Consciousness - an Introduction

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23.0 Preliminaries

We talk of ourselves not only being conscious, but we talk of being conscious of things and conscious of facts. (I am conscious of the table, I am conscious that there is a table in the room)

So (1) consciousness is attributed to people, animals, etc. (“creature consciousness”)

(2) conscious mental states vs. unconscious mental states.

Consciousness is an attribute of a mental state – whereas consciousness is an attribute of creatures in (1).

Note: one can be conscious of X without being conscious that it is an X – I can be conscious of John without being conscious that John is a policeman.

Consider the following thesis (P): If one is perceptually conscious of some object, then one’s experience of that object is conscious.

(P) relates creature consciousness to state consciousness.

23.1 Higher-Order Theories.

‘Higher order’ theories of consciousness are theories that hold something like (P): A mental state is conscious iff the subject S is conscious of S.

This yields a counter-intuitive result, in that if one is perceptually conscious of some object, then one is conscious of one’s visual experience of that object – but then, the driving philosopher is impossible.

But more importantly, these theories imply that we are always inward-looking, and that seems wrong-headed.

There are 2 versions: Higher order thought, and higher order experience (HOT and HOE).

HOT: a state is conscious iff one has a thought about it.

HOE: a state is conscious iff one has an experience of it.

The driving philosopher seems to show that we have perceptual (phenomenal) states that are conscious, but are we are not aware of.

If this is right, higher order theories are false.

It is worth noting that this is really the only problem for HOT - most people thing that HOT is fine for belief / desire propositional attitudes.