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M.J.Ratcliffe@durham.ac.uk**The Problem with the Problem
of Consciousness****Abstract**

This paper proposes that the 'problem of consciousness', in its most popular formulation, is based upon a misinterpretation of the structure of experience. A contrast between my subjective perspective (A) and the shared world in which I take up that perspective (B) is part of my experience. However, descriptions of experience upon which the problem of consciousness is founded tend to emphasise only the former, remaining strangely oblivious to the fact that experience involves a sense of belonging to a world in which one occupies a contingent subjective perspective. The next step in formulating the problem is to muse over how this abstraction (A) can be integrated into the scientifically described world (C). I argue that the scientifically described world itself takes for granted the experientially constituted sense of a shared reality. Hence the problem of consciousness involves abstracting A from B, denying B and then trying to insert A into C, when C presupposes aspects of B. The problem in this form is symptomatic of serious phenomenological confusion. No wonder then that consciousness remains a mystery.

Keywords

consciousness, heterophenomenology, naturalism, objectivity, phenomenology, sense of reality, subjectivity

Introduction

The problem of consciousness or “hard problem of consciousness”, if you prefer to call it that (Chalmers, 1996, xii), is set up against a backdrop of questionable metaphysical, epistemological and phenomenological assumptions. It is premised on the view that the empirical sciences are the best means through which to understand every aspect of the world. Whether we want to understand atoms or oak trees, we are best placed to do so by adopting the methods of empirical science and by staying within the bounds of an ontology that is deemed acceptable by empirical science. In fact, for something to be understood just *is* for it to be integrated into a mechanistic conception of the world driven by current science.

Although there is of course much debate in science as to what the ultimate constituents of the world actually are, what does seem increasingly clear is that the causal, mechanistic world described by biology, physics and chemistry is not something within which human experience resides comfortably. Consciousness is a part of the world that just does not seem to fit in, something we do not currently understand, which we strive to understand by somehow integrating it into a scientific view of things. It is conceived of as a mysterious part of an otherwise non-mysterious world. For example, Chalmers (1996, xi)

begins by stating that consciousness is the “biggest mystery” and qualifies this by adding that it “may be the largest outstanding obstacle in our quest for a scientific understanding of the universe”; what we don’t understand is how “consciousness fits into the natural order”. And McGinn (1989, p. 349) summarises the problem with the oft-quoted question “how can technicolor phenomenology arise from soggy gray matter?”

I think that there is something very wrong with how the problem is set up. Indeed, I will go so far as to suggest that formulations which start by taking the scientifically described world for granted and then go on to puzzle over how people’s internal experiential worlds fit into the scientifically described world are incoherent. Some philosophers think they can think about consciousness in this way but they can’t really – they’re confused. The ‘problem of consciousness’ that they are preoccupied with is not that of reconciling human experience with the world in which that experience occurs but instead that of trying in vain to reconcile a vague, partial and misleading description of experience with the world as it is described by certain areas of science.

Any attempt to bring consciousness into a scientific worldview must at least start off with an acceptable – albeit provisional and incomplete – description of what it is that we are seeking to explain. So how is ‘consciousness’ usually described? In addition to lots of references to ‘qualia’, ‘raw feels’ and the like, there is a consistent emphasis on subjectivity. Consciousness is ‘subjective’; it is a matter of how things *appear* to a particular subject. For example, Nagel (1974) famously appeals to “what it is like” and “how it is” for a subject. Flanagan (1992, xi) similarly asserts that “our mental life has a phenomenal side, a subjective side, that the most sophisticated information processor might lack”. The way in which things appear to the subject obviously differs from how the external world actually is and so consciousness is often contrasted with the ‘external’ and referred to as the subject’s ‘internal’ or ‘inner’ mental life. As Chalmers (1996, xi) remarks, “it still seems utterly mysterious that the causation of behaviour should be accompanied by a subjective inner life”.

Regardless of how intuitive such comments might at first seem, they are based upon a misleading conception of the structure of experience. To briefly summarise the problem, your consciousness does not consist merely of ‘the world as it appears to you’. It is not a ‘subjective world’ to be contrasted with an ‘objective world’. You encounter ‘the world as it appears to you’ against the backdrop of an experience of belonging to a world. When you adopt a perspective upon things, you are already *there*, amongst things. *Subjective* perspectives on things incorporate a sense of their own incompleteness, their contingency – you experience the subjective aspect of your experience *as* ‘the world as it appears to me at this particular time and in this particular place’, rather than as ‘the world’ or ‘my world’. So the ‘subjective’ aspects of experience are only part of the story and, if consciousness is to be satisfactorily described, they need to be situated in their broader experiential context.

