

**Phil 490: *Consciousness and the Self***  
**Handout [17]**  
**Jesse Prinz: *All Consciousness is Perceptual***

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**§ Major Claims:**

- 1. Consciousness = Phenomenal consciousness.**
- 2. All phenomenal consciousnesses are perceptual.**
- 3. To say that phenomenal states are perceptual is to say that their representational vehicles always belong to one of the senses: touch, vision, audition, olfaction, and so on.**
- 4. All conscious states comprise mental representations (in the sense that they are mental contents that are representational in nature).**

**§ The Contrast between Christopher Peacocke and Jesse Prinz**

**Peacocke:**

- (1) There are different species of consciousness: perceptual consciousness, action consciousness, thought consciousness, etc.
- (2) Conscious thoughts can be characterized as a case of conscious actions.

**Prinz:**

- (1) There is just one species of consciousness: perceptual consciousness.
- (2) Conscious thoughts are perceptually represented.

**[Phenomenal Consciousness]**

\_\_\_ Phenomenally conscious states are mental states that have phenomenal character: it is like something to have such states.

\_\_\_ All other forms of consciousness such as information access or simply being awake are parasitic on phenomenal consciousness.

**\* perceptual consciousness:**

I will define a perceptually conscious mental state as a mental state that is couched in a perceptual format. A perceptual format is a representational system that is proprietary to a sense modality. To say that phenomenal states are perceptual is to say that their representational vehicles always belong to one of the senses: touch, vision, audition, olfaction, and so on. (p. 336)

## § The Perceptual Consciousness Hypothesis [PC]

### [PC]:

- \_ All phenomenal conscious mental states are perceptually encoded.
- \_ If we are ever conscious of thoughts and actions, it is by means of associated perceptual states.

### First Argument for PC:

#### [The Argument from Parsimony]:

- 1) Having a single unified theory is, all things being equal, better than having a family of different theories for each kind of phenomenal states that we experience.
- 2) All phenomenally conscious states are perceptually conscious states.
- 3) Therefore, there is a unified theory of phenomenal consciousness.
- 4) Therefore, PC is a better theory than a pluralistic theory of consciousness.

### Second Argument for PC:

#### [The Argument from Perceptual Sufficiency]:

- (1) From introspection, we find that there is no difference between conscious episodes that cannot be chalked up to a perceptual difference.
- (2) If (1), then all consciousness just is perceptual in nature.
- (3) Therefore, PC is true.

## § The AIR Theory

### AIRs: Attended Intermediate Representations

#### The AIR Theory:

- \_ All conscious perceptual states are attended intermediate-level representations.

#### \* Intermediate Level:

All perceptual systems are hierarchically organized. Low-level subsystems sample local features of the environment, such as edges, in the case of vision, or individual tones, in the case of audition. At the intermediate level, these features are integrated into coherent forms: edges become contours, and tones become melodies or words. At the high level, invariant features are abstracted: an object seen from different vantage points generates the exact same high-level visual representation, and a word spoken by different people with different accents produces the same high-level auditory representation. Given this general story about how sensory systems are organized, it seems overwhelmingly likely that conscious perceptual states always reside at the intermediate level. (p. 338)

**Prinz's Claims:**

- (i) Attention is the gateway to working memory, and working memory leads to reportability.
- (ii) Attention is a perceptual phenomenon. Attention mechanisms seem to operate on perceptual systems.
- (iii) PC coupled with AIR may be the best available parsimonious theory.

**The Mind's Information-processing Systems**

Perceptual systems	Central systems	Output systems
Receive inputs from the mind-external world.	In charge of cognition and thinking: they are the control centers for judgment, planning and deliberation.	Control behavior: they orchestrate the movements in our bodies when we execute decisions to act.

**§ The Phenomenology of Action:**

\_\_\_ Rather than experiencing the motor commands that cause us to act, we may be experiencing the changes in our bodies that result from the execution of commands. The experience of action may be somatosensory.

**[The Forward Model]**

When a plan is generated in the premotor cortex, a representation is sent to the somatosensory cortex corresponding to what the bodily senses should perceive when that action is executed.

That representation is called a “forward model.” A forward model is an anticipatory somatosensory image.

**The Sense of Agency**

When our bodies carry out motor plans, the forward model is compared with the actual changes that take place in our body as we move. The feeling of agency may arise in this matching process: If a match occurs, we feel that we are in control.

If a match doesn't occur, it's because our bodies didn't move as we predicted they would, and that results in an experience of being passively moved by an external source.

**Cases:** alien hand syndrome, schizophrenia, etc.

### § The Phenomenology of Thinking

How thinking could also be perceptual in nature:

- (I). Visual problem-solving is obviously experienced in a perceptual format.
- (II). With propositional attitude (believe that, think that, desire that ...)
  - (a) We can experience silent speech in a natural language - we literally hear sentences in our heads.
  - (b) Thus, our thoughts have auditory representations.
- (III). Thoughts are sometimes experienced via mental images of what they represent.
- (IV). All mental representations are perceptual in nature, and hence all thoughts have perceptual phenomenology.
- (V). Perceptual images exhaust the conscious experiences associated with propositional contents.

### § Affective Phenomenology: Epistemic Emotions and Thinking

When attitudes feel a certain way, it is in virtue of emotions that they elicit in us.

\_\_\_ **Desire:** We assign positive value, and hence positive affect, to most of the things that we desire, and anticipating positive affect give rise to the feelings that are at once positive but also uncomfortable insofar as they have yet to be realized.

\_\_\_ **Belief:** Beliefs comes in degrees: we can feel certain, confident, or we can feel that something just might be true.

**Prinz: I call each of these emotions an “epistemic emotion.”**

### How this supports PC:

\_\_\_ When propositional attitude types (believing, doubting, desiring, etc.) have a distinctive phenomenological character, it is typically in virtue of associated emotions. This conclusion is compatible with PC, because emotions are perceptual states.

### § Conclusion:

- ❖ All consciousness is perceptual.
- ❖ My analysis of conscious thought primarily involves conscious experiences of images of words, images of things, and emotions.
- ❖ The overarching argument of this paper is that PC offers a unified theory of consciousness and, consequently, should be preferred to other theories, all things being equal.

- ❖ Ultimately, the debate over PC must be resolved empirically.
- ❖ My assessment of the current literature is that there is no evidence for conscious mental states in the absence of perceptual imagery; there are no uncontroversial examples of imageless thoughts.
- ❖ Conscious experience is in the realm of the senses.
- ❖ Like all empirical claims, PC is provisional and I welcome any effort to refute it.