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My research is mainly in the philosophy of mind. My dissertation—*The Structure of Experience*—examines some foundational issues about how conscious experiences are structured. Alongside my dissertation, I also have a research project on issues at the intersection of consciousness, value, and technology.

My dissertation starts with a cryptic puzzle that I develop into a broad research program. The puzzle is from Thomas Nagel’s famous article, “What is it like to be a bat?”, where he speculates about the possibility of an “objective phenomenology,” or a way of characterizing conscious experiences that is objectively accessible. In other words, is there a way for even humans to understand what it is like to be a bat? Though it has been nearly half a century since Nagel’s article was published, nobody has developed the idea of objective phenomenology in depth.

In “Objective Phenomenology” [under review], the first paper of my dissertation, I argue that the key to developing an objective phenomenology lies in the structure of experience. My central thesis is that facts purely about the structure of experience are objective. For example, if we were to learn that the echolocation experiences of bats have three dimensions or variation (like our color experiences), or come in different magnitudes (like our pain experiences), or break down into parts just (like our visual experiences), then we gain a partial grasp of what it is like to be a bat. From this, I argue that investigating the structure of experience is a promising route for future progress in consciousness research.

However, that leaves us with a big question: what kinds of structure do conscious experiences actually have? There has been little consensus on basic questions about the structure of consciousness: Do experiences have parts? Which categories of consciousness are joint-carving? Can consciousness be modeled quantitatively? Could there be more structure to consciousness than what we can introspect? The methodology behind the rest of my dissertation is to systematically examine different kinds of structure and how they apply to consciousness.

In the second paper of my dissertation, “The Microstructure of Experience” [under review], I defend the view that conscious experiences can have microstructures, where the macrophenomenal properties we introspect are realized by non-introspectible

microphenomenal properties. I use empirical considerations (concerning pain, visual, and flavor experiences) to argue that introspection leaves open whether experiences have microstructures. In the third paper, “The Resolution of Experience” [in progress], I argue that consciousness has resolution structure, analogous to the pictorial resolution of images and screens. I show how resolution structure requires us to revise our best models of experience, how different theories about the metaphysics of perception deliver strikingly different views about the nature of resolution, and how resolution sheds light on issues such as the relationship between perception and imagination.

Beyond my dissertation, I am working on two more papers that examine further kinds of structure. In “Phenomenal Mereology” [in progress] I develop a framework for thinking about experiential parts and evaluate whether total experiences or experiential parts are more fundamental. In “Quantifying Consciousness” [in progress], I argue that phenomenal quantities, or features of experience that have quantitative structure (such as painfulness) play key roles in explaining phenomenal similarity, the acquisition of novel phenomenal concepts, the measurement of consciousness, and the discovery of psychophysical laws. In sum, my research currently consists of one paper developing the foundations for my project and four papers examining different structural features of consciousness. I anticipate continuing to develop this research arc in future work.

By mapping the structure of experience, my research also facilitates progress on other issues concerning consciousness. Suppose we are investigating the experiences of other creatures. An upshot of my work is that we are always in a position to grasp facts about how those creatures’ experiences are structured, no matter how alien those experiences might be. Or, suppose we are developing an account of how experiential properties map onto neural properties. Knowing how particular aspects of consciousness are structured would enable us to look for neural properties with matching structures. Or, suppose we are trying to design conscious artificial intelligence. Knowing which features of consciousness can vary independently of each other would enable us to predict which parameters could be tweaked.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Recently, my research has expanded into methodological issues about investigating consciousness. In “First-Person Technology” [under review] I discuss how technology, such as virtual reality devices, psychoactive drugs, or brain-machine interfaces, could enhance first-person investigation of consciousness. In “Introspective Error” [under review], I develop an account of the epistemology of experience by arguing for two contrasting claims about introspective error: first, that all introspective judgments are fallible, and second, that introspection is immune to errors of misleading evidence. These papers complement my core research by clarifying how first-person methods could be used to investigate the structure of consciousness.

Alongside my core research on the structure of consciousness, I also have a research project on consciousness and value. In “Is Consciousness Intrinsically Valuable?” (*Philosophical Studies*, 2018), I argue that consciousness has no intrinsic value by developing thought-experiments designed to compare the value of consciousness itself to the value of the specific phenomenal character of an experience. In “Value Experientialism” [in progress], I argue for value experientialism, or the view that conscious experiences are the source of all value. And in “Wireheading: A Philosophical Analysis” [in progress], I examine philosophical issues concerning *wireheading*, or altering a subject’s reward circuitry so that they constantly experience massive amounts of pleasure. In future work, I plan to continue to apply my theoretical research on consciousness and value to new issues arising from emerging technologies.

Although my research is centered on philosophical issues about consciousness, my research also involves issues outside that center. For example, my papers discussed above address topics such as intrinsic value, epistemic basing, fundamentality, and the nature of scientific artifacts. I have also applied empirical work to the philosophical issues I am interested, across fields such as neuroscience (e.g., pain asymbolia), psychophysics (e.g., color experience), and engineering (e.g., brain-machine interfaces). However, all my research remains unified by a central motivation: to advance our knowledge of consciousness.