Descriptions of consciousness in terms of subjective sensations, raw feels and the like are selective abstractions from consciousness that bear little relation to the structure of experience. Pinker (1997, p. 60) emphasises the *mystery* of consciousness in stating that “consciousness or sentience, the raw sensation of toothaches and redness and saltiness and middle C, is still a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma”. But if you take a toothache away from its experiential context, from your experience of yourself as a being who is situated within a world and has a contingent perspective upon it, and then take the

feeling of toothache as an exemplar of what it is to *be* conscious, consciousness will inevitably remain mysterious. Experience of the *world* is completely overlooked by such descriptions; a sense of being part of a world is replaced by reference to a few free-floating sensations. The exercise is analogous to that of attempting to describe the structure of a cathedral by focusing only on a few choice tiles that one has noticed hanging off its roof.

I suspect that the confusion arises due to a fairly simple mistake. In thinking about consciousness, there is a tendency to start by replacing the world as it actually appears with the world as described by certain choice sciences, a description that includes only inanimate, physical stuff. Rather than describing experience and *then* turning to address the question of how it relates to the scientific worldview, experience is interpreted from the outset as something arising *in* the world that is characterised by science. It cannot be outside of the head, as there is no phenomenology out there anymore. So it must exist only in the residue, taking the form of subjective states or strange internal qualia that do not fit in anywhere but have nowhere else to go.

Of course, many philosophers acknowledge that consciousness has an external phenomenology; it involves things appearing as ‘outside of me’ (e.g. Rowlands, 2001). And the talk of consciousness as a ‘subjective inner life’ that some philosophers engage in is often ambiguous; it is not clear whether the ‘subjective’ phenomenology is claimed to be ‘internal’ or whether brain processes that are ‘internal’ are claimed to be responsible for a phenomenology that appears to be ‘external’. However, I will propose in what follows that acknowledging that consciousness presents things as *external* to the subject of experience does not go far enough. There is more to experience than what *appears* to a person, regardless of whether the relevant appearances are experienced as internal or external. There is more to consciousness than the *act* of ‘appearing’ too. All experience has a background structure, a sense of belonging to a world shared with other people, a world *within* which one occupies a unique, contingent and changeable perspective. Once this aspect of experience is properly acknowledged, the problem of consciousness, conceived of as that of integrating the weird goings on inside people’s heads with the objective, physical world in which they take place, becomes unintelligible.

In what follows, I will elaborate, illustrate and try to convince you of all this by appealing to some simple phenomenological examples. It is important to emphasise that the aspects of experience that I refer to in what follows are described in much more depth by phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Hence the structure of experience is far more complicated than this brief discussion might suggest. However, elaborate descriptions of these aspects of experience are not required in order to call into question orthodox conceptions of the problem of consciousness. All that is needed is the simple acknowledgement that experience *does* include them, given that the problem with the problem of consciousness is its failure to acknowledge the fact that we experience ourselves as being in a world at all.

The Objectivity I have not Chosen

When you ascribe a subjective perspective to another person, you do not contrast every aspect of that person’s experiential world with your own experiential world, as though there were two wholly separate consciousness realms, generated in two different heads. Consider the following passage, in which Jean-Paul Sartre comments on his participation as a subject in a laboratory experiment:

“Why indeed should we use the term ‘subjectivity’ for the ensemble of luminous or heavy or odorous objects such as they appeared to me *in this laboratory at Paris on a day in February*, etc. And if despite all we are to consider this ensemble as subjective, then why should we recognize objectivity in the system of objects which were revealed to the experimenter, this same day in February? [...] I shall give the name subjectivity to the objectivity which I have not chosen.” (1989, p.312)

