

Consciousness and Experience



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Consciousness and Experience, by William Lycan. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Bradford Books, 1996. Pp. xviii + 211. \$35.00.

Billed as a sequel to his 1987 *Consciousness*, this formidable work advances Lycan's campaign for his functionalism about the mind. While it slightly modifies Lycan's 1987 view, the current book furthers his project primarily by responding to a wide array of new, consciousness-inspired objections to functionalism, which have proliferated in the intervening years. Familiarity with the earlier book is not presupposed here; *Consciousness and Experience* stands alone as a tightly argued, comprehensive defense of functionalism.

Lycan champions functionalism by defending two key theses about the mind: (I) consciousness is internal monitoring (this is the "inner sense" view), and (II) mental properties are exhausted by representational and/or functional properties (this is a species of representationalism). He uses the first thesis to defuse subjectivity-based objections to functionalism, while his brand of representationalism combats qualia-based objections. (A virtue of the book is the precision with which the author distinguishes disparate phenomena alleged to undermine functionalism, all of which fall under the umbrella "consciousness".) Together, these theses provide a unified, functionalist theory of the mind.

Theses (I) and (II) are strictly independent. That consciousness consists in being monitored or represented by a particular faculty does not entail that the monitored state is itself representational. Conversely, a state's mentality could consist in its representational features without higher-order awareness playing any special role. By conjoining these, Lycan commits himself to a deeply intentional account of the mind. Not only is mentality exhausted by representational features, but those mental states which are conscious are so by virtue of being represented. Add to this a broadly functionalist account of representation, and Lycan's primary goal is secured.

With the first thesis, Lycan develops Locke's claim that consciousness consists in the operation of inner sense. He follows Armstrong in using an evolution-based, teleological criterion for "internal attention mechanisms", responsible for the "scanning" or "monitoring" which constitutes inner sense; the view can thus ground a naturalist account of the mind. Further, he stipulates that the inner sense view pertains only to states we are conscious of. This restriction to what Dretske has called "transitive consciousness" sidesteps important objections, and limits the force of the claim that consciousness is inner sense. With this limited explanandum, and by carefully distinguishing scanned from scanning states, Lycan persuasively rebuts a range of objections to the inner sense view.

Two points about Lycan's defense of inner sense deserve mention. Replying to Rey's claim that notebook computers are self-scanning, Lycan argues that consciousness comes in degrees, and these computers may, in fact, possess a low degree of it. He concludes that there may be no determinate number of consciousnesses in a single body. Regardless of whether the phenomena at

issue warrant the label “consciousnesses”, some principled way to distinguish a subject’s consciousness from these purported subsystem consciousnesses is needed. For the evolution-based constraint on consciousness is that only what has the function of monitoring *for the subject* can contribute to consciousness. Taken at face value, this constraint, together with the admission that subsystems may be conscious, appears to attribute subjecthood to the subsystems, obliterating the contrast on which the qualification “for the subject” is based. Perhaps the constraint applies only to consciousness above a certain degree. But then Lycan’s basis for denying Searle’s claim, that consciousness is “on/off”, evaporates, as Searle allows that, once “on”, consciousness can vary in robustness. In any case, the status of subsystem consciousnesses, and their relation to conscious subjects, remains unclear.

My second point concerns one of Dretske’s objections. The inner sense view of consciousness shares with its similar competitor, the higher-order thought (or HOT) theory, the obligation to explain why awareness of a mental state makes that state conscious. As Dretske has noted, awareness of a freckle does not make *it* conscious. The chief virtue of such theories is their deflationism about consciousness; failure to explain why awareness of mental states differs from awareness of freckles could indicate that, far from dissolving the mystery of consciousness, such theories merely displace it. Lycan claims that the difference lies in the fact that mental states, unlike freckles, are *mental*. This response shifts a heavy burden to Lycan’s account of the mental. For Lycan, representational/functional features must distinguish mental states from freckles. But admittedly non-mental states have functional and, in some sense, representational features. Because it does not say what sort of such features suffice for mentality, or explain why they do, the reply to Dretske’s objection is seriously incomplete. This is an important lacuna in a book which aims to dispel consciousness worries.

The defense of the inner sense view targets subjectivity-based arguments. One anti-functional argument which has roots in both subjectivity concerns and qualia concerns is the knowledge argument. According to its proponents, knowing what it’s like to experience red, say, requires actually experiencing red, and so phenomenal knowledge cannot be assimilated to knowledge of the objective or physical. Lycan laudably observes that the objective/subjective distinction has no obvious correlation to the physical/mental distinction. In blocking the knowledge argument’s anti-materialist conclusions (materialism is incompatible with *subjective* qualia, and with *subjective qualia*), he brings to bear the inner sense view as well as his representationalism.

