at the New Millenium*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures for 2000–2001 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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2. Six Analyses of Consciousness

To come now to a second of my short lists, it is of sorts or families of answers to the question of the nature of consciousness generally. Six have been getting attention. Several of them have been getting it for a long time.

Plain or 17th Century materialism, what Donald Davidson calls 'Nothing-But Materialism'⁵, allows to events of consciousness only certain physical properties. These are neural properties as we know them—electrical and chemical properties of current neuroscience—or other properties of current science. By way of a useful parody, consciousness is cells. If the idea started with Hobbes, it has gone on being bequeathed. David Papineau in *Introducing Consciousness* seems to be one residuary legatee.⁶ A lot of scientific models of consciousness turn up here, including a recent one in terms of the common interpretation of Quantum Theory, this model being inspired sometimes by the wonderful proposition that since consciousness is a mystery you need a mystery to explain it.

A second answer to the question of the nature of consciousness is that conscious events have neural or anyway physical properties, but not of the electrochemical kinds in, say, in Kandel, Schwartz and Jessell's current edition of their splendid *Principles of Neural Science* or even in editions that can be anticipated.⁷ Consciousness is not the stuff in current neuroscience, but the stuff of future science. We found the physical reality of magnetism, and one day we will find the physical reality of consciousness. Maybe because of its vagueness, this is a popular view, certainly in the laboratories. It has also had philosophical advocates, such as me in a weak moment.⁸

Thirdly, the pill of plain materialism with respect to our consciousness is coated by adding a proposition about the input and output relations into which our neural events enter. This is one understanding of functionalism and cognitive science with philosophical ambition. Here we start with the truth that desires, say, are items with certain causes and certain effects, and equally banal

⁵ Donald Davidson, 'Mental Events', in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980).

⁶ David Papineau, *Introducing Consciousness* (Cambridge & New York: Icon/Totem Books, 2000). For a review, see my 'Consciousness and Inner Tubes', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 7, 7, 2000.

⁷ Kandel E. R. R., J. H. Schwartz and T. M. Jessell, *Principles of Neural Science* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991).

⁸ 'Consciousness, Neural Functionalism, Real Subjectivity,' *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 32/4, October, 1995.

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truths about computers and computation, as well as forgetfulness about other truths about desires and computers. We leap to the drama that our own conscious events are wholly electrochemical events related to certain other events. The drama is coming to the end of its run philosophically, as behaviourism did before it.⁹ It is becoming respectable science—brain science, the science of the basis or a basis of consciousness, not the philosophical issue of its very nature.

A fourth view is another understanding of functionalism and the like. Here the conscious events are identified not with actual events in relations, say electrochemical events, but with whatever events could turn up in the relations—or rather, not even that class of events themselves. Conscious is the relations, not the possible events in them. Consciousness is in this sense abstract. That is what is said, to whatever effect.

A fifth sort of view is that the mind is the brain, or consciousness is identical with neural processes, but in the mere sense that conscious properties are properties of single events that also have neural properties. Davidson's identity theory comes here, as does a past favourite of my own, the Union Theory.¹⁰ This sort of thing is rightly said to be a dualism of properties, which you can take as a philosophical recommendation, but not enough of one.

Finally, immaterialism. Consciousness is a matter of properties and also a thing, one thing per person. Both are out of space. This is the vague idea of us all to start with, and the idea of Descartes, mentioned already as one end of the range or ranges of ideas of the subjectivity of consciousness. Is there a very great deal of philosophy that comes down to this sort of thing? Is it what non-materialists privately think they have to believe? Despite Wittgenstein's behaviourism, is it the implication of his piece of self-indulgent audacity that whatever thinking comes to, there is nothing happening in the brain that corresponds to it?¹¹ Certainly this immaterialism *is* in a good deal of elevated reflection by the philosophers of origination or Free Will.¹²

⁹ 'Functionalism, Identity Theories, the Union Theory', *The Mind-Body Problem: A Guide to the Current Debate*, R. Warner and T. Szubka (eds.), (Oxford & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994).