In this passage, Sartre appreciates that experience does not take the form of an internal ‘technicolour phenomenology’ but a rich, intricately structured experiential world. Consciousness *is* finding oneself amongst a collection of objects in a laboratory at a particular time, as opposed to being a collection of mysterious internal sensations that occur when one is in the laboratory. In addition, the passage suggests that labelling one experiential world ‘objective’ and another ‘subjective’ is unwarranted. The experimental subject’s world is construed by the experimenter in terms of subjective states possessed by an entity residing in the objective world revealed to the experimenter’s gaze. Conversely, the experimenter’s objective world is itself a subjective world from the perspective of her experimental subject. Of course, one could retort that the experimenter’s *objective world* is not the world *as the experimenter experiences it* but the world as described by science and *understood* by the experimenter. But, as I will argue later in this section, it is doubtful that the experimenter’s understanding of the world can be cleanly extricated from her experience of it. If her experience consisted solely of internal qualitative sensations and the like, it surely could be. But her experience is not like that at all.

At this point, we have a stand-off between two experiential realms, neither of which warrants the label ‘objective’ with its implied dominion over the other ‘subjective’ realm. There seem to be two *separate* worlds, each belonging to a subject. However, this construal of the situation is mistaken. Whenever we contrast our own subjective perspective with that of person P, we do not contrast complete experiential worlds but only those aspects of experience that we take not to be shared between ourselves and P. In so doing, we continue to take for granted other aspects of experience as shared. These aspects take the form of the world in which *we* both reside, the world in which *we* adopt contrasting perspectives, the world that is neither ours nor P’s alone. This shared world is part of our experience but it does not participate in the contrast.

Sartre contrasts the system of objects as it appears to two different people but he does not contrast their awareness of time or their appreciation of being together in “*this laboratory*”. It is taken for granted that the two share a situation, a point that applies to our interpretations of each other more generally. Whenever we ascribe to another person some mental state, conscious or otherwise, we continue to quietly assume the experiential backdrop of a shared world that we find ourselves in together, a world that is *there for both of us*. The point is nicely expressed by R. D. Laing (1969, p. 22):

“... *the world* – the world around me, the world in which I live, *my world* – is, in the very texture of its mode of being-for-me, not exclusively my world, but your world also, it is around you and him as well, it is a shared world, *one world, the world.*”

The specifics of what one takes for granted when contrasting one’s perspective with that of P and also the extent to which things are taken for granted can vary from case to case. For example, in walking down a familiar shopping street on an ordinary day and attributing an experiential state to another person, one will most likely continue to presuppose that she too finds herself in a shared experiential world, comprised of the same artefacts and social norms,

with pavements that are for walking on, signs that point the way, shops that sell various things, buses that reliably take one to specific locations. There is a complicated configuration of equipment, with associated norms, which is presupposed as a common world by both parties when they interpret each other. Several phenomenologists have emphasised the extent to which interpersonal understanding depends upon acceptance of a common world of social roles, artefact functions and general norms of conduct (see Ratcliffe, 2007 for a detailed discussion). In so doing, they have also recognised that psychological differences are attributed to people against this backdrop. For example, Heidegger (*Being and Time*, Division One, IV) discusses the part played by shared norms and configurations of equipment. And Gurwitsch stresses the extent to which situations are structured by a shared appreciation of interconnected social *roles*:

“... situations become visible in the horizons in which sellers, anonymous buyers, purveyors, employers, listeners, readers, masters, servants, etc., act out their roles. *As bearers of these roles in the ‘co-included’ situations (and only in these roles of theirs), those who belong to the world of fellow human beings appear in the references mentioned.*” (1979, p. 98)

Exactly the same things are not taken for granted in every case. But *something* at least is always taken for granted as shared; some aspect of experience always takes the form of *where we already find ourselves*. I have not seen any argument in the literature on consciousness to the effect that we are able, in describing consciousness from a first- or a third-person perspective, to consider one consciousness in its entirety, without tacitly accepting certain aspects of that consciousness in the form of a presupposed, shared world.

