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The Unbearable "Likeness" of Being

Astrid Friedrich

A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Philosophy

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

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ABSTRACT

THE UNBEARABLE "LIKENESS" OF BEING

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For a conscious being, there is something "that it is like to be". For a human being, this is the unique feeling that she encounters in her experience. I can best describe consciousness as this feeling of what it is like to be. In order to establish that there is indeed something that it is like to be, it will be necessary to formulate appropriate grounds for consciousness. It will then be possible to examine the process in which the subjective feeling of what it is like to be arises.

The most basic form of consciousness can be understood by distinguishing between sensation and perception. According to this distinction, the senses have a double province: on the one hand they make us perceive; on the other hand they make us feel. Perception implies a belief in something external, whereas sensation has no such implication, rather it implies a sentient being that is affected in a certain manner.

Although sensations are modality-specific, and hence seem to be similar across the human species, each experience can contribute to a person's sense of subjectivity. Sensations are required for conscious experience, but I suggest that valuation is required for the understanding of the feeling of "what it is like to be" that people experience.

The valuation I am proposing takes place whenever we experience something. The attitudes develop from past experiences. Therefore, for each person, the sensory experiences she has become uniquely "what it is like" for her because the value she sets to them contribute to her conscious experience.

*
For Mom and Dad
with love

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INTRODUCTION

Thomas Nagel, in "What is it like to be a Bat?" argues that for an organism to be conscious, there must be something "that it is like to be that organism".¹ I can best describe consciousness as this feeling of what it is like to be. My consciousness is constituted by what my experiences are for me; for example, what pain and pleasure feel like to me, what red seems like to me.

There have been many questions surrounding the coherence of our concept of consciousness. I have, therefore, found it essential to examine the sensation/perception distinction in order to establish grounds for an understanding of consciousness. Yet, even as we will discover that there is empirical evidence for consciousness, it still remains a mystery how consciousness is even possible. I do not wish to attempt to explain whether and how the human's feeling of subjectivity arises out of the material workings of the brain, rather I will attempt to explain why humans have a unique feeling of what it is like to be.

Describing human consciousness as in part having the ability to experience sensations somehow fails to do justice

¹ Thomas Nagel, "What is like to be a Bat" Mortal Questions. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 166.

to the feeling of what it is like to be. Sensations in themselves do not seem to exhaust the subjective feeling that human beings have. The human's feeling of what it is like to be, in a certain sense seems private, and if not so, it certainly seems ineffable. When I have a sensation of pain, simply using words to describe this sensation does not do justice to my subjective feeling. My conscious experience of what it is like to feel this pain is part of the whole that makes up my subjective feeling of what it is like to be.

Human sensations may be labeled. But this identification of sensations is somehow incomplete. According to Graham Dunstan Martin, the everyday reality, our sensory environment, is ineffable. He argues:

...a word is after all only a word. You cannot keep warm inside the word 'blanket' or give birth to the word 'child'; you cannot climb the words 'Stac Polly'; you cannot eat the words 'coq au vin' or play the words "Wolverine Blues". A word is like a label pinned on a chair to tell you whose it is, or like a sign post at the entry of a village. It follows, therefore, that the real is, very largely, ineffable. That is to say, not only can it not be said, spoken, expressed or described as it really is - we always knew that! - but it cannot be said spoken, expressed or described as we human beings find it to be.

The way we find things to be, or rather what they are like for us, is something that contributes to our conscious experience. It cannot be denied that sensory experience across the human species is similar, for it is a fact that

² Graham Dunstan Martin Shadows in the Cave. (New York: Arkana, 1990), 36-37.

sensations are modality-specific, but an individual's sensory consciousness, her feeling of what it is like to be that person is something unique. The basis for this is to be found in the manner in which she sets values to her experiences. Attitudes towards sensations can create variances in the way things are felt by different people. Attitudes are built on past experiences and play a large role in the feeling of subjectivity. Sensations are not merely of, for example, pleasure or pain; they become part of the person's conscious life, because they are like "this" for her. This not only explains why someone can like something that another person may dislike, but it is at the root of understanding why humans have a strong feeling of subjectivity. Each experience in a person's life becomes "what it is like" for that individual.

Consciousness is what distinguishes people from inanimate objects, and perhaps even from less developed organisms. To a certain extent, a person's consciousness may be tied to her free will, for in so far as she can freely develop attitudes toward her sensations, these sensations are what it is like for her. Quite simply, for a person to be, is for her to have an undeniable feeling of what it is like to be for her.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DOUBLE PROVINCE OF THE SENSES

Sensation and Perception

In this first section, I would like to examine the distinction between sensation and perception from a philosophical standpoint. This distinction is of great importance in the pursuit of an understanding of consciousness. Much false reasoning about consciousness is due to the lack of recognition of this distinction. Sensation and perception will be distinguished here through several thought experiments. Sensation and perception will be found to be two very different things.

Thomas Reid's account of perception is based on a common sense description.¹ His theory suggests the immediacy of perception, memory and thought. It may be seen as a criticism of the "theory of ideas" as proposed by Berkeley and Hume. According to the theory of ideas, every object of thought must be either an impression or an idea that is a copy of an earlier impression.⁴ It seems that

¹ S. A. Graves, The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 21-25.

⁴ George Berkeley, Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous. Ed. Robert Merrihew Adams. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1713), 43-45.

Reid has proposed his theory because much of the mistaken reasoning about perception is based on drawing an analogy between mind and body. It is this incorrect endeavor of analogical reasoning from mind to body that leads some philosophers to talk about impressions in the mind when they wish to speak about perceptions. Reid's reasoning is a way to avoid the skepticism that often occurs when one posits ideas between the mind and the external world. Avoiding this kind of skepticism is possible by arguing that sensations are not objects we feel, but rather mental acts we perform. Furthermore, these acts immediately suggest a corresponding quality in an external object.

According to Sajma and Kamppinen in A Historical Introduction to Phenomenology, Reid does acknowledge the existence of mental events, and he also accepts the existence of extramental objects, but he questions the existence of intramental objects of such acts. In view of Reid's position, Sajma and Kamppinen argue:

While empiricists seem to confuse two senses of 'idea', namely as 'mental act' or 'operation' and as 'intramental object of mental act', Reid insists on their sharp separation. In connection with this distinction, he distinguishes also between perception and consciousness. Perception, he argues, is directed to extramental objects, consciousness on the other hand is directed to our mental acts themselves.⁵

Reid criticizes the theory of ideas, because he is unable to discover the presence of these ideas. Reid is

⁵ Seppo Sajma and Matti Kamppinen, A Historical Introduction to Phenomenology. (London: Croon Helm Ltd., 1987), 22.

indeed aware of the presence of sensations, yet these have been treated by other philosophers as a variety of ideas. Reid firmly holds, however, that sensations do not fall into the class of ideas. He argues that they do not present themselves as objects, nor as objects mediating other remote objects.⁶

Reid's position suggests that the philosophy of mind at the time required a reformation. The philosophy of mind had to be cleansed from any attempt to incorporate by analogy the mind's operations and the behavior of bodies. One of these idealist theories that Reid sought to avoid was the view that the mind and its objects in perception, thought and memory, are to be treated as if they were remote interacting bodies requiring a medium to connect them. Reid attempts to develop a philosophy of mind that may give rise to the knowledge of the phenomenon of human nature.

In order to distinguish properly between sensation and perception, it is important to clarify first what is meant by each term. Thomas Reid, in his Essays Concerning the Intellectual Powers of Man, clearly explains the difference between the two. Perception, he argues, is distinct from conception and imagination.⁷ This seems to be correct, because we do not say that we perceive things of which we are not fully certain. I may conceive of Pegasus, or

⁶ Thomas Reid, Essays on the Intellectual Powers Of Man. (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1969), 107-110.

⁷ Ibid., 8.

imagine a unicorn, but I cannot say that I perceive these (unless I speak of a picture). Furthermore, perception is used only in reference to external objects. I perceive tables and chairs, but I do not perceive my pain. When I experience pain, it is not said that I perceive pain. When I feel pain, I sense it. Quite simply, perception is applied to the evidence that we receive from our senses of the external world. Our abilities, such as seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting, each expresses the operation proper to its sense, but they all have one thing in common; this is perception.

Let us imagine holding a ball in our hand. It is possible to perceive the roundness of the object in our hand. The sensations in our palm and the fingers give us information about the object of the perception. Reid argues that sensation is not made possible by any resemblance between the sensations and the qualities found in the object. He defends this view by claiming that the roundness of the ball and the feeling of bent fingers are two very different things. According to Reid, sensations that give rise to perceptions are "natural signs", they work in an analogous manner to language.⁸

Let us now examine sensation more thoroughly. According to Reid, sensation is the name given to a certain act of mind. However, sensation is different from all others, here in particular perception, in so far as

⁸ Ibid., 302-303

sensation has no object distinct from the act itself. When I have the sensation of pain, I cannot say that the pain is something over and above the sensation I have. The pain and my sensation of pain are one and the same thing." There is no distinguishing between the pain and the sensation of pain, not even in imagination. This is not only true for pain, it is the rule for all sensations. Sajma and Kamppinen argue that Reid's position advocates that in perception the act of perceiving, that is the mental act, may be distinguished from the object perceived. In the case of sensation, on the other hand, it is not possible to separate the act of sensing and the thing sensed.¹⁰

Now that the difference between sensation and perception has been made somewhat clearer, I will further examine the distinction that Reid proposes. It is often the case that in theories, sensation and perception are bundled together. This mistake may occur because the perception of external objects is, more often than not, accompanied by some sensation corresponding to the object perceived. What may deepen the confusion even more is the fact that in most cases and in most languages, the same name is used to express both the external object perceived and the sensation that accompanies it. For example, "red" refers to a color

⁹ Ibid., 29.

