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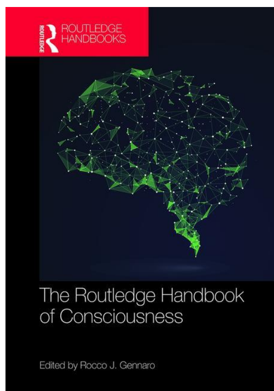

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Rocco J. Gennaro

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CONSCIOUSNESS IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

Larry M. Jorgensen

A fully naturalized philosophy of mind is often held up as a gold standard. As one person has noted, "a casual observer of recent philosophy of mind would likely come to the conclusion that, amidst all of the disagreements between specialists in this field, there is at least one thing that stands as more or less a consensus view: the commitment to a *naturalistic* philosophy of mind" (Horst 2009: 219). In this pursuit of a naturalized philosophy of mind, consciousness often receives concentrated attention, in part because the phenomena of consciousness seem particularly recalcitrant, difficult to explain in the terms of the physical and biological sciences. There is an expectation that consciousness will turn out to be compatible with the natural sciences, but for now just how remains a mystery. One version of this expectation is that consciousness is compatible with a fully physicalist metaphysics. If consciousness is explicable in terms of purely physical interactions, then it seems easily explicable in terms of the natural sciences.

However, a quick historical survey will show that naturalism has not always been combined with physicalism. Insofar as we can identify a common project under the heading of "naturalism," it is a project that can unfold in quite a few ways. Attempts at naturalizing consciousness turn out to be compatible with versions of dualism and idealism, and there is reason to expect that even today a fully naturalized theory of consciousness might be incompatible with physicalism.

This survey of consciousness in Western philosophy will focus on one particular thread: the search for a naturalized theory of consciousness. Of course, there are many *non*-naturalists in the history of Western philosophy, philosophers who argue for some degree of divine influence in nature or who argue that humans are exceptional and can act in ways that should not be conceived of in terms of natural causation. And many of these philosophers have interests in understanding and theorizing about consciousness. So, I do not intend to argue that the history of consciousness is exhausted by a survey of the efforts to naturalize consciousness. But I think that the efforts to make consciousness intelligible in natural terms encompasses a broader swath of philosophers in the West than has previously been allowed. For example, the mere fact that a philosopher is a theist (as many, going back to Ancient Greece, were) is not an indication that they are not interested in a naturalized philosophy of mind.

In what follows, I will begin by characterizing what I take the goal of naturalism to be, characterizing it in a way that will identify a common project from Ancient Greece through to today.[1] Second, I will look at Aristotle as a prime mover in articulating a naturalized theory of consciousness. Third, I will argue that as the Aristotelian physics and metaphysics were

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overturned in the early modern period, consciousness came to the fore as a philosophical issue, and the uniquely modern conception of consciousness became a focus of concentrated attention. Fourth, I will consider how Kantian views redirected the discussion of consciousness. I will close with some brief considerations of how the historical development of a naturalized theory of consciousness might inform today's efforts.

1 Naturalism and Consciousness

A *naturalized theory* is a theory that has no irresolvable "mysteries"—mysteries like those presented by phenomenal consciousness or subjective experience. As Fred Dretske has put it, a naturalized theory may not "remove *all* the mysteries [but] it removes enough of them… to justify putting one's money on the nose of this philosophical horse" (Dretske 1997: xliii). While many of today's defenders of naturalism will define naturalism in terms of the natural sciences, there is reason in a survey to articulate a broader definition. What is it *about* continuity with the natural sciences that would make this a desirable goal? I will identify two principal constraints that I believe to be at the core of what makes naturalism desirable.

One way to recognize a naturalized theory is that it provides plausible or satisfactory *explanations* of all mental states and events. This is evident from the claim that we want to remove *mysteries* from our theories. Naturalism is about discharging explanatory demands. Any explanation of consciousness should make it *intelligible*. Call this the *intelligibility constraint*.

Of course, there may be *non-natural* ways to make something intelligible. When natural events are conceived of in terms of the behavior of the gods, this is a way of making those events intelligible. However, if appeal to the gods makes the explanation *more* mysterious (because the gods are fickle and unpredictable), then it would not satisfy the intelligibility constraint. What we want is a way of making the events intelligible without introducing new mysteries: making them intelligible in ways that would allow us to (at least in principle if not in practice) make predictions and govern our behavior accordingly.[2]

However, some conceptions of divine activity are fully consistent and predictable.[3] Would such a theory that incorporated divine activity into natural explanations be a naturalized theory? Surely not. Rather, a second requirement on naturalism seems to require intelligibility in terms of the *natures* of the things themselves. That is, an explanation should be *immanent* to the things being explained. This is not to say that natural events must be intelligible in terms of *intrinsic* properties. Rather, any properties invoked should be properties (intrinsic, dispositional, relational) of the kinds of things being explained. For example, rain would be more *naturally* explained by appealing to the properties of the atmosphere and water cycle rather than by appealing to divine activity. Call this the *immanence constraint*.[4]

