

QUALIA OR NON EPISTEMIC PERCEPTION: D. DENNETT'S AND F. DRETSKE'S REPRESENTATIONAL THEORIES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract

Starting from a comparison between two representational theories of consciousness (Dennett 1991, *Consciousness Explained* and Dretske 1995, *Naturalizing the Mind*) this paper aims at highlighting certain consequences of an intention characteristic of this kind of theories, namely the intention to do away with the use of different explanatory principles for *qualia* and for representation. It is argued that, in case this can be done, a representational theory of consciousness should be anti-intellectualist (as Dretske's theory is) and not intellectualist (as Dennett's is). The importance of higher-order representational states (namely beliefs) in the explanation of consciousness is thus restricted to what appears to be the appropriate domain: introspective knowledge. Once the explanatory role of higher-order representations is restricted to introspection, the need to include a theory of what Dretske calls non epistemic perception in the theory of consciousness becomes apparent. There are, however, certain ontological problems that should be faced before such a theory can be put forward.

Key-words: Qualia; perception; Dennett; Dretske; representational theories; consciousness; introspection; intentionality; philosophy of mind.

1. Introduction

It is not uncommon, in the philosophy of mind, that intentionality (or content, or representation) and consciousness are dealt with separately. This means, of course, admitting that different kinds of explanation are in order for, on the one hand, propositional mental states (such as the belief that 3 is a prime number) and, on the other hand, mental states (or mental features) which are felt (such as the experience of green or that special qua-

lity, “*what-it’s-like-to-be-ness*”, for a certain creature). There are, however, some theories, the so called representational theories of consciousness, that presuppose a continuity of content and consciousness in their explanation of consciousness. According to these theories, which are developed namely by the two authors I will be speaking about today, D. Dretske¹ e D. Dennett², what we call consciousness simply *is* representation, a certain kind of representation. This means, to start with, that people like Dennett and Dretske (unlike for instance D. Chalmers³ or F. Jackson⁴) refuse to consider the so called phenomenal consciousness as an extra property of the world such as it is. The position of authors such as those mentioned, for whom the theory of consciousness is a theory of that extra property, phenomenal consciousness, depends on an argument for the existence of something ontologically new, something else in respect to a description of all physical fact regarding cognition⁵.

Not to accept the conclusion of any such argument is the first step towards a representational theory of consciousness. But what does it mean to argue that consciousness is a sort of representation? First, from an explanatory point of view, it means that one will try to do away with the putative difference between *what’s it’s like to be*, for a creature, and the occurrence of representations in its mental life.

¹ DRETSKE 1995.

² DENNETT 1991.

³ CHALMERS 1996. The notion of a *zombie*, a being that is phenomenally ‘off’, is almost always used to explore the idea of phenomenal consciousness as an extra property. According to D. Chalmers, the fact that *zombies* are *logically* but not naturally possible is revealing. Recognizing that this is the case is the first step towards conceiving the place of consciousness in our world, a problem that Chalmers investigates through the notion of (natural) *supervenience*. Cf. PINTO 1999.

⁴ JACKSON 1983, JACKSON 1997. The Knowledge Argument (whose central character is Mary, a neuroscientist who’s a specialist of colour) aims at establishing the failure of logical supervenience of phenomenal consciousness on physical facts. Thus, for F. Jackson *qualia* are epiphenomenal.

⁵ One possible argument is F. Jackson’s Knowledge Argument, mentioned in the above note, another is the famous bat case, explored by T. Nagel in NAGEL 1974. Other arguments use the notion of *zombie* and variations on *qualia*. For a general introduction to and description of this kind of theories of consciousness and arguments associated with them, cf. PINTO 1999. I assume here that no such argument is a knock-down argument. Another observation about the “conceptual geography” of theories of consciousness: representational theories of consciousness should be considered in contrast not only with dualisms such as those defended by D. Chalmers and F. Jackson, but also in contrast with positions such Searle’s (SEARLE 1992), according to which the mere fact that we consider something as mental already presupposes consciousness.