¹⁰ Seppo Sajma and Matti Kamppinen, A Historical Introduction to Phenomenology. (London, Croon Helm Ltd., 1987), 115.

perceived in the external world, and it also refers to the sensation we have when looking at red objects.

Although this may give some people reason to believe that sensation and perception should not be distinguished, I believe that there is indeed much more evidence in favor of the distinction. The mistaken view that sensation and perception are one and the same can be a major contributor to confusion about the nature and status of consciousness. Hence, it will be necessary to examine further what Reid proposes about the distinction between sensation and perception.

Let us look more closely at perception. When we focus on the act of perceiving an external object, Reid argues that we will find three things:

First, Some conception or notion of the object perceived. Secondly, A strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present existence. And, thirdly, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning.¹¹

According to the first aspect of perception, it is necessary to have some notion or concept of the object that we perceive, in order to perceive it. We will have a clearer notion of the object if we directly perceive it, instead of simply conjuring up a memory of the object, or trying to imagine the object. However, there are also degrees in perception itself. If we take vision for

¹¹ Thomas Reid, Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man. (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1969), 111-112.

example, an object at a closer distance is usually perceived more clearly and distinctly than one at a further distance. A very small object may be perceived more clearly and distinctly with the aid of a microscope. Lighting conditions will also play an important role in the quality of visual perception.

The second aspect of perception which Reid proposes, states that, in perception, there is an irresistible conviction and belief in the existence of the thing perceived. When perception is clear and steady, there is no doubt of the reality of the thing perceived. If there is no doubt of the reality of the perception, likewise there is no doubt of the reality of the object perceived.

There are, however, two exceptions that come immediately to my mind regarding this certainty. Firstly, a person may claim and truly believe that she has an irresistible conviction in some apparent perception, when indeed this clearly violates the testimony of her senses. A hypochondriac, for example, may constantly tell the doctor that she can't walk, when indeed the doctor cannot detect anything physically wrong with her.

The second exception comes to mind when Reid suggests that in the past, many philosophers have claimed that our senses cannot be trusted. I can understand that everyone occasionally is in error in her perception, yet I strongly disagree that this makes a case against the usual certainty we have in perception. The example that comes to mind in

this situation is that of optical illusions. A tower, for example, may look round when in fact it is not. This kind of visual illusion can be the result of many things: distance from the tower, the angle from which we are looking at it, and lighting, can all play a role in how the tower is perceived by us. These kinds of optical illusions sometimes seem very convincing because even if we are aware of the real facts of the situation, the illusion still remains.

I do not think that these exceptions undermine what Reid has proposed. In both cases it may be said that although there is a feeling of conviction, certain clarity is lacking in the perception. Reid's point still stands, in both cases the person thinks that her perception is correct. The fact that the perception in either case is not entirely clear should allow for the discrepancy between apparent perception and reality. However, if the perception is perfectly clear and distinct, it should indeed reflect the object in reality. Therefore, as Reid has proposed, we are indeed usually convinced that our perceptions are correct, and more often than not, it is truly the case that they are correct.

The third aspect of perception proposed by Reid, is that the conviction is immediate, that is, it does not depend on reasoning. It is not necessary to build an argument to be convinced of the existence of what we perceive. Reid argues that:

Perception commands our belief upon its own authority and disdains to rest its authority upon any reasoning whatsoever.¹⁷

This third aspect of perception can easily be demonstrated in everyday life. I do not need an argument to convince me that the cars I perceive in the street are real. I trust my perception, the simple fact that I see the car is more than enough to keep me from stopping in front of an oncoming car. Furthermore, if perception needed an argument, we would move about extremely slowly, and would probably have been killed off as a species altogether. It makes sense that we are immediately convinced about our perceptions; it is the way we act in view of them, and it is more efficient than trying to prove them.

As it has already been mentioned, almost all of our perceptions have accompanying sensations. It is due to this accompaniment that many people have been driven to conclude wrongly that perception and sensation can be bundled together. Further confusion may also arise because sensation and perception are not distinguished in common language; this is simply because the purpose of common language does not require such a distinction. It is therefore often the case that a quality perceived and the sensation corresponding to that perception go under the same name.

¹⁷ Ibid., 116.

The example that Reid gives of the rose may help clarify the distinction between sensation and perception. When we smell a rose there is the dual operation of sensation and perception. The pleasant odor I feel, taken in itself, not in relation to any external object, is sensation. The odor of the rose affects the mind in a special way. This special kind of affection can take place without any thought of the rose. Sensation, in this case the pleasant smell of the rose, is felt with no requirement of thought of any external object. A sensation of pleasurable smell is nothing more than what it is felt to be. The very being of a sensation rests in its being felt, and when it is not felt, then it simply does not exist. There is no difference between the sensation and the feeling of it.¹¹

How then does perception differ from sensation when smelling a rose? Perception, contrary to sensation, must always have an external object. In the case of the rose, it is the quality in the rose that is discernible by the sense of smell. Although the sensation I feel and the quality I perceive are called by one and the same name, they are indeed two very different things. As Reid argues, there are two different things signified by the smell of a rose. One of these things is in the mind and can be only in a sentient being. The second thing is only and properly in the external object. The sensation felt when smelling a rose is

¹¹ Ibid., 242-243.

in the mind, and the mind is the sentient being. The rose is not sentient, because there can be no sensation, or anything resembling sensation in the rose.¹⁴

This distinction between sensation and perception holds true for all the names we give to smells, tastes, sounds, and other "feels". As Reid maintains:

They signify both a sensation and a quality perceived by means of that sensation. The first is the sign, the last, the thing signified.¹⁵

The distinction can be easily demonstrated through further examples. Let us imagine the case of pressing your hand firmly against a table. If you press hard enough, you may feel pain. The pain felt is the sensation in the mind, and there is nothing that resembles pain to be found in the table proper. Furthermore, the hardness we perceive in the table is characteristic of the table, and no such hardness is to be found in the mind.

Nicholas Humphrey, in his A History of the Mind¹⁶, also gives several examples that quite clearly demonstrate the distinction between sensation and perception. Humphrey argues that sensation and perception can be distinguished using different kinds of attention. Humphrey suggests imagining someone writing on your back with a feather. There are two things here: on the one hand there is the

¹⁴ Ibid., 243-244.

¹⁵ Ibid., 244.

¹⁶ Nicholas Humphrey, A History of the Mind. (New York: Harper Perennials, 1992), 66.

tactile stimulus, that is the sensation; and on the other hand there is the perception of what is being written. Humphrey proposes another example. He asks us to imagine running our fingers over a bruise that is on our body. Once again two things occur here: there is our ability to perceive the bump caused by the bruise, however, we are also capable of sensing the pain caused by touching the bruise.¹⁷ This example can also show the distinction between sensation and perception when the experiment is done with another person. If someone else runs her fingers over my bruise, she has the ability to perceive the bump on my skin, but she does not experience the sensation of pain caused by the touching.

According to Sajma and Kamppinen, Edmund Husserl, in his Logical Investigations, formulates a theory of sensation and perception that is analogous to that which Reid has proposed.¹⁸ Husserl argues that there is a fundamental difference between sensation and content.¹⁹ The content is to be identified with what is contained in the mental act. A mental act is directed not to its content, but rather via its content. The view that the object of an experience is not a part of the experience was developed because an experience may be aimed at an object that does not exist.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Seppo Sajma and Matti Kamppinen, A Historical Introduction to Phenomenology. (London: Croon Helm Ltd.; 1987), 82.

¹⁹ Edmund Husserl, Logical Investigations. Trans. N. Hindley (London: Routledge, 1970), 558-9

This essential distinction between sensation and content may be expanded to the relationship between sensation and perception. It may be argued that sense perceptions, unlike sensations, are mental acts that require contents. Furthermore, two identical sensations can allow for the perception of two different things; however, identical contents necessarily point to the same object. Such a fundamental difference may occur because the subject can be affected by certain beliefs and desires, and these may give rise to differences in interpretation of sensory input.

Husserl also distinguishes between sensation and perception in his Cartesian Meditations.²⁰ This distinction allows Husserl to argue that the Transcendental Ego perceives itself as having a worldly self - the empirical ego. The empirical ego is embodied. Husserl distinguishes between active and passive genesis. Many of the activities that go on in the body are at the passive level, such as the ability to constitute sensations. There is however, also the active element, that is the ability to actively affect the environment.

According to Husserl, he is able to single out his animate organism uniquely separate from all other things in nature. This occurs because he is able to recognize that his body is not just any body, it is what he calls an

²⁰ Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations. Trans. Dorion Cairns, (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960), 92-93.

animate organism. Husserl argues that this "animate organism" is:

The sole Object within my abstract world-stratum to which, in accordance with experience, I ascribe fields of sensation (belonging to it, however, in different manners - a field of tactile sensations, a field of warmth and coldness, and so forth.)²¹

According to Husserl, we find ourselves to be uniquely different from all other things in the world. The reason why we are able to distinguish ourselves in this manner is because we have the ability to have sensations. Sensations are different from perceptions, as can be seen in the following statement by Husserl:

Touching kinesthetically, I perceive "with" my hands; seeing kinesthetically, I perceive also "with" my eyes; and so forth; moreover I can perceive thus at any time. Meanwhile the kinesthesias pertaining to the organs flow in the mode "I am doing", and are subject to my "I can".²²

According to this view, two things occur via our senses. When our senses are at work, there is on the one hand the "I am doing" and on the other hand "I am subject to my...". According to this view it may be said that on the one hand we are able to perceive through our senses; and on the other hand we are able to have, or to be, the subject of sensations. Husserl expands on this idea to develop an account of a more complex kind of sensation, which he calls "reflexive kinesthesia". According to this idea, the

²¹ Ibid., 97.

