

Richard Brown

Editorial Introduction

Philosophers Facing Phenomenal Consciousness, Online

The first online philosophy conference was held in 2006, the second in 2007. Thomas Nadelhoffer and Eddy Nahmias organized both. I enjoyed these conferences and the spirit of discussion and inclusiveness that they encouraged. I found myself thinking that it would be really great if someone would do an online consciousness conference. After thinking about it I decided that I would try to organize the online consciousness conference myself. It turned out to be a lot of work but in the end the first annual online consciousness conference, held at <http://consciousnessonline.wordpress.com> February 19th–March 4th 2009, was a gratifying success. The whole process was made easier by the enthusiasm, commitment, and willingness to experiment of those who were involved and I would like to thank those that served as reviewers, moderators of comments, all of the presenters, and of course all of the people who stopped by to join in the fun. In the two weeks of the conference we had over 11,000 hits and very active discussions in the sessions, which can still be viewed at the conference website. The six articles presented in this special issue, all descendents of papers presented at the online conference, serve as examples of the potential for interaction between online venues and traditional print formats.

David Rosenthal gave the keynote talk entitled ‘Consciousness and its Function’ (not included here but published in *Neuropsychologia*, **46** (3), 2008, pp. 829–40). This paper is very interesting as it presents an argument that consciousness has no appreciable function by

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considering various proposed functions and showing there is reason, whether commonsense, experimental, theoretical, or some combination of these, to think the proposed benefit conferred by consciousness is really something the creature would have even if the mental states in question were not conscious. For instance, in response to the claim that the function of consciousness lies in it facilitating rational thought, Rosenthal adduces experimental results showing consumer choices are more rational when the choices are made unconsciously, as well as commonsense pre-theoretic considerations like our everyday experience of an answer to a problem just coming to us 'out of the blue'. He also argues from a purely theoretical standpoint to show we would not expect conscious intentional states to have any added function. The rationality of a mental state is tied to that state's intentional content, which as previously noted, can occur unconsciously, thus, whether one accepts functional-role semantics or not, any functionality associated with rational connections can be captured by unconscious intentional contents and their relations to other intentional contents (for a full review of this article see my review in *Philosopher's Digest*, available at <http://www.philosophersdigest.com/neuropsychologia/consciousness-and-its-function-david-rosenthal>).

In the first paper **Clare Batty** defends the view that olfactory experiences have only existentially quantified content. So an experience of smelling fish, for instance, will have representational content of the form that 'something or other is fishy and here'. This account of the content is then used to explain why it is that we are comfortable attributing olfactory hallucinations but not olfactory illusions; the kind of representational content in olfaction only allows us to say that something is there or that it isn't. Olfactory experience, on the abstract account, does not present an object as having a property and so we would expect that our olfactory experience doesn't lend itself to illusions.

In the second paper **Dave Beiseker** defends type-z materialism according to which we are the very zombies that dualists conceive. The materialist, unlike the physicalist, denies that the mind-brain identities are necessary. While the type-a physicalist holds that zombies are inconceivable, and the type-b physicalist claims that they are conceivable but not possible. The type-z materialist holds that zombies are conceivable, possible, and actual. That is we might find out that we live in a zombie world in which case it will be angelic beings with non-physical qualia that are conceivable but not possible. He then argues that those who like the phenomenal concepts response to the zombie argument should adopt type-z materialism.

In the third paper **Richard Brown**, who is micorphysically identical to the author of this introduction, defends an a priori type-c physicalism by employing four parody anti-dualist thought experiments. A priori physicalism is the view that the physical facts entail the qualitative facts a priori. It is typically thought that the conceivability of zombies rules this view out. However non-physical duplicates of me that lack qualitative properties –zombies— as well as physical duplicates of me that have physical qualia –shombies— are every bit as conceivable as zombies and ghosts. In fact which of these one finds conceivable depends only on what theory one accepts. However both cannot really be ideally conceivable and so one set, either zombies and ghosts or zombies and shombies, must merely be prima facie conceivable. Only new empirical evidence will decide the issue but once the evidence is in the deductions will be a priori, just as Chalmers and Jackson argue is true in the water/H₂O case.

In the fourth paper, **Barbara Montero** defends Russellian physicalism, which is a physicalist version of Russellian monism. According to the Russellian the properties that physicists talk about — mass, charge, charm, spin, etc. — are the properties of some fundamental stuff that has those properties. Montero proposes to call these hidden things ‘inscrutables’. On this view the inscrutable properties ground consciousness and so are not physical in the sense that they are not captured by physics. Montero argues that one small modification of this view results in a Russellian Physicalism. If one thinks that the inscrutables are the ground for both qualitative properties as well ordinary physical properties there will be nothing special about the qualitative properties and so this view will count as in the letter and spirit of physicalism; but one that withstands the conceivability arguments.

In the fifth paper **Gualtiero Piccinini** further develops and defends his self-measurement view of first-person reports and distinguishes it from Dennett’s heterophenomenology. Both of these views agree that first-person data is third-person and public but Piccinini proposes six modifications to heterophenomenology that will, he argues, preserve the third-person public nature of first-person data while also bringing it more in line with the actual practice of scientists. In particular Piccinini’s self-measurment account of first-person data denies that consciousness is the target of study, that only verbal reports counts as first-person data, that scientists should be neutral about the truth-value of the first-person reports, that the data is beliefs about mental states rather than the mental states themselves, that persons are

incorrigible when they report their mental states, and that third-person methods licenses the same experiments as first-person methodologies.

In the sixth paper **Justin Sytsma** presents data from experimental philosophy on the folk concepts of phenomenal consciousness. He argues that the folk are naïve realists about qualitative properties in contrast to the common assumption, typified by people like Dennett, who think that the folk theory of phenomenal properties construes them as secondary properties. For instance Sytsma argues that the folk treat colors as mind independent qualities of objects when they claim that an unobserved tomato would still be red and that the redness is located on the tomato. Similarly when asked they deny that the red is in their mind or that there could be inverted spectra. Sytsma also presents evidence that the folk feel the same way about pains. They claim that pains can exist in the pained body part, that they can exist unfelt and that two distinct subjects could feel the same pain if it was located in a shared body part.

I hope that you enjoy reading these papers and thinking about these issue. I know I certainly enjoyed putting it together! I also hope to see you at the online consciousness conference in the future.