But it is easier to explain what one means when one speaks about explaining consciousness as representation if we take higher-order representational theories such as W. Lycan's⁶, D. Armstrong's⁷, D. Rosenthal's⁸ and D. Dennett's⁹ as an example, rather than first order representational theories such as Dretske's. Higher-order theories explain the fact that certain mental states of a cognitive system are conscious in virtue of the fact that other mental states of the same cognitive system have them as their object. The higher-order states can be either perceptions –that's what D. Armstrong and W. Lycan, for instance, propose –or beliefs– that's what D. Rosenthal e D. Dennett suggest¹⁰. Conscious creatures are those in which representations with such characteristics occur.

Although I have included Dennett in this list, his theory of consciousness isn't the first example coming to mind when higher-order representational theories are discussed. It isn't too hard to find out why it is so: Dennett's theory of consciousness consists *prima facie*, in a model, the Multiple Drafts Model, which I would call cognitive rather than specifically philosophical, plus an eliminative argument about *qualia*. Apparently, nothing substantive is said about the nature of consciousness. However, Dennett's contribution for the theory of consciousness is not that poor: what he has to offer is in fact a representational theory, or, to be more specific, a belief-like higher-order representational theory. What I want to do now is to compare Dennett's proposals about the nature of consciousness with Dretske's. The first thing to notice is that, in fact, in their theories of mind, Dennett and Dretske share important points –namely both are *teleofuncionalists* (according to teleofunctionalism we can account for the nature of representations by means of an appeal to functions of designed devices) and *externalists* (according to externalism the theory of mind does not have as its object the physical interior of cognitive systems but rather relations those vehicles stand in with what's external to them). However, they end up developing rather different theories of consciousness. This is why I think a comparison between them would be useful. In fact I think such a comparison will inevitably highlight the kind of decisions which are at stake the moment one decides to develop a representational theory of consciousness, particularly a representational theory which starts from the general positions

⁶ LYCAN 1997.

⁷ ARMSTRONG 1997.

⁸ ROSENTHAL 1997.

⁹ DENNETT 1991.

¹⁰ I will consider 'belief-like' and 'perception-like' second order representational theories of consciousness (corresponding to what is usually mentioned as HOT and HOP theories).

about the nature of mind that I have mentioned above. There's another reason which makes me want to contrast Dennett's and Dretske's positions on the nature of consciousness: I think Dennett's theory of consciousness fails in part because Dennett treats the problem of consciousness as if it were above all an epistemological problem. Now, unlike Dennett (and like Chalmers or Jackson) Dretske does not consider the problem of consciousness to be epistemological. It is the metaphysics of consciousness that interests Dretske, although he, exactly as Dennett does, works on a representationalist, continuist, theory of consciousness¹¹.

2. Representational facts

Before I move on, I will try to be more explicit about what I take to be a representational theory (of consciousness, or of mind in general). A representational theory is about *representational facts*. The expression 'Representational facts' refers to what is represented in representation. That means that representational facts are not facts about the vehicles of representation (for instance, about what goes on inside a creature's brain). Thus, the difference between mind and brain is the following: as Dretske would put it, mind is the representational aspect of the brain (that's is, by the way, the rationale for the division of labour between neuroscience and philosophy). Practically speaking, it means that it won't be by looking inside, considering the inner workings of cognitive systems (as a neuroscientist does) that we will ever understand the nature of mind and of mental facts. Why is that so? I will introduce a fetish example of Dretske's (an example of non mental and non human representational facts) to illustrate this point. Think about a fuel gauge in a car's dashboard. First, the material it is made of is quite indifferent when it comes to its representational function. What function is that? That for which the device was designed, in this case to represent the level of fuel in the fuel tank. Why is it that we say that is the device's function? This is where teleofunctionalism comes in: a function is that for which a device is designed, and that is not an internal or intrinsic property of that device but rather something which depends on the history of that kind of devices. There's more: the position of the pointer represents

¹¹ I use this expression to refer to the position from which I started: the fact that representational theories of consciousness assume a continuity between content and consciousness when explaining consciousness. In other words, it is assumed that consciousness is a kind of representation and that the principles involved in the theory of representation and in the theory of consciousness are the same.

