

Ted Honderich

## *Radical Externalism*

If you want a philosophically diligent exposition of a theory, something that has got through review by conventional peers, go elsewhere (Honderich, 2004). If you want an understanding made more immediate by brevity and informality, read on. The theory is a Radical Externalism about the nature of consciousness. If it is not a complete departure from the cranialism of most of the philosophy and science of consciousness, it is a fundamental departure.

You are *seeing this page*. What does that fact come to? What is that state of affairs? The natural answer has a lot in it, about the page as a physical thing, whatever one of those is, and about your retinas and your visual cortex. It also has in it philosophy and science about the relation between a neural process and your consciousness.

So there is more to your seeing the page than your consciousness of it.

Is there some mistake in that remark? Some mistake in saying that your consciousness is only part of the story of your seeing the page? Well, we *can* decide to say that your being conscious of the page *was* all of the fact of your seeing the page as just understood, a fact with your visual cortex in it as a part. But that is a special usage, an extraordinary one. Our ordinary assumption is that your visual cortex was no part of your *being conscious* of whatever it was. That fact about you, that property of you or state of affairs with respect to you had no neurons in it.

Is there anything dubious or maybe uninformed about speaking of your consciousness a minute ago as something that did not have your visual cortex in it? Certainly the verbal practice of a lot of philosophers and scientists of consciousness suggests so (Papineau, 2000; Honderich, 2000). But if there really were something dubious, the whole history of the philosophy of mind would be open to doubt in this preliminary way.

That history has had in it the main proposition that mind and brain — including your mind and brain a minute ago — are two things, this being ‘dualism’, and also the proposition that they are one thing, in fact the brain, this being ‘monism’. In order for it to have been conceptually possible consistently to say they are two things, talk of your consciousness has to be understood as not itself talk of your brain. Also, talk of your consciousness has to be understood as not talk of your brain in order for it to be possible to maintain, as other than a conceptual or logical truth, that your mind really was only one thing with your brain. To which it can be added that the history of the science of consciousness includes much on mind–brain correlation. That too depends on consciousness not having cortex as a part of it.

If we now ask for an explanation of the existence of this standard conception of consciousness, one comes to hand quickly. We ordinarily take it that consciousness is something we *have*. It is because in seeing the page we don’t *have* the neurons or whatever that the neurons are not part of the consciousness. Your consciousness, in this understanding of it that is standard and nearly universal, is such that there is nothing in it or to it that you do not *have*.

To this proposition, no doubt, one response will be that it is not clear what it is to *have* something in the sense in question. Somebody will say it’s plainly not like having money or an arm or a hope. The rejoinder is that there is nothing clearer to me than what was in my consciousness a minute ago and what was not. I do indeed know what I was seeing, what I was thinking, what I was feeling. My having something in the relevant sense was my doing those things.

Being a difficult philosophical customer, you may say that this is not good enough as a clarification of saying that consciousness is something we have. Well, it has to be admitted that the final answer to the question of what it was for you to have or to experience things or propositions or feelings will be that you were conscious of them, whatever that comes to. We are on the way to an answer to the question.

Our subject right now, however, is whether any answer to which we come will have to be in accord with this datum about consciousness being something we have. One impediment in inquiry, you can think, here or elsewhere, is the idea that we don’t know what we haven’t got an analysis or decent understanding of. Well, whatever my analytical problems, I know there is past, present and future, and that representations represent, and that effects are not events that might not have happened given everything just as it was. I know too that my consciousness is something that I have. Certainly other pieces of

language can be added and they are of some use. Consciousness is present to me, immediate, in no way a matter of inference.

Join me in putting aside, please, talk of the unconscious, the sub-conscious, lurking or bullied desires unnoticed by their owners, and all that. It preceded Freud, of course, and is entirely independent of his own theories of early sexual desires and what-not. This sort of talk, some of it reasonable, is easily made sense of in terms of brain rather than mind. It is not any kind of consciousness, but rather dispositional beliefs and feelings, which is just to say existing parts of possible causal circumstances, standing parts of possible nomic correlates for ordinary or non-dispositional beliefs and feelings (Honderich, 1988; 1990, pp. 86, 92). We can keep confused consciousness, of course, which is just as much consciousness as any other kind.

