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Introduction

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Dimensions of Conscious Experience
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Introduction

Background

This book presents a selection of papers that were first presented in an international workshop "Varieties and Dimensions of Conscious Experience", held at the University of Skövde in October 1997. The idea of the workshop was to bring together a small number of researchers who share in common an interest in conscious experience but approach the phenomenon from different angles. The authors were then given the opportunity to develop their papers further, taking into account the discussions in the workshop and in subsequent exchanges. As a result, at least the following dimensions of conscious experience are covered in this anthology: subjectivity vs. objectivity, nonconceptuality vs conceptuality, language, evolution, neural level, microphysical level, creativity, art and dreams. The book provides a kind of "microcosm" of the developing interdisciplinary field of consciousness studies.

Description of the papers

We will here briefly summarize the contents of the papers, beginning with Ronald Chrisley's article. One of the key issues in understanding conscious experience is the turning of subjectivity of experience into something like objectivity of understanding. It has been suggested, for instance, by Thomas Nagel that this is an impossible project as the objectivity of the "view from nowhere" necessarily shuts out what we want to understand in the subjectivity of a perspectival experience. Ronald Chrisley suggests that Nagel's conclusion might be too hasty. Chrisley puts forth a different notion of objectivity, not as a view from nowhere, put as a view from anywhere. According to this notion, objectivity is not one kind of special view amongst other possible views, but rather a way of negotiating between different views, of maintaining something in focus while taking different perspectives on it. This does not amount to a new viewpoint, a view from nowhere, but rather to a skill or capacity of

perspective-juggling. In Chrisley's view, objectivity is not a disembodied thing, it is something that ultimately depends on the constitution of the cognitive agent as a whole. This implies that the search for an objective understanding of conscious experience includes an inquiry into the possibilities and limitations of us as inquirers, thus giving new weight to the old philosophical maxim "know thyself".

Daniel Hutto's paper begins with the observation that a major reason why consciousness is a philosophically problematic phenomenon has to do with the difficulties of incorporating consciousness into our familiar object-based conceptual schema. As a number of recent philosophical studies have emphasized, our basic forms of conscious phenomenal experience are *nonconceptual* in their nature. Hutto suggests that we ought not treat conscious experiences as kinds of object at all. It is better to regard consciousness, not as what is experienced, but as the medium through which we experience. Before reaching and explaining this conclusion Hutto provides us with an elaborate critical review of recent philosophical literature on representational theories of consciousness, nonconceptual content and the nature of phenomenal experience.

Maxim I. Stamenov presents a case for a specific level of linguistic sentence formations that is necessary and sufficient for a mental content to become a conscious one. Cues can be taken from the fact that the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic levels of language are partly non-overlapping, thus creating a possibility to distinguish them from one another by comparing various degrees of discrepancy. Stamenov separates between three syntactic and three semantic on-line subsystems of sentence processing, and argues that for some language structure to become conscious an interface between two of them, the syntactic surface structure and the semantic localistic meaning structure, must be enacted. The argument is based on the analysis of transitive sentence formation, the unity of which according to Stamenov does not permit explanation in terms of an overarching conceptual metacategory or a syntactic structure. Thus the unity is a matter of interfacing the surface level of syntax and the semantic level of localistic meaning structure, the link being consciousness as a mechanism of dual-focus at this level. Thus, the transitive construction is seen as the "common denominator" between the content and the structure of consciousness.

Ingemar B. Lindahl approaches the problem of consciousness from an evolutionary perspective through a discussion of a solution to the problem of coadaptation and gradual evolution. He calls the solution the MBO-hypothesis after its first proponents Conwy Lloyd Morgan, James Mark Baldwin and Henry F. Osborne. According to this hypothesis, plasticity and learning may provide

room for acquired characteristics, which in turn may be replaced by hereditary variation promoted by natural selection, thus creating an illusion of Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characteristics. This hypothesis is especially interesting when it comes to behavioural patterns, where the plasticity needed might be provided by mental processes or consciousness. It might be possible for animals to maintain a behavioural pattern intelligently or consciously until it is partly or totally replaced by overtly similar genetically transmitted variations, "hardwiring", so to speak. This, of course, leads us to a central question: is consciousness a causal factor in producing plasticity or behaviour or just another name for hardwired neural and material processes? Lindahl suggests that in Baldwin's theory problems occur because Baldwin tries to reconcile a dualistic view of consciousness with a materialistic analysis of causation. In contrast to this, Lindahl discusses the evolutionary ideas of William James and Karl Popper, who have argued for the survival value of consciousness, which in turn would imply some kind of causal efficacy of consciousness. This conclusion supports, according to Lindahl, an interactionist picture of the mind and the body. As for the existence of consciousness in animals, Lindahl mentions two important considerations. First, in a Darwinian view, nothing prevents us from positing a continuum of intentional mental life in the same way we posit a continuum of biological structure. Second, Lindahl claims that the problem of inferring from overt behaviour to "inner" mental life is not a methodological one since such inference from observed effects to unobserved causes is quite common in natural science. According to him, the decisive step is the choice of the topic of inquiry. Stopping inference from behaviour and biological evolution to experiental or mental notions is unfruitful, to say the least, if one is interested in the question of how consciousness has been preserved in biological evolution. That question, Lindahl points out, is a quite natural one to ask in view of the evolutionary facts and the fact that we quite obviously are conscious. His conclusion is that it seems likely that consciousness has been preserved because of its usefulness, part of which may lie in the generation of behavioural patterns that can prepare the way for natural selection of innate structure.