not the pointer but rather something which is external to it, and to which it is connected in terms of covariation. Imagine now representational devices to which the same principles apply, plus circumstances in which no one told us what the "pointers" are for and there are no scales. That's approximately the situation the philosopher of mind finds himself in when he stands before the brain trying to conceive the nature of representation¹². One way to express what I have just said in the language used in the philosophy of mind is to say that representational facts do not supervene on a cognitive system's internal physical facts. That leads us to externalism: to understand conscious mind or the nature of the mental in general is not the same as understanding mechanisms or vehicles of the mental in the interior of cognitive systems about which we can speak in terms of causation¹³. In order to understand what such vehicles do, namely representing, we must consider the exterior of the system (more examples, again of non mental representations: it won't do just to consider the inner mechanism of a thermometer to know what it represents, or what is the nature of that which it represents, namely temperature. Representational facts are not facts about the vehicles of representations but rather facts about the relation between the occurrence of representational vehicles and the system's environment, what's exterior to it. So far Dretske and Dennett would agree¹⁴. My problem is to understand where the difference between them lies and to understand what that difference shows about the decisions involved in a representational theory of consciousness.

¹² This is, by the way, where an hypothesis such as Jerry Fodor's Language of Thought finds its place.

¹³ Externalism about mental content is the position according to which vehicles of representation are / occur in the interior of cognitive systems but that which makes them the kind of mental states that they are is not inside those systems. What 'gives' them intentional content, *aboutness*, are relations that stand between internal occurrences and what goes on / exists in the exterior. It should be noticed that externalism is not just a metaphysical stand on the nature of mental content, it is also a general conception of the nature of representation. If we consider, for instance, a piece of written text, such as this page, what makes it the case that A represents B are not intrinsic properties of A (such as for instance the ink used to print the words) but something about the purpose or function of A in an informational context. In order to grasp and conceive that function one has to consider relational facts.

¹⁴ This is in fact an exaggeration: Dennett and Dretske disagree when they discuss the nature of intentionality or representation, if what's at stake is "intrinsic intentionality" as opposed to "attributed intentionality", or the "instrumentalism" involved in attributing intentionality (cf. MIGUENS 2001). That is however a disagreement within common basic positions.

3. Dennett

I will start with Dennett. The Multiple Drafts Model he presents in *Consciousness Explained* is meant to explain the character of the phenomenological experience of cognitive systems such as ourselves in which on the physical level, the *hardware* level, there is parallel distributed processing of information and on the functional level there are competing agents, producing multiple drafts, that is, content-fixations Dennett refers to as *microtakings or microjudgements*. These two levels are subpersonal levels. At the subpersonal level Dennett's theory includes explanatory hypothesis about certain characteristics of our conscious experience, such as its unity, centrality, control and sense of present or presence. According to Dennett, those are virtual characteristics, depending on interfaces. It is based on such virtual unification, control and centrality that mental life appears to conscious beings such as ourselves and it is considering the epistemic status of the reports about their own mental life made by beings in which such devices are 'implemented' that Dennet discusses and 'quines' (that is, eliminates) *qualia*.

For Dennett, the term *qualia* names those intrinsic, ineffable, private, uncorrectibly known characteristics of our mental lives (or, to put it simply, the fact that there are such characteristics in our mental lives). From the moment one defines *qualia* thus (as epistemic properties, features of the knowledge a system has about its own mental states), when one defends, as Dennett does, that there are no qualia in our mental experience, what one means is that there could not be, in a subject's mental experience, something that is immediately known and ineffable, something that the subject does not explicitly "perceive" (i.e. something the subject does not believe he's aware of).

To take one of Dennett's examples: one of the cases in *Quining Qualia*¹⁵ is that of the coffee tasters Chase e Sanborn whose job consists in making sure that the flavour of the coffee they taste remains the same across time. They have both, however, lost the pleasure they used to feel when they tasted that coffee, which used to be their favourite above all others. One of them thinks that it happened because he became a much more sophisticated coffee taster, although that coffee's flavour remains identical, while the other thinks it has happened because his tasters have changed although the flavour of that initial coffee remains unaltered. Dennett's point is that none of them can intersubjectively establish which case is their case: if there

¹⁵ DENNETT 1988.

are no explicit beliefs, if the subjects are not explicitly aware of any difference, there simply are no differences (in the putative ineffable conscious experience). This is the *first person operationalism* associated with the elimination of *qualia*: differences that do not make a difference are not differences. In other words, when we are dealing with consciousness, with awareness of, there is no logic space between reaction and appreciation. What follows if we agree with such an eliminative conclusion? We admit that self-access in conscious systems such as ourselves is not epistemically incorrigible – but no one had denied that!, –and that self-access is a matter of beliefs and not of *qualia*.