Come now to the most useful form of the proposition I have been labouring — and, as you will be hearing, not just as an explanation of a conception of consciousness. The most useful form of the proposition that consciousness is something we have is this: with respect to consciousness, *there is no difference between appearance and reality*. With consciousness, what there seems to be is what there is. What there seems to be is all there is. If you want to set out to know the whole nature of your consciousness, not a scintilla left out, let alone a basement, however you subsequently proceed to try to analyse it, just reflect on what it seems to be, tell yourself what you have.

We started, after putting aside your seeing a page, with the property, fact or affairs that was exactly your consciousness of the page. We now have it that a certain question is crucial. What did your consciousness *seem* to consist in? An answer can grow on you fast. It was *for the page to be there*. What your consciousness seemed to consist in was nothing other or more than that. In a better sense of the words than employed by some philosophers, that is what it was like for you to be conscious of the page and that is all that it was like.

It wasn't as if what seemed to be had, or given or on hand, like the page, included something else as well. There wasn't something such that the rest of what was on hand was a *content* — there wasn't a container or vehicle. There wasn't any sign at all of this item raised up into being by ordinary philosophical talk of the contents of consciousness. There wasn't 'the mind' or 'the self', which still turns up in advanced philosophy that does not remember Hume's service in reminding us that we are aware of no such thing. There wasn't a relationship of intentionality, aboutness or directedness in your consciousness of the page. There wasn't an act of affirmation in it as well

as the page. No doubt all of that has to do with truths, but not truths about what it seems to be to be conscious of the page you are seeing.

Consciousness is perceptual, reflective or affective — in brief it has to do with seeing, thinking and wanting. We are as good as never engaged in only one of the sorts of things. There are large problems here. One is the understanding of the mixing and melding of the three parts, kinds, sides or whatever of consciousness, of how one contributes to another, even in ordinary seeing and acting.

A further problem, obviously connected, is that of the priority or fundamentality of perceptual as against reflective and affective consciousness. It is clear enough, I take it, that there are relatively pure cases of perceptual consciousness, whatever has to be said of what is in them, and that maybe one of those was the property, fact or state of affairs that was your being conscious of a page.

That this fact of consciousness necessarily was what it seemed to be, the state of affairs that was *the page's being there*, a state of affairs outside your head, is one of the several most fundamental propositions of the Radical Externalism that is our subject. More fully, to be perceptually conscious is only for an extra-cranial state of affairs to exist — for there to be a spatio-temporal set of things with a dependence on another extra-cranial state of affairs and also on what is in a particular cranium. The page's being there, and more generally *your world of perceptual consciousness* is things being in space and time, with such further properties as colour, and being dependent on a scientific or noumenal world underneath and also dependent on you neurally.

The particular state of affairs in question, and your ongoing world of perceptual consciousness, are different from but also like other states of affairs and worlds. They are different, that is, from other conceptualizations of what there is — where *what there is* is whatever it is to which we bring our perceptual, conceptual, theoretical and other schemes, systems and apparatuses, including our perceptual apparatus.

A world of perceptual consciousness is not the physical world. The physical world, very briefly indeed, consists in two categories: (1) things taking up space and time and also having other properties as standardly or publicly perceived, as distinct from properties dependent on anyone in particular, and (2) things that also take up space and time, are without perceived properties, but stand in causal or other lawlike connection with things in the first category. The physical world then consists in the perceived physical world, including pages, and in what you can call the physical world of science, including

atoms — already mentioned as a necessary condition of each world of perceptual consciousness. There is not much of a liberty taken in speaking of there being pages in both a world of perceptual consciousness and in the perceived physical world, and indeed in referring to each of a related pair of things as *a page*.