Of course, it could be argued that an appreciation of norms, roles, functions and the like is not part of conscious experience but a cognitive accomplishment that itself has no phenomenology. However, this is highly implausible. There are numerous documented cases in the psychiatric literature of people who report experiencing everything around them as strangely devoid of function. Stripped of their functions, or their practical significance more generally, things lack their usual ‘affective pull’ and appear curiously distant, detached (e.g. Sass, 1992: Chapter 2; Ratcliffe, 2008: Chapter 2). Much the same experience is described by Sartre in his novel *Nausea*. In place of the usual objects of experience, which are imbued with practical significance, there are “soft, monstrous masses, in disorder – naked, with a frightening, obscene nakedness” (1963, p. 183). In normal circumstances, however, we assume that others inhabit the same realm of familiar things as us, a world that is already practically significant and in which things are presented as having certain established functions. Thus, in thinking about consciousness, we do not manage to shove the whole experienced world into our own head, shove other worlds into other people’s heads and then conceive of all these worlds as anomalous features of an objective world, which is described by science and somehow understood without it being in anybody’s head. Instead, the accomplishment of consciousness in opening up a world of shared practical significance is something that is obliviously presupposed and consciousness is misleadingly associated only with those features of experience that are contrasted with the experiences of others.

If the reader is not wooed by appeals to changed experience in psychiatric illness or by the writings of phenomenologists, it should be noted that there are plenty of other arguments for the view that experience has a rich *cognitive* structure. Galen Strawson, for example, has argued at length for the claim that there is such a thing as “cognitive experience”. This, he says, is “hopelessly

obvious to unprejudiced reflection” even if not to certain philosophers (2005, p. 287). For example, when two people hear the same words spoken, only one of whom speaks the language in question, what they experience is very different. One experiences only a string of sounds whereas the other experiences meaningful sentences. Similarly, the experience of seeing words on a page is indissociable from an appreciation of word meaning. Seeing only the shapes and colours of the letters is a very different experience, rather than being the same experience but having a different cognitive content associated with it.

How can consciousness reveal a world that is not just *mine*, a world that is shared with others? Surely a subject’s perspective upon the world is exclusively hers. When I turn to look at the diary sitting next to my computer, I experience things in a unique way. The way in which the diary appears right now belongs to me and me alone. However, the assumption that a perspective on the world incorporates only ‘what actually appears to the subject whose perspective it is’ is at odds with what we really experience. As Husserl (1989, 2001) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) both discuss at length, when we experience something, what we experience is an enduring object, rather than a synchronic experiential snapshot that is subsequently inferred to be the appearance of something. There is more to experience than what *actually* appears from one’s current vantage point; there is also a sense of what *would* be revealed from another vantage point or by manipulating the object in various ways. Experience is structured by what Husserl and Merleau-Ponty call *horizons*, possible ways of perceiving and manipulating a thing that shape how the thing is actually experienced. A sense of what one would perceive if one changed one’s vantage point and of what would appear if one acted upon the object in a particular way are part of the experience – all experience is permeated with salient possibilities. Hence a perspective includes the sense that the world is not exhausted by what actually appears from that perspective; a sense of the perspective’s contingency is sewn into its structure (See Ratcliffe, 2008: Chapters 4 to 7).

Many of the possibilities that surround objects implicate other people, how they might experience or access things. A hammer is *for* a specific role, regardless of who uses it. It appears as *to be used in a certain way*, rather than as *to be used in a certain way by me*. These possibilities can involve a generalised other, the ‘one’ who might do ‘what one does’ with a hammer, or a specific other. With respect to the latter, Jan van den Berg comments on how another’s perspective can be a particularly conspicuous aspect of one’s own experience, especially when one is pursuing activities such as showing her around the town where one lives, for instance:

“... one can learn to know another best by travelling with him through a country or by looking at a town with him. One who often shows the same town to different people will be struck by the ever new way in which the town appears in the conversation that is held about the sights during such a walk. These different ways are identical with the people with whom one walks, they are forms of subjectivity. The subject shows itself in the things.” (1972, p.166)

More generally, the world appears as a world that I share with others. It is a world that is infused with their possibilities, in which I occupy a contingent, changeable and partial perspective.

The sense of a perspective’s contingency thus has two aspects: (a) the possibility of my adopting other perspectives that will reveal things differently and (b) the possibility of other people or even other organisms adopting perspectives that will reveal things differently from how I *actually* perceive them or even from all the physically possible ways in which I could *possibly* perceive

them. The distinction between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ is thus part of experience and the idea of having a more or less objective perspective is bound up with “the apprehension of a multiplicity of subjects sharing a mutual understanding” (Husserl, 1989, p. 86). What is available to my current subjective perspective is only one aspect of my conscious life, which is inextricably bound up with other aspects; it does not exhaust my experience of reality. Indeed, my experience of the world as *real* is at least partly constituted by an experience of it as something that can never be wholly swallowed up by any number of contingent perspectives that I or another subject might adopt: “the real lends itself to unending exploration; it is inexhaustible” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 324).