As much as it is part of an epistemological criticism I think that the elimination of *qualia* is a relatively trivial conclusion. The eliminative conclusion does not in any way eliminate consciousness itself (nor has Dennett ever claimed such a thing) –it only questions certain assumptions about self-access, certain presumptions of ineffability, privacy and incorrigibility. Doing that, it reenacts what I would call a classical wittgensteinian position.

I will assume, then, that it is not consciousness that is eliminated with the *qualia* argument but rather an epistemological and intellectualist version of *qualia*, and keep to the fact that Dennett never says that the cognitive system (in which and for which he denies that there are *qualia*) is not conscious. In fact, the theory of consciousness is about those systems, among intentional systems (or representational systems) in general, which are conscious creatures. It is their consciousness that is explained through higher-order mental states, namely beliefs about first order cognitive states of the same system. This is where (after the sketch of a cognitive model and an epistemological criticism) a representational theory of consciousness steps in. According to this theory, there is consciousness in that system if and only if higher-order mental states, mental states which are about other mental states of the system, occur. These mental states are beliefs, not perceptions. Dennett adds a qualification that makes his theory a dispositionalist theory: first order cognitive states (for instance, an instant of visual perception in one of us) could bring about many beliefs. Now, these beliefs do not have to be explicit: in order to assure the possibility of conscious cognitive states it is sufficient that first order cognitive states are kept in the system's memory so that they are available to be the object of belief. There's something in this dispositionalism¹⁶ which I think is worth noticing: dispositionalism is supposedly an answer to an unrealistically excessive conception of the cognitive task involved in the self-monitoring of the cognitive

¹⁶ In contrast with David Rosenthal's theory of consciousness.

systems under consideration: those authors defending an inner-sense theory of consciousness would incur in that excess¹⁷. Let's look at the argument again: the reason for favouring disposicionalism seems to be cognitive, that is, what Dennett has in mind when he subscribes to this dispositionalism is the way he conceives of cognition at a subpersonal level. The replacement of explicit presence of mental states with availability in memory (so that those contents may be the object of beliefs) is connected with a cognitive principle that is important to Dennett, the 'Illusion of Immanence'¹⁸. According to this principle mental beings such as ourselves are not capable of distinguishing, by means of introspection alone in their own mental lives what has always been there, and been there explicitly and that which needs expliciting when self-exortation occurs (when I want to know what I think, namely by means of introspection). That is illuminating of the kind of move Dennett typically makes in his theory of consciousness: most of Dennett's suggestions are about how consciousness can exist in a certain system and not about what consciousness is. Standing up for dispositionalism, Dennett has in mind the inner functioning of systems, what happens to representational vehicles at a functional level, as it is usual in psychological models of cognition¹⁹. That's why I think there's an ambivalence here: when Dennett considers consciousness he might be thinking of self-monitoring (self-monitoring definitely is the key to understanding consciousness) as a subpersonal *self-scanning* mechanism, generating interfaces, or he might be thinking in terms of content or representation, namely when he proposes a belief-like higher-order theory of consciousness (a HOT theory). It is possible to do both, but one must not mix things up, especially when one subscribes to general externalist principles about the nature of representation.

Does Dretske do any better?

4. Dretske

I think he does, and without considering the problem of consciousness as being mainly a cognitive problem (a problem about subpersonal

¹⁷ That's the case with a perception-like second-order representational theory such as W. Lycan's.

¹⁸ The expression "Immanence Illusion" is Minsky's (cf. MINSKY 1985:155) and refers to an idea about the status of the present for the subject himself. It is important to notice that just as the elimination of *qualia* doesn't mean consciousness is denied of a certain creature, the same happens with the Immanence Illusion: it is not a denial of consciousness.

