

Book Reviews

Ralph Pred

Onflow: Dynamics of Consciousness and Experience

London and Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2005, xii +348 pp.

ISBN 0 26216 227 X (hbk)

Reviewed by John Dance

Onflow offers a phenomenological account of consciousness. Pred takes his inspiration from the work of William James — in particular, from James' notion of the 'Stream of Consciousness' [SC]. The first published example, in 1884, of this influential and highly suggestive metaphor is thought to have been by James who was one of the first scientific thinkers to take the idea seriously and investigate it from the viewpoint of what Pred terms 'radical empiricism', meaning, I think, that theory must be tested rigorously against personal experience and rejected if it doesn't match up. James was not entirely on his own when it came to developing this approach to studying consciousness since Husserl was developing his phenomenology at roughly the same time and there is clear evidence that the two men were familiar with each other's work. There is some debate about who influenced whom. One view is that Husserl owed a considerable debt to James. Either way, Pred is of the opinion that this particular brand of ontology has a lot going for it and that James' particular analysis provides a sound basis for a contemporary phenomenology of consciousness.

James, while a seminal influence, does not provide a fully fledged theory of consciousness. To remedy this, Pred looks to additional sources and in particular to A.N. Whitehead whose work, he suggests, complements and develops James'. Pred recognises that some of his source material is as much as 120 years old. It thus needs a fairly radical overhaul to bring it intelligibly within the sphere of modern scientific and philosophical discourse. A large part of Pred's task is to

do just this. To help him he enlists the support of Searle and Edelman — both names familiar to readers of *JCS*! So what we have in *Onflow* is, roughly, a synthesis of work by James and Whitehead seen through the eyes of Searle and contemporary ‘brain science’ and orchestrated by Pred. The originality of the book lies in Pred’s initial intuition about how all the apparently disparate elements fit together.

The SC is, by definition, hard to get a grip on and Pred does not try to avoid the difficulties of describing something which is in unceasing flux. Indeed he castigates ‘traditional empiricists’ for a subservience to abstraction and western grammatical forms which ignores the SC’s essential dynamism and has consequently led much modern philosophy down a blind alley. To break free from this mind set and keep the dynamism of the SC before us, he proposes to investigate it by making a series of ‘Approximations’. These seek to characterise the SC in ways that permit a realistic description of the whole to be built up. I had some problems with this concept and, although Pred does produce a persuasive collection of ‘snapshots’, I didn’t feel approximation carried the weight assigned to it — indeed I was never quite sure that approximation was all that different from the *epoche*.

The first approximation is ‘intentional’. Obviously this is where Searle fits in and Pred, while not entirely uncritical, more or less accepts his main conclusions and links intentionality to James’ ‘characters of thought’. The SC can thus be seen from one perspective as a flow of intentional states. The next approximation defines consciousness as a process — rather than as a ‘thing’. The third approximation is ‘concrescual’. This is heavily indebted to Whitehead, who, particularly in his later writings, is, as Pred himself confesses, difficult and obscure. In places Whitehead reads like one of the more arcane scholastics, and I’m not sure that Pred’s interpretation, and ‘naturalisation’, of Whitehead always clarifies matters! However the concept of ‘concrecence’ is important and it’s worth sticking with Pred’s lengthy and painstaking account of how ‘the vague’ — inchoate undirected eddies and surges in the SC — becomes ‘the definite’ or ‘concrete’ and resolves into focus as what we ordinarily think of as thoughts or perceptions. His ideas here seem to have a lot in common with Cantwell Smith’s (1996) ‘philosophy of presence’, where the scientific and philosophical problem addressed is how entities emerge from a universal ground.