Heterophenomenology

All healthy experience incorporates an appreciation of the incompleteness of one’s perspective and of occupying a world *in which* one adopts that perspective. This point seems to have been lost on many of those philosophers who have recently offered influential analyses of consciousness. Take, for example, the method of “heterophenomenology” advocated by Dennett (1991). He claims that a science of consciousness should, like science more generally, be based upon third-person data, rather than upon first-person experiences that are accessed via unreliable introspective methods. The proper explanandum for a science of consciousness is a description of what people generally take their experience to be like, compiled from their reports. The resultant narrative should, he says, be treated as analogous to a work of fiction, a description of what subjects believe to going on in their mental lives, which may or may not turn out to be accurate. Dennett describes its content as follows:

“This fictional world is populated with all the images, events, sounds, smells, hunches, presentiments, and feelings that the subject (apparently) sincerely believes to exist in his or her (or its) stream of consciousness.” (2001, p. 98)

But our experiential worlds do not just seem to exist *in* our streams of consciousness and they are populated with a great deal more than images, smells, feelings and the like. So what is actually being offered in the ‘heterophenomenological’ reports that comprise the starting point for Dennett’s theory of consciousness? The subject takes for granted from the outset that she shares a world with the heterophenomenologist and that they both have access to most of the same things. She focuses only on what is hers and hers alone, the aspect of her phenomenology that she is able to contrast with the experiences of other people. The result is not a narrative that describes what people take their experience to consist of but a partial narrative that focuses solely on those features that are theirs alone. In attending only to what the person says about *her* experiences and then trying to explain in scientific terms why she would say such things, the heterophenomenologist is oblivious to the world that both she and her subject continue to take as given, the experiential realm where they have their different perspectives and convey their narratives to each other. It is no wonder that ‘consciousness’ seems to disappear in Dennett’s hands. He ignores the background structure of conscious experience and focuses instead on partial descriptions of experience that presuppose this background. Taken out of context, the features to which these descriptions refer can eventually be made to vanish, with the help of some ingenious thought experiments.

Hence the problem with the problem of consciousness is that it is founded upon a caricature of experience rather than upon what might be discovered

through a more disciplined phenomenological reflection. Phenomenology, as practised by the likes of Husserl, reveals a world of which we are a part and in which we have a unique perspective, which we contrast with the perspectives of others. Descriptions of consciousness that appeal to internal mental life, qualia, subjective states, what-it-is-likeness and so on are symptomatic of confused reflection. Zahavi (2007, p. 31) summarises the situation nicely:

“Phenomenology is not concerned with establishing what a given individual might currently be experiencing. Phenomenology is not interested in qualia in the sense of purely individual data that are incorrigible, ineffable and incomparable. Phenomenology is not interested in psychological processes (in contrast to behavioural processes or physical processes). Phenomenology is interested in the very dimension of givenness or appearance and seeks to explore its essential structures and conditions of possibility. Such an investigation of the field of presence is beyond any divide between physical interiority and physical exteriority, since it is an investigation of the dimension in which any object – be it external or internal – manifests itself. [...] Phenomenology aims to disclose structures that are intersubjectively accessible, and its analyses are consequently open for corrections and control by any (phenomenologically tuned) subject.”

Dennett, in describing his own conception of phenomenology, appeals to the Sellarsian contrast between scientific and manifest images, and proposes that:

“What phenomenology should do is adumbrate each individual subject’s manifest image of what’s going on with them. The ontology is the *manifest* ontology of that subject. It can be contrasted with the ontology that is devised by the cognitive scientist in an effort to devise models of the underlying cognitive processes.” (2007, p. 250)

However, each subject’s experience is not simply ‘subjective’ but involves being part of a shared experiential world. A *subjective manifest image* is not to be contrasted with *the manifest image*. The ‘manifest ontology of a subject’ includes a sense of its *not just being an ontology for the subject* but a world shared with other subjects. Consciousness was never a matter of some idiosyncratic, subjective view of the world, estranged from all other such views and from the objective world as described by science. Consciousness is not just a matter of having a subjective perspective within the world; it also includes the sense of occupying a contingent position in a shared world. From within this experiential world, we manage to conceive of the world scientifically, in such a way that it fails to accommodate the manner in which we find ourselves in it. Hence the real problem of consciousness is that of reconciling the world as we find ourselves in it with the objective world of inanimate matter that is revealed by empirical science. It should not simply be assumed from the outset that a solution to the problem will incorporate the view that science reigns supreme.

