CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS MENTAL STATES

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ABSTRACT
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The purpose of the paper is to analyze the (ordinary-language) distinction between conscious and unconscious mental states, as when people say "Admittedly I did (saw, desired, believed, etc.) X, but I wasn't conscious of it." It is argued that "unconscious" varieties of mental states, processes, or events---even perception---can be analyzed entirely in terms of the possession, exercise, acquiring, or loss, of dispositions, whereas conscious mental states involve the same dispositional items, temporally conjoined with at least one of a variety of appropriate experiences. The "temporal conjunction" relationship between behavior and "appropriate" experiences turns out to be much looser than recent causal or functional theories of mental concepts have allowed; the views of e.g., David Armstrong and Daniel Dennett are critically discussed.
Conscious and Unconscious Mental States

Contemporary Anglo-American philosophy of mind has paid relatively little attention to analyzing distinctions between conscious and unconscious mental states. To the extent the subject has been discussed, many have echoed Freud's view that ordinary mental language is concerned only with conscious mental states, while talk of unconscious mental states is scientific theorizing—theorizing which may utilize elements analogous to ordinary mental concepts, but conceptual innovation nonetheless. For instance, in "Motives and the Unconscious", Antony Flew claims that "if you are prepared so to extend such notions as motive, intention, purpose, wish and desire that it becomes proper to speak of motives and so forth which are not known to...the person who harbors them, then you can interpret (and even guide) far more human behavior in terms of concepts of this sort than any sophisticated adult had previously recognized." (My italics.)

By contrast, the perspective from which I will be working in this essay is that unconscious mental states are a familiar part of the ordinary person's conceptual scheme (and not just because theoretical terminology has "trickled down" into ordinary usage, a la "a glass of H$_2$O.") To be sure, we do not frequently hear the man on the street referring to unconscious Oedipal desires and the like. But that is just because an unconscious Oedipal desire is an (hypothesized) exotic type of unconscious mental state; we do not hear the man on the street referring to (hypothesized) types of exotic physical particles, either. We do find ordinary people saying things like "I see now that my action was self-serving, but believe me I wasn't conscious of any selfish desire at the time", or "I must have seen the log in the path, since I stepped over it, but I wasn't conscious of it"; and we do find them referring (quite synonymously, it seems) to believing X without realizing it, doing Y without thinking about it, or seeing Z without it "registering." Thus, on my view, talk of unconscious mental states is much older than the science of psychology; and Freud, rather than discovering a whole new domain of mental states, merely

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1I am grateful to Michael Bayles, Tyler Burge, Janice Moulton, and Don Howard for comments on earlier versions of this paper.


What follows, then, is intended mainly as an exercise in ordinary language analysis: I believe that ordinary people have the concept of a contrast between conscious and unconscious mental states, and I want to explore the presuppositions and structure of this distinction. While I also believe that this conceptual structure has important ramifications—e.g., for the problem of other minds, attributions of moral responsibility, and as a basis for possibly recasting some of the more bizarre theories of psychologists and psychoanalysts—I will not be discussing these issues. My objective for now is just to understand a fragment of the ordinary conceptual scheme.

I.

To fix intuitions, let us begin by looking at an excellent example from D.M. Armstrong. Suppose, says Armstrong, that "...one is driving very long distances in monotonous conditions. One can 'come to' at some point and realize that one has driven many miles without consciousness of the driving, or, perhaps, anything else. One has kept the car on the road, changed gears, even, or used the brake, but all in a state of 'automaticism'... One must have in some sense been perceiving, and acting purposively. Otherwise the car would have ended in a ditch. But one was not conscious of one's perceptions and one's purposes." Armstrong's case gives us a very clear way of imagining what people mean when they contrast conscious and unconscious varieties of a given mental state. For instance, Armstrong mentions perception and action. If we want to imagine the difference between conscious and unconscious perception of (say) the road, we just compare the way in which the driver perceives the road immediately before and after "coming to." If we want to compare conscious and unconscious actions, we compare the way the driver does something like stepping on the brakes in the automatic state with the way he does it when paying attention. And we can use Armstrong's example as a schema for generating cases involving other types of mental states. For instance, the driver has certain beliefs, e.g., that the maximum safe speed on this road is 60 m.p.h. He must, as Armstrong says, "in some sense" retain that belief in the trancelike state, and this is so even if he has never thought about how fast to go on this road—for he drives about the right speed by using accelerator and brake, would avow if asked that 60 was the maximum safe speed, etc. Suppose, then, that we compare the way the driver in the unconscious state manifests his belief that the appropriate speed.

"Actually, Freud disclaimed discovery of the unconscious, saying that it had long been familiar to "poets and philosophers." He did, however, claim credit for the first scientific study of it.

is 60 m.p.h. with the way he manifests it if he "comes to" and says to himself "I've got to watch my speed--this road isn't safe at over 60!"

Here we seem to have a clear contrast between conscious and unconscious belief that the appropriate speed is 60.

Or, consider emotions. Suppose that while in the automatic state the driver is drumming his fingers on the steering wheel while following a slow car; eventually he snaps out of the trance and what dominates his awareness is a feeling of annoyance at the delay. Here would seem to be a contrast between a conscious and unconscious emotion.

Now, to generalize, we do not of course have to be driving on deserted highways to have unconscious mental states. Armstrong's illustration is a good one, because the contrast involved in suddenly "coming to" from highway hypnosis is so dramatic, and involves simultaneous unconsciousness of so many mental states. But, in fact, the same thing happens to all of us every day on a lesser scale; we momentarily slip into a daydream and later speak of doing whatever we were doing "without thinking about it" or "without any awareness of it." We do not even need to slip into a daydream: we are always in many mental states (consider all our mundane perceptions and actions), but at any given time we are surely only conscious of one or two.