²² Ibid.

animate organism is reflexively related to itself. In favor of this view, Husserl argues that when you touch your own fingers, you feel both the touch and the touching.²¹

It may therefore be concluded that sensation and perception are two different things. Sensation by itself implies neither the conception nor the belief in any object external to it. Sensation requires a sentient being and a certain manner in which that sentient being is affected. On the other hand, perception implies an immediate conviction or belief in an external object. Perception requires an object different from the mind to be perceived, and different as well from the act of perception. Sensation and perception are indeed very different, and should by no means be categorized as one and the same thing. Sensation and perception must remain distinct from one another.

A Brief History of Development

In this second section, I would like to endorse the distinction between sensation and perception discussed in the previous section, through a more empirical approach. I would like to examine developments in evolution to find evidence for the emergence of both sensation and perception, and more importantly for their distinction.

Sensation and perception have not always existed as distinct characteristics in the history of life. According to Humphrey, in the very beginning, when the Earth first

²¹ Ibid., 100.

came into existence and was devoid of living creatures, there were no phenomena in the sense of "appearances". There were no phenomena, because phenomena are dependent on an observer; there was no one to whom things could appear.⁴ Therefore, during these very preliminary stages of our planet's development, there was not yet anything like what we now label "subjective feelings", and there were no phenomena of the external world. Therefore, it can be argued that at some time there were no sensations of red or pain, and there were no perceptions of external objects.

Now, some four billion years later, there are sensations and perceptions. What has occurred that we may conclude that there are both sensations and perceptions in the world? I would like to examine what Humphrey proposes: a possible version of the development of sensation and perception in evolutionary history.

In order to better understand how sensation and perception came to be, I would like to examine what Humphrey proposes has happened in evolution. Humphrey speculates that pure chance brought together the first molecules in the primeval soup, which had the capacity to generate new copies of themselves.⁵ The type of evolution that took place here is that which Darwin has proposed. First, complex living molecules, such as DNA arose; then single cell organisms,

⁴ Nicholas Humphrey, A History of the Mind. (New York: Harper Perennials, 1992), 38.

⁵ Ibid., 39.

such as amoebae evolved; then further developments gave rise to multi-celled organisms, such as worms, fish and ourselves.

Once living organisms evolved, a very important phenomenon came to be. Each living organism is spatially bounded, and the importance of this phenomenon lies in the fact that this package belongs together. Each individual organism is a self-integrating and a self-individuating whole. Living organisms, unlike other bounded objects, such as tables and chairs or any other inanimate things, have self-imposed boundaries, which are actively maintained. For living organisms there is a distinct difference created by the boundary: there is the "me" and the "not me". As Humphrey argues, an animal's boundaries, its skin or membrane, is of crucial importance. The animal's boundaries contrast it to the outside world, and also allow this outside world to impact upon the animal.²⁶ An animal could hence react positively or negatively to what impacted upon it.

Further developments yielded more elaborate kinds of sensitivity. This was marked by the evolution of more discriminatory sense organs in the face of different types of stimuli. Once there is such an increase in the ability to discriminate, there is also an expansion in the range of possible responses to a given stimulus. For example: where there was once only local reaction to a stimulus, there

²⁶ Ibid., 40.

evolved the possibility that the information due to the local excitement could be sent to other parts of the animal, and cause responses there as well.

Even though the level of sensitivity and reactivity had become more complex at this point of development, Humphrey argues that it was likely still insufficient for the world to have any, or much meaning to the animal.²⁷ Although the level of reactivity is more complex, it does not seem that the world would have much meaning to the animal. The animal at this stage reacts only to stimuli as good or bad, the animal does not recognize the stimuli as coming from specific phenomena in the world, hence the animal does not make a distinction between the external world and how things feel for the animal. The animal's reactions are only to good or bad stimuli, and these are not recognized as arriving from an outside source nor as being good or bad "for me".

Further developments allowed an animal not only to react to a stimulus as good or bad, but also to respond to a stimulus as being good or bad "for me". There is a great difference between simply reacting to something good or bad and reacting to something as good or bad "for me". Humphrey gives an example to clarify this distinction:

Compare, for example, the effects of low humidity on two bounded objects: a wood louse and a puddle. The heat is "bad" for both of them because it dries them

²⁷ Ibid., 41.

up. But whereas the puddle just sits there and shrinks in size, the wood louse runs away. Both react to low humidity: but while the puddle's response is non adaptive and carries no implication of being meaningful, the wood louse's response potentially does: it implies "here is a situation not to my liking."²⁸

Such a distinction would seem to imply that certain events in the world have reached the status of meaningful phenomena once "prototypical minds" have evolved. When such meaningful phenomena came to be for animals, they brought with them great new developments: for the first time ever, certain events could be said to "exist as something for someone".

Humphrey argues that before any development of any other kinds of mental phenomena, there were primarily "raw sensations", such as tastes, smells, sensations of sound, etc. Then there was a path that led to the development of other mental abilities. One side of the development allows animals to assess what is currently happening to them. The other path of mental development led to the ability to assess what is happening in the external world. " This distinction may be stated simply as: "what is happening to me" versus "what is happening out there".

It is clearly beneficial for an animal to determine correctly what is happening to it, that is, to establish its own state of being. It is important for it to know, for example, "what is it like to have warmth on my skin?"

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 43.

However, it is also more advantageous if the animal could, in addition to assessing its own state, determine what is happening in the external world. This would allow it to answer questions, such as: "what is causing this warmth?" Hence an animal with both capacities could not only label the warmth as bad, but could conclude that the warmth is due to the sun, and in future act correspondingly to avoid the sun.

The questions "what is happening to me?" and "what is happening out there?" are two very different kinds of question. Humphrey argues that they require two different kinds of answer. For example, it is one thing for an animal to recognize that light affects it in a given manner, yet it is an entirely different thing for the animal to determine that the light comes from the sun, and a break in the light may mean a predator is approaching and causing a shadow.³⁰ The ability to realize "what is happening out there" is the ability to represent the objective world, in this case: a predator is approaching. Being able to assess "what is happening out there" is very different from "what is happening to me", the former allows the animal to recognize a predator, the latter merely allows the animal to determine that no light is upon its skin. The former ability is not only very different, it can be of extreme importance to survival.

³⁰ Ibid., 43.

Are determining "what is out there", and "what is happening to me" actually different things? I believe that they are indeed very different. If I have a sensation of warmth on my back, I am sensing something that affects me in a subjective manner. I can seek as long as I wish, but I will never find that sensation of "warmth on my back" out there in the world of tables and chairs. This sensation of "warmth on my back" can be found exclusively in me. As it has already been mentioned by Reid, the sensation and the feeling of it are one and the same thing. Therefore, what is happening to me when I sense the warmth is the feeling of warmth, and this is not outside of me. In order for me to find something in the external world that can account for the sensation of warmth on my back, I must change the way I think. In the first place, I must stop focusing on the subjective sensation of warmth, and turn my attention to the external world. What do I perceive out there? I can conclude that since the sun generates heat it may be responsible for the sensation of warmth that I have on my back. The sun and the sensation of heat are two different things. The sun is the physical phenomenon, and the sensation of warmth is the subjective sensation in me. Therefore, "what is happening out there" and "what is happening to me" are two very different things.

How is it possible to shift from what Reid calls the "sign" to what he calls the "signified"? In other words, how is it possible to transfer from sensation to perception,

or from "what is happening to me" to "what is happening out there"? Humphrey suggests that if we follow evolution, we realize at some point sense organs were connected to a central processing mechanism. Yet, subjective sensory states and objective views of the external world imply different things. The former relies on such things as the ephemeral present and "me-ness", whereas the latter depends on notions of permanence and "otherness".⁴¹ The information arriving at the central processor is the same in both cases. In order that the information that was originally utilized for subjective mental states, be now used for the representation of the external world, it is understandable that an entirely different form of information processing had to develop.

Due to this requirement of different manners of evaluation, Humphrey argues that two distinct classes of mental representation have evolved. He maintains that:

While one path led to the qualia of subjective feeling and first person knowledge of the self, the other led to the intentional objects of cognition and objective knowledge of the external physical world.⁴²

There are indeed dual modes of representation. There are two different manners in which information can be processed: one is required to be able to have subjective representation of mental events; the other is required to

⁴¹ Ibid., 44

⁴² Ibid.

assess the happenings of the external world. Subjective feelings and physical phenomena are two distinct things that require their own distinct forms of representation. Sensation arises through one mode of representation, and perception is the result of another mode of representation. Sensation and perception arise through different processes and hence are distinct from one another.