Radical Externalism is not the externalism of Putnam (1975), to the effect that meaning has a part that is reference-in-the-world, or the externalism of Burge (1979; 1986a,b), to the effect that meaning has a kind of dependency on things in the world. You can object to both (Honderich, 2004, pp. 67–85). The Radical Externalism being contemplated here in one of its three parts is indeed the general proposition that what it is to be perceptually conscious is for a world in a way to exist — i.e. for things to be in space and time with certain properties and for them to have certain necessary conditions. Notice that a clear sense has been given or at least gestured at with respect to talk of the existence. Notice too that there is not much more reason to regard a world of perceptual consciousness as ‘mental’ than the perceived part of the physical world — both have a dependency on human perception, etc.

Before going on to reflective and affective consciousness, and to argumentation for the whole theory, let us think a little more about perceptual consciousness and what we have already.

Did it occur to you that there might be an old objection to saying that what it seemed to you to be conscious of the page was just that the page was there, and no more than that? Were you tempted to say that the seeming fact was consistent with your in some sense being aware of, your having, no more than a collection of *mental* items — what were first called *ideas* in the history of British empiricism and ended up as *sense-data* or maybe *non-conceptual contents*? That is, did it occur to you that what your consciousness seemed to be might be consistent with the doctrine of phenomenalism or representative perception? As against realism and what is different from realism but closer to realism than phenomenalism, which is Radical Externalism?

Well, I myself can tell the difference between a state of affairs that is the existence of ordinary things and a state of affairs that is the existence of representations of ordinary things. In our lives as they are, there is a good difference between representations, which can be in various ways wrong, and ordinary things, which can't. Seeing isn't like dreaming — seeing doesn't seem to be like dreaming, which truth is unaffected by your having to get out of the dream to know the fact. And if you now say, maybe with traditional phenomenologists, that your perceptual consciousness is a dream that never goes wrong, a dream

we never wake up from, is there any distance left between perceptual consciousness as the existence of a world and perceptual consciousness as representations of some world?

There are things to think about there, but not to think about now. So too with the recommendation of Occam's Razor, a principle of simplicity or parsimony in theories, of avoiding the unnecessarily complex — and hence, I think, another recommendation of Radical Externalism. We get rid of something unnecessary. There is another fact about phenomenalism that can be considered more quickly.

There has been one argument for phenomenalism, originally known as the argument from illusion. It comes to the proposition that what we standardly call consciousness of the world might exist without the world, and the person in question couldn't tell the hallucination from a veridical experience. You could have a brain in a vat stimulated so as to produce consciousness indistinguishable from what we call consciousness of a page. And so consciousness of a page is a matter of sense-data or whatever and nothing else.

The worn story depends on something that this Radical Externalism denies. The story depends on the possibility of a causal or lawlike sufficient condition rather than a necessary condition in the brain (Honderich, 1988; 1990, pp. 106–44; 2004, pp. 19–46). According to Radical Externalism, there isn't a sufficient neural condition for perceptual consciousness — whatever is true of reflective and affective consciousness. Much of the history of the philosophy of perception has been resistance to phenomenalism or reluctant and grudging acceptance of it. Think of Ayer (1956). The theory of consciousness we are contemplating has the side-recommendation that it undercuts the only argument for the irritating possibility that it's all a kind of dream.

Now a few words about reflective consciousness, say thinking of home, and affective consciousness, say wanting to be there or intending to get there. As remarked at the beginning, there have been externalisms more radical than the one under consideration, attempts to formulate and sustain a theory of consciousness that takes it out of the cranium in all of its three parts, sides or whatever (Tonneau, 2004; cf. Manzotti, 2006).

The externalism under consideration, the whole thing, does remain true to the proposition that all there is to any consciousness is what is had. The theory also remains true to the proposition that what it is to be conscious in any way is for something to exist in a certain way — hence *Consciousness as Existence* as a name for the theory. Thirdly, therefore, the theory reduces consciousness to things at least close to what other theories and attitudes take to be the contents of conscious-

ness, thereby supposing or implying there is more to it than the contents. But the theory does not take all of consciousness outside the cranium. It does not do so with all of reflective consciousness.