Antti Revonsuo draws attention to the central role that cognitive neuroscience plays in the emerging discipline of consciousness studies. For one of the most exciting aspects of consciousness studies has been to learn what cognitive neuroscience research says about such phenomena as blindsight, 40-Hz synchronous activity correlated with perception, neural correlates of binocular rivalry, and functional brain imaging of conscious states. Revonsuo points out, however, that cognitive neuroscience research is based upon implicit assumptions

on what consciousness is, where it is to be found, and which methods can be used to reveal it. These assumptions need to be carefully scrutinized, and a kind of philosophy of cognitive neuroscience is called for. In his paper he first reviews some of the findings on visual awareness that have recently been made in cognitive neuroscience. He then raises the question of what exactly are the phenomena that have been measured in these studies. If we assume that consciousness is a level of organization in the brain, Revonsuo argues that it is not at all clear that we have directly measured that level in a functional neuroimage.

Basil Hiley and Paavo Pylkkänen begin by considering the general issue of naturalizing the mental. It has been traditionally problematic to find a place for mental properties in a physical universe, whether one is considering the causal powers of mental properties, their directedness (intentionality/ meaningfulness), or their conscious properties. The developments in contemporary physics require a new concept of the physical domain and consequently the mind-matter problem may be affected. Hiley and Pylkkänen focus on the so called ontological interpretation of the quantum theory (developed by Bohm and Hiley) which claims that in order to make intelligible the puzzling empirical and theoretical results of the quantum theory one has to postulate a new property of active information playing a role at the quantum level. This is a new ontological hypothesis which provides a new way of approaching the traditional philosophical problems concerning mental and physical properties. Hiley and Pylkkänen further consider the philosophical implications of some even more general proposals arising from physics, proposals, which are required, if we are to make progress in some of the unsolved problems of physics, such as quantizing gravity. Their paper involves some speculative metaphysics, but they emphasize the connection of their ideas to solid empirical results and mathematical formalism that correctly describes them.

Gordon Globus and Elena Bezzubova are encouraged by the new resources which Quantum Brain Dynamics (QBD) offers for philosophical discussion. QBD is a new approach which originates in the application of quantum field theory to brain functioning and is represented by, for example, Mari Jibu and Kunio Yasue. Globus and Bezzubova adopt a "postmodern" perspective which requires that QBD has to be approached with caution: a route between the Scylla of science-technology and the Charybdis of metaphysical consciousness has to be found. On the one hand one has to watch out for interpreting QBD in the traditional modernistic technoscientific sense. This would easily give rise to just another form of *Gestell*, the hidden control that technology has over our thinking according to Heidegger. On the other hand the modernistic notion of

consciousness is prone to perpetuate the dualities between the mental and the physical along side many other metaphysical dualities. Globus and Bezzubova's postmodern QBD provides us with a poetic synthesis of quantum field theory, neuroscience, Heidegger and Derrida. We are encouraged, in understanding our brain-Existenz, to give attention to the dynamical fullness of interpenetrated possibilities whose probabilities are under nonlocal cognitive control.

In his article, John Briggs presents a sceptical if not ironical view of the hubris of reductive accounts of consciousness. Briggs separates between three types of ordering processes in consciousness, the primary order, the primordial order, and the order of what he denotes by the term "this*otherness". The primary ordering is one in terms of knowledge, of abstracting or filtering the plenitude of sensory information into abstract representations. This mapping might be either "built-in", hardwired, or "built-up", learned. According to Briggs, this is the process that Western society and materialist science is most aware of. The second type of order Briggs calls the primordial order, which is the process of un-abstracting the abstractions created in the primary process. Evidence of the primordial process can, according to Briggs, be found all over the human record, but an emphasis on the voiding and unabstracting primordial process is more familiar from Eastern schools of thought. Such unabstracting Briggs sees as a fundamental part of creative activity, in shaping new mappings and representations, but even more importantly, in reminding us of the inadequateness of all primary order conceptualizations. The third order, that in his view unites the primary and primordial orders, Briggs denotes with the neologism "this*otherness". The word is intended to point out the way in which for example certain works of art keep the "thisness" of primary order and the "otherness" of primordial order together in an unresolved whole. *This*otherness* brings about an aesthetic distance that makes it possible to experience the whole in an impersonal, non-objective and non-subjective way. Briggs sees *this*otherness* at work in true metaphors that neither lapse into ideas or abstractions nor into revolts or nullifications of abstractions. Thus *this*otherness* is the order which more than the primary order essentially characterises consciousness, and which by its very existence calls into question the validity of algorithmic accounts of the primary order as explanations of consciousness *tout court*.

In her article Susanne Ackers approaches consciousness through art. According to her, the history of art and history of technology should not be separated too strictly, as both reflect consciousness as *mediated* experience. Ackers analyses a contemporary work of art, Charlotte Davies' *Osmose* that can be described as a virtual space. The noteworthy aspect of the work is that it both

aesthetically and technologically breaks the classical tradition that Panofsky described in his "Perspective as a Symbolic Form." In virtual spaces like *Osmose* perspective is perceivable not as symbolic form but as individual time of the like encountered in works of literature. Thus this kind of mediated art experience can give a glimpse of what a "materialization of consciousness" in the Jamesian sense might look like.

Tere Vadén discusses the division of conscious experience to dreaming and waking. A metaphysical unbalance in favour of waking and contra dreams can be discerned in many contemporary notions of dreaming. According to Vadén, this unbalance is structurally analogous to the bias in classical Freudian theory, where the notion of dreamwork is introduced as a way of implying waking-life purposes and goals to dreaming. Vadén analyses the philosophical motivation and production of the distinction through terms of asubjective experience, where the distinction of subject and object has been dissoluted. The dissolution leads, according to Vadén, also to a partial dissolution of the dream-waking duality; a dissolution that is well in agreement with recent studies in neuroscience.