After examining this plausible development in evolution it is quite persuasive to conclude that sensation, what is happening to the animal, and perception, what is happening out there, have not always existed at the same time. Different developments have brought each of these to exist. It seems reasonable that natural selection would opt for the establishment of both manners of representation. Any animal that had the ability to process incoming information in this dual mode would seem to be at an advantage over any other lacking one of these abilities. It is important for an animal to assess accurately what is happening to it. It must properly determine which sensations are good and which ones are bad for it, through assessing what is or is not to its "liking". However, the next logical step would be to be able to seek manners of well-being. In order to do this, an animal must be able to assess what is going on in the external world. When an animal is able to determine that there is a sun out there, and it produces warmth and light, the animal will be able to actively participate in influencing what sensations it has. If the animal prefers

darkness, it can seek to avoid the sun by retreating to a shaded place.

In order for an animal to act in such a manner it must be capable of processing "input" in two different manners. In the first place, it must process the information in a manner that gives rise to subjective representation of mental events. These are the sensations felt by the animal that can be agreeable, disagreeable, or simply indifferent. In the second place the animal must process the "input" in a method that promotes a representation of the external world. This kind of objective representation will allow the animal to act in a fashion that is conducive to its well-being.

Sensation and perception have both come into existence through some evolutionary process. They seem to be distinct because they require different modes of information processing. The skeptic, however, may not be satisfied with such an answer. Perhaps it may be argued that sensation and perception are simply two different ways of examining the same thing. In this case the proofs of distinction that have been forwarded may arguably be insufficient. If sensation and perception are to be undeniably different, it would be imperative to show that they can indeed go their separate ways. It can be shown that sensation and perception, in certain circumstances, do in fact go separate ways. This occurrence can be observed in phenomena such as upside-down vision, skin vision and most convincingly in blindsight.

CHAPTER TWO

BLINDSIGHT

Reinforcing the Sensation/Perception Distinction

In this section, I would like to examine the phenomenon of blindsight, in order to determine whether it may be used to support the distinction between sensation and perception. Blindsight can be said to perform this task, if it is a case where sensation and perception go their separate ways. According to one interpretation of the clinical studies made in this area, blindsight is a phenomenon in which a kind of perception occurs in the absence of visual sensation. If this is indeed the case, blindsight would give empirical support for the reality of sensory consciousness.

Before proceeding any further, it is important to clarify what is meant by "blindsight". Blindsight is a phenomenon that occurs in subjects that have suffered extensive damage to the primary visual cortex. These subjects are termed blind because they claim to have no sensation of light or dark or color in the affected area. Blindsight patients claim not to experience anything at all in their blind field. Therefore, the blindsight subjects are affected by their blind field in a way similar to the way a normally sighted person is affected by her blind spot.

There is no positive black area, but only an inability to discriminate any sensory stimulus in the area. The interesting thing, however, is that certain perceptual abilities still remain intact in blindsight. In laboratory tests, when these individuals have been asked to ignore the fact that they cannot see anything presented to them in their blind fields, they have been able to make quite accurate guesses about what is in their "blind" field. It has been discovered that if the subject ignores the fact that she does not sense anything, she can guess at a rate far above chance when asked whether there is an X or an O in the affected visual field.

Lawrence Weiskrantz uses the term "blindsight" to describe residual visual capacities in patients with cortical damage in part of their visual fields.¹¹ Weiskrantz uses the term "blindsight" to refer to the ability such patients have to make certain classes of responses to visual stimuli, while at the same time claiming not to have any explicit perceptual awareness of stimuli in their blind fields. Blindsight is the apparent dissociation between the patient's capacity to discriminate visual stimulus and her awareness of it.

According to the findings Weiskrantz has made in laboratory tests, there is a major difference for the patient between stimuli in the blind field and stimuli in

¹¹ L. Weiskrantz, Blindsight. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 23-24.

the normal field. The patients claim that perception and awareness are very different in the two cases. The experiments endorse the claims made by the patients. Weiskrantz argues that the subject virtually never reports noticing when a stimulus has been presented in the blind field. Yet, when the patient is asked what is in her blind field (an X or an O), the patient's response is correct more often than incorrect. In some cases the patient has had a perfect score. The patient is usually surprised at the rate of success, for she does not believe she has any visual capacity. The patient claims to be "guessing" or acting on a "gut reaction" when asked to respond to what is in her blind field.³⁴

It seems that blindsight provides a case of perception with no sensation. In studies conducted with blindsight patients, the patients claim to have no visual sensation in a given area of the visual field. The validity of these claims can be reinforced by the damage to the patients' primary visual cortex. The patients are able to guess at a rate far above pure chance, however, when asked what is in their blind areas. Somehow the information is still reaching the cortex. This is not too surprising because information arriving from the eyes has many routes to the cortex. Even if there is damage in the primary visual cortex, visual information may still arrive at other cortical areas in the brain. The fascinating thing that

³⁴ Ibid., 31.

occurs in blindsight is that visual information is received somehow by the brain, but there is no accompanying sensation.

Humphrey suggests that what may be happening in blindsight is a case of pure perception.³⁵ By this he means that the subject "just knows" what is in her visual field. This view contradicts what blindsight patients claim, for they want to claim that they have no visual perception at all. As Humphrey points out, however, these claims do not mean much, since subjects of subliminal messages will also claim that they have no visual perception, even if the message has reached them.³⁶ It seems that in both cases the subject does indeed have the perception, but the sensation is lacking. Since the sensation is not there, the subjects think there is no perception, and feel unwilling to acknowledge that they perceive. It seems reasonable to assume that since the subjects are used to having their perception accompanied by sensation, a lack of sensation will make them feel uncertain about their perception. This lack of sensation may make the subjects feel like they are acting illogically when acknowledging such perceptions. But pure perceptual knowledge is not so far-fetched an idea. Humphrey explains the idea well in the following passage:

But then what would we expect of pure perception?
What would somebody say if he had it? Perhaps the

³⁵ Nicholas Humphrey, A History of the Mind. (New York: Harper Perennials, 1992), 90.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

fact is that pure perception, if it occurred, would never be acknowledged for what it is: the subject would always doubt what was going on and would never be inclined to say "I just know there is something out there" because in the absence of sensation he - "I" - would not feel he had any direct personal involvement in the business of knowing.¹⁷

It seems reasonable to conclude that blindsight may actually be an example of pure perception, or at least something close to it. The tests on blindsight subjects seem to reinforce this view. Although the subjects are not willing to acknowledge that they are able to discriminate better than chance, there is evidence that visual information is reaching the brain. The reason why the patients deny that they are perceiving anything seems to be due to the lack of sensation. The lack of sensation causes in the subjects a certain deficit in so far as their personal involvement is concerned.

Hidden Structures

Another argument that sensation and perception do in fact go their separate ways in blindsight is suggested by Colin McGinn in his The Problem of Consciousness.¹⁸ McGinn argues that in normal vision, we should distinguish between two different sorts of properties of conscious experience. He calls these surface properties and deep properties. The former properties are accessible through introspection by the subject, the latter properties are not accessible.

¹⁷ Ibid., 90-91.

¹⁸ Colin McGinn, The Problem of Consciousness. (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991), 110-116.

These two properties together give rise to usual sight. In blindsight the surface properties are lacking, whereas the deep properties are working. McGinn argues that blindsight gives empirical proof for the hidden structures of consciousness."

McGinn proposes these hidden structures because he believes that there must be more to consciousness than there seems to be, otherwise it could not depend on the physical world in the manner in which we know it does. He maintains that nature could not give rise to consciousness without first constructing a substructure for consciousness to be seated on. He argues:

How can consciousness be physically governed in this way and yet be so utterly unlike that which governs it? How can the subjective have its roots in the objective? ... The solution, I suggest is to recognize that conscious states possess a hidden natural (not logical) structure that mediates between the surface properties and the physical facts on which they constitutively depend.⁴⁰

McGinn suggests that consciousness must have such a hidden structure. Furthermore, this hidden structure is inaccessible to us, hence any real understanding of how consciousness is connected to the material world may be inaccessible to us. He argues that the idea of hidden structures is not new to the history of scientific thought. He claims:

³⁹ Ibid., 111.

⁴⁰ Ibid.; 100.

Only by venturing beyond the observable can we develop adequate theories of the observable. Examples abound: the atomic and subatomic structures of matter; the curved structure of space-time in relativity theory; the molecular structure of DNA; the logical grammatical structures latent in natural language; the unconscious processes and structures operating in the mind.⁴¹

In many facets of science we discover that there are hidden structures. McGinn argues that in all these cases, these hidden variables are necessary for the development of theories in the respective field. It is imperative to recognize the unobservable, otherwise the observable may be unclear or incomplete to us. McGinn points out that in physics, biology and linguistics, such hidden variables have been accepted as necessary parts in the explanation of the phenomena. He argues that things must be similar for consciousness.⁴² Hence to begin to understand consciousness, we must consider the possible effects of the unobservable structures.

In the case of consciousness, the hidden structures work on a kind of mediating level, hence neither physical nor phenomenological. The hidden structures would not operate at the phenomenological surface, nor would they be at play at the level of the physical hardware, that is they would not merely coincide with the physical properties of the brain.

⁴¹ Ibid., 89.

⁴² Ibid., 89-90.

McGinn argues that the view of consciousness as being conceived as being wholly on the surface, completely exposed, as having no hidden parts, is mistaken.⁴³ Such a mistaken view sees consciousness as having nothing that could escape us. Such a view of consciousness McGinn calls a kind of "diaphanous membrane". Hence in such a view it may be concluded that consciousness is not the type of phenomenon that could have anything hidden from our immediate observation.