The naturalizing project, then, will be to satisfy these two constraints, and so a naturalized theory of consciousness would be one that makes consciousness *intelligible* in terms of features of the mind and body. Or, to put it differently, it will provide an explanatory *framework* that ensures intelligibility, consistency, and immanence, and in which consciousness plays its unique role. Consciousness then becomes an intelligible aspect of nature. Without such a framework, consciousness remains somewhat mysterious.[5]

With this understanding of naturalism, we can now turn to the topic of consciousness.[6] Tracing the development of consciousness in Western philosophy is complicated by the fact that the *term* consciousness was not coined until the seventeenth century.[7] Even more problematic is that once the modern term "consciousness" is in use, the term becomes an umbrella for several different phenomena. My approach, then, will be to identify passages in which it is clear that the philosopher is grappling with what we today identify under the heading of "phenomenal consciousness."

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Phenomenal consciousness is typically described as the "what it's like" aspect of experience, the first-personal aspect of experience.[8] In this survey, I will focus on passages where it is somewhat clear that the philosopher is grappling with the subjective mental *seeming* of world or imagination.

2 Ancient Greek Conceptions of Consciousness

While ancient philosophers had much to say about the soul (*psyche*), consciousness as such was not a primary focus of theoretical work. Some argue that these issues are wholly absent from Ancient Greek concerns. As one scholar wrote of Aristotle:

> The general account of sense-perception remains for the most part basically physiological… There is an almost total neglect of any problem arising from psycho-physical dualism and the facts of consciousness. The reason appears to be that concepts like that of consciousness do not figure in his conceptual scheme at all; they play no part in his analysis of perception, thought, etc. (Nor do they play any significant role in Greek thought in general.)
>
> *(Hamlyn 1993: xii–xiii)*[9]

The search for consciousness in Ancient Greek philosophical texts may well be a fool's errand. However, other scholars have noted some overlapping concepts or concerns in Ancient Greek texts, which—with the necessary translation—can be seen as in the family of issues related to consciousness.

For example, although Plato never provides an analysis of consciousness, his theories have implications for a theory of consciousness. Plato makes use of a conscious-unconscious divide, most frequently in reference to knowledge. In reply to the oracle at Delphi, Socrates replies, "I am very conscious that I am not wise at all; what then does he mean by saying I am the wisest?" (Plato 1997: *Apology* 21b),[10] and in *Charmides* Socrates expresses a "fear of unconsciously thinking I know something when I do not" (166d). Similarly, in *Philebus*, Plato presents the intellectual faculties as necessary to having some sort of unified experience, since, with respect to pleasurable experiences, you would need a kind of judgment to "realize that you are enjoying yourself even while you do" and you would need memory in order to unify it in a common experience, "for any pleasure to survive from one moment to the next" (21c, cf. 60d-e). This role for the intellect in awareness connects with Plato's theory of recollection, which holds that we have in our minds ideas of which we are unaware, needing only the right triggers to bring them to the surface as if remembering them (*Meno* 81b and following).[11]

While someone might be able to work with these threads to develop a Platonic conception of consciousness, Plato himself left the theory rather sketchy. Even with respect to sensation, Plato gives more attention to bodily motions rather than the states of the soul that result from these motions (see *Timaeus* 42a, 43c, and 61d-68d). What *is* clear is that Plato would not be inclined to *reduce* sensation to the motions in the body.[12]

Aristotle, by contrast, gives extended treatment of the nature of the soul, perception, and the intellect in *De Anima* and other works (*Sense and Sensibilia* and *On Sleep*). Some scholars have seen the resources here to construct a theory of consciousness that maps somewhat faithfully onto what we would call phenomenal consciousness. One particularly key passage is *De Anima* 3.2, where Aristotle says:

> Since we perceive that we see and hear, it must either be by sight that one perceives that one sees or by another [sense]. But in that case there will be the same [sense]

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> for sight and the color which is the subject for sight. So that either there will be two [senses] for the same thing or [the sense] itself will be the one for itself. Again, if the sense concerned with sight were indeed different from sight, either there will be an infinite regress or there will be some [sense] which is concerned with itself; so that we had best admit this of the first in the series.
>
> *(Hamelyn 1993: 425b11–15)*

This cryptic passage has yielded a variety of interpretations of Aristotle's conception of consciousness. Since the language here suggests we are aware of our sensations by means of a perception of a perception, Aristotle must have in mind some sort of "inner sense." The inner sense reading is a version of what is called a *higher-order theory of consciousness*: a higher-order perception takes a lower-order perception as its object, rendering it conscious.[13]