¹⁰ Davidson, 'Mental Events'; Honderich, *A Theory of Determinism: The Mind, Neuroscience, and Life-Hopes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) or *Mind and Brain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), both p. 71 ff.

¹¹ *Zettel*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Oxford, Blackwell, 1967), ss. 608–10.

¹² Robert Kane, (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

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These six sorts of view, I propose, have recently exhausted the argued or contemplated possibilities. Consciousness could be material or strictly physical, maybe in a package not delivered yet or with ribbons. It could be abstract. It could be paired with the neural in single events. Or it could be traditionally mental.

3. Perceptual Consciousness as Existence

To these six sorts of view can be added one, which has now got some attention¹³, about perceptual consciousness in particular.¹⁴ It is that your being aware of this room consists in certain things existing in a certain sense. You being aware of this room, to put it into a mouthful, consists in there being a certain state of affairs—things outside your head occupying space and time, and being as coloured as things ever are and also propertied in other ways, and having a required or necessary condition in the unperceived physical world outside you and also such a condition in neural events in only your head. In virtue of this latter dependency on what is in your head and also where the head is, the state of affairs is different in what it contains from any other such state of affairs and also the states of affairs that are the perceived physical world and any part of the perceived physical world.

To repeat, what it is for you to be aware of this room, perceptually conscious, *is* for things to exist in this sense—spatio-temporally, with certain properties, with certain dependencies, and different from other such things. The awareness *is* the existing.

This view, Perceptual Consciousness as Existence, may have the unique recommendation of satisfying all the four criteria set out at the start for an adequate analysis of consciousness. Certainly a

¹³ Rudiger Vaas, 'Consciousness and Its Place in Nature', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 9, 2, 2002.

¹⁴ 'Consciousness as Existence,' in Anthony O'Hear, (ed.), *Current Issues in the Philosophy of Mind*, Royal Institute of Philosophy lectures for 1996–7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 137–55; 'Consciousness as Existence Again,' in *Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, Vol. 9, *Philosophy of Mind*, ed. B. Elevitch (Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1999), and also *Theoria*, No. 95, June 2000; The second paper corrects the first in certain important respects. See also 'Consciousness as Existence and the End of Intentionality', referred to in note 4. All the papers are on my website: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctytho/>

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principal argument for the view is the extent to which the competing analyses do not satisfy the criteria.¹⁵

The three materialist views—functionalism on the first understanding is such a view¹⁶—clearly fail the subjectivity test. No coating can change the pill. Nothing will get us to agree that consciousness itself is cells. That consciousness is not cells is the most resilient proposition in the philosophy of mind, and has been since the 17th Century. Having seen off behaviourism, it will do the same with materialist functionalism. We can be as certain that a materialism of future science will fail for the same reason, leaving out the subject-matter on which we have a grip.

The fourth view, functionalism understood as being about abstract relations, fails the second test, about reality. No. 5, the dualistic identity theory, gives no contentful account of the property it assigns to the one thing that is identified by also having other properties. It doesn't get started. It doesn't come up for testing. The sixth view, Immaterialism, fails the second and fourth tests—reality and the input-output problem. None of the six views pays enough attention to the first criterion—in short, differences between the seeming and therefore maybe the actual natures of seeing, thinking and desiring.

Is Perceptual Consciousness as Existence the remaining arguable theory? How it gives us a clear and actual fact of subjectivity may be evident. According to this view, there actually are subjective worlds or states of affairs. There are worlds different from, if like or related to, physical or objective worlds. They are in a plain sense private and do not exist in the absence of a brain or the like—neither of which facts takes them seriously out of analogy with the perceived part of the physical world.¹⁷ So subjectivity is rescued from mysterious and inapposite ideas and images, and of course a self or an elusive subjective aspect of each mental event.¹⁸

¹⁵ That we need *something* new is the view of very many philosophers. See, for example, Thomas Nagel, 'Conceiving the Impossible and the Mind-Body Problem,' *Philosophy*, July, 1998.

