

MIND

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Mind World: Essays in Phenomenology and Ontology, by David Woodruff Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xviii + 309. H/b £50.00, \$75.00, P/b £18.99, \$28.00.

Mind World is a book about consciousness and ontological categories. It takes up the classical themes of phenomenology (intentionality, subjectivity, qualia, self-awareness, embodiment, cultural embeddedness, etc.) and links them with the agenda of ontology (describing the basic structure of the world). Smith takes his inspiration as much from Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty as from Aristotle, Plato, Descartes, Whitehead, and Searle. He thereby continues a project started in two previous books to which he frequently refers: *Husserl and Intentionality* (together with R. McIntyre 1982) and *The Circle of Acquaintance* (1989). Although its goal is constructive, *Mind World* also contains some sharp criticism of the naturalist mainstream in contemporary philosophy of mind. Naturalism is unacceptable for Smith because of the ontological reductionism that comes with it. It cannot offer, therefore, what Smith is looking for, namely an account of 'the structure of consciousness, with all the properties we find in it through phenomenology' that also shows how consciousness 'finds its home in the complex structure of the world, with all the forms we find recounted in a systematic ontology' (p. x).

The book includes six previously published papers and two new ones, tied together by prolegomena, overviews, abstracts, an appendix, and intermediary surveys that help the reader along. Yet *Mind World* is still not easy reading. It offers a variety of stimulating ideas that surface at various places and in varying contexts. It is therefore often necessary to go back and forth within the

book to see how these ideas are fully developed. The ontological issues receive their full treatment only in the final two chapters. In my comments I will first briefly consider the underlying ontology and then focus on two important phenomenological questions with which Smith is concerned.

1. Three-facet ontology

Smith begins with a basic distinction among the *form*, the *appearance*, and the *substrate* of an act of consciousness. These three 'facets'—as he calls them—are taken to be categories that define the nature of any entity whatsoever (p. 17). Concerning the nature of acts of consciousness Smith says: 'We distinguish the intentionality of consciousness (its form); the way we experience consciousness (its appearance, including so-called qualia); and the physical, biological, and cultural basis of consciousness (its substrate)' (p. 10). This is a much-simplified explanation, however, since the form-appearance-substrate distinction is not a mould into which the features of intentionality, qualia, and physiology *cum* culture fit in. As Smith himself notes, one and the same feature may play several roles here. For instance, the act's intentionality is said to be 'part of its *form* but also of its appearance in reflection', the difference lying in the fact that—in so far as it belongs to the form of a mental act—its intentionality is experienced 'without retreating into a reflection' (p. 24). Hence the form of every conscious experience involves an inner awareness as well, a feature not yet mentioned in the above quote that belongs to the act's appearance as well. Things get still more complicated when Smith speaks of 'the form of inner awareness' (pp. 83ff.) and thereby applies the form-appearance-substrate distinction to one of the features that characterize a mental act, not just to the act as a whole.

Setting these complications aside, his view might be taken to contain the following claims:

- (1) Every act of consciousness has an intentional structure and involves an inner awareness of itself,
- (2) It has a phenomenal character (a 'what it is like' aspect), and
- (3) It is embedded in a physical, cultural and social context.

As it turns out, however, none of these claims are actually endorsed by Smith without qualification. With respect to the first claim, he leaves room for acts of consciousness whose form includes no inner awareness and perhaps no intentional structure at all (pp. 2, 110ff., 115). Claim two is first endorsed ('every conscious mental act has its phenomenal character' p. 100), but immediately qualified by the remark 'that a mental act could intimate itself reflexively without yet being phenomenal' (p. 100, cf. pp. 194 and 277). Finally, with respect to claim three, Smith acknowledges that there are forms of minimal consciousness that do not depend on a cultural or social embedding (pp. 112, 147).

In the end, then, the three-facet ontology may be less helpful than it first appears to be. It appears much simpler than it is and might therefore mislead

one to draw conclusions that—on second thought—turn out to be too strong. When the required qualifications have been made, it leaves us with a number of questions that may or may not have a good answer: for example, what is the form of acts of minimal consciousness that have no intentional structure? What is the appearance of unconscious mental acts? What fixes the relation between the phenomenal quality and the inner awareness of an experience: its form or its appearance? And how do we know whether there are mental acts that have a phenomenal quality, but lack an inner awareness: by considering its form, its appearance, or its substrate?

2. The realm of phenomenology

Smith echoes Brentano's conception of descriptive psychology when he assigns to phenomenology the task 'to describe, interpret, and analyze our own conscious experience, just as we experience it from our own first-person perspective' (p. xi). Yet, there is a difference worth noticing. According to Smith, phenomenology merely '*begins* in the description of conscious experience from our own point of view' (p. 16, my emphasis), but it is not confined to this task. In combination with ontology, it takes on board an explanatory agenda: 'The intentional-subjective form and appearance of consciousness must be 'explained' ... in a phenomenological ontology that observes the three-facets of consciousness' (p. 31).

This brings Smith into fundamental opposition to the naturalistic mainstream in contemporary philosophy of mind. Naturalists deny that the question 'What makes a mental state conscious?' (p. 77) can be answered by a phenomenological method, whereas this is exactly what Smith wants to prove. In his view, naturalists confuse causal role and phenomenological form: 'Our task, remember, is to analyze the form of inner awareness, the *phenomenological form* of the awareness that, by hypothesis, makes a mental state conscious, a form we *experience* in living through a conscious mental state' (p. 97).