However, Victor Caston interprets the *De Anima* passage differently. Here is a reconstruction of the argument Caston thinks Aristotle is presenting here (Caston 2002):[14]

1. We perceive that we see the color red, which means that there is a dual content: we perceive that we are seeing red, and we perceive the color red.
2. We perceive that we are seeing red either (i) by means of a distinct perception or (ii) by means of the initial perception (the act of seeing).
3. *Therefore*, either (a) there will be two perceptions of the same thing (namely, the color red, since perceiving that we are seeing red is a perception of red just as the primary perception of red is), or (b) the one perception will also be of itself.
4. But there are not two perceptions of one and the same thing (namely, the color red). (No Double Vision thesis)
5. *Therefore*, the one perception will also be of itself.

Caston concludes that Aristotle has something *similar to* a higher-order theory, where consciousness is grounded in the content of the perception (grounded in intentionality). However, Aristotle would deny that the higher-order state is distinct from the original perception. Rather, the original perception is reflexive: it is a perception of red *and* a perception that I am seeing red. The regress argument in *De Anima* suggests that if the higher-order perception were distinct from the lower-order perception, then the theory would be incoherent. Aristotle rejects this view and says instead that "we had best admit this of the first of the series." That is, we had best admit that the first perception is reflexive and includes itself as an object of its perception. Thus, Aristotle's theory would be incoherent on the internal sense theory.

What the internal sense interpretation and Caston's interpretation have in common is that they both see Aristotle as grounding phenomenal consciousness in intentionality. The difference is in whether the grounding of phenomenal consciousness in intentionality requires a distinct perception or not. But the basic move is one that will be common among those that look for a naturalized theory of consciousness: it satisfies the intelligibility constraint, since it provides a way of explaining consciousness in terms of something more fundamental, and it satisfies the immanence constraint, since the explanation of consciousness is fully in terms of other aspects of the mind. We might be inclined here to press further for an account of intentionality, which Aristotle would answer in terms of his hylomorphism and causal relations between perceivers and intelligible forms, again satisfying the intelligibility and immanence constraints.[15] Minds, perception, and consciousness are explained in an integrated way with the whole of nature in a hylomorphic framework.[16] Thus, we have one example of a naturalized theory that is not straightforwardly a physicalist theory of mind.

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3 The Seventeenth-Century Awakening

With the advent of revolutions in astronomy and physics, the early modern philosophers were not satisfied that the Aristotelian framework offered an intelligible account of the world, and in general they regarded explanations in terms of forms particularly *un*illuminating. Seventeenth-century philosopher Nicolas Malebranche argued that such "ways of speaking are not false: it is just that in effect they mean nothing" (Malebranche 1997: 444, cf. 242). One general trajectory of early modern natural philosophy was to dispense with substantial forms and to provide explanations in terms of merely material interactions. Whether this materialist mode of explanation could also explain human mentality then became a controversial matter, and it forms the backdrop of our conversations today.

It is during the seventeenth century that we first find explicit introduction of concepts and terms related to consciousness. Prior to the seventeenth century, the language of consciousness was bound up with the language of conscience (a moral sensibility, and "internal witness" to one's own integrity). But in the seventeenth century, and beginning particularly with Descartes, these two concepts began to diverge, resulting in the more purely psychological concept of consciousness, separated from its moral sense. This shift required the introduction of a new vocabulary. The English language acquired the word "consciousness" in the seventeenth century.[17]

This conceptual and linguistic shift more closely aligns with the way consciousness is framed as a philosophical problem today. As such, it is worth noting just what led to the introduction of this more distinctively modern conception of consciousness.

The most concise story that I can tell of this seventeenth-century innovation focuses on Descartes and Leibniz. We will see a similar relation between Descartes and Leibniz as there was between Plato and Aristotle. While Plato's philosophy had *implications* for a theory of consciousness, he left it largely unanalyzed, but Aristotle developed the idea and presented a wholly integrated and naturalized philosophy of mind. Similarly, Descartes's philosophy made use of the concept of consciousness in its modern sense, but he did not go very far in presenting an analysis of the concept. Leibniz was the first major philosopher to give focused attention to this task, and his account of consciousness goes much farther than Descartes's in integrating perception and consciousness into the natural order.[18]

Starting with Descartes, we see that he defines thought *in terms of* consciousness:

> *Thought*. I use this term to include everything that is within us in such a way that we are immediately aware [*conscii*] of it.
>
> (*Descartes 1985: 2.113, cf. 1.195*)

Descartes uses the term "thought" broadly, to include all mental states such as doubt, understanding, affirmation, denial, willingness [*volo*], refusal [*nolo*], imagination, and sense-perception (2.19). And so, Descartes's definition of "thought" entails that all mental states are conscious. Consciousness, for Descartes, *is* the mark of the mental.