McGinn argues that such a view of consciousness is wrong. He suggests that consciousness should rather be viewed as a kind of pyramid. In this case, only the tip of the pyramid is accessible through observation or introspection. The rest of the structure of consciousness is made up of complex internal workings. These are hardly even imaginable from the point of view of what is accessible to us. We are not able to form the concepts needed to understand the structure of consciousness.⁴⁴

If we consider what we already know about blindsight, blindsight seems to suggest that there is a certain disassociation in the properties of consciousness. McGinn suggests this. He claims that in the case of normal vision, both surface and deep properties are working. In the case of straightforward blindness, neither sort of property is

⁴³ Ibid., 90-91.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 91.

at play. There is no visual discrimination, and neither property is activated by external stimuli. In the case of blindsight, McGinn argues that a disassociation of the two kinds of properties occurs. In blindsight, the deep properties are activated, yet the surface properties are not activated.⁴⁵ In this case, stimuli arriving from the external world affect the deep properties, yet the surface ones are not affected, hence they do not make it to awareness.

This deep property is what McGinn calls a hidden structure. In blindsight, the hidden structure operates alone without the accompaniment of the surface structures. This distinction between deep structures and surface structures is given empirical support through the phenomenon of blindsight. This distinction, however, also gives us a better understanding of what is going on in blindsight. In blindsight, as McGinn has suggested, the deep properties are activated, yet the phenomenal surface is lacking, hence no sensation is present. Since in blindsight there are only effects reaching the deep structures of consciousness, we are not aware of this information through normal observation. The awareness of the visual stimulus in blindsight is not present because only the inaccessible structures are receiving the information. Therefore, in blindsight we are not aware in the usual manner of the

⁴⁵ Ibid.; 111.

visual stimulus because the sensation at the surface is not present.

There does indeed seem to be a dissociation between sensation and perception in the phenomenon of blindsight. In normal vision, when the sensation is present, there is awareness of the visual stimulus, hence we are consciously aware of what is presented in our visual field. In blindsight, however, we are not aware of the visual stimulus in the normal manner because the properties that are being affected are hidden to us. Therefore in blindsight the patient is not capable of being aware of what is presented in her visual field.

Dennett's Criticism

In order to understand Dennett's criticism of the view that blindsight gives support for the idea of sensory consciousness, it is essential to outline Dennett's idea of heterophenomenology. According to Dennett, heterophenomenology is a phenomenological method that can give a third person description of subjective experiences. He argues that heterophenomenology:

...is the neutral path leading from objective physical sciences and its insistence on the third person point of view, to a method of phenomenological description that can (in Principle) do justice to the most private and ineffable subjective experiences, while never abandoning the methodological scruples of science.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Daniel Dennett, Consciousness Explained. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 72.

Dennett argues that in pure phenomenology, we attempt to explain experience at the experiential level. He maintains that this is insufficient. He gives the example of laughter; how do we explain this phenomenon? From a phenomenological standpoint, we would say that we laugh because something is funny. Dennett argues that this form of explanation is not very informative, it is circular.⁴⁷ His task is to establish a non circular method for describing and characterizing the phenomena. The method of heterophenomenology is the approach he will develop.

Dennett begins by criticizing what he calls the first person plural approach. This approach consists in beginning with the "I" and generalizing to "we". This methodology has been believed to be unbiased, but Dennett firmly holds that there is no such thing as a presuppositionless, non-biased first person approach. He argues that no first person perspective is neutral. He claims that it is incorrect to view introspection as merely looking and seeing; he maintains that we are in reality also engaging in theorizing.⁴⁸ Dennett uses these criticisms of the first person perspective to pave the way for a third person approach.

This type of third person perspective would require one to do an experiment and to interpret it from an objective perspective. Meaningful data are extracted from the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 66-67.

experimental subject. What the subject says about her experience is to be treated as a text that is supposed to be semantically meaningful. Dennett is willing to grant the subject with the last word, yet in the end, the experimenter is presented with a semantically interpretable text. This text is taken to constitute the "heterophenomenological world". The text gives us the subject's notional world; this is a logical construct of how things seem to the agent.

The question may then arise: how do we relate the heterophenomenological world to the real world? Dennett seems to maintain that this question can temporarily be suspended. He argues that the heterophenomenological world can be treated like a fictional text. The theorist can raise historical or biographical questions about the text.⁴⁹

Dennett argues that questions about experience in the heterophenomenological world are ones that ask how experience relates to the brain. He equates experience with logical constructs from the heterophenomenological perspective, which are to be mapped onto the brain.⁵⁰ It seems that Dennett does not want to say that the subject reports brain events, rather he maintains that the "seemings" are physiological events.

This kind of approach allows for the subject to have the last word, but the subject does not decide about the ontology. She may have the final word about how she feels,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 78-80.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 85.

but the ontological status of all statements is determined by the scientist.

It was necessary for Dennett to introduce the heterophenomenology, as a manner of interpretation, because it will allow him to develop his detrimental arguments against consciousness. The subject may say that certain things seem to her in a given manner, but the scientist interprets this as a judgment. Dennett is able to develop the argument that there is no such thing as real "seeming".⁵¹ Dennett wants to use this approach because he attempts to establish that there is no "central meander", that is there is no internal witness to what is happening in experience, to which things can "seem to".

Dennett's attack on the view that blindsight may be used to defend a conception of consciousness that rests on the sensation/perception distinction, relies on his view that there is no distinguishable feature between sensory consciousness and a certain sort of spontaneous judgment or what he calls "presentiment". Furthermore, Dennett's criticisms depend on his view that the main difference between blindsight and conscious vision is that the person who has conscious vision does not require prompting, whereas the blindsight patient does require prompting. Such a view contends that the prompting is the crucial difference between normal vision and blindsight. This leads to the

⁵¹ Ibid., 134.

undesirable conclusion that prompting is the only difference between normal vision and blindsight.

Dennett attempts to criticize the conclusion that blindsight gives empirical support for the sensation/perception distinction. In order to do this, he argues that there only are presentiments. Presentiments, according to Dennett, are different events of content fixation occurring in various areas and at various times in the brain. Furthermore, he claims that the presentiments can affect other processes with the content. Some of the content fixations can have effects that eventually lead to the utterance of sentences. Dennett maintains that this is then the creation of the heterophenomenological text. Dennett further argues that the illusion of an author is created when interpreting this text.⁵²

In order to undermine the view that blindsight may give support for consciousness, Dennett must establish that there is no such thing as real "seeming" for a person. This is exactly the line of argument he takes, he argues:

There is no such phenomenon as really seeming - over and above the phenomenon of judging in one way or another that something is the case."⁵³

In support of this position, Dennett gives the example of wallpaper. Let us suppose that you walk into a room and notice that there is wallpaper with identical tiny sailboats. The wallpaper seems to you that way, even if you

⁵² Ibid., 364-365.

⁵³ Ibid. 364.

do not see each individual sailboat in high resolution. In this case, as in all others, Dennett wants to say that the seeming is identical to the judgment.⁵⁴ If a person claims that the wallpaper seems to be covered with identical tiny sailboats, Dennett would suggest that she rather has judged the wallpaper to be as described.

Dennett then assumes that he can conclude that the blindsight subject is indeed capable of visual discrimination, he argues that the only difference between blindsight and normal sight lies in the richness of the information received.⁵⁵ The "seeming to me", the so-called qualitative feature, according to such a position, is nothing more than a judgment about the situation at hand.

Dennett's criticism of what blindsight may be able to demonstrate rests on his functionalist view of what is sufficient for conscious visual experience. Dennett maintains that if unprompted blindsight were in fact possible, there would be no functional difference between it and normal vision. If this is the case, normal vision and blindsight would both be "conscious", and blindsight would fail to provide evidence for what it was intended to by proponents of the sensation/perception distinction. Dennett thus wants to undermine the status of consciousness, by reducing it to a mere higher-grade form of discrimination.

⁵⁴ Ibid.; 354.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 327-330.

Dennett argues that unprompted blindsight without consciousness is inconceivable.⁶⁶ Dennett's argument is set forth in order to demonstrate that blindsight does not prove the reality of qualia. Such a view contends that blindsight does not confirm what it is thought to because blindsight patients require prompting. Dennett's position suggests that a path may be drawn from blindsight to normal visual consciousness without involving anything like sensation along the way.

According to most of the laboratory experiments with blindsight patients, it is necessary that the experimenter prompt the patient when to guess. As it has been seen, Dennett's position requires this to be of paramount importance. This position suggests that if unprompted blindsight did occur, it would not be much different from normal conscious vision. In an attempt to demonstrate this view, Dennett asks us to imagine a blindsight patient that has trained herself when to guess. He suggests that one of three scenarios may be claimed by the patient:

(1) "Just guessing of course! Can't see a darn thing, you know, but I've learned how to guess when to guess."

(2) "Well, what started out as sheer guesses gradually lost their status of guesses as I came to trust them. They turned into presentiments, shall we say? I would suddenly just know that something was going on in my blind field..."

(3) "Well actually, it is very much like seeing. I now effortlessly act in the world on the basis of

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 342.

information gleaned by my eyes from my surroundings."

Yet, in all three of these possibilities the subject would claim that the visual sensation is still lacking.