Pred’s first three approximations are essentially descriptive. However acceptable or persuasive to rational commonsense these accounts of consciousness may be, they still raise the vexed question of evidence. Although Pred repeatedly invites his readers to follow his

argument by using the 'radically empirical' method of testing it against their personal experience, this does not seem entirely satisfactory. Pred is presumably aware of this difficulty since the fourth approximation, which he describes as 'neurobiological', considers how the research of Gerald Edelman, into consciousness as a biological system, supports his own account. The choice of Edelman is particularly apt. Edelman himself admits to being influenced by James and his latest publication (Edelman, 2005) starts off, almost identically to Pred's, with a summary of James' ideas. To my mind this is the most satisfying part of the book. It is based on sound science and brings Pred's theory, potentially, into the realms of testability. It also allows a credible and satisfying conclusion to Pred's argument, making this, despite some difficulties with earlier parts of the text (e.g. in terminology, style and method) a rewarding and thought provoking book which reinforces the growing (and desirable) tendency in phenomenological research to acknowledge the role of empirical investigation.

References

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Edelman, Gerald M. (2005), *Wider than the Sky* (London: Penguin)

David Woodruff Smith and Amie L. Thomasson (eds.)

Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind

Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005, 322 pp.

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Reviewed by Dimitris Platchias

This volume aims to overturn the assumption that analytic philosophy of mind has little to do with phenomenology, by attempting to show that work in phenomenology may lead to progress on problems central to the philosophy of mind. A nice way to illustrate the gulf between the two traditions is to note that Edmund Husserl, a key figure in the phenomenological tradition, was claiming almost a century ago that a philosopher's job, when seeking absolute insights and apodictic knowledge, does not concern the world as such but rather the world appearing to consciousness. On the other hand, Daniel Dennett (1987) makes it clear at the beginning of his inquiry: 'I declare my starting point to be the objective, materialistic, third-person world of the physical sciences.' This is of particular interest since Part I of the book, which attempts to find a place for phenomenology in the philosophy of mind, is an anti-Dennettian polemic.

The book comprises five Parts. I found it helpful that each of the 14 essays of this volume starts with an abstract. However, philosophers working in the analytic tradition may find the introductory remarks a bit perplexing. It is explicitly stated that phenomenology is the study of experiences themselves and their interrelations, not the search for laws or causal explanations. Immediately after, it is noted that conceptual analysis of mental state types characterises at least one thread in the analytic philosophy of mind. Well, it characterises a main thread. Ned Block (1995), for instance, rightly points out that the concept of consciousness is a mongrel needing clarification. Owing to such conceptual problems, mental phenomena involve issues other than purely scientific ones. In addition, while in the philosophy of mind experiences are typically characterised by what it is like to have them, the editors make it clear that studying the what-it-is-like aspect of an experiential state is to study only an aspect of the experience: 'there is more to the "feel of conscious experiences" than the qualitative or the phenomenal character of the experience' (p. 7). I should stress that the term 'experience' in the phenomenological jargon, is used for a wide range of types of mental state, from perception, thought, memory, imagination and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action and social activity.¹

In Part I, Paul Livingston analyses the history and the development of functionalism, emphasizing methodological continuities with the tradition of phenomenology. He argues that functionalism emerged as a sophisticated response to problems of the meaning and reference of psychological terms, but says that subjective experience cannot be functionalised. He concludes that both approaches attempt to capture our inmost nature in terms of its logical, conceptual, or causal structure but both fail. Although Livingston's analysis of the development of functionalism is quite engaging, he fails to mention Wilfrid Sellars' proto-functionalism, as described in a 1956 classic essay 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind'. Further, David Chalmers (1996) is included in the anti-functionalist camp. In the second essay, Galen Strawson targets Dennett's account and argues for the thesis that experiential (conscious) states need not necessarily involve any sensory qualitative properties and that the only truly intentional entities are conscious experiential episodes. Although I think we have reasons to believe that experience should be characterised independently of

[1] But there's more. In the last essay of Part IV, Kay Mathiesen discusses 'collective consciousness'. He defines the phenomenon as essentially requiring three characteristics: multiple conscious subjects, genuine intentionality and that the (collective) subject forms a social group.

sensory qualities (the example of understanding experience² provided by Strawson is suggestive enough) this can be taken to suggest that the latter are not essentially experiential. And I don't think this is something that Dennett would disagree with. Further, since recent empirical findings suggest that sensory states can occur unconsciously and sensory states are intentional according to Strawson, why think that intentionality is essentially experiential (conscious)?

