

The Unity of Consciousness

A workshop at the University of Bergen

Abstracts

Sebastian Watzl, 'The subjectivity and unity of consciousness unified: attention and phenomenal unity'

What explains that our conscious experiences are phenomenally unified? What explains that our conscious experiences have subjective character, i.e. that there is something it is like for you - the subject - to enjoy those various experiences? It is natural to think that answers to these two questions should be closely connected. Consciousness provides you with a single perspective, and hence is unified and subjective. But recent discussions of these two aspects of consciousness seem to be almost entirely disconnected. Unity gets explained in terms of phenomenal mereology (e.g. in Bayne), subjectivity in terms of self-representation (e.g. in Kriegel). Can we provide a unified account of both? Here I suggest such an account, based on the idea that attention structures consciousness into what is more and what is less central. Subjects most fundamentally enjoy a single conscious experience: they are experiencing some aspects of the world more centrally than others. This is the actively structured single perspective of each subject. Experiences are phenomenally unified insofar as they are part of the structure provided by attention. Since you can be, and maybe often are, aware of attending, and hence experiencing some things more centrally than others, what unifies consciousness also might provide for its subjective character.

Ole Koksvik, 'Three Models of Phenomenal Unity'

If consciousness is unified in the sense of displaying phenomenal unity, then, if a subject enjoys two experiences at the same time, there is something it is like for her to enjoy the two experiences together. The question remains, however, of how that something is related to what it is like for her to enjoy the first experience and what it is like for her to enjoy the second. In this paper I discuss three metaphors that may serve as models for this relation, explain why it matters which of them is true, and begin to explore how we might decide between them.

Uriah Kriegel, 'Brentano on conscious unities'

It is well known that Brentano designated intentionality as the mark of the mental: all and only mental phenomena, he said, are intentional. In fact, however, Brentano offered six different marks of the mental. The sixth and last is surprising: he claims that all and only mental phenomena *necessarily appear to us as real unities*. What did he mean by this, and is there any thesis in the area that is plausible?

Tim Bayne, 'The Unity of Consciousness as a Constraint on Theories of Consciousness'

An acceptable theory of consciousness should be consistent with, and perhaps even explain, the structural features of consciousness. In this paper I consider various ways in which the unities of consciousness might act as constraints on theories of consciousness. I focus in particular on a distinction between so-called 'building block' and 'unified field' approaches to consciousness, arguing that the unity of consciousness gives us some reason to prefer unified field approaches to consciousness over building block approaches.

Farid Masrour, 'Unity of Consciousness: In Defense of a Leibnizian View'

The topic of phenomenal unity of consciousness has received significant attention during the past three decades. Different theorists have offered different accounts of the facts in virtue of which phenomenal unity obtains. Despite their differences, these views exhibit a common tendency to ground phenomenal unity in a primitive form of oneness. This paper sketches and motivates a novel view that diverges from this tendency and builds unity from the ground up without an appeal to a primitive oneness.

Susanna Siegel, 'Some Questions about the Unity of Consciousness'

I will discuss a number of questions about the unity of consciousness.