The same point also underlies Smith's criticism of higher-order theories of consciousness. In order to escape the notorious regress problem these theories postulate *unconscious* higher-order mental states and hence face the question: 'How can an unconscious higher-order thought (HOT) make conscious a state it is about?' Smith takes this to be a hopeless move: 'If it is the HOT that makes that mental state conscious, then it ought to be somehow integrated into that consciousness. It ought to be a proper part of the given conscious state and so itself somehow conscious, something experienced in that mental state' (p. 96).

But what is the argument here? It looks like a *petitio* when Smith simply assumes that a mental state is made conscious by 'a form we experience in living through it' (p. 97). That is exactly what naturalists deny when they appeal to information processes or higher-order mental acts that are not conscious. However, it may turn out that the entire debate here is otiose as the question 'What makes a state conscious?' is ambiguous. Compare the question 'What makes a person a bachelor?' One can answer this question by pointing out the

features which are analytically contained in the concept: for example, the properties of being unmarried and being male; or one can do so by citing facts that might prevent somebody from getting married: for example his anxieties or his love for freedom and independence. Similarly, Smith can answer his question by pointing out the phenomenological form of an act of consciousness, while naturalists look for facts that explain why these features are realized. The features contained in the concept of consciousness must be accessible from the first-person perspective, as Smith claims, while naturalists can rightly claim that this is not true of the facts that explain why mental acts have those features. Since Smith acknowledges that informational processes that are inaccessible from the first person perspective play an important role in the substrate of consciousness, he might do the same for unconscious mental states, like higher order thoughts. And then no conflict would be left, or so it seems.

3. *The paradox of subjectivity*

One problem phenomenology confronts, as a purely descriptive discipline, is the paradox of subjectivity. Smith takes this to be the 'really hard problem' of consciousness (p. 80): 'How can I be both subject and object of consciousness, both a conscious subject and an object in nature' (p. 15).

The problem here is actually twofold. We need to understand the peculiar nature of inner awareness, and we need to fit it into our general ontology. In tackling the latter problem Smith proposes a view that he calls 'unionism' (pp. 177ff; cf. p. 15). Following Husserl's theory of essences, he distinguishes various material and formal categories and claims that these categories—by cutting across each other—provide a unifying bond: 'The world is unified by the systematic ways in which formal categories interweave and govern material categories' (p. 177).

Unionism seems at first to be quite similar to what non-reductive physicalists propose: the world is divided into layers connected by specific inter-level relations that are spelled out in terms of supervenience or ontological dependence (cf. pp. 33, 163). But Smith's unionism differs from other multi-level ontologies in two ways. It derives the unity of the world not *merely* from relations like supervenience ('dependence alone does not place mind in the world' p. 191), and it admits a possibility that runs counter to the very idea of non-reductive physicalism, namely that the relevant dependence-relations may hold both ways. Thus, not only may consciousness depend on culture and vice versa, but the non-mental realm may depend on consciousness as well (p. 163). This should prevent us, I think, from classifying Husserl's view—and Smith's unionism as well—as a form of naturalism even in the widest sense of this term (cf. 201ff.).

What makes the problem of subjectivity really hard, however, is its seemingly paradoxical character. It takes some effort to appreciate this paradox. Suppose that I remember the experiences I had yesterday after drinking a few glasses of Californian wine. In this case I am simultaneously a subject that

remembers my experiences, and an object of my own thoughts. There is nothing puzzling about having such reflexive thoughts and thereby occupying the double role of subject and object. In order to confront the paradox of subjectivity, we need to consider my mental situation when I am enjoying the wine *without* reflecting on this experience. Husserl and Smith claim that even then an inner awareness is present, and *that* poses a problem: how can I be both subject and object in a *pre-reflective* act of consciousness? In response to this problem Smith offers his 'modal analysis of inner awareness' (p. 98, cf. pp. 50f). According to it the experience I have in drinking the wine—despite being a non-reflective first-order mental event—has a complex structure like this: 'Phenomenally, in this very experience, I am now feeling dizzy'.

A natural way to understand this proposal would seem to be that experiences implicitly involve an act of self-ascription. But this is not how it is meant, as Smith emphasizes: 'The character 'phenomenally' modifies the form of the whole mental act. And within the scope of that character, the form 'in this very experience' ... reflexively indicates or intimates the act itself. But nowhere in this structure is there the form of separately observing or judging that the act is occurring, or that I am in that mental state' (p. 100).

The subtleties of this view are further discussed in chapter two, where Smith tries to show that one can accept the Cartesian cogito as an 'experientially certain' judgement without committing oneself to a doctrine of infallibility (cf. pp. 53ff.). Further illumination is needed here however. Smith argues that his modal analysis differs both from Brentano's theory of inner perception and from the accounts of inner awareness offered by Dretske (pp. 83–101). But the differences are hard to pin down, and there are other recent proposals by Keith Hossack, Uriah Kriegel, Robert W. Lurz, and Dan Zahavi that seem to come even closer to what Smith has in mind here. Taking their views into account should prove helpful in further developing the modal analysis of inner awareness.

University of Salzburg
 Franziskanergasse 1
 A-5020 Salzburg
 Austria
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JOHANNES L. BRANDL