Taylor Carman argues in a similar spirit that Dennett's account is not only false but also incoherent. Carman argues that a distinction must be made between how things seem and how we think they seem, otherwise one's judgments about one's experiences are incorrigible. He christens Dennett's view 'eliminativism' and goes on to say that 'if there's no getting it right simply because there's no it, then there's a sense in which there's no getting it wrong, either; there's just wrong-headedness' (p. 68). He concludes that Dennett's account in denying the existence of qualitative sensory experience, given the fallibility of our experience reports, is incoherent. This being so, we cannot coherently eliminate experience in favour of mere verbal judgments. Nonetheless, it doesn't follow that that which must exist to enable corrigibility must be a 'qualitative phenomenal experience' or a 'brute subjective quality' as Carman calls it. It may well be something mental, qualitative but not essentially conscious, subjective or private. And Dennett doesn't deny the existence of such phenomena.

The following four Parts cover a wide range of issues extending from self-knowledge and intentionality to temporal awareness, perception and action. The editors interestingly argue that phenomenological reduction does not rely on the viability of introspective approaches to the mind. However, while their view can be taken to undermine the inner-sense model of introspection, it appears to be compatible with other higher-order theories of consciousness of the analytic tradition (which they reject altogether). There are many similarities, for instance, between Smith's account of 'reflexive content' and Rosenthal's account of the content of non-introspectively conscious states. In the following essay, John Bickle and Ralph Ellis argue quite convincingly that scientific findings, showing that experiences like those produced by normal sensation may be engendered by cortical microstimulation, are compatible with phenomenology. They appeal to the currently popular philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, saying that phenomenology can contribute to interesting empirical

[2] By 'understanding experience' Strawson means that there is something it is like, experientially, to understand a sentence for example, spoken or read over and above the strict qualitative/sensory character of the experience.

predictions such as whether phenomenal experiences produced by direct cortical stimulation are localised. But although they initially state that the combination of phenomenology and neuroscience they propose will provide a useful route to address the ‘hard’ problem of consciousness they later discard it. They say in effect, that phenomenology and neuroscience can happily co-exist. But we are still clueless as to how the fine-grained phenomenology of conscious experience can arise from neural processes in the brain (explanatory gap). Such phenomenological investigations aim not to close the gap but to bridge it — at best — by establishing reciprocal constraints.

In the first essay of Part III, Johannes Brandl defends Brentano’s immanence theory of intentionality (the view that all kinds of mental phenomena involve a relation between the experiencing subject and some kind of non-real or intentional object) and argues that a commitment to an ontology of non-real entities is not an essential part of the immanence theory. In the other essay of this section, Richard Tieszen appeals to Husserlian phenomenological ideas in order to account for intentional relations with abstract or ideal objects. Part IV focuses on the different senses in which there may be unities across different conscious experiences. Wayne Martin argues that experiential states should not be construed as atomistic qualitative entities but rather as intentional states unified by internal relations between them. Sean Kelly addresses the problem of temporal awareness. Kelly appeals to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘perceptual grip’ in order to properly describe the phenomenon, but does not attempt to explain it. Following Heidegger, he says that phenomenology is essentially descriptive not explanatory.

In the last Part of the book, Clotilde Calabi argues that perception involves normativity. She identifies our reasons for actions, not with beliefs or experiences but with the perceived situations — ‘perceptual saliences’ — and argues that these saliences show up as perceivers exercise a faculty of attention. In the second essay, Charles Siewert develops an interesting account of what distinguishes sensory from cognitive intentionality by appealing to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘motor intentionality’. According to Siewert, our (sensory) experiences have sensorimotor intentionality, that is, they are inseparably tied to our capacities for movement. In the final essay, Jose Bermudez attempts to do justice to Merleau-Ponty’s thinking about bodily awareness, though without following Merleau-Ponty’s conclusion that the phenomenal body (i.e. as it is lived and experienced) as opposed to the objective body (i.e. as a physical mass of bone, muscle and nerves) cannot be elucidated scientifically. In place of Merleau-

Ponty' simple phenomenal/objective body distinction, Bermudez considers more complex distinctions between different ways of representing the objective body and provides a new taxonomy of types and levels of bodily awareness in an attempt to develop an understanding of the difference between awareness of our own bodies and that of external objects.