¹⁶ Argument for this, and also the objection that strict functionalism is incoherent, see my 'Functionalism, Identity Theories, The Union Theory,' *op. cit.*

¹⁷ See in particular 'Consciousness as Existence', despite the mistakes in it.

¹⁸ For an account in terms of a subjective aspect of each mental event, rather than a substance-subject or the like of mental events, see my *A Theory of Determinism: The Mind, Neuroscience and Life-Hopes*.

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It is as evident that the view makes consciousness into a reality. It is *of the same sort* as the physical. Very roughly it makes awareness into a state of affairs akin to the state of affairs that is the perceived physical world. As for satisfying the first criterion, differential phenomenology, the view was prompted by it—prompted by the fact that what being aware seems to come to is indeed things somehow existing.

As for the input-output criterion, my world of perceptual consciousness consists in things in space. This state of affairs can be in plain causal connection with all other categories of things in space, in particular the things in the physical world. Certainly there can be cross-classification causation—causation between worlds of perceptual consciousness and the physical world.

4. Features of the View

This view of perceptual consciousness, rightly, makes it fundamental to reflective and affective consciousness. To say more of it, therefore, is also to speak of them. It can most easily be made clearer, perhaps, not by adding more formal content to the above somewhat formal statement of it, but by more informal means, the first one being a reminder having to do with heads.

The view does indeed take perceptual consciousness right outside of heads. What it is for you to be aware of the room is for an extra-cranial state of affairs to exist. This is not a certain familiar truth. It is not the truth that our ordinary concepts of seeing or touching, to the extent that there are ordinary concepts, bring in extra-cranial facts—that *seeing* by definition is different from hallucinating. That leaves it possible that the perceptual consciousness itself is in the head—cells, immaterial stuff, or whatever. That is not Perceptual Consciousness as Existence.

To say a word more about this radical externalizing of perceptual consciousness, contemplate the literal question 'Is your consciousness inside your head?' It is a question that we are all inclined at least to jib at.¹⁹ Some of us want to say no, on account of what can be called folk immaterialism. Some of us want to say no on account of the fact just remarked on, that seeing etc. necessarily

¹⁹ In my recent experience the fact has been illustrated in discussions with a couple of scientists, Susan Greenfield, author of *The Human Brain: A Guided Tour* and *The Private Life of the Brain*, and Roger Penrose, author of *The Emperor's New Mind* and *Shadows of the Mind*.

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involve a thing seen or whatever. Is it possible to put aside both of these distractions and still want to say no—straight-off, so to speak? I think so. Conceivably Wittgenstein in one of his better moments did so, when he went on against thinking and feeling being 'a process in the head'.²⁰

All this is bad news for the materialisms. My present point, though, is that it seems a virtue of our account of perceptual consciousness, whatever needs to be said of reflective and affective consciousness, that it saves us from further unhappiness, gives us a good reason for saying at least some consciousness is *not* stuff in our heads. It goes to the end of the path on which recent doctrines of externalism and anti-Individualism hesitate.²¹ What the view leaves behind inside the head is only what is there for certain, which is a brain.

As a second informal reminder of the view, is it also worth remarking, as some have, that it makes consciousness part of ontology, not epistemology? Maybe the remark has some use. In it, what is the subject-matter of ontology taken to be? If that subject-matter includes existing states of affairs, and if the subject-matter of epistemology is taken to have to do with a mysterious mental relation of ours to those states of affairs, then the view in question does of course transfer perceptual consciousness from epistemology to ontology.

A third thing about the view is that it presupposes what some philosophers will hurry to call a Kantian premise. This is that there is a so-called noumenal reality to which we bring our own perceptual and neural machinery—our classificatory machinery. It is my own inclination to think of this reality-underneath as not being beyond or almost beyond our conceiving or classifying, but rather as being the unperceived but certainly theorized part of the physical world.

