

in working on an academic puzzle than engaging their concern for solving the enormous problems in reality. As I have argued above, the authors ignore at least two elephants in the room: population growth and veganism. Both of these represent possibilities towards sustainability, but the authors offer no clue in this regard. The encouragement of green virtues is without clear guidance for what to do and what not to do. Virtues are no guarantee of moral behaviour; not even a guide. One first needs moral values (like the liberal ‘no harm’ principle), and then one can see what values encourage adherence to this moral guidance. It is painful to notice that environmental philosophy – at least in this book – is not of any help.

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Josh WEISBERG. *Consciousness*. Cambridge: Polity, 2014. 174 pp.

To be honest, reading this book was both helpful and disappointing. It was helpful because it provided a concise and lucid overview of the current situation in the debate on consciousness. It was disappointing because it nowhere questioned that very situation. I will return to this point at the end of my review.

Weisberg is enthusiastic about his subject and does not shy away from expressing himself accordingly in his writing – at times in combination with a statement of his own ‘guarded optimism’ concerning ‘strongly reductive views’ (145; a telling example from page 46 reads: “For my part, I think it’s super amazing that we might ‘just’ be a physical system. I find it incredibly inspirational to think of myself and the rest of humanity in this way.”). Through such comments, and through his overall style of writing, the book acquires a personal, at times somewhat jovial feel. Nevertheless, Weisberg is quite capable of putting himself in the shoes of defenders of all the various views he describes, and knows how to present the most important arguments in a concise and convincing manner, even if at times his phrasing is somewhat sloppy (compare, for instance, the conflicting characterizations of physicalism on pages 2 and 3).

The book comprises 8 chapters, 15-20 pages each, the first of which is introductory in character, while the others run through the main positions in the contemporary debate. The respective chapter headings read: “Mysterianism”; “Dualism”; “Nonreductive Views”; “The Identity Theory”; “Functionalism”; “First-Order Representationalism”; “Higher-Order Representationalism”. The order of the chapters is not arbitrary: Weisberg takes them to run “from the least reductive to the most reductive” (17). In what follows, I will move through all seven of these chapters in turn (thus focusing on the helpful side of the book), and then reflect on the book as a whole (thus explaining what I find disappointing).

Chapter 2, “Mysterianism”, starts with Colin McGinn’s ‘permanent mysterianism’: the view that we are simply unable to understand how mind and body relate. We then move to ‘pessimistic temporary mysterianism’, which embraces the views of (the earlier) Thomas Nagel and Joseph Levine. Neither think such an understanding can be obtainable

unless we manage to extend our current conceptual and scientific approach. Finally, we are presented with ‘optimistic temporary mysterianism’ of Patricia Churchland, who thinks that we will get to a proper understanding once we have a better grasp of the brain than we now have. (And here one starts to wonder to what extent this chapter really is the ‘least reductive’.)

Chapter 3, “Dualism”, starts with a nod to Descartes only to move on quickly to property dualism, motivated largely by Chalmers’s famous Zombie argument. Dualists of the interactionist variety have to make room for consciousness’s non-physical influence on physical systems in ways that do not violate the physical laws – which requires giving up causal closure (according to one understanding of that notion). Among the options discussed, there is the idea that consciousness is what makes the quantum-mechanical wave function collapse. Dualists of the epiphenomenalist variety do not face such problems of making room for non-physical influence, but face the converse problem of explaining how consciousness can ever become manifest in behaviour. The most pressing worry for these views is that adding consciousness as a “primitive” seems to be “a very non-Copernican addition to our basic ontology” (51).

Chapter 4, “Nonreductive Views”, deals with monistic views. It starts with ‘Russell’s Gap’ (54): physics tells us about the causal roles of fundamental particles, but not about what they are intrinsically like. (Here Weisberg is somewhat sloppy, especially when explaining Russell’s Gap in terms of dispositional properties and their categorical bases – see 56.) So perhaps consciousness fits into this gap, either as a basic feature of matter down to the smallest particles, yielding panpsychism, or as emerging from the particles’ ‘neutral’ (i.e. neither physical nor phenomenal) intrinsic natures, yielding neutral monism. Both views threaten to slide back into either dualism or physicalism: they require the spelling out what the supposed micro-psychical or neutral features of matter are in such a way that they are indeed neither physical nor dualist, and they require some story as to how such small psychical or neutral building blocks combine to form the unified consciousness of, say, a human being – where that story must differ from analogous stories that could be told on the basis of a purely physical ontology.