Presupposed Reality

How does the scientific world relate to the world of everyday experience? With a significantly revised description of consciousness (which acknowledges that consciousness includes the sense of occupying a contingent and partial perspective within the context of a shared world) perhaps the naturalistic project could begin anew, armed with a better explanandum and thus a better chance of success. In order to explain consciousness in naturalistic terms, we would need to scrutinise and explain all aspects of consciousness, rather than obliviously presupposing achievements such as finding ourselves in a shared world. Husserl, like most other phenomenologists, is dismissive of such a project:

“As long as we live in the naturalistic attitude, it itself is not given in our field of research; what is grasped there is only what is experienced in it, what is thought in it, etc.” (Husserl, 1989, p. 183)

Naturalistic enquiry inevitably presupposes the experience of belonging to a world but remains oblivious to this. It is within a context of experienced belonging that one adopts the attitude typical of scientific enquiry. In so doing, one becomes absorbed in the naturalistic attitude and forgets the way in which the world was already given before one adopted it. Naturalistic thought thus involves, according to Husserl, a kind of “self-forgetfulness” (1989, p. 193).

I do not wish to challenge the view that certain aspects of experience can become objects for fruitful scientific enquiry (as opposed to being taken for granted as a world that the scientist lives in but fails at the same time to acknowledge). However, I propose that Husserl’s point is applicable to at least some aspects of experience, including the *sense of reality*. To conclude this paper, I will briefly sketch a transcendental argument for this claim. A far more detailed version of the argument is offered in Ratcliffe (2008). Arguments along similar lines can be extracted from the works of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, amongst others.

Empirical science is concerned with finding out what reality consists of. In order to be able to advocate a naturalistic account of the world, one must have the capacity to believe that some things and not others are real. The relevant ‘beliefs’ are often assumed to consist of propositional attitudes. In other words, they take the form ‘x believes that p’ or ‘y believes that q’, where p and q are meaningful propositions, such as ‘London is in Germany’ or ‘all cows are green’. Now, most instances of believing do not involve believing sentences to be true or false but taking things to be the case or not to be the case. For example, in turning round and seeing my briefcase on the floor, I take it to be the case that the briefcase is on the floor, rather than taking the sentence ‘the briefcase is on the floor’ to be true and only then coming to believe that my briefcase is on the floor. I do not have to assent to the sentence because I am immediately struck by my being in a situation where the briefcase is on the floor.

For any belief about anything to be possible, one must have a sense of what it is for something to be the case in the world, to be real. This ‘sense’ cannot itself take the form of a belief, as the distinction between being real and not being real is presupposed by the possibility of all beliefs concerning the nature of reality. In other words, in order to believe either that x is real or that x is not real, one must grasp the difference between the possibilities of being ‘real’ and ‘unreal’; one must understand what the modalities of belief are. So where does this sense of the real come from? First of all, it is clear that it is part of experience; we experience things as *being there, real, part of the world*, rather than experiencing an appearance and then coming to accept by means of an inference from experience that what seems to be the case really is the case. As Husserl (2001, p. 66) appreciates, there is a “believing inherent in perceiving”. By ‘believing’ he does not mean a specific act of taking something to be real. In attempting to determine whether something is or is not real, we already take for granted a sense of reality, a sense of belonging to a world, to a place where some things show up as real and others not. The sense of reality, which operates as a background to all experience and thought, is the sense of finding oneself in a world amongst things and other people, in a realm that offers up the possibility of some things being real and others

not. This sense of reality is part of our experience, an aspect of what many philosophers refer to as ‘consciousness’.

That there is a background sense of reality, a space in which the sense of ‘is’ and ‘is not’ are intelligible, can be made most readily apparent by reflecting on those cases where it is diminished or altered. In everyday life, people sometimes complain of everything seeming distant, dreamlike, not quite real, somehow strange, fake or strangely unfamiliar. Such experiences are more intense or more long-term in many kinds of psychiatric illness. For example, patients with schizophrenia frequently claim that the sense of reality is diminished or absent, that reality is gone from experience. Their complaint does not seem to be that all objects of experience look as though they are ‘not real’ but, rather, that the possibility of anything being real is removed from experience. One no longer finds oneself in the world in such a way that things can be encountered as ‘real’ or as ‘not real’ in the usual sense. In Ratcliffe (2008), I discuss these experiences at length and document a number of different ways in which the sense of reality can change.

