

CONSCIOUSNESS AS EXISTENCE – Ted Honderich – Agrigento, November 2005.

What is it for you now to be aware of this room? What is it for you to be thinking of home? What is it for you to be wanting to be there? Your perceptual, reflective and affective consciousness – your actual consciousness, as distinct causes, neural correlates, effects of it or anything else.

Criteria for adequate theory of your consciousness in general. (1) It has a nature all of which is had by or given to you. (2) Subjective in being different from mine and from objective outlooks etc. (3) It is a reality, i.e. physical or near-physical. (4) It has other than neural properties – this is the most resilient proposition in the philosophy of mind. (5) Interacts causally with physical events. (6) At least some consciousness seems not to be something inside your head.

What it seems like for you to be aware of this room is for the room in a way to exist – for there to be a state of affairs outside your head, a world of perceptual consciousness (wpc). Seems spatio-temporal, and could depend both on you neurally and also on a noumenal world underneath, the world of atoms.

What it seems to be for you to think of what is not present is only for there to be representations (in a wpc) and/or representations in your head, both possibly spatio-temporal and having the same dependencies.

What it is for you to want something, it seems, is for there is to be outer values (in a wpc) and also inner sensations and representations, all of these possibly spatio-temporal and relatedly dependent.

Consciousness as Existence theory is that your consciousness actually is in these three ways as it seems and as is possible. It puts consciousness partly outside the head. It goes beyond the externalisms of Putnam and Burge. Some of its recommendation is comparative, its superiority to only 2 alternatives:

Devout Physicalism – theories that allow only neural properties to consciousness - ruled out by (1) its having a nature which is as it seems. This physicalism also ruled out by the resilient proposition (4). Requirements of subjectivity (5) and seeming non-cranialism (6) count against it too.

Spiritualism – theories often called dualism that take consciousness out of space – ruled out by (5) causal interaction and of course (3) consciousness being a reality, at least near-physical.

Your perceptual consciousness according to Consciousness as Existence (1) is what it appears to be. (2) On account of your point of view and conceptual individuality, on which your wpc is partly dependent, your perceptual consciousness is different – subjective. (3) Your being aware is a reality, not a mental world, a near-physical state of affairs different from the physical world in not being owed to our somehow amalgamated points of view and our shared or universal conceptual scheme. (4) Your awareness is not reduced to neural activity. (5) A wpc, being spatio-temporal, of course can relate causally to other wpc's and the physical world. (5) Your perceptual consciousness is not cranialized.

Reflective consciousness on the theory has a seeming nature different from perceptual. The theory has it that reflective consciousness consists in the mentioned representations, these being things that share some of the causal properties of what they represent. The account also satisfies all the other criteria.

Affective consciousness according to the theory also satisfies all the criteria.

The theory is not circular or non-analytic. Perceptual consciousness is proposed to be precisely the existence of a world, not consciousness of the existence of a world. Reflective consciousness is precisely the existence of representations. Theory has the further characteristic that it reduces all of consciousness to more or less what other theories take to be its objects or contents. It is a near-physicalism. No funny relations within or part of it, whatever relations hold between it and the brain.

Given the theory, neuroscience in itself is inquiry into a necessary rather than a sufficient condition of perceptual consciousness – and of parts of reflective and affective consciousness. This fact of only a neural necessary condition of perceptual consciousness defeats the long-running argument from illusion or a brain in a vat. A splendid side-recommendation of the theory.

The theory is conceptual reconstruction rather than analysis, but in accordance with our grip on consciousness. It makes all of consciousness a subject for science, and differently for philosophy.