While this passage is not intended as an analysis of consciousness itself, Descartes makes the important shift from a moral notion of *conscience* to a purely psychological notion of *consciousness*. In the famous *cogito* argument, Descartes's "internal witness" (the older sense of conscience) testifies to the existence and nature of an active mind (the modern psychological sense of consciousness). In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes explicitly sets aside moral concerns[19] and turns inward to discover a psychological criterion for truth, giving rise to an emphasis on the more purely psychological sense of consciousness.

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This much is clear. It is less clear whether Descartes provided a *naturalized* theory of consciousness. But he does suggest that consciousness has a structure:

> *Idea*. I understand the term to mean the form of any given thought, immediate perception of which makes me aware [*conscius*] of the thought.
>
> *(2.113)*

The proposition that the "immediate perception" of a thought "makes me aware of the thought" might suggest a higher-order theory of consciousness. However, Descartes actually has a model closer to what Caston was arguing for on behalf of Aristotle. Each thought involves self-reference. As Descartes says in reply to a Jesuit, Pierre Bourdin, who raised objections to Descartes's views:

> My critic says that to enable a substance to be superior to matter and wholly spiritual…, it is not sufficient for it to think: it is further required that it should think that it is thinking, by means of a reflexive act, or that it should have awareness [*conscientia*] of its own thought. This is…deluded…. [T]he initial thought by means of which we become aware of something does not differ from the second thought by means of which we become aware that we were aware of it, any more than this second thought differs from the third thought by means of which we become aware that we were aware that we were aware.
>
> *(2.382)*

Notice, first of all, that this exchange is couched as a worry about physicalism—Bourdin thinks that Descartes has not provided enough of a distinction between the material and the mental. What more is needed? The mental substance "should think that it is thinking, by means of a reflexive act," that is to say, "it should have awareness of its own thought." In his response, Descartes argues that the awareness of a thought comes from the thought itself by means of what Alison Simmons describes as "a form of immediate acquaintance" that a thought has of itself (Simmons 2012: 8). Each thought is reflexive in this minimal sense, and so for Descartes all thought is conscious thought.

This structure may not provide for a naturalized theory of consciousness in the sense described above. What exactly is this "immediate acquaintance," and how is it to be understood in terms of other features of the natural world? One way we might understand what is going on is to say that the thought *represents* both an external object and itself, in which case consciousness would be explicable in terms of representation. However, Alison Simmons argues that "Cartesian representation [is] tied to the notion of objective being, so that a thought represents whatever has objective being in it…, and there is no indication that Descartes thinks that thoughts exist objectively within themselves" (8). Thus, while thoughts seem to be self-intimating for Descartes, this is not by means of any representational content. And so consciousness is not explained in terms of representation for Descartes. Simmons concludes that "consciousness does not seem to be analyzable into any other features of thought" (8).[20]

If this is right, then consciousness does not have any further explanation. Consciousness in its most basic sense, for Descartes, is a kind of immediate acquaintance a thought has of itself. While acquaintance requires a structure—the thought is *about* itself in some way—this structure is not representational. But what else could it be? Descartes does not give us much more to go on. There are similar limits in Descartes's account of mind-body interaction that relate to current discussions of qualia, the qualitative aspects of experience. Descartes says that it is *possible* that the same motions of the body could have been represented in the mind differently (for example, the feeling of pain in the foot could have been represented in the mind as "the actual motion occurring in the brain, or in the foot," or "it might have indicated something else entirely" [Descartes 1985: 2.61]). That is, there is no way of explaining why certain motions of the brain give rise

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to certain qualitative experiences, other than appealing to divine teleology when devising the mind-body union. This arbitrariness and the limits of explanation for consciousness and qualia entail a *non*-naturalized theory of mind and consciousness.

John Locke's account of consciousness also includes a self-referential aspect. As Shelley Weinberg has recently argued, each mental act for Locke is a complex state involving, "at the very least, an act of perception, an idea perceived, and consciousness (that *I am perceiving*)" (Weinberg 2016: xi). Locke makes innovative *use* of this reflexive account of consciousness in his accounts of sensation, memory, and personal identity, but he provides no deep *analysis* of the concept. Although Locke does define consciousness as "the perception of what passes in a man's own mind" (Locke 1975: 2.1.19), this definition does not yield a full theory. As such, although Locke parts ways with Descartes on important matters, they are alike in that neither has given a full analysis or a fully naturalized theory of consciousness.[21]

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz turned the Cartesian mind upside down, and he argues that neither Locke nor Descartes has provided a fully naturalized theory of the mind. Contrary to Descartes's view that consciousness is the mark of the mental, Leibniz argues that *representation* is the mark of the mental and that consciousness is grounded in representation. For Descartes, all mental states are conscious and some are representational; for Leibniz, all mental states are representational and some are conscious.