Overall, I find the book quite informative about the several, important respects in which phenomenology meets the analytic tradition. It's a welcome addition to the expanding literature on the subject. Work in phenomenology can certainly contribute to contemporary philosophy of mind: the better the description of a phenomenon, the more adequate it is as a basis for explanation and understanding. But this seems to require abandoning Dennett-like approaches to the mind and holding on to the irreducibility of the mental.

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Alan Palmer

Fictional Minds

Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004, 247 pp.

ISBN 0 80323 743 X (hbk)

Reviewed by Roberta Tucker

Fictional Minds won the Modern Language Association prize for independent scholars in December 2005. Bravo to Alan Palmer for writing an apparently necessary book. The surprise is that it *was* apparently necessary. Literary scholarship comprises many specialties, each with its own subdivisions and areas of controversy: narratology, reader response, discourse analysis, etc. To the general public, the most familiar area is practical criticism in articles, essays or sometimes book-length critical expositions of a professional's view of a particular work. In the mostly undergraduate classroom, criticism usually involves rather direct explanation of an individual work, confirming the plotline, the interaction of the characters, something of the historical context, a bit of the author's biography, something of the

literary technique — all this based on an eclectic assemblage of research in the subdivisions of literary scholarship.

Dr. Palmer's intention is to create a foundation for what he regards as a particularly neglected area in the field of narrative theory. What's missing, he claims, is a theory of the functioning and interaction of characters' minds within the fictional world. His approach has two prongs. First, narratology has concentrated in the recent past on individual, private, mostly verbal consciousness. He, in contrast, wishes to focus on the functioning of the whole of characters' minds — emotions, will, actions — as they are exhibited within literary works. He wants to use what has recently been learned in the cognitive sciences (such as cognitive neurology, psychology, and other related fields) as informative. Secondly, he wants to look at how characters' minds interact. Again, based on his readings in cognitive research, he wishes to shift the focus for viewing character interaction in novels from the perspective of individuals to that of societies of individuals; his theory takes as primary the social mind, instead of the private mind which has hitherto occupied centre stage. This approach is also to serve as a corrective to the over-emphasis in literary theory on structuralism, deconstruction, etc., where importance has been attributed, not to the work itself, but to its situation within an *exterior* social context. He aims to return to the work itself, though both approaches are essential he asserts, and must be properly balanced.

What is interesting or puzzling, depending upon your point of view, is that there already exists an enormously rich tradition of examining characters' minds in other types of literary scholarship, so the lack in narrative theory is surprising. For example, on the specific issue of the 'intermental' (the social/shared aspect of characters' minds), numerous examples spring to mind from hugely differing sources. In creative works themselves, there are the detailed psycho-social manoeuvrings in a Racinian tragedy, the representation of crowd psychology in Zola, and the varying and intensely 'intermental' possibilities explored in science fiction. The examination of characters' whole minds and character interaction is, whether broadly acknowledged or not, the bread and butter of practical criticism and of introductory literature classes. Modern authors not only exploit the interplay between the social and the private mind, but also anticipate or use recent cognitive research. And not only individual authors but also numerous scholars in various areas of literary scholarship have done the same — for example the extensive work by such well-known researchers as David Miall in reader response theory, David Herman in narratology, and many others. Cognitive research in literature is accustomed both to looking at

character interaction in the works themselves and also to investigating the work in its relation to authors, readers and 'exterior reality'. Nevertheless, although much has been done and significant contributions made, this work has been slow to gain the recognition of the majority of literary scholars. Maybe *Fictional Minds* will provide a catalyst to the advancement of this whole field.

Congratulations to Alan Palmer for identifying this particular void in narratology and noting the relevance of cognitive research to it. Kudos to him also on shifting the focus in narrative theory and attempting to achieve a balance between attention to individual consciousness and to interactions between characters. I suspect that the void will be rapidly filled because, as with a hole dug on a sandy beach, the surrounding ground is already so very saturated!

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Mention here neither implies nor precludes subsequent review

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