Chapter 5, “The Identity Theory”, takes us to the first reductive station. Its core is the mere claim of identity – consciousness *just is* physical; there is nothing more explanatory to say. Weisberg thus calls this view ‘weakly reductive’, and contrasts it with functionalism, which provides more in terms of explanation (see the next chapters). On the identity theory, the identity is brute, motivated merely by “inductive pressures to simplify” (80). One salient problem for such a view is multiple realizability, which motivates functionalism (but empirical findings are mentioned that may counter this worry). The chapter contains discussion of many more intricate issues – phenomenal concepts, Ned Block’s distinction between access-consciousness and phenomenal consciousness, etc.

Chapter 6, “Functionalism”, concerns the attempt to identify the functional role of consciousness, in terms of its “input, output, and interaction profile” (93). Weisberg discusses Baars’ famous ‘global workspace theory’ as an example (97ff.), but takes the category of functionalist theories to be much broader – he even includes Alva Noë’s

‘enactivist’ theory of consciousness therein (100), which does not always make for a good fit with the rest of the chapter. Apart from familiar issues concerning ‘China brains’ and the like, Weisberg’s worries for functionalism include first and foremost the claim, central to Chalmers’ Zombie argument (but also to Block’s resistance to a functionalist analysis of ‘phenomenal consciousness’), that consciousness is simply not a functional concept, so that functionalism can only get off the ground by “changing the subject” (102). And another worry concerns the dispositional character of the account: why should, e.g. *availability* to the global workspace “make any difference to how things seem to a subject” (104)?

Chapter 7, “First-Order Representationalism” (FOR), differs somewhat from the others. It is supposed to cover representation-based versions of functionalism, which Weisberg develops with the help of the idea of *transparency*. In its strongest form, transparency implies that “we’re *never* directly aware of our mental states, even in introspection; rather we’re only aware of the properties those mental states represent” (114). But not all such states are conscious: they are only conscious if they are available for cognitive processing. This ‘ordinary’ functionalist element, which in fact constitutes the core of the view, makes one wonder what exactly differentiates the resulting views from those covered in the previous chapter. (The answer is that this chapter is more like a stepping stone to the next, where representation plays a much more central role.) In any case, Weisberg here introduces some fairly complex ideas concerning representation (in particular, Dretske’s views), but the presentation is so compressed that it becomes quite ‘impressionistic’ indeed (111).

Chapter 8, “Higher-Order Representationalism” (HOR), starts with the ‘transitivity principle’ (127): a mental state is conscious only if its bearer is *conscious of* the state, where to be ‘conscious of’ a state is explained in representational terms. The state that plays the relevant role of representing a target mental state can be either a distinct state (thought-like or perception-like) or it may be the target state representing itself, resulting in a self-representational theory. The upshot is that “[...] a mental state is conscious when I’m aware of myself as being in it in a suitably immediate way” (130). Concerns related to this sort of view include the puzzle over how a non-conscious state can make another non-conscious state conscious; the problem of higher-order misrepresentation (do I merely seem to be conscious if I represent myself as being in a state that does not exist?); and the worry that the transitivity principle is, again, merely a way of changing the subject.

As my brief summary indicates, Weisberg’s book is suitable reading both for those new to the topic and for those who need an update on the latest developments. At the same time, the book as a whole is symptomatic for the kind of approach that the contemporary debate takes towards the issue of consciousness – and that approach is, alas, woefully fixed on a quite narrow and questionable philosophical picture. The starting point is the “[...] scientific view that everything happening in the universe is ultimately a process involving the basic forces of nuclear attraction, electromagnetism, and gravity, in various combinations” (13). Furthermore, it is assumed that “[...] a tentative consensus – or at least a mild optimism – has emerged concerning the prospects of a naturalized

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theory of representation” (108). In effect, it is thus asserted that we can understand what it is to harbour mental states ultimately in terms of nuclear attraction, electromagnetism, and gravity; and the problem of consciousness thus becomes the question “what has to be added to a mental state” – in the described sense – “to make it a conscious state” (12). These are, more or less, the beaten philosophical tracks of the contemporary consciousness debate, which Weisberg’s book never leaves. An exceedingly narrow physicalist ontology is assumed, and then the question becomes whether or not we need to squeeze in some spooky non-physical stuff in order to understand consciousness.

Given such premises, it is not surprising that the only two ways of not pessimistically resigning into mysterianism are (i) the desperate move towards dualism or panpsychism, or (ii) the ostrich triumphs of speculative reductivism. The debate thus cries out for a thorough reflection on its philosophical underpinnings. And it is not as if there was a lack of suitable alternative ideas around – for instance, what if we start out with a different take on the ‘scientific view’, such as the pluralistic view developed by Stanford School people like Nancy Cartwright and John Dupré? And what if we start out with a different metaphysical view, such as a metaphysics of powers, or a neo-Aristotelian metaphysics of substances (to mention just a few venues that I would find it interesting to explore)? Considerations such as these are what made this book, apart from being helpful, also a disappointing read for me.

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