Leibniz is the first major philosopher to introduce a systematic argument for *non*-conscious mental states, and he argued that the failure to recognize non-conscious mental states is a significant mistake. Leibniz says,

> It is good to distinguish between *perception*, which is the internal state of the monad [that is, a simple substance] representing external things, and *apperception*, which is *consciousness*, or the reflective knowledge of this internal state, something not given to all souls, nor at all times to a given soul. Moreover, it is because they lack this distinction that the Cartesians have failed, disregarding the perceptions that we do not apperceive, in the same way that people disregard imperceptible bodies.
>
> *(Leibniz 1989: 208)*

Leibniz coins a new term, *apperception*, which is the nominalization of the French verb for "to be aware of," in order to point out what the Cartesians missed. While the Cartesians properly speak of perception, which, *by definition* for Leibniz, is a representational state of a simple substance, they fail to recognize that some perceptions are not *apperceived*. That is, there are some perceptions of which we are not aware.

Leibniz makes his desire to *naturalize* the mind explicit—it is an animating principle in his philosophy of mind. Leibniz saw himself as providing a more consistently natural account of physics and of mind than the Cartesians. For example, in a letter to Arnauld, Leibniz says,

> The ordinary Cartesians confess that they cannot account for [the union of mind and body]; the authors of the hypothesis of occasional causes think that it is a "difficulty worthy of a liberator, for which the intervention of a *Deus ex machina* is necessary;" for myself, *I explain it in a natural manner*.
>
> *(Leibniz 1967: 145, emphasis mine)*

And Leibniz posits a general rule:

> This vulgar opinion—that we ought in philosophy to avoid, as much as possible, what surpasses the natures of creatures—is a very reasonable opinion. Otherwise, nothing

> will be easier than to account for anything by bringing in the deity, *Deum ex machina*, without minding the natures of *things*.
>
> *(Leibniz and Clarke 1956: Letter 5, §107, translation altered)*

Leibniz regarded the philosophies of Descartes and others who followed him as general failures in providing a *naturalized* philosophy of mind, and he aimed to do better.

Leibniz sought to provide a naturalized theory by arguing that all changes result from the immanent natures of the things themselves. That is, although Leibniz was a theist, he did not countenance divine meddling in natural occurrences.[22] And so Leibniz developed some heuristic principles that would enable him to test for the intelligibility of a system, to see whether the system had rid itself of mysteries. One such principle is the principle of continuity, which says that any natural change proceeds by degrees and not "by a leap" (see Leibniz 1969: 351–354). Leibniz applied this principle to Cartesian physics to show that Descartes's laws of impact yielded gaps in the explanation. That is, there were unexplained mysteries remaining in the system, and so the theory ought to be rejected in favor of one that makes all of the changes intelligible in terms of the natures of things. Leibniz also explicitly applies this to his theory of mind, which, for him, is a simple substance: "Since all natural change is produced by degrees, something changes and something remains. As a result, there must be a plurality of properties and relations in the simple substance, although it has no parts" (Leibniz 1989: 214, see also Leibniz 1996: 51–59).

What this means for Leibniz's theory of consciousness is that conscious states must arise by degrees from states that are not conscious. Some have interpreted Leibniz's theory of consciousness as requiring a higher-order perception, as is suggested by the quotation above, where Leibniz describes consciousness as "the reflective knowledge of [the] internal state." However, if the higher-order theory requires a distinct higher-order perception (as most interpretations have it), then it is difficult to see how such a perception could arise by degrees.[23]

Recent interpreters instead read Leibniz as articulating an account of consciousness that arises from variations in what he calls "perceptual distinctness." The concept of "perceptual distinctness" plays several roles in Leibniz's philosophy, but the central aspect of the concept for his theory of consciousness is that a perception becomes distinct when it is distinct*ive*, that is, it *stands out* from the background of other perceptions. This happens when there is enough similarity in what smaller perceptions represent that, when aggregated, they present their contents together more forcefully. (A process Leibniz describes as the "confusion" of their representational contents.) Here is one frequently repeated example from Leibniz:

> [T]he roaring noise of the sea… impresses itself on us when we are standing on the shore. To hear this noise as we do, we must hear the parts which make up this whole, that is the noise of each wave, although each of these little noises makes itself known only when combined confusedly with all the others, and would not be noticed if the wave which made it were by itself.
>
> *(Leibniz 1996: 54)*

In this example, Leibniz says that the *petites perceptions*—each little wave noise—aggregates into the full experience of the sound of the wave. And he describes sensation identically:

> Also evident is the nature of the perception…, namely the expression of many things in one, which differs widely from expression in a mirror or in a corporeal organ, which is not truly one. If the perception is more distinct, it makes a sensation.
>
> *(Leibniz 1973: 85; see also Leibniz 1996: 134)*

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Sensation and other forms of phenomenal consciousness are functions of the combination of representational contents of perceptions. Once a perception has passed a sufficient threshold of distinctness against background perceptions such that it stands out, then that perception will be a conscious perception. Of course, the threshold will vary by context, since it will take more to exceed a very noisy background versus a tranquil background. Passing the threshold "makes a sensation." Call this the *threshold interpretation*.