According to Dennett, if unprompted blindsight were to occur, it must be the case that one of the three possibilities occur. Either the subject has somehow learned when to guess, or she has learned how to act on presentiments, or she has learned how to act much like a sighted person; that is effortlessly. However, in all three cases, let us suppose that the subject will claim that she does not experience any qualitative feature to visual experience. In view of these conditions, Dennett strongly maintains that unprompted blindsight, if it were to occur quite effortlessly, could not be any different from normal conscious vision.⁵⁴ Dennett attempts to question the coherence of qualia. He questions the possibility of some experiential content that could still be absent, for example, in scenario (3).

Dennett's main point seems to lie in his conviction that content and quality are inseparable. As it has been shown, Dennett's view is that the only difference between regular sight and blindsight is a matter of higher grade magnitude of discrimination. According to this view a person with normal visual abilities simply has a higher

⁵⁴ Ibid.; 343.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 358-359.

grade discrimination than a blindsight person. Furthermore, all there should be involved in visual qualia is very rich informational content. This view maintains that there is no real seeming. By this is meant that there is no such thing as qualitative sensation, there are no qualia. Hence, according to Dennett, we may assume, what it means to say that a cloud seems to look like a rabbit, is that we judge the cloud to look like a rabbit. This view maintains that sensory consciousness is nothing more than the ability to discriminate rich informational content.

Unprompted Blindsight

In order to undermine Dennett's view about consciousness, it will be necessary to examine the possibility of unprompted blindsight with no visual sensation. If unprompted blindsight devoid of visual sensation is in fact possible, it would undermine the functionalist view of what is required for conscious experience, and would reestablish a more secure position for consciousness.

Charles Siewert in his article "What Dennett Can't Imagine and Why", attempts to use such a tactic relying on what we can imagine in certain hypothetical situations, much as Dennett does, and then attempts to use it against Dennett.⁵⁰ Throughout Consciousness Explained, Dennett

⁵⁰ Charles Siewert, "What Dennett Can't Imagine and Why." Inquiry. Vol. 36. No. 1/2 (March 1993)93-95.

uses the philosopher's imaginability claim. He argues that certain things are unimaginable. In particular, Dennett argues that unprompted blindsight without qualia is unimaginable. Siewert argues that certain possibilities claimed to be unimaginable by Dennett are in fact imaginable, that is to say, unprompted blindsight is indeed imaginable.⁶⁰ If Siewert's proposal is correct, Dennett's argument against blindsight will fail, and consciousness will retain its reality.

Siewert suggests imagining a blindsight subject that is occasionally struck with the thought: "there is an X in my affected visual field." This person is able to make accurate assessments of what is in her "blind" field when exposed to a visual stimulus. She is, however, not able to consciously see anything in this "blind" area. This case still remains a case of blindsight. Siewert argues that this form of blindsight is imaginable. Contrary to Dennett's belief, it is conceivable to make unprompted use of information provided by the eyes, without conscious vision. It may therefore be concluded that the crucial difference between blindsight and normal vision does not lie in mere prompting.⁶¹

Dennett's claim that there is nothing distinguishable between sensory consciousness and spontaneous judgment also seems erroneous. Dennett's view here seems to reflect his

⁶⁰ Ibid., 97.

⁶¹ Ibid., 98.

functionalist position. His claim appears to imply that there is no functional difference between the two. As it has been discussed, Dennett's position suggests that the only difference between sensory consciousness and spontaneous judgment would be in the level of discrimination. This type of arguing would attempt to conclude that consciousness is not as much as we would like to believe.

Functionalism theories of the mind maintain that if two systems are functionally equivalent then there is no mental difference between the two. A functionalist approach to consciousness would hold that if a machine were functionally equivalent to a person, then it may be concluded that there is no mental difference between the two. Dennett relies on a form of functionalism in his attempt to undermine consciousness. Dennett, however, uses a dismissive functionalist position in view of consciousness. He attempts to undermine consciousness by arguing that there is no functional difference between unprompted blindsight and regular sight, and hence there is such thing as qualia or as consciousness as we conceive of it.

Siewert proposes that if we reject Dennett's belief in a lack of distinction between sensory consciousness and spontaneous judgment, it would have grave results for Dennett's eliminativist functionalism in face of consciousness.¹ On one interpretation, blindsight does

¹ Ibid., 94.

provide for such a necessary distinction. Blindsight can be interpreted as an example of the possibility of having some of the abilities of normal vision left intact, such as spontaneous discrimination, whereas the conscious element of vision is not present. In cases of blindsight, Siewert claims:

If one can conceivably have this eye provided capacity for judgment without visual consciousness, it is very difficult to see what the crucial "functional" difference is supposed to be which makes the other functionally similar vision conscious.⁶³

The conceivability of unprompted blindsight cuts deep into Dennett's negative views on consciousness. If unprompted blindsight is indeed possible, it can be used to demonstrate the difference between sensory consciousness and spontaneous judgment. Even more importantly, however, it exhibits the fault in Dennett's functionalist approach to consciousness.

In order to reinforce the argument about unprompted blindsight, it will be useful to examine the possibility of unprompted blindsight. This will also allow us to understand why unprompted blindsight is not common, and hence in experimentation the patient usually has to be prompted. This however, should by no means imply that prompting is the vital distinction between normal vision and blindsight. As it has already been explained, the distinction lies in consciousness.

⁶³ Ibid., 99.

According to a study performed by Weiskrantz with one of his patients, unprompted blindsight does indeed seem to be a conceivable possibility. Weiskrantz's patient, BD., when presented with a moving object in his blind field, said he was not able to "see" the object, yet he claimed to have a feeling that something was there. In some cases when the salience was increased, BD. said he "saw" something, yet the experience was not veridical. In such cases, BD. was presented with a vigorously moving object, however, BD. described the stimulus as complex patterns of waves.⁶⁴ It seems conceivable that a blindsight subject can learn to act on a "feeling" of stimulus without being incited by an experimenter. A parallel study to this human subject was performed by Humphrey with a monkey.⁶⁵ The monkey had its whole visual cortex surgically removed. The ability for normal vision was no longer present. Much like its human blindsight counterparts, however, the information received from the eyes could still reach other areas of the brain through different pathways.

Humphrey spent two years teaching this monkey that it was not blind. The monkey had made incredible improvements, and was able to act much like a normal sighted monkey. Humphrey writes:

⁶⁴ L. Weiskrantz, Blindsight. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.), 167.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Humphrey, A History Of the Mind. (New York: Harper Perennials, 1992), 88.

She improved so greatly over the next few years that eventually she could move deftly through a room full of obstacles and pick up currents from the floor. She could even reach out and catch a passing fly. Her 3-D spatial vision and her ability to discriminate between objects that differed in size and brightness became perfect."⁶⁶

The experiment that Humphrey conducted with the monkey certainly does not reflect the abilities that human blindsight subjects have been able to develop. The level of unprompted blindsight is much less developed in human patients. Laboratory tests have shown, however, that some human subjects may have a very accurate ability for unprompted blindsight.

Humphrey suggests that the experiment with the monkey seems to reinforce the conclusion that one of the main reasons that human subjects may not exhibit unprompted blindsight is because the action would seem irrational to them. Since a monkey has a less developed concept of self, it is easier to convince it to act upon the perceptions it has. Furthermore, humans are constantly reinforced to act in a rational manner.⁶⁷

Normal vision is experienced with the perception and an accompanying sensation. In blindsight the perception is present whereas the sensation that usually accompanies the perception is lacking. This certainly is unusual, and this seems to be the reason why the subject may not act upon her perception. If a patient is presented with a pure

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 92.

perception, she will probably feel unwarranted to act on it, for it does not seem to have the appropriate status if the usual sensation is missing. The patient will feel that she does not have any perception.

Furthermore, blindsight patients are often unwilling to cooperate in experiments because they truly have no visual sensation and believe that it is irrational to attempt to receive any information from their "blind" field. In many cases it takes a lot of convincing for the subject to guess what is in her blind field. If this seems irrational to the patient, it would certainly be even more irrational for her to be expected to try to figure out when to guess when something is in her affected visual field. The lack of sensation is like a lack of evidence for the patient. To be asked to guess something when prompted sounds silly enough, but to be asked to guess when to guess seems ridiculous.

Taking these ideas into consideration, it is quite understandable why many patients feel insecure about acting upon their pure perceptions. Some patients have the ability to ignore the lack of normal sensation, however, and are able to act on their pure perceptions.

Since we have established that unprompted blindsight is indeed conceivable, and also a matter of fact; we can strongly conclude that the difference between sensory consciousness and spontaneous judgment cannot lie in mere prompting. Therefore, Dennett's position suffers defeat in attempting to undermine consciousness.

Another important aspect of Dennett's view on consciousness lies in his claim that there are only presentiments, and any difference lies only in the richness of informational content. It seems that Dennett has bent the meaning of "presentiment" to an unacceptable point.

A presentiment is supposed to mean some kind of hazy idea that somehow comes to us, or that we are suddenly aware of something in a not so clear manner. However, when discussing unprompted blindsight, Dennett suggests that what is happening in a case where there is fast automatic unprompted blindsight, patients are working on presentiments. Dennett argues that if the patient is operating in this fashion, then she is operating like a normally sighted person, and hence these presentiments are very rich in informational content.⁶⁴ Such a view of "presentiment" seems a violation of the original meaning of the word. Presentiment is supposed to be something hazy and uncertain. It seems that Dennett wants to replace our sensory consciousness with "informational rich hazy ideas that occur to us".

Such a view does not make any sense. If a presentiment is supposed to be something hazy, then it cannot become something that is rich in informational content. These must be two different things. Furthermore, it does not do justice to the word "judgment" to use it to replace

⁶⁴ Daniel Dennett, Consciousness Explained. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1991), 342.