II.

I now turn to my primary objective: to present an analysis of what we mean in ascribing conscious or unconscious mental states to someone. My rough provisional hypothesis is as follows: To be in a mental state unconsciously, in the sense just developed, is nothing more than to acquire, possess, or exercise a disposition (in a sense of "disposition" very close to that with which Ryle has familiarized us--the difference being that I am a realist about dispositions, and do not think it is a category-mistake to think of them as actual states of the organism.) A conscious mental state, on the other hand, is 1) acquiring, exercising, or possession of dispositions of the same sort which completely constitute unconscious mental states of a given variety, 2) temporally conjoined with the occurrence of at least one of a cluster of "appropriate" experiences, plus 3) a current (though not necessarily activated) disposition to avow being in the mental state in question (under some description.) The avowal condition will be discussed in section III below; the main thrust of the analysis is that the conscious/unconscious distinction is basically the distinction between dispositions that are temporally conjoined with certain kinds of experiences and those that aren't. Of course, the relation of "temporal conjunction with certain kinds of experiences" will have to be spelled out more precisely below; but let me start by just returning to our Armstrongian examples and illustrating what I have in mind.

To begin with the case of unconscious action. Consider the difference between the driver who acts consciously in, say stepping on the brakes,
and the driver who acts this way unconsciously. In the latter case, the claim is that his mental state can be completely and exhaustively described in terms of the exercise of a certain disposition: roughly, the disposition to depress the brake pedal when circumstances requiring the slowing of the car are perceived. That is to say, he is in a state such that if certain conditions are realized, then a certain kind of behavior results, and, then, those conditions are realized; but the manifestation of the disposition does not involve the having of experiences, any more than does the manifestation of a glass's disposition to break when dropped.

On the other hand, suppose the driver performs the action of stepping on the brakes consciously; then the suggestion is that the assertion that he acted consciously can be roughly analyzed in terms of two main conditions: 1) that the disposition which completely constitutes the unconscious action has, again, been activated, AND 2) that at least one of a cluster of "appropriate" kinds of experience (such as the driver's saying to himself "here I should step on the brakes") has occurred at the same time. But now we need some kind of explanation of what is meant by "appropriate". Of course, this is not the only kind of experience which occurs as the experience-part of consciously stepping on the brakes: some people, perhaps, do not verbalize the thought; others may visualize a foot stepping on a brake; others may attend to the kinaesthetic sensations of extending their leg; some may have a feeling of "setting" themselves to step on the brakes, etc. Indeed, there is probably a nearly infinite variety of experiences which could, in context, count as the conscious part of consciously stepping on the brakes. (If you believe that at least part of the explanation for the fact that we speak an intersubjective, non-private, language about our experiences is that we get told that we're having certain kinds of experiences (e.g., pain) on the occasion of certain stimulus and/or response conditions (e.g., skinned knees and crying) then the impossibility of specifying precisely which experiences constitute consciousness of mental states will seem obvious: people can be conditioned to associate radically different sorts of experiences with the same stimulus-response conditions.) On the other hand, from having consciously acted on numerous occasions, we all also know pretty well what sorts of experiences constitute the family which we associate with actions we consciously perform, so that the class of experiences which are "appropriate" to consciously acting won't include just any old experience which happens, on an isolated occasion, to occur cotemporally with the exercise of the disposition. (No doubt natural selection has partially determined the class of "appropriate" experiences.)

Nevertheless, to reiterate, I think in many cases no experience which would, in context, count as the conscious part of consciously acting, occurs. In fact, it seems that only in a relatively small percentage of acts like stepping on the brakes are people acting consciously. (Of course, they may be in some other conscious mental states, such as perceiving the road, or thinking about the weather.) But, narrowing down to the specific mental state of acting, I would suggest that only beginners or very self-conscious drivers are usually in the mental state of acting consciously when they step on the brakes.

Let me make perfectly explicit the assumption upon which I am operating here. "Consciousness", I believe, is just a generic term for the having of any sort of experience; thus my view is that reference to any kind of conscious mental state ought to be analyzable partly in terms of some more specifically described kind of experience. This "generic term" account of consciousness has recently been forcefully advocated by C.O. Evans, who in turn traces it back to James Mill:

It is easy to see what is the nature of the terms Conscious and Consciousness, and what is the marking function which they are destined to perform. It was of great importance for the purpose of naming, that we should not only have names to distinguish the different classes of our feelings, but also a name applicable equally to all those classes. This purpose is answered by the concrete term Conscious; and the abstract of it, Consciousness. Thus, if we are in any way sentient; that is, have any of the feelings whatsoever of a living creature; the word Conscious is applicable to the feeler, and Consciousness to the feeling: that is to say, the words are Generical Marks, under which all the names of the subordinant classes of the feelings of a sentient creature are included. When I smell a rose, I am conscious; when I have the idea of a fire, I am conscious; when I remember, I am conscious...

However, though this position invites a request to list the species of consciousness, I will not be committing myself on that issue in this paper. My own sentiments are admittedly reductionistic: I contemplate the possibility that emotions are just sensations of bodily upsets, or that thoughts are just quasi-perceptual images (including auditory images of spoken words). Certainly a mental world containing irreducible items like "feelings of tendency", "awareness of agency", "volitions", etc. seems suspiciously overpopulated to me. But no reader who disagrees with me on

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this score need reject my account of conscious mental states as such.