The threshold interpretation as presented here may oversimplify matters a bit, since it doesn't spell out how perceptual distinctness also works across time and involves memory. There is some interpretive controversy around this point, but some of the basics seem to be agreed on by scholars today.[24] Scholars tend to agree that what accounts for consciousness, for Leibniz, is representational features of the underlying unconscious perceptions. This account of consciousness will allow for a number of interesting claims: (a) consciousness comes in degrees; (b) at a particular threshold consciousness arises; (c) the threshold and degrees of distinctness are sensitive to context; and (d) the theory of consciousness bears a strong analogy to what is going on in Leibniz's dynamics: the same underlying smaller forces may or may not have their effect depending on other variables. And this view is a naturalized theory in that consciousness is explained by the underlying intentionality of perception and so satisfies the intelligibility and immanence constraints of naturalism.[25]

What we have from Leibniz is the first concerted attempt at an analysis of consciousness in terms of more fundamental features. Leibniz presents a representational theory of mind and consciousness, which bears interesting relations to contemporary discussions of representational theories. But what is additionally remarkable is that Leibniz presents a naturalized theory of mind that is broadly idealist. The most fundamental elements of reality, for Leibniz, are "monads," which are minds or mind-like substances that are fully representational. Other features of nature, such as inter-substantial causal relations, are explained in terms of representational relations among these mind-like substances. And so, we have another example of a naturalized, non-physicalist theory of consciousness.

4 Kantian Consciousness

Kant famously introduced a systematic division in philosophy, a result of what he calls a new Copernican Revolution. In astronomy, Copernicus's great insight was that we should factor into our astronomical calculations how the movement of the earth affects our observations. Kant had a similar insight. Metaphysics had sought to describe the world *as it really is,* and the project consistently hit dead ends. And so, Kant proposed a new Copernican Revolution: in order to make sense of our observations of the world, we have to factor in what *we* contribute to our knowledge of things.

At its most basic, Kant's system is a philosophy of mind: what are the features of our own minds that enable us to experience the world? Kant argued that our minds actively structure our experiences so that things can become objects of experience *for us*. That is, when we are affected by something, our minds structure the experience. But Kant went beyond what we might ordinarily think—for example, we might think that certain subjective perspectives or points of view might distort our experience in some ways, but in general we are able to experience things as they are. Kant argues for a more radical conclusion: space and time are themselves the basic ways our minds structure and organize our experiences, which allows us to experience things coherently, connected, and causally related. And so, objects of our experience are in space and time because our minds *must* structure things according to the forms of space and time. But the things *as they are in themselves* are not spatiotemporally structured. This creates a division in Kant's philosophy between phenomena, objects of our experience, and noumena, things as they are in themselves. Kant then claims that we can *know* phenomena, but we cannot know noumena, things as they are

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in themselves, since they can never be objects of our experience. There is more to the story, but this is enough background for us to see what is at issue in Kant's philosophy of mind.

One consequence of Kant's division is that now the meaning of the word "nature" is put into question. Kant argues that "if nature meant the existence of things *in themselves*, we would never be able to cognize it" (Kant 2004: 46). That is, since we don't have cognitive access to things as they are *in themselves,* we would never be able to know anything about nature in this sense. But, he says, nature has "yet another meaning, namely one that determines the *object*," and so nature in this sense is "the *sum total of all objects of experience*" (Kant 2004: 47–48). That is, when we seek knowledge of an object, it will always be knowledge *as* a possible object of experience. Judgments based on this condition are objectively valid, since we are identifying the necessary conditions by which the things become *objects of experience*. But we should not be confused and regard these objectively valid judgments to describe things *as they really are*, independent of the conditions of experience.

And so, to *naturalize* a theory for Kant requires paying attention to the conditions of experience, in order to determine the necessary conditions and relations that objects must have. And this will be true of our own minds as well. When we do empirical psychology, we will be attending to the conditions under which we become objects of our own experience. Introspection becomes the basis of empirical psychology.[26]

One aspect of consciousness that precedes empirical psychology is, what Kant calls, the *transcendental unity of apperception* (borrowing Leibniz's word). What he argues is that there is a condition of *unity* that must be applied to consciousness in order for it to provide a single experience:

> This original and transcendental condition is nothing other than the *transcendental apperception*. The consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in internal perception is merely empirical, forever variable; it can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearances, and is customarily called *inner sense* or *empirical apperception*… There must be a condition that precedes all experience and makes the latter itself possible.
>
> *(Kant 1997: A106–107)*

Thus, Kant gives us an argument for the unity of consciousness, a formal unity that is a condition for experience. But this is different from the "merely empirical" consciousness that yields inner sense. We should not confuse the formal condition of *unity* with a claim about what we *are* as minds, however. Kant says that "apart from this logical significance of the *I*, we have no acquaintance with the subject in itself…" (Kant 1997: A350). That is, the logical unity necessary for us to have experience at all does not give us cognition of our own mind *as it is in itself*. We are always an appearance, even to ourselves.