Of course, we will not be able to study the structure of our sense of reality if we are pre-occupied exclusively with what the constituents of reality are. The sense of reality is presupposed by the project of charting what the real world contains. So, in order to reflect upon the nature of our sense of reality, a very different kind of enquiry is required, one that seeks to make explicit those aspects of experience that are ordinarily take for granted and to study their structure. This, amongst other things, is what phenomenology aims to do. Given that the sense of reality is itself an achievement of ‘consciousness’, consciousness cannot be wholly understood by any enquiry that takes the sense of reality for granted. Hence it cannot be understood through a naturalistic stance, which is concerned only with the nature of the contents of reality. It follows that consciousness is not wholly amenable to naturalistic explanation.

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Matthew Ratcliffe

Das Problem mit dem Problem des Bewusstseins

Zusammenfassung

In dem Artikel wird die These vertreten, dass sich das – um es in populärster Weise zu formulieren – „Problem des Bewusstseins“ auf einer falschen Interpretation der Erfahrungsstruktur gründet. Der Kontrast zwischen meiner subjektiven Perspektive (A) und der gemeinsamen Welt, in der ich meine Perspektive einnehme (B), ist Bestandteil meiner Erfahrung. Beschreibungen von Erfahrungen, die den Grundstein für die Bewusstseinsausbildung legen, neigen jedoch dazu, lediglich Ersteres zu betonen, wobei sie merkwürdigerweise die Tatsache vergessen, dass Erfahrung mit einschließt, sich zugehörig zu der Welt zu fühlen, in der man eine kontingente subjektive Perspektive einnimmt. Der nächste Schritt bei der Formulierung des Problems ist, darüber nachzudenken, wie diese Abstraktion (A) in die wissenschaftlich beschriebene Welt (C) integriert werden kann. Der Verfasser stellt die Behauptung auf, dass die wissenschaftlich beschriebene Welt selbst das durch die Erfahrung konstituierte Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit zu einer gemeinsamen Wirklichkeit als selbstverständlich voraussetzt. Daher schließt das Problem des Bewusstseins mit ein, dass A von B abstrahiert und B abgestritten wird; sodann wird versucht, A in C zu inserieren, wenn C Aspekte von B voraussetzt. Das so geartete Problem ist symptomatisch für massiven phänomenologischen Wirrwarr. Demnach verwundert nicht, dass das Bewusstsein weiterhin ein rätselhaftes Phänomen ist.

Schlüsselbegriffe

Bewusstsein, Heterophänomenologie, Naturalismus, Objektivität, Phänomenologie, Realitätswahrnehmung, Subjektivität

Mathew Ratcliffe

**La Question du Problème du Problème
de la Conscience**

Résumé

L'article affirme que le « problème de la conscience », dans sa formulation la plus répandue, est fondé sur une interprétation erronée de la structure de l'expérience. Le contraste entre « ma perspective subjective » (A) et « le monde partagé dans lequel j'adopte cette perspective » (B) fait partie de mon expérience. Néanmoins, les descriptions de l'expérience sur lesquelles est fondé le problème de la conscience n'ont tendance qu'à l'accentuer, négligeant étrangement le fait que l'expérience implique le sens d'appartenance au monde dans lequel on occupe une perspective subjective contingente. L'étape suivante de la formulation de ce problème consiste à réfléchir sur ce comment cette abstraction (A) peut être intégrée dans un monde décrit scientifiquement. (C). Je soutiens que le monde décrit prend scientifiquement lui-même pour acquis le sens de la réalité partagée basée sur l'expérience. Par conséquent, le problème de la conscience implique de soustraire A de B, de nier B puis d'essayer d'insérer A dans C, tandis que C présuppose des aspects de B. Le problème de cette forme est symptomatique d'une importante confusion phénoménologique. Il n'est donc pas étonnant que la conscience demeure un mystère.

Mots-clés

conscience, hétérophénoménologie, naturalisme, objectivité, phénoménologie, sens de réalité, subjectivité