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Editorial Introduction

The Study of Consciousness and the Reinvention of the Wheel

Many scientists have until recently considered consciousness to be unsuitable for scientific research. As Damasio remarks, ‘studying consciousness was simply not the thing to do before you made tenure, and even after you did it was looked upon with suspicion’ (Damasio, 1999, p. 7). Prompted by technological developments as well as conceptual changes, this attitude has changed within the last decade or so, and an explanation of consciousness is currently seen by many as one of the few remaining major unsolved problems of modern science. It has become customary to describe this change in terms of an ongoing ‘Consciousness Boom’. What is occasionally forgotten, however, is that although contemporary main stream neuroscience might only recently have started to investigate consciousness, the topic is by no means a *terra incognita* for those familiar with the philosophical tradition. Since the beginning of the modern era, consciousness has been subjected to intense investigations by such diverse thinkers as Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, James, Dilthey, Bergson and many others. As for more recent times, consciousness and subjectivity have been of main concern to phenomenologists throughout the twentieth century, whereas the interest in these issues in analytical philosophy has only been particularly evident in the last ten to fifteen years. The majority of the systematic investigations in analytical philosophy have moreover been conducted in a rather ahistorical manner, with no particular attention being paid to the possible resources of the tradition. But by ignoring the tradition one might miss out on important insights that in the best of circumstances end up being rediscovered decades or centuries later (cf. Zahavi, 2002).

Much current research aims at locating and identifying particular neural correlates of consciousness. It might appear obvious that, say, German Idealism or phenomenology have little if anything to offer to this specific enterprise. But one should not forget that we will not get very far in giving an account of the relationship between consciousness and the brain if we do not have a clear conception of what it is that we are trying to relate. To put it differently, any assessment of the possibility of reducing consciousness to more fundamental neuronal structures, any appraisal of whether a naturalization of consciousness is possible, will not

only involve metaphysical and epistemological clarifications, it will also call for a detailed analysis and description of consciousness. As Nagel once pointed out, a necessary requirement for any coherent reductionism is that the entity to be reduced is properly understood (Nagel, 1974, p. 437). In other words, although much current research focuses on questions concerned with the precise relation between brain and consciousness, questions of this kind by no means exhaust the challenges currently facing the study of consciousness. To mention just a few quite different urgent questions:

What is the relation between intentionality and self-consciousness?

What is the temporal structure of the stream of consciousness?

What is it like to think abstract thoughts?

How does social interaction influence the structures of experience?

Is it possible to conceptualize experiential life?

What is the cognitive function of affective experiences?

Is self-experience always embedded and embodied?

What does it at all mean to be a subject, to be a self?

But questions like these are not new, and have been explored for centuries. To think that the contemporary study of consciousness, as a result of the last ten to fifteen years impressive achievements, is already on top of things and that it has superseded whatever insights the tradition might have had to offer merely expresses a too optimistic confidence in the progress of science.

To put it bluntly, it would be folly for any systematic investigation of consciousness to proceed as if its subject-matter had only been discovered in the last fifteen years. Given recent developments within cognitive science, given the increased tendency to actually investigate the structure of consciousness (the status of the first-person perspective, the nature of selfhood, the significance of embodiment, etc.) it is counterproductive to continue to ignore the rich insights that can be found in the tradition. The danger of spending precious resources on rediscoveries is too great.

It is of course impossible to do justice to the entire philosophical tradition in a single volume. But hopefully the contributions contained in this special issue of *Journal of Consciousness Studies* can serve as appetizers. They all address the following issue: To what extent can the current discussion of consciousness in mainstream cognitive science and analytical philosophy of mind profit from the resources found in the Kantian and post-Kantian tradition, in phenomenology and in hermeneutics.

Why this specific focus? The focus of the volume reflects the kind of work done at the Center for Subjectivity Research, where three of the contributors reside. This is a centre of excellence funded by the Danish National Research Foundation and located at the University of Copenhagen. The research at the Center is based on an unorthodox collaboration between researchers coming

from philosophy of mind, comparative literature, philosophy of religion, psychology, and psychiatry, and aims at clarifying and analysing three fundamental structures of consciousness: Intentionality, self-consciousness, and intersubjectivity (i.e., consciousness in its relation to the world, to itself, and to others). In working on these topics, the center explicitly seeks to further the dialogue between philosophy and empirical research and to encourage the integration of different philosophical traditions (Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, phenomenology, hermeneutics and analytical philosophy).¹

In the first of the contributions, ‘Kant, cognitive science and contemporary neo-Kantianism’, **Andrew Brook** argues that Kant should be considered the intellectual godfather of cognitive science, and that many of Kant’s ideas — in particular his views on consciousness of self, on the unity of mind, and on the structure of conscious experience — far from having been superseded by more recent cognitive research, has not even been assimilated by it. To exemplify the contemporary relevance of Kant, Brook then compares Kant’s own views with recent neo-Kantian proposals by Cassam and Hurley.

