

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

A deep concern with consciousness and intentionality is one of the several things that has lately moved into the centre of the philosophy of mind. The issue of consciousness is often treated as something distinct from intentionality, but – as Tim Crane notes in his incisive new Foreword – there is now something of a sea-change. This classic volume may be at least partly responsible for the shift in how philosophy of mind is starting to be understood. Before its first appearance, discussions of consciousness and intentionality in the context of perception were in their infancy. The book was a departure from the way this part of philosophy was conceived. It pointed to new ways to look at the discipline, addressing both the epistemology of mind, and intentionality and consciousness, especially in connection with perception. Showcasing many leading figures in the field, it offers a splendid overview of the issues at stake.

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Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-009-10863-8 — The Philosophy of Mind  
Edited by Anthony O'Hear , Foreword by Tim Crane  
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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009108638](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009108638)

DOI: 10.1017/9781009105262

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First published as Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement: 43, Current Issues in Philosophy of Mind, 1998, Paperback ISBN 9780521639279

This edition first published 2022

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-009-10863-8 Paperback

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## FOREWORD

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When this volume came out in 1998, it accurately represented some of the dominant and emerging concerns of the philosophy of mind at that time. It is interesting to compare, twenty years on, how these topics look now, what has and has not changed and what this tells us about the state of the philosophy of mind today.

A notable feature of *Current Issues* is the relative lack of discussion of the traditional mind–body problem, and its various proposed solutions: dualism, idealism and the varieties of physicalism and functionalism. At the time this represented something of a departure from the way this part of philosophy is usually conceived. The leading student anthologies of the 1990s (e.g. W. G. Lycan's *Mind and Cognition* (1990) or David Rosenthal's *The Nature of Mind* (1991)<sup>1</sup>) put the mind–body problem at the centre of their story of the philosophy of mind, a tradition which continued into the 2000s with David Chalmers's *The Philosophy of Mind* (2002) and Timothy O'Connor and David Robb's

<sup>1</sup> W. G. Lycan (ed.), *Mind and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990; David Rosenthal, *The Nature of Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

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*The Philosophy of Mind* (2003)<sup>2</sup>. This story typically begins with Cartesian dualism – perhaps because it is historically prior, or because it is thought to be closer to the reader's 'pre-philosophical' views – and then presents criticisms and alternative metaphysical visions: behaviourism, physicalism of reductive and non-reductive kinds, and functionalism.

Despite the familiar and almost mechanical way in which these ideas are introduced in these books, there is nonetheless something slightly odd about this roll-call of philosophical positions. For one thing, why is behaviourism treated so seriously? Behaviourism in psychology was historically important, but philosophical behaviourism is surely more of an argumentative stalking horse than a genuinely believable doctrine. After all, the only philosophers who are ever attributed behaviourist views, Gilbert Ryle and Ludwig Wittgenstein, both explicitly denied they were behaviourists. Another obscure aspect of this picture is why the problem is so often framed in terms of the Cartesian concept of substance, a concept which few philosophers these days employ elsewhere in their metaphysics. The somewhat wooden nature of this whole debate often arises from its participants neglecting or refusing to question the intelligibility of the categories in terms of which it is frequently framed.

*Current Issues*, by contrast, largely ignored this metaphysical straitjacket, and provided an alternative picture of the discipline. (The one exception is Jaegwon Kim's paper, to which I

<sup>2</sup> David Chalmers (ed.), *The Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; Timothy O'Connor and David Robb, *The Philosophy of Mind*. London: Routledge, 2003.

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will return later.) A number of distinct themes can be identified. One was the epistemology of mind – the papers by Martin Davies and (the late) Tony Stone, and by Jane Heal on other minds; Crispin Wright wrote on self-knowledge; and Quassim Cassam investigated more broadly some Kantian themes in the epistemology of mind. Among other themes, the papers by Cynthia Macdonald and Michael Morris investigated the ‘normativity’ of the mind and mental discourse, Andy Clark discussed embodiment, Jennifer Hornsby action and Christopher Peacocke freedom. The remaining papers – by Ned Block, Naomi Eilan, Ted Honderich, M.G.F. Martin, the late Gregory McCulloch and me – focus mainly on questions about consciousness and intentionality, especially in connection with perception.

A deep concern with consciousness and its relationship to intentionality is obviously one of the things that have moved into the centre of the philosophy of mind since 1998. This concern has expressed itself in two broad trends. One is the idea that consciousness itself should be understood in terms of intentionality: this is ‘intentionalism’ or ‘representationalism’. The other is the idea of the phenomenology of thought or cognition, that thought has its own distinctive phenomenology.<sup>3</sup> Related to this ‘cognitive phenomenology’ is the distinct doctrine of phenomenal intentionality,<sup>4</sup> which attempts to explain intentionality in terms of consciousness.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Bayne and Michelle Montague (eds.), *Cognitive Phenomenology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Michelle Montague, *The Given*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Uriah Kriegel (ed.), *Phenomenal Intentionality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

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Each of these trends, in their different ways, attempts to break down the sharp distinction between consciousness (or 'phenomenal consciousness') and intentionality, which had dominated analytic philosophy of mind since at least the 1950s. This distinction has been formulated in a number of ways, but common to them all is the idea that intentionality has nothing essentially to do with consciousness, and that the core (or especially problematic) conscious phenomena have nothing essentially to do with intentionality. Here is a clear statement of the view by David Rosenthal in 1994:

There are two broad categories of mental property. Mental states such as thoughts and desires, often called propositional attitudes, have content that can be described by 'that' clauses. For example, one can have a thought, or desire, that it will rain. These states are said to have intentional properties, or intentionality. Sensations, such as pains and sense impressions, lack intentional content, and have instead qualitative properties of various sorts. (349)<sup>5</sup>

Qualitative properties in this sense are sometimes known as 'qualia', and the problem of consciousness is often conceived as the problem of explaining how a physical system can have such properties.