¹⁹ Cf. for instance Baars and M. Minsky.

mechanisms) or an epistemological problem (a problem about a creature's knowledge of its own mind). Dretske starts by putting the appeal to higher-order mental states in its proper place, as what an externalist theory of mind should affirm about that part of our mental life that is introspective knowledge. Now, this decision makes it clear that what's left behind by a teleofunctionalist, externalist, theory of mind that explains introspective consciousness by means of an appeal to a creature's beliefs about its own mental states is (in Dretske's terms) a theory of non epistemic perception. I think that the way Dretske deals with non epistemic perception and finds a place for it within a representational theory of consciousness must be compared with the way Dennett deals with *qualia*.

As is well known, Dretske theory of mind starts from information theory, a mathematical theory, a theory of information whose quantity is measured in bits, and which exists in several supports. Information theory is obviously not about mental phenomena and does not have to consider the question of content. But it is starting from it that Dretske wants to understand what is it that we're thinking of when we speak about content or representation. Dretske terms this content (or representation, or intentionality) semantical information and conceives it in terms of indication or correlation. This is the domain of representational facts which are, as I said before, facts about informational functions of designed devices, the vehicles of representation (for instance neural goings-on in a biological creature). Now, what Dretske sustains about semantical content is good not just for the intentional, belief-like, aspects of the mental, but also for the ones whose nature is harder to figure, i.e. *qualia*. According to Dretske conscious experience is also representation. In the case of *qualia* (consider for instance the sensation of green) as in the case of beliefs, understanding representation is not the same thing as understanding the vehicles of representation, not the same thing as looking inside the physical system (where nothing 'green' can be found). What's at stake is that which is represented, and what's represented is, according to Dretske, properties in the world. In a word, for an experience of blue to be conscious there won't have to be a perception of the creature's own cognitive states, or a belief about the creature's own cognitive states, but just the world.

The way Dretske deals with conscious states (in terms of informational functions of vehicles of representation) means above all that when he speaks about a system's conscious states (or in general about a system or a creature being *aware of*) he is not speaking about self-consciousness or introspection. If you show how a creature represents the world according to the principles of semantic information, you may admit that that creature is *aware of*

without having to identify it with the fact that “it is aware that it is aware”. Dretske defines *conscious states* in a rather *sui generis* way: that which makes an internal state conscious is the role it has in making the global system, the creature, conscious. An experience of *x* is conscious not because the creature, the global agent, is aware of an experience or aware that it is having it, but because given the fact that that state is a certain kind of representation, it (the state) makes the creature aware of *x* (an object, a property) that the state is a representation of. Experiences are conscious not because the creature is aware of them but because it is aware with them. Conscious states thus defined, unlike the creatures in which they occur, are not, obviously, aware of anything whatsoever. Conscious creatures are creatures in which such representations occur and that is obviously not a question of beliefs or explicit perceptions for the system / the creature. This is the position that makes the difference between Dretske’s first order theory and higher-order theories. We must remember that according to higher-order theories of the HOP type (higher-order perception) a mental state will be conscious if it comes to be the object, by means of the operation of an inner sense, of another mental state of the same system, this second order state being a perception. In HOT (higher-order thought, that is, belief-like second order theories) a mental state will be conscious if it comes to be the object of a belief. According to Dretske, however, declaring that a mental state is conscious because it is the object of a second order representation simply leaves the problem open. The first thing one has to know is how the first order state is represented. Representing it as a brain state, for instance, isn’t enough: if it was technologically possible for a creature to come to be perceptually aware of its own neural states that wouldn’t make them conscious. To put it in Dretske’s terms, such vehicles would have to be, represented as representations. According to Dretske, the main mistake of inner sense theories such as Lycan’s (i.e. HOP theories) is ignoring that the monitorization of content vehicles through the operations of an inner sense would never be enough for the existence of meta-representations, representations of representations as representations (an analogy: if we make a photocopy of a photograph we don’t get a representation of that photograph as a representation of *x*, only, for instance, a representation of the photograph as a dark rectangle).

On the other hand, the main objection Dretske poses to second order theories, which associate consciousness in general to the existence of beliefs about the creature’s own mental states, is the following: if a creature is conscious only if it has beliefs about its own mental states, attributing consciousness to small children and animals (the type of creatures that pose

a big problem to Dennett) becomes illegitimate. Dretske overcomes this difficulty by deciding that conceptual awareness, which is so important for Dennett, must have a different place in the theory of mind, a less intrusive place than that which Dennett gives it when he uses conceptual awareness to explain consciousness *tout court*: For Dretske, conceptual awareness is properly placed in the theory of introspection.