Of this world, the world of atoms, we make or construct the perceived physical world, that public world, and we also come to have exactly what you have been hearing of—worlds of perceptual consciousness. We make of the reality-underneath a lot of other worlds as well. So a somewhat familiar line of thought out of the history of philosophy is in Perceptual Consciousness as Existence. And,

²⁰ Zettel, s. 611.

²¹ Honderich, 'The Union Theory and Anti-Individualism', in *Mental Causation*, John Heil and Alfred Mele (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

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incidentally, no real multiplying of worlds, no creative prodigality in the way of David Lewis.²²

A fourth comparison has to do with the fact that philosophers of mind have hitherto been inclined to make out of the bottom world not only the perceived or public world outside of heads but also a mental world inside of heads, which latter world has then failed to measure up to good criteria for analyses of consciousness.

The present view having to do with existence constructs things differently. It is different in making out of the bottom world a generally perceived world outside of heads, a physical world having in it things of certain perceived properties and dependent on perceivers generally, and also worlds of perceptual consciousness, each to some extent different and having a different and unique dependency.

Fifthly, Perceptual Consciousness as Existence *is* separate from other views, and despite some misconceptions cannot be seen as or turned into any of them. It evidently is none of the listed materialisms—17th Century, futuristic or functionalist. It is also remote from functionalism when that doctrine is taken immaterialistically, as making consciousness into a matter of bare relations. Consciousness as Existence isn't the dualistic identity theory either. It is, by the way, less dualistic about mind and body than that theory. It does not assign unexplained properties of consciousness to the same events that also have other properties. That is, it does not leave properties of consciousness as possibly entirely unlike physical properties, but makes them akin to physical properties. Finally, the view is nothing like immaterialist.

One more informal characterization—which will lead us further down the agenda. Brentano regarded consciousness as consisting in *content* or *object* and something else. The second thing, which he referred to with commendable restraint in his talk of *direction*, also presupposed a self or inner point of view or what you will along these lines. There has since been some philosophical time given to the subject of content—the content of consciousness. One view takes the content of your present perceptual consciousness to be physical chairs and the like.

With this in mind it is possible to see the existential view of perceptual consciousness in a certain way. What it does is to reduce perceptual consciousness to something related to what others often more vaguely call its content or object. Those of sensitive philosophical dispositions, who react badly to talk of reduction, can as

²² Lewis, David, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

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well see the view as one that enlarges perceptual consciousness into a reality gestured at by others in talk of content or object.

Let us now press on. What of reflective and affective consciousness, thinking and the like and desiring and the like? Can these two other parts, sides or elements of consciousness be understood in a way that fits in with the nature of perceptual consciousness as we have it? For a start, can reflective and affective consciousness be identified with something like what others regard as only their content?

Certainly it will at least be embarrassing if the shortcomings of the six general views of consciousness are escaped in the case of perceptual consciousness and then have to be put up with to some extent in connection with reflective and affective consciousness. We really cannot put together what we have about perceptual consciousness with a materialist or an immaterialist view of thinking. Not only would we be falling into a kind of inconsistency, we would be back with the input-output problem or some other one. We cannot take up a merely functionalist view of our feeling, desiring and intending, not only because of inconsistency but also because such a view would have its own intrinsic shortcomings.

5. Reflective Consciousness, Possible Worlds, Concepts etc.

To start with reflective consciousness, thinking in a wide sense, you can try to bring it into a taxonomy.

- (1) There are the sorts of thinking that enter into and are part of what we have been concerned with so far, perceptual consciousness. These reflective things implicit in perceptual consciousness include conceptualizing, mentioned already, and also attending.
- (2) Reflective consciousness also includes memory—both the activity of remembering and the result of the activity.
- (3) There is curiosity and inquiry. We ask questions, try to measure, seek causes and effects, experiment, guess, reason, seek to prove, and do philosophy, science and politics.
- (4) Whether or not as a result of curiosity and inquiry, we suppose, judge and believe things to be the case. This is our thinking in a narrow sense—thinking that such-and-such in whatever way, thinking somehow that something has a property or relation.
- (5) We imagine things, make up stories, create art.
- (6) In sleep we dream.