Returning now to examples, I want to conclude my illustration of the proposed analysis of conscious and unconscious mental states by taking up the especially controversial case of unconscious perception. Controversy notwithstanding, the analysis proceeds in exactly the same way. I suggest that when our long-distance driver unconsciously perceives the road, only this much is true of him: he acquires a disposition to respond in a discriminating way to the environment—specifically, what he sees of the road—should he be so inclined. (Typically, of course, perceptions are combined with such inclinations: for instance, our driver is presumably inclined to keep the car on the road. But it does not seem to be part of the concept of perception that the information gathered in perception be put to any use, and that is why, following Armstrong⁹, I describe the disposition which is acquired in perception as a disposition to respond in a discriminating way, should we be so inclined.) And conscious perception will be, on the proposed analysis, the acquiring of this same disposition plus an "appropriate" kind of experience. Here there seems to be much more "focus" to the family of appropriate experiences which constitute consciousness in the case of (visual) perception: they will be, at least in almost all cases, visual sensations.¹⁰ In the case of the driver, for instance, the visual sensation will be the image of a road stretching out in front of him.

Now, the resistance I anticipate to this account is the complaint that surely the having of visual sensations is essential to any kind of visual perception, conscious or unconscious. How, for instance, could the driver acquire the information which enables him to discriminate road from ditch if not by awareness of his visual field? If the visual field had nothing in it, or, more accurately, if the unconscious driver had no experiences constitutive of his visual field, he might as well be blind. But a blind driver, of course, would end up in a ditch.

Yet, I think, this view that perception requires awareness of a sensory field is only a philosopher's prejudice, and if we turn our attention to perceptions of some of the other senses, this is easily seen. Take, for instance, tactual perception. Supposing the reader is currently sitting in a chair, I would claim that he or she is perceiving the chair; my evidence for that claim would be the exhibition of a discriminatory response to the chair, namely, allowing the body to relax and more or less conform

⁹Armstrong, Materialist Theory, pp. 82-3.

¹⁰Some philosophers and psychologists seem to use "perception" and "sensation" in just the opposite of the way I do, i.e., they use "sensation" for the physical stimulus, "perception" for the experience. I can see no right or wrong about this, but I do want to mark the terminology explicitly.
to the contours of the chair. (I assume an inclination to be comfortable.) Yet, I suspect that, at least until I brought up this example, few if any of my readers were having any tactual sensations, unless they were in a very uncomfortable chair, or were furniture hedonists of some sort, reveling in the feel of their particular chair. There were no conscious tactual perceptions, and thus I would say that there was no somatic field, for the while. But there was tactual perception.

Now, perhaps someone would want to object that that example does not show that unconscious tactual perception is going on all the time they are sitting in a chair; they might suggest that all that happens is that they consciously tactualy perceive while sitting down, adjust appropriately, and then shut off the perceptual mechanism. I do not see how that kind of view is going to deal very easily with the fact that they probably shift position, in a satisfactory and coordinated way, every few minutes; and, indeed, I doubt that some readers have had a conscious tactual perception all day, even when sitting down. But take another example where more is "happening": kinaesthetic perception, for example, of walking. Now, it is a fact that in order to walk properly, we have to perceive the current position and movement of our legs; consider what happens when alcohol cuts down the flow of information. And, this flow of kinaesthetic perceptions is something we are sometimes conscious of: for instance, a person who had been temporarily paralyzed might, when finally getting out of the hospital bed, revel in how it felt to walk again. But, the point is, we do not have to be conscious of kinaesthetic sensations in order to walk, and usually are not. As I look out my window, none of the people walking across the quad appear to be staggering about like drunks; yet I doubt that many of them are aware of any kinaesthetic sensations. So, I suggest, they are unconsciously perceiving the movements and positions of their legs. They have to, in order to walk properly; but no state of consciousness is involved.

And so I think it goes with unconscious visual perception: when we unconsciously visually perceive, as our long-distance driver unconsciously perceives the road, then it seems to me that we simply have no visual sensations. (And, if visual fields are nothing more than unified collections of visual sensations, then the claim is that unconscious perceivers simply do not have visual fields, for the duration of the time during which they unconsciously perceive.) They continue to acquire dispositions to discriminatory responses, should they be inclined to respond to their environment, but that is the whole story about them.

A couple of subsidiary arguments support the view that perception without sensation is possible. For one thing, there is the evidence of so-called "subliminal perception": if the message "buy popcorn" is flashed on the screen very rapidly during a movie, the popcorn consumption of theatregoers typically increases. Yet they will deny any awareness of seeing such a message. Or, consider the case of a long-distance driver who is vividly daydreaming about a certain scene at his destination. If he were also having visual sensations, then (given the assumption that he
has only one visual field) he should as it were experience a "double ex-
posure". This never happens, and this is easily explained on the hypo-
thesis that he is visually perceiving without having visual sensations.

But mainly I advocate the view that perception without sensation is
possible just because it seems a correct report of what goes on—or,
more properly, does not go in—in my mind when I unconsciously perceive.
Certainly it is barely possible, as James suggests, that when I uncon-
sciously perceive, I have sensations, but immediately forget having them;
after all, by the very nature of the case, I cannot be conscious of what
is going on when I am unconsciously perceiving. But I do know this:
that in most cases, if I try to remember a sensation I have had in the
last few minutes, I can do so. But I honestly cannot remember having had
any sensations, when I "come to" from having unconsciously perceived. Of
course, this proves nothing: the defenders of unremembered sensations
will simply say that it is just the sort of sensations one has when "un-
consciously" perceiving that one does not remember. But this sounds sus-
piciously like an ad hoc hypothesis: why shouldn't the sensations had
during (supposedly) unconscious mental states be rememberable? I often
remember things I was not aware of at the time they happened, such as
where I set my keys down. (I owe this point to Janice Moulton.)