Very briefly, what it seems to be to think of home now is for something to exist that has some of the properties of home. That is what a representation essentially is — something that shares some effects with what is represented. Think of the exclamation ‘Fire!’, however that may stand as an effect to a previous cause, say fire. Some of these representations *are* external — those in actually written language for a start. These will have the *character*, so to speak, of everything else that makes up someone’s perceptual consciousness. We will be coming to that character, partly what will be called *subjectivity*, in a minute or two. But there is also what is rightly called the language of thought (Fodor, 1975). Yours consists in representations internal to you — neural representations. They have a related character.

As for wanting to be at home or intending to get there, and affective consciousness generally, one essential point is that this too is to be understood in terms of the characters of anyone’s perceptual and also reflective consciousness. Part of the rest of the story here is that there are values in our perceptual worlds — including scenes in nature, pictures in art galleries, and people who are good-lookers or who care about the hurts of all others. It is very mistaken to suppose that the story of value is a story that does not contains things as real as woods, paintings and people — stuff of perceptual consciousness. More of the story of affective consciousness has to do with bodily sensation before acting or in acting and of course representations of actions.

But leave the subject of reflective and affective consciousness and look at more of what is to be said about and for this Radical Externalism as a whole, and primarily about and for what is primary in it, the account of perceptual consciousness.

You will anticipate, I hope, that it is certainly the determined intention of this Radical Externalism not to be circular. The theory is not and does not include or rest on a non-analysis. It is not the proposition that perceptual consciousness consists in a world’s existing *of which there is consciousness or awareness*. Similarly the analysis of reflective consciousness is not the useless line that it consists in representations *of which we are conscious*. So with the analysis of affective consciousness. Rather, Radical Externalism is that the fact of consciousness of the three kinds or whatever is no more than the existence of the three states of affairs — the existence of things with certain dependencies.

Do you say that the proposition that what it is for us to be perceptually conscious is for there to be an external state of affairs is an absurd proposition? Taken in one way, maybe the one that comes to mind first, that is true, but perhaps no skin off the nose of its proponents. The proposition is not conceptual analysis, not a report of ordinary or specialist usage. For such an analysis, for a start, go to the circularities of a good dictionary. You will find consciousness defined as awareness. Or go to ordinary and hesitant beliefs about consciousness, folk-beliefs or images that tend in the direction of what is called Cartesian dualism. Descartes didn't make it up.

Rather, in saying that perceptual consciousness consists in an external state of affairs, what we do is propose what it is reasonable to call conceptual revision or even reconstruction — conceptual revolution if you are being grand (Thagard, 1993) — and what it is also reasonable to call conceptual *correction*. The latter description, implying a mistake in ordinary beliefs and usage, is the important one. It reports the fact that Radical Externalism corrects our concept of perceptual experience so as to bring it into line with what in fact are conceptual commitments of ours that are firmer than the one to Cartesian dualism, better named spiritualism or mentalism.

Radical Externalism so conceived is an exercise in consistency — as always, consistency with something or some things given priority. To speak differently, and to put all of my cards on the table, the proposed Radical Externalism is the only sort of theory that satisfies what are essential criteria for an acceptable theory of the nature of consciousness. If you will put up with my saying so, the criteria have the demands of reality in them.

One of these is that a theory of consciousness must actually be a theory *of consciousness*, not anything else. A second criterion, of which you have also heard, must be truth to the seeming nature of consciousness itself. These two criteria, and what they come to, and the satisfaction of them by Radical Externalism, are perhaps the best introduction to the theory.

We will get to the rest of the criteria, some hardly less important, in a minute. First, consider the matter of the alternatives to radical empiricism, alternative also to be judged by way of the criteria. The argument for Radical Externalism is in a very important part the extent to which the alternatives fail to satisfy the criteria.