"seeming". Judgment does not convey the same meaning in the following sentence that usually is stated with "seeming": I judge that cloud to be a unicorn galloping through a snowy field.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LIKENESS OF BEING

Bats, Cockroaches and Humans

The sensation/perception distinction has given us empirical evidence for consciousness. Humphrey has developed a theory of consciousness that focuses on this distinction. I believe, however, that sensation alone does not do justice to consciousness. It seems that sensations alone do not explain the feeling of subjectivity that humans experience. Sensations are manners in which we exist in our bodies, but sensation as such seems to lack in explanatory value in so far as humans have a feeling of "what it is like to be".

According to Thomas Nagel, to have conscious experience means that there is something it is like to be that organism (for that organism).⁶⁹ In "What is it like to be a Bat?", Nagel questions whether any physicalist approach can do justice to the reality of consciousness. Nagel engages in a methodology to get at the structures of subjectivity. He suggests that if physicalism is true, then there must be a physical account of the subjective character of experience. He argues, however, that subjectivity places a constraint on

⁶⁹ Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" Mortal Questions. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 166.

physicalism. Nagel maintains that any theory that would not explain the subjective character of experience would leave out something important.¹⁰

I am not here interested in whether any physicalist approach could do justice to subjectivity, I am interested rather in what Nagel refers to as a feeling of "what it is like to be". I believe that this feeling is central to the idea of consciousness. Furthermore, I doubt that sensations alone allow humans to have this feeling of what it is like to be. I believe that the human feeling of subjectivity is dependent not only on the having of sensations, but also on the setting of value to these sensations. A sensation of pain, for example, is more than a mere feeling of discomfort. The pain we sense is what it is in part by how we value what is happening to us. When a person evaluates her sensations, these sensations become an intricate part of what it is like to be that person.

Before we move on to the idea of valuation, I would like to examine what Nagel means by "what it is like to be". Nagel is attempting to show that every organism that is conscious has a feeling of what it is like to be that organism. This means that each organism experiences the world from its own subjective point of view. He suggests imagining what it is like to be a bat. He argues:

Even without the benefit of philosophical reflection, anyone who has spent some time in an

¹⁰ Ibid., 165-175.

enclosed space with an excited bat knows what it is to encounter a fundamentally *alien* form of life....

...It will not help to try to imagine that one has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one's mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of high-frequency sound signals; and that one spend the day hanging upside-down by one's feet in an attic. In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for me to behave like a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat.¹¹

There is something that it is like to be a bat for the bat, and this is true for all other conscious creatures. Nagel probably chose to discuss the bat, because his aim was to show the shortcomings of a physicalist approach. It seems that Nagel may have chosen such an example because the bat's sensory abilities are so different from the human's. This type of example lets Nagel in the first place demonstrate that consciousness is experienced "from a point of view", and secondly that this subjective point of view may not be accessible from a third person perspective. We can, however, also examine this feeling of what it is like to be in humans. What is it like for other human beings to experience heat? It seems feasible to assume that their sensation will be similar to my own, yet this does not mean that they will experience it in the same manner as I will. I believe our feeling of what it is like to be goes beyond mere sensation of pleasure or discomfort.

¹¹ Ibid., 168-169.

Let us once again examine one of Nagel's examples. In The View From Nowhere, Nagel once again questions the ability of an objective standpoint to explain subjective experience. He argues that from the objective standpoint we can never know exactly how scrambled eggs will taste to a cockroach.¹² Once again, if we ignore any attempt at understanding subjective experience, and we focus on other human beings, we can ask the same question: "what will scrambled eggs taste like to another human?" The question here is not whether or not we can truly discover this, rather this question focuses on the fact that the taste of scrambled eggs is "like this for her". Some people enjoy scrambled eggs, whereas others do not. The taste of scrambled eggs is a taste sensation, and this sensation is like "this" to for a given individual.

A need for Valuation

As I have already mentioned, sensations alone are insufficient in explaining why humans have a feeling of what it is like to be. Sensations are merely ways in which we exist, hence we need some form of valuation to make sense of these sensations. I believe that it is when we set value to what is happening to us, that a true sense of subjectivity emerges. Therefore, our feeling of what is like to be depends on our ability to set value to our sensations.

¹² Thomas Nagel, The View From Nowhere. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 25.

This attribution of value to our experiences which I propose here is similar to that suggested by Sartre in his work on freedom in Being and Nothingness.¹³ According to Sartre, we are free, or rather, condemned to choose. Yet, sensation alone could not provoke us to make a decision, because pain or pleasure are only ways in which we exist in our bodies. We must set value to our sensations; this Sartre argues allows us to create motives.¹⁴ I would like to argue for this point, and furthermore claim that this says something about how we experience our sensations, which is for each individual "what it is like to be me".

Sartre develops his conception of freedom through a distinction between two kinds of being: the being "for itself" and the being "in itself". Christina Howell in Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom describes the distinction between the two kinds of being.¹⁵ She argues that the for itself is to represent what is understood as human being, and the in itself simply represents what it understood as the world. The "for itself", what Sartre also calls Nothingness, is said to have the power to nihilate Being, that is the "in itself". It is through this nihilation that freedom is possible.¹⁶ Freedom is achieved when a human being

¹³ Jean Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 182-192.

¹⁴ Ibid., 186-180.

¹⁵ Christina Howells, Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 16-17.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16-23.

is able to nihilate the "for itself", that is to say, when she is able to imagine a state of affairs as non-existent. She is then able to create motives for her actions, and these motives are not dependent on any present state of affairs.

According to Sartre, the world of being "in itself" is deterministic. His central concern in Being and Nothingness is to explain how freedom is possible in such a world. Sartre concludes that freedom is possible only if humans can stand back from the world, in doing so they bring forth the possibility of what can be different.''

Sartre's position on freedom rests on his view of how motives are formulated. Sartre does concede that our actions can be said to be determined in so far as they have motives, but it is human consciousness that freely produces these motives. Sartre maintains that our actions are free, not because they are not determined by motives, but rather because we are able to retreat from what is at a given moment, to realize that something is lacking in the present circumstances, and to use this lack as a motive for choice in action.¹⁸ Sartre calls this a "nihilating power". This works on two levels, in the first place it proposes an optimized state of being as not now existing, and secondly, it recognizes that the present situation is not yet this

¹⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness. Trans. Hazel E. Bains, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 185.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

desired state of affairs. Since it is the deficiency of a state of affairs rather than its presence that motivates our choice, Sartre may claim that no state of affairs can be said to motivate an action.

According to Hammond, Howarth and Keat in Understanding Phenomenology, Sartre maintains that the phenomenon of non-being is grounded in the concept of negation.¹⁹ They give the example: Pierre's absence can frustrate one with as much force as his presence could.²⁰ If we were supposed to meet a friend and this friend does not show, his absence can frustrate us, just as much as he could frustrate us with annoying questions, for example, if he were indeed present. Sartre can hence ground the objectivity of non-being.

According to Sartre, it is due to this non-being in the world that the world is not completely causally determined. It must therefore be the case that if non-being is not causally determined, it must have some other origin. In order for an act to qualify as non-causal in origin, this act cannot be causally determined by events in the world. Sartre describes the process in which such non causally determined acts arise. He maintains that we must stand back and withdraw from the world.²¹ We may then question a part

¹⁹ Michael Hammond, Jane Howarth and Russell Keat Understanding Phenomenology. (Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 114.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

²¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 187.

of it and hence entertain the idea that the situation could be otherwise. Sartre calls this the act of nihilation. He also claims that humans can step back from the world only when they also step back from themselves. Hence in order to be free, a form of double nihilation takes place. Hammond, Howarth and Keat claim that when Sartre examines the possibility of nihilation:

He argues that one can do this only if one is able to stand back and inquire about oneself, and thus 'nihilate' the world. In terms of freedom and causation, Sartre's point is that an act of questioning can break the causal chain of events only if it is itself not causally determined even by previous events in the life of the questioner; that is, it must be free. But since, for Sartre, any uncaused event requires that some questioner stand back, withdraw from what is questioned, the original source of such events must be capable of withdrawing from itself, questioning its own activities. This demand for a self questioner is satisfied by human beings. They are beings who can question, stand back from their own lives: who are, that is to say, free."

In order to understand clearly what Sartre is proposing here, I would like to examine one of his examples of how motives are an integral part in the freedom of our choices.

Sartre argues:

In so far as a man is immersed in the historical situation, he does not even succeed in conceiving of the failures and lacks in a political organization or determined economy; this is not, as stupidly said, because he "is accustomed to it," but because he apprehends it in its plenitude of being and because he can not even imagine that he can exist in it otherwise... It is on the day that we can

"Michael Hammond, Jane Howarth, Russell Keat, Understanding Phenomenology. (Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 117.

conceive of a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and our suffering and we decide that these are unbearable. A worker in 1830 is capable of revolting if his salary is lowered, for he can easily conceive of a situation in which his wretched standard of living would not be as low as the one that is about to be imposed on him."¹

According to this view, the worker will have assessed things as intolerable only after he has formed the intention of changing his situation. The worker's suffering in itself cannot be motive for his action. The worker must stand back from the situation and achieve a double nihilation. On the one hand he will have to recognize the satisfaction with his actual state of affairs as a "pure possibility", and on the other hand he must assess the present situation that threatens a preferred state; and he must decide that he is unhappy with such a situation. Sartre argues that two important consequences result:

(1) No factual state whatever it may be is capable by itself of motivating any act whatsoever. For an act is projection of the for-itself towards what is not, and what is can in no way determine by itself what is not.

