

Reflexivity vs Transparency in the Study of Consciousness

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Models of Consciousness

- Models of consciousness tend to endorse either
 - transparency: we are aware only of externalia (the objects, colors, etc represented in consciousness)
 - reflexivity: we are aware of our experiences (and of ourselves?)

Strong and Weak Theses

- Strong Reflexivity: We are always aware of our experiences
- Weak Reflexivity (Weak Transparency?): We are sometimes aware of our experiences.
- Strong Transparency: We are never aware of our experiences

Varieties of Awareness

- N.B. Awareness here should be something like (quasi-perceptual) property-awareness or event-awareness, now just (quasi-cognitive) fact-awareness.

Against Strong Transparency

- I deny strong transparency and favor at least weak reflexivity: I think we are at least sometimes aware of our experiences.

Phenomenological Experiment

- Move your head and attend externally: nothing seems to change
- Now attend to your experience: something seems to change dramatically.
- You're aware of a change; the external world doesn't change; so it's a change in your experience.

Attention and Awareness

- This strongly suggests: we can be aware of features of our experiences, when we attend to them.
- This falsifies a strong transparency thesis.

Weak Reflexivity

- Many phenomenological arguments for reflexivity, including this one, establish only weak reflexivity:
- When we attend to our experiences, we're aware of them.

Consciousness without Attention

- What about experiences we don't attend to?
- Introspection arguably doesn't tell us whether we're aware of these (since when we introspect, we attend).
- So introspection is consistent with denying strong reflexivity?

Abductive Argument

- Abductive argument for strong reflexivity: strong reflexivity is the best explanation of weak reflexivity.

Explaining Attention

- Q: How can we attend to our experiences?
- A: Because we're already aware of them (or acquainted with them) and we exploit this awareness relation.

Alternative Model

- Alternative: attention to experience creates awareness of experience.
- Pre-attention, we are aware at most of associated externalia.
- Post-attention, we're aware of our awareness of externalia.
- Q: How do we become so aware?

Question

- Question: What other reasons are there to favor strong reflexivity over weak reflexivity?
 - Phenomenology
 - Explaining attention/introspection?
 - Uniformity?
 - ...

Strong Reflexivity Model

- The model I like: in experience, we're always aware of externalia and aware of our awareness of externalia.

Varieties of Awareness

- There are two levels of awareness here
- Awareness of externalia is awareness 1: phenomenal representation (nonfactive)
- Awareness of experiences is awareness 2: Russellian acquaintance (factive).

Hierarchy and Regress?

- When we're aware₁ of x, we're aware₂ of being aware₁ of x (in virtue of the nature of awareness₁).
- When we're aware₂ of x, are we aware₂ of being aware₂ of x?
- [Either no; or being aware₂ of x is not a distinct phenomenal state from x.]

Relationship

- What's the relationship between being aware¹ of x and being aware² of being aware¹ of x?
- They're not identical (different logical structure).
- But they have the same phenomenology (not both phenomenal states; being aware² is a phenomenally conscious mental state).

Grounding

- My view: being aware₁ of x grounds being aware₂ of being aware₁ of x.
- By the nature of the phenomenal, one is always acquainted with the phenomenal.
- Phenomenal awareness is by its nature self-revealing.

Phenomenology and Awareness

- I think: it's an essential (and analytic) feature of the phenomenal that for any phenomenal state, we're aware of (acquainted with) being in it.
- The acquaintance is not a separate phenomenal state; it's an aspect of the original phenomenal state, and has exactly the same phenomenology.

Toward a Reduction?

- Can we use this model to reductively analyze the phenomenal?
- E.g. a state is phenomenal if we're aware of being in it? (higher-order theories?)
- Or, if we're aware of being in it by virtue of being in it? (self-rep theories?)

More Needed

- No: either aware = phenomenally aware, in which case there's no reduction.
- Or aware = represents (or some broader notion), in which case the definition is inadequate.

Non-Conscious Representation

- Common objection to representationalism: unconscious states can represent, so representation doesn't suffice for consciousness.
- One needs X-representation (= conscious representation) for an adequate theory.

Non-Conscious Self-Representation

- Objection to representationalism:
unconscious states can self-represent, so
self-representation doesn't suffice for
consciousness.
- One needs X-representation (= conscious
representation) for an adequate theory.

Candidates for X

- Candidates for X:
 - representation that plays a functional role (usual problems for functionalism about consciousness)
 - explicit representation (inadequate)
 - conscious representation (nonreductive)
 - ...

Order of Grounding

- I think: rather than self-representation grounding experience, experience grounds self-representation.
- Nonreductive self-representationalism?

Self-Awareness

- Q: Does awareness of our experiences entail awareness of self?
- A: I think so.

Experiences and Subjects

- I think: it's analytic that every experience is had by someone.
- Experience = what it is like to be = what it is like to be a subject.
- Maybe momentary, maybe nonsubstantial, but still a subject!
- What are the arguments for subjectless experiences?

Awareness of Subjects

- When one's aware of an experience, one is aware of what it is like to be (a subject), so one is at least tacitly aware of a subject.
- Perhaps one could be aware merely of someone's having this is experience? But experience doesn't seem like this.
- One is acquainted with a concrete event: the event of my having this experience.

Consciousness and Self-Consciousness

- If so: all consciousness involves self-consciousness.

Residual Issue

- Residual issue: how can there be a self-revealing relation of consciousness”
- i.e. a relation awareness I such that whenever S is aware I of x, S is acquainted with S’s being aware I of x?

Homework Exercise

- I'll leave that as a (hard) homework exercise.