But, given this, we can still differentiate levels of consciousness *within* empirical experience for Kant. The transcendental unity of apperception is conceptually prior to nature (in Kant's sense), since it performs the synthesis that allows us to have experience of objects in the first place.[27] But the main function of empirical consciousness is to provide differentiation of objects, and he appeals to the relative clarity and distinctness of a perception to explain this differentiation, and so Kant follows a broadly Leibnizian analysis of consciousness in terms of the distinctness of a mental state.[28] With respect to empirical consciousness, since all objects of experience have been synthesized according to the forms of space and time, there will always be *some* differentiating factor among them, even if it is relatively obscure. But the relative distinctness of the mental state will allow Kant to differentiate low-level consciousness (obscure and indistinct) from higher degrees or levels of consciousness (which are more distinct).[29]

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Thus, Kant gives us a robust *naturalized* theory, provided that nature is understood as within the domain of experience itself, but we must always acknowledge that such a theory is limited, remaining at the level of phenomena. Within phenomena, events are intelligible in terms of immanent laws and structures. But Kant doesn't provide a much more robust account of empirical consciousness, making use of some of the Cartesian and Leibnizian theories bequeathed to him. In general, the systematic attention to an analysis of consciousness will have to wait for another century or so.[30]

5 Naturalized Theories of Consciousness Today

None of the philosophers I have looked at provide physicalist theories of the mind, and yet, arguably, some of them do make attempts to *naturalize* the mind. One main project of much recent philosophy of mind has been to discover how the mind fits into a physical world, and so naturalism has been regarded as coextensive with physicalism. But I think this is a mistake. And this brief historical tour provides some examples of ways we can aim for the goals of naturalism without prejudging the debate between physicalism and its detractors.

It might turn out that the best naturalized theory of consciousness will also be a reductive or physicalist theory of consciousness. But it may not. Recently some have argued for naturalized versions of dualism (Gertler 2012) and panpsychism (Brogaard 2015). By distinguishing the aims of naturalism from those of physicalism, we may be able better to articulate what we want from a naturalized theory without presupposing the outcome.[31]

Notes

1 This is not to imply that the understanding of the naturalizing project from within each historical context was common. Rather, I mean to say that the proper contextual understanding of each philosopher yields a common thread that we can recognize as overlapping and forming historical precedents for later ways of thinking about the mind.

2 I say, "in principle if not in practice," since many of the natural causes are so complex that it is *practically* impossible to make a prediction if not *theoretically* impossible. Quantum mechanics is often mentioned in this context, raising the question of just how strong the intelligibility constraint ought to be. I don't have a fully formed answer to this, but if the natural sciences become as unpredictable as the fickle gods, then I am not sure any more what the project of naturalism will be. There does seem to be *some* condition of intelligibility required even in these cases, and interpretations of quantum theory seem to support this claim.

3 One historical model of this is the theory of Occasionalism, which explains all causal interactions in terms of fully consistent and unchanging divine activity. We can expect law-like regularity in causal interactions because God's activity is regular. See Adams (2013).

4 There are perhaps other ways to formulate the constraints of a naturalized theory, and indeed someone trying to articulate how naturalism is understood today would likely identify different constraints. However, I intend to identify constraints in a way that are sufficiently neutral to the theory that results from them. For example, I would not want to identify a constraint of intelligibility *in terms of common or universal natural laws*, since that is a modern concept and Aristotle would be rejected as providing naturalized theory from the outset.

5 These two constraints might create problems for a theory in which consciousness turns out to be a *basic* property of the mind. But intuitively this seems right. If consciousness turns out to be basic, then consciousness will be able to play a role in explaining *other* features of mentality, but it will not *itself* be explained. Someone might try to save naturalism here by positing it as a basic fact that consciousness is a property of the mind, in which case it satisfies the immanence constraint—there is no appeal to other things to explain the presence of consciousness besides the fundamental nature of the minds themselves. But this leaves open the question of intelligibility.

One prominent response of this sort is found in Descartes's reply to Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. When Elisabeth asks how mind and body interact, Descartes appeals to a primitive notion of mind-body

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union, which is not explicable in terms of any more fundamental notions. Many historians of philosophy have found this rather *un*intelligible. And, as we will see below, Descartes hits other obstacles of this kind when he discusses consciousness. For the exchange between Descartes and Elisabeth, see Princess Elisabeth and Descartes (2007: 61–73), Garber (1983), and Yandell (1997).