In his article ‘The embodied self: Reformulating the existential difference in Kierkegaard’, **Arne Grøn** argues that one can find a sophisticated conception of embodiment in Kierkegaard. According to Kierkegaard, the human mind exteriorizes itself in history and language, in action and speech. It is embedded and embodied in a social, historical, and cultural context. Grøn points to some of the affinities between this conception and ideas in contemporary cognitive science, and then argues that Kierkegaard’s investigation might be particularly pertinent for those interested in an enactive approach to consciousness and cognition.

The contribution by **Peter Poellner**, ‘Self-deception, consciousness, and value: The Nietzschean contribution’, contains a discussion of Nietzsche’s analysis of self-opacity and self-deception. Poellner argues that none of the three main contemporary models of self-deception (split mind, nonintentional motivated error, and bad faith) can satisfactorily accommodate the kind of phenomenon Nietzsche claimed to have discovered and which he called *ressentiment*: a subject’s intentional misinterpretation of her own current affective experiences. Poellner points to certain limitations in Nietzsche’s own model, but then argues that it can be improved by means of an incorporation of insights found in Husserl and Sartre concerning pre-reflective self-awareness, and that it thereby remains relevant for any contemporary attempt to do justice to the complexity of affective experience.

In his paper ‘Back to Brentano?’, **Dan Zahavi** starts out by discussing some of the objections that have recently been raised against the higher-order theories of consciousness. Within the last few years, a number of authors have suggested that a Brentanian or neo-Brentanian theory of consciousness might provide a better one-level alternative. Zahavi presents this alternative in detail, and argues that although it might contribute important insights to our understanding of the

[1] More information about the research activities of the center can be found at www.cfs.ku.dk.

relation between consciousness and self-awareness, it ultimately remains beset with problems. He then suggests that it would make more sense to take a closer look at the work of Sartre, Husserl, and Heidegger, if one is on the lookout for promising alternatives to the higher-order theories, than to return all the way to Brentano.

In her contribution, 'Representationalism and beyond: A phenomenological critique of Thomas Metzinger's self-model theory', **Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl** subjects Metzinger's recent analysis of the first-person perspective to a phenomenological criticism. Rinofner-Kreidl discusses the differences between Metzinger's neurophenomenology and classical Husserlian phenomenology, and argues that Metzinger on a number of points misrepresents the latter. She then takes particular issue with Metzinger's representationalism and naturalism, and makes the case that phenomenology as a form of transcendental philosophy must remain non-naturalistic.

In his article "'Cognitive impenetrability" and the complex intentionality of the emotions', **John Drummond** focuses on the issue of 'cognitive impenetrability', a phrase introduced by Goldie to designate the fact that emotional reactions are often impervious to what we know. Certain emotions continue to be experienced even though we recognize that the beliefs belonging to them are false. This fact speaks against the exaggerated cognitivism of recent 'belief-desire' accounts of emotions, which deny to the feeling component of emotions any element of intentionality. Drummond does not challenge Goldie's findings, but argues that only a phenomenological account — which analyses the fundamental presentational character of the experiences — can fully illuminate the complexity of emotional intentionality.

The contribution by **Louis Sass**, 'Affectivity in schizophrenia: A phenomenological view', contains an analysis of the affective or emotional disturbances in schizophrenia. Focusing on three distinct modes of schizophrenic experience: body alienation, 'un-worlding' and inner fantasy, Sass suggests that a phenomenological approach can explain why schizophrenic individuals display at one and the same time both an exaggerated and a diminished level of emotional response; an apparent paradox that was first discussed in the work of the German psychiatrist Kretschmer.

In his article 'Belief and pathology of self-awareness: A phenomenological contribution to the classification of delusions', **Josef Parnas** argues that the phenomenon of delusion — typically defined as a false, incorrigible belief about the world — is, in fact, quite heterogeneous, and that it from a phenomenological perspective makes good sense to distinguish two importantly different types of delusion: empirical delusions and autistic-solipsistic delusions. Whereas empirical delusions involve something close to normal forms of belief, even though these beliefs are incorrect, autistic-solipsistic delusions, which are frequent in schizophrenia, derive from and express radically altered structures of experience. They do not involve truth claims about the world in the same sense as do empirical delusions and normal beliefs. For the very same reason, they are not

explicable by means of the standard way of accounting for delusions, namely in terms of a defective 'reality testing'.

In his contribution 'Hermeneutics and the cognitive sciences', **Shaun Gallagher** examines the relationship between philosophical hermeneutics, i.e., the theory of interpretation which was developed by thinkers like Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Gadamer, and contemporary cognitive science. By considering three questions: How do we know objects? How do we know situations? How do we understand other people? Gallagher argues that what hermeneutics discovers is not in opposition to what cognitive science discovers, and that the two sides can learn from each other.

In the final article of the volume, 'Narrative, identity and the self', **Dieter Teichert** examines Ricoeur's hermeneutical concept of narrative identity. Teichert first shows how Ricoeur develops his concept in the context of an encompassing reflection on time and narrative. He then accounts for Ricoeur's distinction between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood and contrast Ricoeur's view of the self with current neo-Lockean theories of personal identity. In the final section of his paper, Teichert then compares Ricoeur's conception with Dennett's well known notion of the self as a centre of narrative gravity.

References

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