5. Introspection

Even if we accept externalism and develop an externalist theory of representation, introspection seems to resist. The situation where a subject knows what he thinks (for example "I think today is Friday") clearly seems to be a case of taking a look at some kind of interior. Besides that, introspection, as direct knowledge a mind has of itself, non inferential ability of being aware of one's own mental occurrences, is, in a way, the paradigm of what we call consciousness. But if we assume that mental facts, as representational facts, concern not inner vehicles but some kind of relations these stand to with what goes on in the interior, how would it be possible that taking a look inside we would know what we think? How is it possible to account for introspection (as opposed to a non mental representation, such as a fuel gauge or a picture) in an externalist theory of mind? To define representational facts within an externalist framework seems to endanger not just first person epistemic authority but conscious experience itself.

But what interior is that that we are thinking of when we consider introspection? Let's consider again the situation when someone knows what they're thinking (that today is Friday or that they're listening to someone speaking Portuguese). What is going on? We're not dealing with a process by means of which that person's interior is in some way observed: those mental facts we try to find out about by means of introspection are not "inside our heads", in the sense of skulls and brains. Introspective knowledge is knowledge of mental facts, not knowledge of neurophysiological facts. The sensation of green which we know we're having wouldn't be found inside the system nor would the thought "today is Friday" which we know that thinking. In our case, only a working living brain would be found, and neurophysiological, electrochemical processes going on. Now, that's not what introspection gives us (at least in my own case introspection gives me my mental life). And the same way we don't find that sensation of green or the thought that p inside the system we won't find introspective thoughts such as "I know that I think that p". The whole situation must be conceived in terms of content or representation.

Dretske has a suggestion to make: introspection is not some kind of perception of one's own mental states²⁰ but rather awareness of facts, knowing that, conceptually coming to know via indirect perception. Conceptually coming to know should be compared to the following situation: someone weighs himself and looking at the scale comes to know not only that there is a silver scale in front of his eyes but also a fact about himself, that he weighs x. Defending that introspection is knowledge of facts is admitting that the situation is more similar to coming to know, being informed, that we have some disease than to directly feeling that disease (unlike what an inner sense theory would lead us to think). Far from being the very paradigm of consciousness, introspection is just a case where a mind conceptually represents itself as representing, something obviously not all minds do (small children and animals don't)²¹.

The representational theory of consciousness Dretske puts forward thus involves an important difference between introspection and conscious states in general. Interestingly, what Dretske says about introspection comes very close to the way Dennett conceives what he generally calls consciousness. Restricting conceptual awareness to introspection, Dretske may admit that consciousness in general, what it is like for a creature to be aware of, does not have to be that explicit know-that Dennett thinks it must be. On the other hand, Dretske calls for something else in the theory of consciousness, some account of that kind of *awareness* that is in no way identifiable with the conceptual awareness that according to Dennett simply is the whole of consciousness. An example: let's think about a situation where a child, who cannot yet count, visually perceives, in succession, seven fingers and then eight fingers. The example is parallel to those Dennett evokes when he is speaking about *qualia* and wanting to do away with the "imaginary differences" involved (i.e. when he wants to conclude that differences that do not make a difference do not exist, and so that there are no *qualia*). The difference is that for Dretske differences in awareness, even if the subject is not aware of them, do exist: "the experience of eight objects and the experience of seven objects are different conscious experiences, not be-

²⁰ One of the arguments for that is the fact that introspection does not have its own phenomenology, besides the phenomenology of sensory modalities.