6 For more discussion of how naturalism is used in today's context, see Carruthers (2000), De Caro (2010), Dretske (1997), and Horst (2009). As I mentioned, my own characterization here differs in important respects from the positions defended in these texts since my goal is to find the *core* of naturalism that would allow us to make an informed survey of historical theories.

7 For an exposition of the Greek and Latin lexical history, see Lewis (1960).

8 The *locus classicus* for this description of phenomenal consciousness is Nagel (1974).

9 See also Wilkes (1984: 242):

> I would point out that the Greeks, who by the fifth century BC had a rich, flexible and sophisticated psychological vocabulary, managed quite splendidly without anything approximating to our notion of 'consciousness'…

10 On this passage and its connection with the theory of recollection in the *Meno*, see Brancacci (2011).

11 However, even here it is difficult to say just how *un*conscious these ideas are since the *Charmides*, a dialogue about the nature of temperance, claims that if temperance really resides in you then it "provides a sense of its presence" (159a). And so, while the theory of recollection might imply unconscious ideas, it might also merely imply *obscured* but conscious ideas.

12 See Plato's discussion of the Protagorean claim that "all things are in motion" in *Theaetetus* 152c–d, 156a and 181d–183c; see also his discussion of material vs. psychological causes in *Phaedo* 97c–99b.

13 Thomas Johansen has provided a careful argument for this view (Johansen 2005).

14 For another close reading of *De Anima* 3.2 that does not entail a kind of "post-Cartesian, post-Kantian" self-consciousness, see Kosman (1975).

15 For more on Aristotle's philosophy of mind, see Irwin (1991) and Shields (2007: ch. 7).

16 Peter A. Morton also makes this claim, describing Aristotle's theory as a *naturalized* theory, meaning that Aristotle "constructs a theory wherein the soul is an integral part of the natural order of material objects, plants, and animals" (Morton 2010: 37).

17 The Oxford English Dictionary lists some early uses of the word, "consciousness," the first being in 1605, although these earlier uses still retained the sense of "conscience." But later, in 1678 and 1690, Cudworth and Locke use the term "consciousness" to refer to a more purely psychological capacity (OED 2017).

18 For a fuller story of what was going on in the seventeenth century, see Jorgensen (2014).

19 "It should be noted in passing that I do not deal at all with sin, i.e., the error which is committed in pursuing good and evil, but only with the error that occurs in distinguishing truth from falsehood" (Descartes 1985: 2.11).

20 Scholars have argued that there are other forms of consciousness in Descartes, but if this most basic form of consciousness cannot be made intelligible, then other forms will have similar problems. For more on consciousness in Descartes, see Lähteenmäki (2007), Radner (1988), and Simmons (2012).

21 For more on Locke's innovative use of the concept of consciousness but also some of its limitations, see Weinberg (2016) and Jorgensen (2016).

22 The extent to which Leibniz allowed for *any* miracles is controversial, although he does claim that a non-natural theory requires "perpetual miracles" to fill in the gaps in explanation. This is a charge Leibniz leveled at Descartes, Malebranche, and Isaac Newton. And so, even if Leibniz would grant an isolated miracle, it would not be a part of the natural theory to allow for this given that it would be an event that has its source *outside* of the natures of finite things.

23 For arguments in favor of the higher-order reading, see Gennaro (1999), Kulstad (1991), and Simmons (2001). For discussion of the criticism from the principle of continuity and some possible ways around this for the higher-order interpreters, see Jorgensen (2009).

24 For recent work on this controversy, see Bolton (2011), Jorgensen (2011a), Jorgensen (2011b), and Simmons (2011).

25 One might ask what explains the intentionality of thought. For Leibniz this was explained in causal terms, by the internal causes of each individual mind. That is, each mind's present perceptual state causes subsequent perceptual states, which have a complex structure that present to the mind similar structures external to the mind.

26 For more discussion of this, see Brook (2016).

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27 See Kant (1997: B 414–415n), where Kant says that there are infinitely many degrees of consciousness down to its vanishing. But the way he characterizes consciousness suggests that the vanishing is simply a limit case of obscurity. Qtd. in Dyck (2011: 47).
28 Mediated by Christian Wolff and others. See Dyck (2011).
29 For illuminating discussions of Kant's theory of consciousness, see Dyck (2011) and Sturm and Wunderlich (2010).
30 For a sampling of the discussion of consciousness and unconscious thinking, see (Taylor and Shuttleworth 1998: Introduction and contents of Section II).
31 I would like to thank Rocco Gennaro and three of my students—Rachel Greene, Landon Miller, and Jonathan Stricker—for helpful comments on drafts of this essay.

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