

The Nature of Consciousness
Handout [3]
David Armstrong: *What Is Consciousness?*

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§ Armstrong vs. Descartes

Descartes: Consciousness is the essence of mentality.

Armstrong: The mental includes both consciousness and unconsciousness.

The mental:

[I] The unconscious: A totally unconscious man has a mind and the mind is in various states.

___ He does not lack knowledge and beliefs.

___ He may be credited with memories and skills.

___ He may be credited with likes and dislikes, attitudes and emotions, current desires and current aims and purposes. He may be said to have certain traits of character and temperament. He may be said to be in certain moods.....

[The mental states of a totally unconscious person are thus "causally quiescent": ___ knowledge and beliefs may be said to be causally quiescent while they are not producing any mental effect in the person.]

But:

___ He does not perceive, has no sensations, feelings, or pangs of desire.

___ He cannot think, contemplate, or engage in any sort of deliberation.

[II] The conscious: When there is mental activity occurring in the mind; when something mental is actually happening.

§ Different Kinds of Consciousness

1. [Minimal Consciousness]

___ a single faint sensation; not totally unconscious.

[Question: Can you give any example?]

2. [Perceptual Consciousness]

___ Consciousness of what is currently going on in one's environment and in one's body.

[The case of a long-distance truck driver: having 1 & 2, but lacks 3.]

3. [Introspective Consciousness]

___ "inner" perception; perception of the mental.

___ It is thus a perception-like awareness of current states and activities in our own mind.

___ (i) is not all-knowing: It is not a total awareness of the current states and activities of our mind.

___ (ii) is not indubitable: It may fail to respond to the mental reality of which it is a consciousness.

___ (iii) is private: Each of us perceives current states and activities in our own minds and that of nobody else.

* This privacy, however, is *contingent* only. We can imagine that somebody else should have the same direct consciousness of my mental states and activities that I enjoy.

==> [Question: Is this possibility conceivable?]

___ (iv) is causal: The mental objects of introspection act within our mind so as to produce our introspective awareness of these states.

==> [Question: How do we explain the causality between mental objects and our introspective awareness?]

___ (v) is consciousness of the self.

___ We learn to organize what we introspect as being states of, and activities in, a single continuing entity: our self.

§ Types of Introspective Consciousness

(i) reflex introspective awareness

(ii) "introspection proper"

___ It is a plausible hypothesis that the latter will normally involve not only introspective awareness of mental states and activities but also introspective awareness of that introspective awareness.

§ Armstrong's Thesis:

Self-Consciousness = Introspective consciousness = Inner perception of our mental activities

§ Armstrong's Argument:

1. Unless mental activity is monitored by introspective consciousness, it is not remembered to have occurred (no event-memory).
2. Thus, without introspective consciousness, there would be little or no memory of the past history of the self.

3. Thus, without introspective consciousness, we would not be aware that we existed -- our self would not be self to itself, nor would we be aware of what the particular history of that self had been, even its very recent history.

4. Therefore, in introspective consciousness lies the foundation for consciousness of the self.

5. Anything mental that exists must have a self-consciousness.

6. Therefore, introspective consciousness is a condition of anything mental existing, or even of anything existing at all.

[Question: *Who* is having the introspective consciousness within us?]