But I think that, in general, there is a less sophisticated reason for
the prevalence of the doctrine that perceiving entails having sensations:
by virtue of the problems which we philosophers think about, we work with
a "one-sided diet of cases." Suppose, for instance, that we want to dis-
cuss whether perception provides a firm foundation for knowledge: we
typically take some case such as seeing our hand, right in front of our
face, or staring at a table, right over there in the corner, as the basis
of a knowledge-claim. And those cases, of course, are cases of conscious
perception. Again, if we are trying to introspectively analyze our per-
ceptions, we pay very close attention to them, and so of course they too
are going to be conscious perceptions. But I am suggesting that if we
back away from these very self-conscious cases and think in terms of our
mundane, everyday perceptions while we walk about, or drive, or sit in a
chair, a very different picture emerges.

To sum up this section of basic exposition, let us look by way of con-
trast at the view of Ryle. Notoriously, after giving a purely dispositional


12Actually, the hypothesis need not be ad hoc: as Daniel Dennett points
out in a slightly different context, there are presumably certain areas
of the brain which are active in characteristic ways when and only when
we are having experiences. See "Are Dreams Experiences?" in Brainstorms
account of intelligence, will, character, and so forth, Ryle says that he has "fallen in with the official story that perceiving involves having sensations."\textsuperscript{13} This is less of a concession than it might appear: Ryle still strenuously objects to treating sensations as ghost-stuff entities which are somehow \emph{inwardly perceived} or \emph{observed}\textsuperscript{14} (he prefers to speak of "having sensations", in a non-relational sense of "have".\textsuperscript{15}) But, remarkably, although Ryle introduces this and a number of other caveats in his concession that we have sensations, he does not try to limit the number of cases in which the (minimized) concession applies; instead, he says that "observing \emph{entails} having sensations."\textsuperscript{16} (My italics.)

Now, it seems to me, Ryle's treatment of perception, on the one hand, and all the other mental concepts on the other, fail for mirror-image reasons. Intelligence, will, emotion, etc., seem to me to at least sometimes involve the having of certain sorts of experiences—thoughts, resolutions, and feelings; in those cases, his purely dispositional account fails. But I think that perception may, from time to time, be \emph{nothing more} than the acquiring of a disposition to make discriminatory responses; hence his insistence that perception entails having of sensations, even in a minimized sense, goes too far in the opposite direction. What is needed is a view that admits that in all these cases, a disposition is acquired, or possessed, or exercised, which may, or may not, be accompanied by the occurrence of a certain appropriate type of experience. And the distinction between dispositions which \emph{are} accompanied by appropriate experiences, and those which are not, turns out on my view to be the same as the distinction between conscious and unconscious varieties of these mental states.

III.

I now want to develop some clarifications and qualifications of the scheme just sketched.

1. In the first place, I want to make it clear that I am not saying that there are conscious and unconscious varieties of every type of mental state; I am only purporting to analyze the concepts of the various types of conscious and unconscious mental states referred to in ordinary discourse. Take, for instance, pain. I am not arguing that there is such a thing as unconscious pain, for, according to my linguistic intuitions, pain is already, by definition, a kind of conscious mental state, and no one ever refers to "unconscious pain."


\textsuperscript{14}Ryle, \textit{Concept of Mind}, pp. 210-14.

\textsuperscript{15}Ryle, \textit{Concept of Mind}, p. 209.

It might seem that on my view, unconscious pain should be possible. For, I admit that there is a conscious state called pain, and on my analysis that is the exercise of a disposition to "pain-behavior" conjoined with a certain sort of unpleasant experience. Shouldn't it then be possible that the exercise of the disposition occur without the experience, thus constituting unconscious pain? For instance, Noel Fleming mentions this case.\textsuperscript{17} A football player twists his ankle in the heat of play; he thereafter limps and winces; but when we ask him, as he comes off the field, about the pain he must be experiencing, he says, "Funny. Until you pointed it out to me just now, I didn't even notice." Wouldn't this be unconscious pain?

My reply is that it would certainly be an exercise of the same disposition that is manifested in cases of pain, but it would not be called unconscious pain, because pain just means "a conscious mental state of such-and such a type", i.e., "exercise of a certain disposition conjoined with a certain sort of experience." That is just how people use the word. I am not denying that cases like Fleming's sometimes occur; I am just saying that the meaning of the word "pain" rules out calling them cases of pain.

But then, it will be objected, perception and action and emotion and belief are like this also: they refer to dispositions-conjoined-with-experiences, too, and so the concepts of unconscious perceptions, actions, emotions, beliefs, etc., are as self-contradictory as the concept of unconscious pain.

All I can say in reply to this is that my linguistic intuitions differ. As far as I can see, examining what people actually say, they do speak of conscious or unconscious perceptions, actions, emotions, and beliefs, but they don't speak of conscious or unconscious pain. We simply have to attune ourselves to the fact that there are these two different types of mental concepts, those where the occurrence of some kind of experience is built into the concept, and those where it isn't, and then painstakingly observe in each individual case what the linguistic facts are. (Other mental concepts which seem to me to fall into the same category as pain are: dreaming, hallucinating, and thinking.)

2. A fall-back position for those who think that consciousness is essential to mental states might be to appeal to degrees of vividness of consciousness. After all, it might be argued, a completely unconscious person would be like a knocked-out boxer, or someone under anesthesia, or someone in a deep, dreamless sleep. But people in my unconscious mental states are not like that; therefore, they must be continuing to have experiences, although the experiences may be very dim and lacking in vitality. Consciousness, then, would be a scalar

\textsuperscript{17}Fleming, Noel, "Mind as the Cause of Motion", \textit{Australasian Journal of Philosophy} 47 (1969), p. 239.
quality, and it would be conceded that there are mental states which involve almost no awareness; but some consciousness would still be held necessary for any mental state.