²¹ «The fact that experiences are identified and individuated by their relational properties (what they have the systemic function of indicating=what they represent-s) does not prevent the person in whom they occur from knowing what kind of experience he or she is having. You are in a better position than I to know what is going on in your mind – what sensations you are experiencing –even though what is going on in your mind is not in your head» (DRETSKE 1995: 124).

cause one is aware that they differ, but because these experiences make one aware of different things - eight objects in the one case seven in the other"²². Admitting non epistemic perception means that we accept that being aware of F does not necessarily involve being aware of F as an F (being aware of seven fingers or eight fingers isn't necessarily being aware of them as seven fingers and as eight fingers, visually perceiving an apple isn't necessarily perceiving the apple as an apple). It is perfectly possible that a creature is aware of something and not aware that it is aware (of anything) or aware of what exactly it is that it is aware of. The main argument for a first order representational theory of consciousness is this: if there can be conscious differences in the experience of a creature, differences the creature is not aware of, then it cannot be the creature's awareness of its own mental states that makes them conscious states. Not all awareness is knowing-that; this is what allows for the existence of differences in conscious states not explicitly conceived of by the global system, that is, the creature.

6. Conclusion

To sum up: I think that what comes out of the comparison between Dennett and Dretske is a point about the importance of conceptual awareness, awareness of facts, in the explanation of consciousness. Dennett's theory of *qualia* makes it plain that for him awareness of facts is what counts if we're going to get it straight about consciousness: for Dennett, consciousness is to be defined so as to make it impossible to conceive of such a thing as non epistemic consciousness. Therefore, Dennett is compelled to identify as consciousness only those cases when a cognitive system is disposed to state-that (that's why he quines *qualia* and worries about what to say about babies and animals –eventually deciding that they are not conscious).

But to think that consciousness has to be epistemic perception is the intellectualist bias of Dennett's theory. Why bias? Because if all consciousness is epistemic perception that which is known ('epistemically perceived') has to be known by a subject, a unified and self-conscious entity. Now, that is not what an externalist theory would lead us to think it is there first when we think of mind. What does someone like Dretske –who shares Dennett's externalism but considers Dennett's theory of *qualia*, his first person operationalism, as cartesian– propose_instead? Dretske must admit and try

²² DRETSKE 1995:116.

to explain the nature of what Dennett rejects as the “bizarre category of the objectively subjective”, that the subject could not declare or assert. And that Dretske calls non epistemic perception. Non epistemic perception will then be explained by means of the representational nature of conscious states, whereas fact awareness, epistemic awareness, will be restricted to a particular kind of consciousness: introspection. Only in introspection must there be self-consciousness, in the (restricted) sense of mental states which have other mental states as their objects. Even those are not experiences: it takes no more than beliefs to account for that kind of consciousness. Besides, when there is introspection, i.e. a situation in which there are creatures who know what they think, there definitely exists something that must be learned, something one year old children and animals are not in any way aware of, and in the case of animals will never be: the fact that they think. As Dretske would put it, that's exactly what is to be expected of an externalist theory of mind.

The argument by which Dretske restricts the scope of higher-order theories to introspection seems convincing. But one cannot help noticing that another problem comes up here, and I want to end by pointing it out. From the moment we accept the division of labour Dretske suggests, the next thing to do, in the theory of mind, is not a theory of the subject but a theory of ‘the world’, a theory of properties, so to speak²³. But if that is the task, just how far does the line of argument we've followed, a line of argument that has come to urge us to pass the theoretical task from a theory of mind to a theory of properties, has to commit us to ‘a ready made ontology’, to a view of the world as a world whose properties are what they are independently of the cognitive systems that represent them? That is not a decision to be taken lightly, especially because if that's what we are committed to we might have to consider again the precedence of a theory of content or representation in respect to a theory of consciousness (this is something all representational theories of mind are committed to) and also a fundamental element of Dennett's theory of *qualia* I haven't mentioned. This is the point: eliminating *qualia* isn't just eliminating epistemic evidence in self-awareness. It is also eliminating the *ready-made* character of the perceived world. In fact, what Dennett does best in is theory of content is to argue that, from the moment there is mind, things do not work

²³ “If, in accordance with the Representational Thesis, we think of all mental facts as representational facts, the quality of experience, how things seem to us at the sensory level, is constituted by the properties things are represented as having” (DRETSKE 1995: 1).

that way, in terms of ready made properties and realism. From the moment there is mind in the world what comes to be is the possibility of non alignment between awareness and the nature of that which is perceived. And that, I think, has to be taken into consideration by any theory of non epistemic perception²⁴.

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²⁴ MIGUENS 2001, Chapter 6 (Fisicalismo, conteúdo e consciência: da filosofia da mente à ontologia).

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