

ME-ISHNESS

A KANTIAN EXPLANATION OF SUBJECTIVE CHARACTER

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1 ME-ISHNESS

Phenomenal Consciousness

To be phenomenally conscious consists in there being something it's like to be a certain organism and to experience mental states from a first-person-perspective (Nagel 1974).

- Qualitative Character

Conscious experiences differ in qualitative character, e.g. reddish visual exp., auditory exp. of violin, taste of wine ...

- Subjective Character/Me-ishness

All conscious representations have a

"Me-ishness" about them. They are something for me as their subject (Block 1995)

3 KANTIAN ALTERNATIVE

The Basic Idea

- M is something for me, if it belongs to the unity of consciousness, as an element of the subjects' one global representation.

The "I think must be able to accompany" each mental representation M, "for the manifold representations that are given in a certain intuition would not all together be my representations if they did not all together belong to one self-consciousness." (B132)

- Empirical Self-consciousness of myself as identical subject only comes about in view of a combination of representations (B133)

- Representations which are nothing for me are e.g. self-contradictory combinations of representations or subliminal perceptions (e.g. blindsight).

4 HO GLOBAL STATES

The Basic Idea

- M is conscious if being incorporated/recruited into the globally integrated state that is the momentary neural/functional substrate of the agent's shifting transient conscious self-awareness.

- No separate HO state M* representing M is needed. (Van Gulick 2004)

Avoiding Objections against HOT/HOP

- Only mental states are candidates for such recruitment

- Error and illusion are not possible

- No conceptual capacities needed

- Global states serve as basis of unified experience

> Is there empirical evidence for neural processes which might execute recruitment?

Central Explananda

UNITY OF SELF

What explains our consciousness of ourselves as one unified self (synchronically and diachronically)?

UNITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In virtue of what function are mental states integrated into one global representation which constitutes our unified experience?

4 HIGHER-ORDER THEORY

The Basic Idea

- Mental state M is conscious if it is represented by a separate and distinct, simultaneously occurring HO state M*. The content of M* is that one is in M. If M* is absent, then M is unconscious.

> My desire for a glass of wine is conscious if I am also in another state M* representing the desire.

- Versions:

HOT: M* = Thought (Rosenthal 1997)

HOP: M* = Perception (Lycan 1996).

Some Objections

- In general, my having a thought or perception about an X does not transform it into a conscious X. Why in the case of mental states? (Dretske 1993)

- Possible Illusion/Error:

M* without M or M* misrepresenting M. What would be experienced in these cases, and why? (Neander 1998)

- Too-fancy-Objection: If infants and higher animals lack the conceptual capacities for HO Thoughts, they cannot have conscious experiences.

- Unity of Consciousness:

Separate HO states cannot explain why M₁, M₂,... are not experienced in isolation. M*₁, M*₂,... might refer to different selves.

Synthesis

Dynamical process of rule-guided acts of cognition, necessary function for explaining:

- perception of object o as an F (Gestaltpsychology) and objects over time (e.g. moving objects)

- regular complex representations in thoughts

- combination of M₁, M₂,... into one global

representation subserving the empirical self-consciousness of subject as subject.

Challenge

Are there empirical processes, which realize - contra Kant's thesis - the functions of synthesis?

The I think

- Unified sense of self cannot be explained by bundle of representations, because "I would have as multi-coloured, diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious" (B134)

- Consciousness involves pre-reflexive self-awareness. Thematic self-awareness is possible through shift of attention

- Self-reference without identification: immunity to error (since "I" = empty in content) (A355, B135, Shoemaker 1968)

- "Virtual", not "local" presence of self in the brain

5 NEUROBIOLOGY

- Binding

Processes needed to combine/unify distributed information about perceived objects, e.g. 40Hz-oscillations. (Crick 1994, Koch 2004, Engel et al. 1999)

- NCC

M is conscious only if its NCC is integrated into a cluster of distributed neural processes with a dynamic core. (Edelman/Tononi 2000)

- Proto-Self

Unconscious biological mechanism monitoring total state of organism and underlying the Core Self carrying the First-Person Perspective. (Damasio 1999)

6 CONCLUSION

- This Kantian approach aims to explain Me-ishness of conscious experiences in terms of unity of consciousness and self.

- Mental state M is phenomenally conscious if being integrated into the cluster of states constituting the subjects' current global representation.

- Analogously, the NCC of each M must be a component of the dynamical cluster of neural processes currently underlying the subject's total state of self-awareness.

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