To begin with, however, I would want to distinguish conscious persons and conscious mental states; my concern so far has only been with the latter. I am inclined to think that a person is conscious if and only if he or she is in at least one conscious mental state; thus I can claim that the long-distance driver is unconsciously perceiving, acting, etc., without lumping him with knocked-out boxers, so long as he is in some conscious mental state. And, as a matter of fact, I cannot honestly say that I have ever fallen into such a deep state of highway hypnosis that I was totally without any sort of experience appropriate to some mental state (e.g., daydreaming or hearing the radio.) Further, it does seem empirically plausible that a person could not be conscious without being in some conscious mental state; we know that people in sensory-deprivation experiments do pass out when their natural sources of material for conscious mental states are cut off for a long time. So I grant that the driver is not unconscious; but I think this concession does not entail anything about the impossibility of unconscious mental states.

I would also be willing to grant the claim that experiences have varying degrees of vividity. It certainly does seem to make sense to speak of being vividly conscious of, say, seeing a car coming head-on at one, or only being barely conscious of seeing a deserted road stretching out into the distance. And no doubt a natural tendency to exaggeration frequently leads people to say that they are flat-out unconscious of being in this or that mental state when more careful description would concede at least dim glimmers of appropriate experiences. But I would still want to hold out for the view that of the whole set of mental states we are in at any moment, many, probably most, of those mental states involve no experience of even minimal vividity. I just cannot find adequate evidence that the wealth of experiences, albeit dim experiences, that the consciousness-is-essential school tells me I must be having, actually take place. (Perhaps my mental life is just less rich than other peoples'.)

3. So far I have been using the term "mental state" to refer indifferentedly to states, processes, or events. But there are special problems which arise in attempting to apply my analysis of "conscious" and "unconscious" to states proper. Take, for instance, belief. There is a clear sense in which we call a belief conscious if only its possessor at some time during the life of the belief acknowledges it. For instance, in this sense our long-distance driver has a conscious belief that one should signal in such-and-such a way for a right turn (he had to answer a question about this for his driver's test), even though the thought never crosses his mind while driving the deserted road. It would be improper usage to call this an unconscious belief, yet analysis in terms of "temporal conjunction" may seem to suggest that the belief will be conscious only when some sort of "appropriate"
experience is occurring. Again, analyzing the state of conscious belief in terms of some event, an experience, being "temporally conjoined" with it might seem to commit me to the view that conscious belief is an occurrence, and thus describable in a present progressive tense: "the driver was consciously believing X." But no such locutions are proper for mental states (as opposed to processes and events.)

I reply that while my analysis does propose to analyze consciousness of mental states (proper) in terms of appropriate experiences being "temporally conjoined" with possession of a disposition, this is only meant to say that the appropriate experience occurs sometime during the life of the state. In the case of a mental event, such as a perception or a decision, which will be the acquiring, exercise, or loss of a disposition, an "appropriate" experience will of course have to occur at a more or less specific instant to be temporally conjoined with the dispositional item. States, on the other hand, persist for stretches of time, and the temporal conjunction I have in mind will only have to occur sometime during the life of the state. Thus my analysis can do justice to saying that the highway-hypnotized driver has the conscious belief that one should signal right turns in such-and-such a way, even though he never thinks about the subject while on the deserted road. He has thought about it sometime during the life of the belief. Nor am I committed to treating conscious belief as an event or process describable in the present progressive tense: I simply claim that a necessary condition for describing this state as conscious is that a certain event or process be related to it in the specified way.

At this point the second (avowal) condition for a mental state's being conscious becomes relevant. Suppose someone has a belief without realizing that they have it, but subsequently finds this out. (E.g., a feminist "consciousness-raising" group might bring a woman to realize that she had had certain beliefs about her status vis-a-vis men all her life—beliefs quite clearly indicated by her behavior, but never consciously identified until this point. We certainly do not want to make such beliefs conscious retroactively, i.e., call them conscious all along just because sometime during their life an appropriate experience (say, thinking "I guess I do believe X") occurs. Mere temporal conjunction in my sense would allow this. But it is ruled out by the avowal.

18Working from an example of a neurotic belief that "competition is dangerous", Arthur Collins ("Unconscious Belief", Journal of Philosophy LXVI (1969), pp. 667-680) claims that part of the analysis of "N unconsciously believes p" is that N be prepared to deny believing p. I think that cases such as mine show that this condition is too strong; once again, the features of those unconscious mental states which are especially interesting to psychologists are being treated as if they were essential. Nothing in my analysis forbids cases such as Collins', but it is also able to accommodate unconscious beliefs about which we have never thought, but which we would be willing to admit having if asked.
condition: the budding feminist in my example does not have a disposition to avow beliefs about her status vis-a-vis men until she attends the consciousness-raising group. Again, the avowal condition is intended to rule out saying that a person is conscious of a belief which is conjoined with "appropriate" experiences only temporarily—say, during hypnosis—except during the hypnosis.

(The question now naturally arises whether an avowal condition might not be sufficient by itself for picking out conscious mental states. But I would argue that it is not: though we are as a matter of fact usually conscious of a mental state if we avow having it, "unconscious avowal"—i.e., avowal in which condition three but not condition two is satisfied—seems perfectly possible. For instance, people sometimes say things about their mental states in their sleep which we take quite seriously. And there is the classic case of the husband who carries on a conversation with his wife while absorbed in the morning paper, even going so far as to avow "Yes dear, I'm listening.")

4. A few more words are needed about another aspect of the "temporal conjunction" relation. Surely, it will be said, this is too weak: the ordinary man conceives of experiences as causally related to stimuli and behavior, not just as mere temporal accompaniments. My account relegates experiences to a tag-along, epiphenomenal status.

