

Review of: "[Commentary] Reporting and Subjectivity Traps: A Brief Opinion Article on Consciousness as Belief"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

[Commentary] Reporting and Subjectivity Traps: A Brief Opinion Article on Consciousness as Belief (by Antonio Martín)

The interest of the article is to put up for discussion an issue that is not new, but which is being revisited in the context of AI: the issue of human consciousness vs. the phenomenological zombie, and its derivatives such as robots and humanoids.

The article has an incipient structure but lacks a conclusion, and the issues it addresses are too broad to be dealt with in such short sections. The format is certainly not that of a conventional article; as a commentary, it is fine, but a section recapping the most relevant points would be missing.

I like the idea of starting your article by reminding us that what we take as our reality are fossilised beliefs. Talking about our consciousness could also be fossilised, true. Maybe one could say today that the soul was a belief of antiquity (and the present). However, I agree with the previous reviewer. To hold that consciousness is a belief, one would first have to define it more accurately. Otherwise, it seems that it is not consciousness in any of the narrow senses, such as that of phenomenology, that you would be talking about, but rather the mind. Your discussion seems to go into the philosophy of mind. And perhaps, in that field, very much marked by Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy, consciousness is only one aspect of the mind, that of being able to witness our own mental processes. The mind would be those mental processes, and the capacity to witness them would be what in that tradition is called consciousness (another mental process of higher order). Of course, in phenomenology, consciousness would be something more transcendental; it would be the possibility of having experiences of the world. Following the line of philosophy of mind, what is a belief is having a mind, not having consciousness. This would be what is held by materialist reductionism and, in particular, eliminativism. When you speak of consciousness, do you mean the mind?

Now, more in detail.

It seemed to me that you establish a convergence (based on certain experiments) between the subjective experience of perceiving and the belief about our perceptions. By this, you seem to want to establish the argument that the two phenomena are indistinguishable in a certain way, so that it can be argued that, if our subjective experiences converge with the belief about what we perceive, then the awareness we have of our perceptions is also a belief. But there are several difficulties with this argument. Again, a definition of consciousness would have to be laid down.

1. If the definition of consciousness equates to the subjective experience of our perceptions (I think something like this is implied in these lines), then our beliefs about what we perceive do not alter the fact that we are experiencing ourselves perceiving, and even rectifying our beliefs about the world. To conclude that consciousness is a belief because our perceptions are subjective is to identify our beliefs with that which allows us to have beliefs and to hold them as our own with respect to the world. That is, improper identification of different levels. That I believe I am seeing a tree (when perhaps there is no tree) is a belief about the world, which presupposes awareness of myself and my perception. To say that my consciousness is a belief is to say that there is no difference between the perceived object (insofar as it is perceived) and my intentional act of perceiving it (noesis), indeed, it would be the reduction of the latter to the former. This implies that all there is are objects that are imposed on us and which (without further background) we tentatively identify, as AI machines do.
2. Already in these first lines, the development of the commentary is implicit, and this speaks of how well organised these two sections are. However, due to what has been said, one can already understand the difficulty of what he develops below; that is, to identify cognitive error or fallibility in metacognition as the argument against consciousness, but again, that is to define consciousness as knowing that one knows (what in phenomenology is referred to as reflective consciousness), but leaves aside the constitutive dimension of experience, which would be pre-reflective consciousness. Anyway, for phenomenology, there would not be one without the other, but that does not imply infallibility: I can only say that the perceived object is a tree because I have had an experience of it (I have perceived it), but that does not imply that my cognitive identification is infallible; I can say that it is a willow tree when in fact it is an oak tree, but that depends on the knowledge we have and our beliefs about the world. The latter can only apply to my current perception, i.e., my current experience of that object, which is always intentional, before being reflective.
3. In the sentence “we may believe to be conscious of something, while the reality is that perhaps there is no actual information available,” again it depends on how you define consciousness (your approach to it is ambivalent); however, in these paragraphs more associated with cognitive science, you clearly use the term as a synonym for metacognition. In any case, it seems a contradiction to say that one is conscious of something that is equated with a void of information. How can one be conscious of something that is not in some way? Of course, for phenomenology, being aware of something implies the constitution of that something for intentional consciousness (nothingness is always experienced as something).
4. Finally, in relation to consciousness and the informant, the self, the text again uses the argument that if the object of my consciousness is constituted in relation to my beliefs, then my consciousness is also a belief. This is taken to the issue of the self. Can it be said that my self-consciousness is an illusion because the consciousness I have of me does not correspond to the objective world? In any case, one could say that I am wrong, but even to be wrong (as Augustine of Hippo already said) one must have a certain existence. The argument that illusions about the world and about us lead to the illusion of the existence of the self is ambiguous and confused. By the self, what do you mean? If by 'self' you mean a certain unity of our consciousness, then self-consciousness does not necessarily guarantee that identity unity (though it is possible to argue for it), but if you are arguing for a stronger sense of self, such as Hinduism, and thus denying the individual existence, I think it is going too far with the established arguments. If one were to admit that consciousness is an illusion, that would not lead to denying the existence of individuals as members of larger

communities that act in ways analogous to each other and different with respect to other communities. It would be quite another thing to say that it is an illusion or a belief that directs them, but in so far as they follow them, they are conscious of it.

I hope that this brief analysis of your commentary will help you to clarify some points and lay a better foundation for your proposal. All the best.