Devout physicalism, a true monism, is the belief or perhaps attitude that our consciousness is a fact, property or state of affairs that involves only physical properties in the sense gestured at earlier — and in particular properties in existing and more or less anticipated

neuroscience. Devout physicalism, once known as materialism, is thinking of importance on the nature of consciousness in the contemporary philosophy of mind. It includes express denials of consciousness as ordinarily understood, say eliminative materialism, and also analyses of it that purport to be true to the ordinary understanding but fail actually to be so. In my view, functionalism, Dennett and Searle, different as they are, come into the latter category (Honderich, 2004).

What still has the name of dualism, contrary to what is often remarked, is not thinking about consciousness that has been abandoned. In fact, it is in a way the majority view not only in the philosophy of mind and perhaps working neuroscience. I hazard this because it appears certain that a majority of philosophers and scientists are rightly unable to swallow devout physicalism and have nowhere to go but dualism.

In brief, it is the theory, rightly associated with Descartes, that your consciousness is somehow non-spatial and hence not physical. It is in fact only misleadingly called dualism, mainly because its distinctive nature and its problems are not owed to its asserting that consciousness is other than physical but rather to its asserting that consciousness is out of space and in fact of a mysterious nature. As remarked, it is better named spiritualism or mentalism.

No doubt theories are sometimes destroyed by single counterexamples clearly seen, or by crucial experiments well-conducted. It is my inclination to think this of devout physicalism and spiritualism. Still, others may not be persuaded, and it is proper to have more tests than one for an adequate theory of consciousness. It is also my belief that the alternatives to Radical Externalism are mainly devout physicalism and the spiritualism, and that Radical Externalism, by the criteria for adequacy, is clearly superior. As for the remainder of theories, they are marriages of things close to devout physicalism, and close to spiritualism, and they inherit the fatal personalities of the parties entering into them.

You have heard of two criteria for a theory of consciousness, one being that it must actually be of consciousness as we know we have it, one being truth to appearance. Devout physicalism fails absolutely to satisfy these criteria. Radical Externalism does satisfy them.

A third criterion is that consciousness is somehow subjective. The term has been variously used and abused, but that consciousness has some character that the term points to is indubitable. Devout physicalism allows for no persuasive sense in which consciousness is subjective. Spiritualism in its carry-on about a self or subject or the mind faces overwhelming objections.

For Radical Externalism, perceptual consciousness consists in a state of affairs that not only is partly dependent on one individual, but is also different from related states of affairs dependent on other individuals. It is also different from the state of affairs that is the perceived physical world as well as other states of affairs that are in defined senses objective. If it is a near-physicalism, it does give clear sense to our conviction about subjectivity.

A fourth criterion of adequacy is that a theory of consciousness must make consciousness a reality, which is to say physical or approximate to physical or in some strong sense reducible to the physical. A fifth criterion is that a theory must not make impossible what is actual, which is causal interaction between consciousness and the physical. Spiritualism fails both tests absolutely. Radical Externalism passes them. Those who follow Descartes take consciousness out of space, and therefore postulate causes and effects that are nowhere. That is certainly not so with Radical Externalism.

There are other criteria that can be no more than mentioned. One has to do with the efficacy of consciousness, which is to say the impossibility of epiphenomenalism. Another, of lesser importance, derives from a common uncertainty about whether our consciousness, all of it, is something in our heads.

I leave unconsidered, too, the recommendation of Radical Externalism with respect to the science of consciousness in particular. It saves it from a certain self-doubt, by making *all* of consciousness persuasively understood a subject for science. It also clarifies a long-running uncertainty about the dependency of mind on brain. In proposing a considerable conceptual shift, hopefully a revolution, it can be no stranger to science, certainly not to physics.

Radical Externalism, despite its successes, has its difficulties, more than have been mentioned. Contemplation of them can for the moment be left to others.

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