Well, in the first place, let me say that I am definitely not advocating epiphenomenalism. Epiphenomenalism is a kind of dualism, but nothing I have said commits me to the view that the experiences which accompany the exercise of a certain disposition are non-physical occurrences. In fact, at another time, I would want to argue that they are physical events. But the present analysis is intended to be neutral between dualism and materialism.

Nevertheless: I think epiphenomenalists are not often given credit for sensing the importance of cases in which behavior that is ordinarily thought of (by philosophers!) as essentially involving some sort of experience is shown to occur as a "pure disposition." For instance, in "On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata and Its Results", Huxley points out that frogs whose spinal cords have been cut and thus presumably feel no pain when acid is brushed on their legs, still pain-behave in the normal way. He also reports the case of a shell-shocked military man who continues to perform remarkably sophisticated actions while in a trance so deep that he does not notice a match being waved in front of his eyes. Neither of Huxley's examples is particularly fortunate: the frog case raises extraneous questions about reflexes and knowledge of animal minds, and the shell-shocked

\[19\] This would seem to be the view of Daniel Dennett in *Content and Consciousness* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.) See especially p. 118 and sections 14-17. Dennett's views are discussed in greater detail in section IV below.
sergeant's behavior is so bizarre as to make us wonder what mental attributes are involved. Still, I think, Huxley's cases point toward what Armstrong's long-distance driver case illustrates more convincingly: we cannot just glibly assert that experiences are an essential part of a causal chain beginning with certain stimulus conditions and issuing in certain behavior, when that same chain sometimes appears without an experience as one of its links.

Now, no doubt, there are causal relationships between individual dispositions and experiences (i.e., tokens of given types). And perhaps some kinds of experiences are essential to causing certain sorts of behavior, while other kinds of experiences are not. A useful analogy might be the difference between wiring the "power on" light for a machine "in series", as electricians say, vs. wiring it "in parallel". (In the former case, if the light burns out, the machine will not work either; in the latter case it will.) One can imagine that perhaps some experiences are wired "in series", some "in parallel." Actually, of course, the wiring of the brain undoubtedly includes feedback and override mechanisms which generate relationships between experiences and behavior far more complicated than the analogy suggests. The biology of the brain undoubtedly adds further wrinkles.

The point, however, is simple: if there is no standard relationship between experiences and disposition acquisition, exercise, etc., then there will be no simple causal relationship we can specify in the second clause of the analysis of conscious mental states. "Temporal conjunction" as I have described it may be too weak, but I have not been able to improve on it.

IV

In this concluding section, I want to bring out some contrasts between my analysis of the conscious-unconscious distinction and other views.

1. Several contemporary philosophers have proposed analyzing unconscious mental states in terms of behavioral dispositions; but only three that I know of have attempted to work out systematically the relationship between these dispositions and conscious mental states.

20In "Unconscious Emotion" (Theoria 31 (1965), pp. 181-90) Harvey Mullane suggests a view according to which conscious emotions have dispositional, experiential and physiological components; unconscious emotions lack the experiential component. Mullane does not discuss other types of mental states; he does not go into much detail about what could count as the experiential component of an emotion; he makes (what is to me) the dubious claim that the experiential component alone is a sufficient condition for the occurrence of an emotion; and the physiological component remains a mystery (bodily sensations would be
In Materialist Theory of the Mind, Armstrong (citing Locke and Kant) attempts to analyze being in a mental state consciously as introspection or inner perception that we have a certain disposition; we are supposed to be in the mental state unconsciously when the disposition is not introspected. But the attempt to analyze consciousness as inner perception seems to me to run into several problems.

In the first place, it seems to generate an infinite regress. If one admits that there is a concept of unconscious perception (as Armstrong explicitly does), then what guarantees that the inner perception is itself a conscious state? An inner perception of the inner perception? (and so on.) Of course, it could be stipulated that inner perceptions are always conscious states, or that the whole complex of external-perception-plus-inner-perception constitutes the conscious state, but such moves seem to lose touch with the ordinary concepts which make the analysis intuitively plausible. After all, Armstrong's long-distance driver case is supposed to illustrate that perception (a single mental state, not a complex) is sometimes unconscious.

Secondly, to treat consciousness as introspection seems to be to conflam two distinct concepts. Consider, e.g., consciously feeling anger, and introspectively observing anger (as in reporting our current feeling of anger at X to a companion Y.) Now, it seems to me that in any concrete instance of such a case, we will be able to find characteristics which the consciousness of anger has but the introspection of anger does not, or vice versa. For instance, the consciousness of anger will probably be a "hot", hard-to-ignore state; the introspection, a "cool" and detached one which takes some effort to bring about. Though we found the anger unpleasant, we might derive considerable satisfaction from the ability to observe ourselves objectively in the midst of an emotional situation. Though we were continually conscious of smoldering in anger for a half hour, the introspection might be intermittent and infrequent. Indeed, to put the matter at its simplest, if consciousness of anger can sometimes occur without being introspected, consciousness of anger cannot be introspection of anger.

(c) In Materialist Theory of the Mind, Armstrong (citing Locke and Kant) attempts to analyze being in a mental state consciously as introspection or inner perception that we have a certain disposition; we are supposed to be in the mental state unconsciously when the disposition is not introspected. But the attempt to analyze consciousness as inner perception seems to me to run into several problems.

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more comprehensible as part of a conceptual analysis.) Nevertheless, his view probably comes the closest to the spirit of the theory being presented in this essay.