The general strategy for refuting the knowledge argument is a familiar one. Since knowledge is intensional, one can acquire it without learning about any object or event of which one was previously ignorant. In other words, it is only a particular epistemic relation to a phenomenal fact that requires undergoing the salient phenomenal experience; the same state of affairs can be known, under a different description, without having the experience. Lycan’s

own gloss of this strategy draws on the inner sense view: for him, it is the scanning relation which underwrites the access to one's own qualitative states exploited by the knowledge argument.

This account of the subjectivity of phenomenal knowledge also draws on representationalism, if only implicitly, and so this response to the knowledge argument provides an illuminating bridge between the book's two main theses. Lycan takes gaining phenomenal knowledge to consist in eliminating conceptual possibilities—that yellow looks phenomenally like what we call “pink”—which are, crucially, *not* metaphysical possibilities. If it is metaphysically impossible for a functional state to have a different qualitative property from the one it does, in fact, have, then qualitative character inheres in functional features. Lycan's representationalism aspires to substantiate functionalism about qualia.

Nearly half of the book is dedicated to this thesis, dubbed “the hegemony of representation”: “the mind has no special properties that are not exhausted by its representational properties, along with or in combination with the functional organization of its components” (p. 11). To explain how phenomenal properties are representational, Lycan updates Armstrong's analysis of phenomenal color, according to which phenomenal color experiences consist in representations of physical color. This analysis provides the basis for responding to a range of inverted spectrum cases, which is done with some ingenuity. The most interesting response asserts that even if perceptual states are at a higher computational level than phenomenal color experiences, the latter may yet be computational, since the computational/structural (software/hardware) distinction is level relative. If tenable, this claim would recast the inverted spectrum debate, for it implies that phenomenal experience can vary independently of representational perceptual states while being none the less representational. The viability of this move depends on an answer to the question: what is it that such phenomenal experiences represent?

A tentative answer may be gleaned from Lycan's treatment of Peacocke's alleged counterexamples to representationalism, to which an entire chapter is devoted. In one such case, a subject sees two trees, one 100 feet away, the other 200 feet away. While seen as being the same height, the trees apparently contribute different qualitative features to the experience, since the image of the closer tree occupies a larger portion of the subject's visual field. Lycan explains such cases by claiming that perceptual states involve at least two “layers” of representation: the subject represents the trees *by* representing tree-shapes, which are Brentano-esque intentional inexistents. Moreover, by acknowledging that some sort of unconscious inference may be required to yield tree representations from tree-shape representations, Lycan allows that these representations are distinct. Perhaps, then, the answer to our question is this: intentional inexistents are what phenomenal experiences, at a lower computational level than perceptual states, represent.

These two moves are not explicitly linked in the book, and this way of linking them is merely speculative. That the book invites such speculations is a mark of the author's success in offering an engaging, sustained defense of a sophisticated and compelling theory of the mind.

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The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology, by Eric T. Olson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, New York, 1997. Pp.189. H/b. £25.00.

Although Darwinian explanatory strategies are being employed ever more widely, in areas as diverse as culture and cosmology, there remains a widespread reluctance to subscribe to a central tenet of Darwinism, namely the thesis that we ourselves are animals. This reluctance does not, for the most part, stem from a belief that we are immaterial souls, but from a doctrine about objects and their identity conditions. We may be wholly material beings, but are nonetheless material beings of a distinctive sort, namely *persons*. Whereas animals have biological identity conditions, persons have mentalistic identity conditions, from which it follows that persons and animals are numerically distinct. *The Human Animal* is a sustained vigorous assault on this way of thinking. Olson's contention is that the Lockean or "Psychological Approach", irrespective of how it is developed in detail, is metaphysically flawed, and he urges us to accept in its stead a Biological Approach, according to which we human persons are organisms of a particular kind, members of the biological species *Homo sapiens*, entities whose persistence conditions are entirely independent of mentality.

I will come to Olson's intriguing metaphysical arguments shortly, but I want to comment first on another aspect of his position, which is also of interest. The Psychological Approach is inspired by imaginary cases in which psychological and physical continuity come apart. Olson's favoured scenario of this sort, tailor-made to mesh with his account of the persistence conditions of organisms, is based on the supposition that our mental states and capacities are located in the upper parts of the brain, the cerebrum, which is surgically separable from those parts of the lower brain responsible for autonomic bodily functions. If the Biological Approach were true, cerebrum transplants would have no more affect on personal identity than kidney transplants, but this seems absurd. Wouldn't it be reasonable for you to care about the person who receives your cerebrum (and so your psychology) in just the ways that you would care about your future self? Wouldn't it be right and reasonable for your friends and family to do likewise? Given the strength of intuitions such as these, isn't it clear that personal identity and psychological continuity are