This conception of the distinction between two kinds of mental properties and the associated conception

<sup>5</sup> David Rosenthal, 'Identity Theories' in Samuel Guttenplan (ed.) *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

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of the problem of consciousness is presupposed in Jaegwon Kim's 'The Mind–Body Problem after Fifty Years', the one paper in *Current Issues* which does address the traditional problem of mind and body directly. One of the conclusions of Kim's paper is that 'the two central problems in the philosophy of mind, the problem of consciousness and the problem of mental causation, come together'. This is because the only way to explain consciousness physically is to 'functionalize it in the physical domain': that is, give a complete functionalist or causal characterisation of consciousness. Kim then argues that doing this would also solve the problem of the causal powers of the mental. But he then argues that it cannot be done, for what are now familiar reasons. It is worth looking back at these reasons, not least because of what they show about how intentionality and consciousness have been conceived.

At the heart of Kim's argument is the view that there are no 'unsurmountable obstacles to a causal/functional account of intentionality', but 'the trouble comes from qualia. For, by contrast with the case of intentional phenomena, we seem able to conceive a physical duplicate of this world in which qualia are distributed differently or entirely absent (a "zombie world" as some call it)'. Kim supports this remark with a reference to David Chalmers's (1996) discussion in *The Conscious Mind*.<sup>6</sup> Kim's view, then, is that although intentionality can be functionalised, consciousness cannot: essentially because zombie worlds are possible.

<sup>6</sup> David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

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In other words, a subject or thinker could have all the intentional states it does without being conscious in the 'qualitative' or 'phenomenal' way. (The phenomenal way is sometimes contrasted with the 'access' way of being conscious: a distinction introduced by Ned Block, and discussed in detail in his contribution to *Current Issues*.)

In any case, Kim's line of argument relies on the sharp distinction between intentionality and consciousness which was challenged by intentionalism on the one hand (the view that consciousness is a form of intentionality) and cognitive phenomenology on the other (the view that some intentional states have their own distinctive form of conscious phenomenology). The rejection of this sharp distinction is also the focus of many of the essays in *Current Issues*. Gregory McCulloch rejects the idea that consciousness should be primarily conceived in terms of sensory states, and argues for a kind of cognitive phenomenology. The content of an intentional state 'can be as much a constituent of the stream of consciousness – whatever that means – as itches or patches of red'. McCulloch's emphasis is on the understanding of the meanings of words, rather like Galen Strawson and David Pitt in similar writings from the 1990s. 'Meanings' McCulloch argues, 'others' as well as our own, can figure as integral components of our conscious life'.

Unsurprisingly, McCulloch is on the side of those who reject the notion of qualia as a useful one in classifying mental phenomena. He would agree wholeheartedly with M. G. F. Martin's statement in 'Setting Things Before the Mind' that 'although many philosophers write as if it is simply

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obvious to us that there are qualia, and that we know what they are, I shall argue instead that this is all chimerical'. And in my own contribution to the volume, I argue that the notion of intentionality should not be understood in a way that rules out consciousness at the outset; and this means not construing consciousness in terms of qualia.

The attempts in these papers to break down the sharp distinction between consciousness (conceived of in terms of qualia) and intentionality is, strictly speaking, independent of the roles of these notions in formulating the mind–body problem. However, a connection can certainly be made if the mind–body problem is formulated in the way Kim does – in terms of whether qualia can be functionalised – or the way Chalmers does – in terms of hard and easy problems. For if the distinction between qualia and intentionality has been misconceived by the tradition, and if the distinction between hard and easy problems is not what Chalmers thinks it is, then the mind–body problem will start to look rather different. As Naomi Eilan argues in her contribution to the volume, 'while this bifurcation between easy and hard problems of consciousness is of some polemical value, it is fundamentally misguided, in my view, if it is treated as a resting place. Neither intentionality ... nor access-consciousness are easy concepts in the sense suggested, and phenomenal consciousness is not impenetrably hard in the sense suggested'. Eilan then explicitly makes a connection between the easy/hard distinction and the intentional/phenomenal distinction: 'a fundamental assumption in treating them as easy is that we can give an account of intentionality and

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accessibility wholly independently of an account of phenomenal aspects of experience’. Eilan’s hope is that if we abandon this assumption then we will make progress with the so-called ‘hard problem’.

This hope has not yet been realised: the problem of consciousness is still widely treated as something distinct from the problem of intentionality (see Goff 2019)<sup>7</sup>. But there have been some movements in the direction that Eilan favours in her essay. These days intentionalism or representationalism about consciousness and perception are more widespread, and are seen as a crucial part of the philosophical landscape. And together with the revival of interest in cognitive phenomenology, and the emerging research programme of phenomenal intentionality (Kriegel 2013; Mendelovici 2018; Pitt forthcoming<sup>8</sup>), the simplistic distinction between qualia and intentionality is beginning to break down. It would be nice to think that *Current Issues* has had something to do with these changes in direction in the philosophy of mind.

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Goff, *Galileo’s Error*. New York: Random House, 2019.

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