22 This criticism comes from Fleming, "Mind as the Cause of Motion", p. 242.

Finally, inner perception as Armstrong describes it does not seem to capture the richness and variety of what people are talking about when they say they are in mental states consciously. Armstrong himself formulates this objection: "For consider what we would be introspectively aware of . . . we would be directly aware of an extraordinarily abstract, and purely relational, state of affairs. We would be aware that something of whose non-relational properties we had no direct awareness at all was operating to produce certain behavior. . . . Now, it may be objected, this is incredibly far from the detailed awareness of the intrinsic properties of objects that is yielded by sense-perception."24

Armstrong's heroic and extremely ingenious reply is to argue that we are after all conscious of something with this "extraordinarily abstract and purely relational" character in bodily perception. We might feel something pressing on our back, for instance, have no idea of its "intrinsic" nature, and yet recognize it as apt for producing a certain effect: our being shoved forward. So, Armstrong suggests (after developing details and further similarities), bodily perception is a good model for introspection.

Let us accept this analogy for the sake of argument, and return to the case of conscious action discussed above (p. 4)—the driver who consciously steps on the brakes. If the description given there was correct, then saying that the driver acted consciously might mean that his behavior was accompanied by a certain kinaesthetic sensation, or by his saying something to himself, or by his visualizing his foot touching the brake, etc. How can Armstrong account for this variety? Let us be generous about another very controversial point and allow that any of these occurrences could represent an awareness of being in a state apt for producing the behavior of stepping on the brakes. Still, they must be something more, or there would be nothing "left over" to differentiate the experience of having a certain kinaesthetic sensation from the experience of saying something to oneself, etc. But Armstrong has nothing to which he can appeal. When he shoulders the burden of accounting for consciousness as awareness of a "purely relational state of affairs" (my italics), he gives up any chance of appealing to "detailed awareness of intrinsic properties of experiences."25

24Armstrong, Materialist Theory, p. 96.

25A second reason why such a move is barred to Armstrong can be seen from this informal summary of the way he wants to argue for a materialist theory of mind: "A mental state is a state of the person apt for the production of certain sorts of behaviour, but the further nature of this state is not given by our concept of a mental state. This blank or gap in the formula enables us to make sense of the assertion that these states are purely physical states of the brain. Physical states can, as it were, be plugged into the gap." (Materialist
(b) According to the view of Thomas Smythe\(^{26}\), we are conscious of a mental state just in case we have privileged access to the disposition which constitutes it. This avoids the special difficulties of Armstrong's inner perception, but it still seems vulnerable to the charge of failure to capture the richness and diversity of consciousness. Further, it brings problems of its own. Smythe describes his account of consciousness as the use of an epistemic criterion, and speaks of consciousness as providing knowledge of our mental states; but I would want to leave room for a distinction between being in a mental state consciously and having knowledge of being in a mental state (consciously or unconsciously.) Suppose, for instance, that someone really did have the appropriate experiences and dispositions—to-avow for being in emotional state E consciously, and yet because they had a history of self-deception about such matters, we had doubts that they were really in E. (Indeed, they might have the doubts themselves.) Then we (or they) would not want to make the claim to know that they were in E, even though they are consciously in E. In general, epistemological doctrines about privileged access, in whatever form, are far more controversial (e.g., to physicalists) than the mere claim that people sometimes have experiences in conjunction with acquiring or exercising certain dispositions. It would be an advantage not to build a highly debatable claim into the analysis of consciousness.

(c) In *Content and Consciousness* and some follow-up essays, Daniel Dennett has advocated a view that is closely related to mine. For he stipulates two senses of the word "aware" as follows: "(1) A is aware\(_1\) that p at time t if and only if p is the content of the input state of A's "speech center" at time t; and (2) A is aware\(_2\) that p at time t if and only if p is the content of an internal event in A at time t that is effective in controlling current behavior."\(^{27}\) ("Conscious" is admitted by Dennett to be as synonymous with "aware" as "any terms we are likely to find in ordinary language", but is reserved for other uses in his scheme of things.)

"Aware\(_1\)" and "aware\(_2\)" bear an obvious similarity to the third and first of my conditions for being in a mental state consciously. But there is also an apparent divergence: for, after all, I would want to say that a mental state is unconscious if there is nothing more to it

Theory*, p. 275.) If mental states as we conceive them were allowed to have intrinsic properties, then the argument is open to the objection that these properties might block the gaps. (I myself would allow the intrinsic properties and argue that they do not in fact block the gaps, but that is another story.)

\(^{26}\)Smythe, Thomas, "Unconscious Desires and the Mean of 'Desire'," *The Monist* 56 (1972), pp. 413-25.

\(^{27}\)Dennett, *Content and Consciousness*, p. 118.
than the effective direction of current behavior. However, I think the divergence can be explained by noting that Dennett says his definitions are supposed to take persons as subjects, whereas I am attempting to analyze the notions of conscious or unconscious mental states. There is, admittedly, a clear sense in which we say a person is aware (or conscious) of, e.g., the road he is driving on, if only he does not end up in a ditch; but in this sense, "aware of" seems to function more or less as a synonym of "perceives." Ironically, however, the mental state of perception can be unconscious, and I claim that the idea of this is captured by saying that the perception is no more than a state which (in Dennett's words) effectively directs current behavior. Thus, despite the misleading divergence of terminology, I think Dennett's two senses of "aware" come very close to two of the conditions in terms of which I analyze the distinction of conscious and unconscious mental states. And indeed, Dennett wants to say many of the same things I do about the "contingent and coincidental" relationship of consciousness and behavior; he even mentions the case of long-distance driving.  