(2) No factual state can determine consciousness to apprehend it as a négativité or as a lack."⁴

It is only when the worker can withdraw himself from himself and the world that he can evaluate his predicament as intolerable and hence create from it a motive for his action. The point that I am attempting to stress here is that things in themselves are insufficient for an individual

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 184-185.

⁴ Ibid. p.185.

to make a choice about them. As Sartre has argued, pain and pleasure are not the motives for seeking or avoiding a state of affairs. This is such because pain and pleasure are only ways in which we exist in our bodies. We can make a choice only once we have developed an attitude towards what our situation is and what it may not be. Such an assessment is required in order to create a motive for our action. Sartre argues that we do create motives for our actions by achieving the double nihilation. This allows us to go beyond the way we exist in our bodies; this allows us to set value to the things we experience. When we set value to our situation, we have created a motive for our action."¹

According to Sartre, no matter what a person's present state, her obligations, habits, desires or aims; these do not determine what this person will choose to do next, because she is always able to decide whether or not to act on these things. Sartre argues that this represents the paramount difference between humans and objects. The future condition of an object is completely determined by its present state and its potentials. Objects, unlike humans, do not have the ability to resist their own nature. Hence objects, unlike humans, are not free."²

¹ Ibid., 190-192.

² Ibid., 192.

Likeness through Valuation

I do not want to focus too strongly on Sartre's view of the nihilating power, but rather on the view that motives are an integral part in our decision making. Furthermore, I would like to focus on Sartre's view that sensations in themselves do not determine our actions. It is the value that we set to our sensations that motivate our actions. I believe that it is this kind of valuation of our state of affairs that gives rise to the subjective feeling of what it is like to be. This valuation takes us beyond the mere distinction between sensation and perception. The distinction in itself, as we have seen, allows us to distinguish between what is happening out there, and what is happening to us, but valuation takes us even further. It is in valuation that we can truly come to explain how in conscious experience, humans have a feeling of what it is like to be.

I would like to reexamine a Sartre type of valuation with another example. Recently, I spent a few days at a friend's cottage. It was a little cold because summer was coming to an end. We had decided to take the row boat out on the lake for a little divergence. Once we were a fair way from shore, I decided I wanted to go for a swim. I could, however, not convince my friend to join in on this activity. I did go swimming and the water was extremely cold, yet this did not prevent me from enjoying myself. I simply had to swim a little harder to keep warm. My friend

only put his hand in the water and shook his head at me. He told me clearly that he thought I was crazy, and that if he were to join me he'd probably die of hypothermia. What may be concluded from this if we take into consideration what Sartre has proposed? I believe that it is not the coldness of the water in itself that prevented my friend from swimming. I believe it was the value he set to swimming in cold water that allowed him to create the motive to remain in the boat. The same applies to my decision to swim in the cold water. I wanted to go swimming, the water was extremely cold, but instead of seeing this as a deterrent, I saw it as a challenge. Hence, my decision to swim was reached through my motives. My motives rested on the value I had set on the activity.

Can it be concluded that the water did not feel as cold to me as it did for my friend? This is probably a conclusion that would be impossible to confirm or disconfirm. This is, however, not a critical thing to know in so far as sensations are concerned. What is important in this kind of situation is to realize that it is not the temperature in the water itself that prevented my friend from swimming, nor is it the temperature of the water in itself that had me form the desire to go swimming. The sensation of cold which we both felt was merely a manner in which we experience the outside world through our bodies. The crucial difference remains in what it is like for me to swim in cold water as opposed to what it is like for my

friend. Although in both cases, each of us would experience a sensation of coldness, I would derive pleasure out of it, whereas my friend would experience discomfort. Although the sensation is similar, what it is like for me is pleasant, and what it is like for my friend is unpleasant. Hence, sensation in itself is not exactly equivalent to the feeling of what it is like to be. The sensation, in this case the cold water, is similar in both cases, yet the feeling of what it is like to be is different. Conscious experience can therefore not be explained by the ability of having sensations alone.

Sensations seem to be quite similar across the human species. This is confirmable because sensations are characteristically modality-specific. Different sensations have different locations in the body, however, more importantly here, sensations belong to a particular qualitative category, related to what is happening to me. A sensation may, for example, be of pressure, heat, light, sound or taste. Furthermore, these will affect me in a certain manner. Humphrey argues this point:

Thus every sensation that I feel belongs to a distinctive "sensory modality," tactile, visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, or a submodality of one of these. A sensation cannot be characterized as the sensation without mentioning which sensory modality it belongs to.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Nicholas Humphrey, A History of the Mind. (New York: Harper Perennials, 1992), 135.

Sensations are modality-specific. If I taste sweetness on my tongue, the description would be incomplete had I not specified the sensation modality it belongs to. I may have said that I feel pain in my tongue when I burnt myself. Once again this sensation is modality-specific. In both cases the sensation involved my tongue, yet the sensations were different. It is not the case that each sensation simply had the quality associated with it. The point must be stressed that if a sensation has a different quality, then it is a different sensation.

Given the fact that our sensations are modality-specific, we may conclude that other people sense things in a similar fashion to us. It is safe to assume that we taste sweetness, we see colors, we feel warmth and coldness. Although our sensations are modality-specific, it is highly doubtful that everyone experiences sensations in the same manner. I believe that this is the main reason that individuals are able to have a feeling of "what it is like to be".

Another important feature that contributes to the feeling of subjectivity is the ability to remember and make use of past experiences. Our memories of past experiences can influence our attitudes about what we experience. Each person has a unique history of life experiences. This history of experiences contributes to the development of attitudes towards future experiences. Let us suppose for example, that my friend had in the past nearly drowned in a

lake due to cold temperatures. His attitude towards swimming in a cold lake at a subsequent time would understandably be negative. Hence, what it is like for him to swim in a cold lake is an unpleasant experience.

If we return to the original example I had given about the swimming, it may be demonstrated how specific attitudes can develop through a valuation of the circumstances. Sensations become something that it is like for me because memories of past experiences allow for a dynamic process in valuation. I enjoy swimming, hence when faced with the opportunity to do so, I have a positive attitude in face of the situation. Furthermore, my past experiences have led me to value challenging and novel activities. I have assessed the situation as challenging coupled with the fact that I would enjoy the activity under normal circumstances, thus I develop a positive attitude towards the present state of affairs. The cold water is not a negative thing for me. I have taken the original input, that is, the cold water, and I have reassessed it with past beliefs and desires. This has allowed me to create my motives, and hence enjoy my swim.

Swimming in the cold lake is an experience that is "like this for me", each of my experiences is felt to be "something that it is like to be". I have my likes and my dislikes that have been built from previous experiences. My memories and abilities to use logical algorithms, such as rules of inference, are part of this creative dynamic

process that determines who I am or what I am. All of these things contribute to my rich conscious experience. Therefore, each experience I have becomes uniquely an experience that is "what it is like to be" for me.

Although among humans the sensations are modality-specific, each individual still has the ability of a unique feeling of subjectivity. Each individual experiences her life as what it is like for her. Each person can set value to her experiences. Furthermore, each individual has her own distinctive accumulation of life experiences, which contribute to her feeling of subjectivity. Each individual thus has a feeling of what it is like to be that individual. Each person has conscious experience, which is what it is like to be that person.

CONCLUSION

I do not here claim to have solved the problem of consciousness. It still remains a mystery how anything like conscious experience may arise out of the physical workings of the brain. Perhaps we may never discover this, for if McGinn is right, and consciousness does indeed have hidden structures, the solution may be forever hidden far beyond our reach. Since I cannot propose a solution to the problem, I do want to defend the approach I have taken in explaining how a feeling of "what it is like to be" arises in human beings.

I have attempted to show that consciousness is in fact a real phenomenon. The distinction between sensation and perception has allowed for this. This was necessary because any discussion about the feeling of what it is like to be, is a discussion of conscious experience.

I have then taken the next step to demonstrate that the subjective feeling of what it is like to be arises in a dynamic process involving sensations and attitudes. These attitudes are based on past experiences. The process, which I call valuation seems to explain how people, who all are subject to similar sensations, are still able to have a

feeling of subjectivity, a feeling not just of "something is happening to me" but also of "this is what it is like for me".

Sensations in a person are far more than simply a manner of existing in the body. The human being is able to have a distinct feeling of subjectivity because each sensation she has is subject to a process of valuation. This dynamic process allows a person to evaluate what is happening to her. Through this process of evaluation, sensations become more than simply a manner of existing in the body; the sensations become "what it is like to be" for that person. Past experiences can influence how new sensations are experienced. Therefore, for a person to be, is for her to undeniably have a feeling of what it is like to be.

I have been arguing that the human's feeling of subjectivity is dependent on more than the ability to have sensations. I have suggested that valuation is a necessary feature in the feeling of what it is like to be. It seems possible that since valuation is necessary for this subjective feeling, perhaps there is a link between free will and consciousness. As Sartre has proposed, humans are free because they are able to freely create motives for their actions. These motives are based on the value we set to certain (non-existent) situations. Hence, valuation is an important feature in freedom. Sartre has argued that sensations alone cannot be the motive of our actions, and I

have argued that sensations alone are not the reason we have a feeling of subjectivity, in both cases there is the necessity of valuation. Perhaps there is some link between human consciousness, and free will.

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