The real conflict between Dennett and me is rather over the issue of whether one can give a complete analysis of consciousness without also bringing in something like my second condition, which requires that a conscious mental state be temporally conjoined with the occurrence of at least one of a family of "appropriate" experiences. Dennett's opposition to such a condition is based on the conviction that no philosophically satisfactory theory of sensations, impressions, "raw feels", "phenomenal properties", etc. has ever been produced; for instance, he devotes a section of Content and Consciousness to pointing out a number of incoherences in traditional notions of mental imagery. Now despite the fact that the demand for such a theory is quite reasonable, a complete and coherent theory of inner experience is obviously beyond the scope of this paper; but what I can do briefly is indicate why I think Dennett's attempt to account for all aspects of consciousness in terms of awareness and awareness is inadequate.  

Consider again the case mentioned above in which a man converses with his wife while absorbed in the morning paper. Our intuition is that something is missing from this man's mental life which would be present in ordinary attentive conversation, but what would this be on Dennett's account? The man's behavior is appropriate to the situation, so he must be aware; and since this is verbal behavior, presumably triggered by a current content of his speech center, he must also be aware.

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28 Dennett, Content and Consciousness, p. 118.


30 Dennett, Content and Consciousness, pp. 132-141.
aware. Dennett has nothing left to turn to. By contrast, on my view, the answer will be that the man has no auditory sensations, no thoughts about what he is going to say next, etc.

Perhaps Dennett's reply would be that cases such as I am describing never occur. Indeed, Dennett describes a somewhat similar case in which the husband only grunts "Oh, really?" during pauses in his wife's speech, and claims that this is awareness\textsubscript{2} without awareness\textsubscript{1} (except perhaps of a "meaningless din of babble");\textsuperscript{31} perhaps he would argue that such conversations are never more sophisticated.

I would doubt this; but there are many cases to consider. What about speech during sleep, the speech of a medium in a trance, or science fiction about drugs or brain surgery that leaves the speech center functioning while blacking out the stream of consciousness? (What about the speech of Huxley's shell-shocked sergeant?) Speech without any corresponding episodes in the stream of consciousness seems all too possible, and any denial of this will certainly need empirical substantiation. No doubt speech behavior is a better indicator of consciousness than other sorts of behavior, but the relationship still seems to be contingent.

2. One popular and recurrent\textsuperscript{32} gambit in attempting to analyze the notion of unconscious mental states has been to treat them as mis-described or unnoticed elements of experiences—thus in effect reducing "unconscious" mental states to a kind of consciousness. For instance, in 'The Unconscious', Ilham Dilman writes:

. . . the trouble one feels about the concept of unconscious thoughts, feelings, and wishes is in part, connected with one's not having a proper grasp of the concept of conscious thoughts and feelings. . . . To say that [someone] is feeling jealous of so-and-so (consciously) is, of course, not simply to say that he is behaving in such-and-such a way. But neither is it simply to say that he has such-and-such fragmentary thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It is to claim that in his awareness he has brought them into connection and grasped the significance of the mental state he is in.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31}Dennett, \textit{Content and Consciousness}, pp. 120-21.

\textsuperscript{32}In addition to the quotation below, see Fox, Michael, "On Conscious Emotions", \textit{Philosophy and Phenomenological Research} 34 (1973), pp. 151-70; and James, \textit{Principles} v. I, pp. 170-72.

... The statement about unconscious envy is a statement about what can be seen in the same way the snake hidden in, but not behind, the bush is seen.34

I have no objection to analyzing some mental states along these lines; and no doubt a good deal of psychotherapeutic practice proceeds by directing the patient's attention to ignored or misdescribed experiences. I would only note, as does Broad in his discussion of this maneuver,35 that it is very peculiar usage to call such mental states "unconscious." (Broad suggests the term "simultaneous undiscriminating awareness" instead.) Further, it seems doubtful that all unconscious mental states can be analyzed along these lines. What can be made, for instance, of someone's desire to mislead himself and others by misdescribing his jealous feelings toward S as, say, justified approval of X? Or suppose

A four year old girl responds to the birth of a brother with evident jealousy and hostility. Since she finds that such behavior meets with strong parental disapproval, she becomes, after a short period of time, extremely affectionate and protective. Her new-found mothering attitude is reinforced and the pattern becomes well established. Her behavior, however, betrays, at least to the perceptive observer, an occasional but unmistakable hostility. She is, let it be said, still quite jealous although there is every indication that her feelings toward the child are almost entirely positive.... The question is, how can we intelligibly regard her experiential state as "misrepresented", how can we say of this case that the emotion is felt but not carefully or accurately discriminated? Since she does not feel hostility or hatred there seems to be no relevant felt quality which would enable us to get the non-dispositional thesis off the ground.36

On the view I am advocating, however, we would simply credit the little girl with two mental states: unconscious jealousy, and conscious affection. The inconsistencies in her behavior would be explained as a conflict of the disposition which completely constituted the unconscious jealousy and the disposition which partially constitutes the conscious affection.

34Dilman, "The Unconscious", p. 466.


3. Finally, a few words about Freud and the psychoanalytic Unconscious. As one who spoke of "the conventional equation of the psychical with the conscious", Freud clearly did not think of himself as analyzing any ordinary concept of unconscious mental states. Nevertheless, if I am right that there is such a concept, Freud may very well have (unconsciously) drawn on it; and at any rate the question arises whether his results could be stated in an alternative terminology. Certainly some elements of such a project have been undertaken. Albert Ellis, for instance, has proposed "An Operational Reformulation of Some of the Basic Principles of Psychoanalysis." And, more generally, Freud's accounts of conscious and unconscious varieties of mental states are always formulated in terms of the passage of discrete entities, ideas, from one (non-spatial) region of the mind to another; but many philosophers have argued persuasively that idea-talk (which Freud seems to take literally, ontologically) can be reinterpreted as a mere manner of speaking. This, the project of liberating Freud from his controversial and perhaps obscure formulation of the theory behind psychoanalysis seems initially viable. But I will leave that labor for a Freud specialist.


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