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Continuing Commentary

Commentary on **Ned Block (1995). On a confusion about a function of consciousness. BBS 18:227–287.**

Abstract of the original article: Consciousness is a mongrel concept: there are a number of very different "consciousnesses." Phenomenal consciousness is experience; the phenomenally conscious aspect of a state is what it is like to be in that state. The mark of access-consciousness, by contrast, is availability for use in reasoning and rationally guiding speech and action. These concepts are often partly or totally conflated, with bad results. This target article uses as an example a form of reasoning about a function of "consciousness" based on the phenomenon of blindsight. Some information about stimuli in the blind field is represented in the brains of blindsight patients, as shown by their correct "guesses." They cannot harness this information in the service of action, however, and this is said to show that a function of phenomenal consciousness is somehow to enable information represented in the brain to guide action. But stimuli in the blind field are *both* access-unconscious and phenomenally unconscious. The fallacy is: an obvious function of the machinery of access-consciousness is illicitly transferred to phenomenal consciousness.

Consciousness as a social construction

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Abstract: If the explanatory gap between phenomenal consciousness ("p-consciousness") and the brain cannot be closed by current naturalistic theories of mind, one might instead try to *dis*solve the explanatory gap problem. We hold that such a dissolution can start from the notion of consciousness as a social construction. In his target article, however, Block (1995) argues that the thesis that consciousness is a social construction is trivially false if it is construed to be about phenomenal consciousness. He ridicules the idea that the occurrence of p-consciousness requires that the subject of p-consciousness already have the concept of p-consciousness. This idea is not as ridiculous as Block supposes. To see this, one must accept that in a unique sense, p-consciousness *is* what we as the subjects of consciousness *take it* to be. Furthermore, the notion of consciousness as a social construction does not depend on the view that the concept of consciousness somehow precedes the occurrence of consciousness as such. In sum, consciousness can plausibly be seen as a social construction, and this view can promote a dissolution of the explanatory gap problem.

Like many other analytic philosophers, Block (1995t) is concerned with the notorious "explanatory gap" (Levine 1983) between consciousness and the brain. He states pessimistically that current naturalistic theories are unable to explain the qualitative nature of consciousness as a feature of the brain (Block 1995t, p. 231). In what follows, we will not argue against this pessimistic statement as such; we will look instead for an alternative path to *dis*solve the explanatory gap problem in the face of the putative failure of current naturalistic theories. This alternative path proceeds from the notion of consciousness as a social construction, a notion that Block ridicules in his target article, construing his argument as a critique of Dennett's (1986 and 1991) claim that "consciousness is a social construction" (p. 238). Block picks out two points from Dennett's book, namely, (1) the assumption that consciousness as the "software" that operates on the cerebral hardware is nothing but a complex of memes (while memes are understood as the cultural analogs of genes), and (2) the idea that "you can't have consciousness without having the concept of consciousness" (Block 1995, p. 238). He proceeds:

> The idea would be that perhaps there was a time when people genetically like us ate, drank, and had sex, but there was nothing it was like for them to do these things. Furthermore, each of us would have been like that if not for specific concepts we acquired from our culture in growing up. Ridiculous! Of course, culture *affects* p-consciousness; the wondrous experience of drinking a great wine takes training to develop. But culture affects feet too; people who have spent their lives going barefoot in the Himalayas have feet that differ from those of people who have worn tight shoes 18 hours a day. We mustn't confuse the idea that culture *influences* consciousness with the idea that it (largely) creates it (Block 1995).

In this paragraph, Block seems to hold that one can only come to the "ridiculous" idea that consciousness is a social construction if one confuses the real capacity of culture to *affect* consciousness with its (trivially nonexistent) power to *create* it. But he does not provide an independent argument against the idea of consciousness as a social construction; he just appeals to the *intuition* that this idea is "trivially false" (Block 1995, p. 239) if construed as a thesis about p-consciousness. We agree that this idea is prima facie counterintuitive, but we nevertheless think that it can be made plausible. To demonstrate this, the above paragraph must be analyzed point by point.

ad 1. Block holds that if we follow the idea he ascribes to Dennett (1986 and 1991), namely, that consciousness as a product of cultural evolution is the software that runs on genetically determined hardware, we would have to concede that earlier "people genetically like us" might have lacked p-consciousness. But genetic identity cannot be the crucial point in the discussion on the possibility of a socially created p-consciousness. This is because genetically identical humans can differ in their functional cerebral organization (though their brains will surely share more common features than the brains of two randomly paired humans) to the same degree as two genetically identical twins can, especially when they have grown up separately in different environments. Whether this difference in functional organization is sufficient to explain the presence of p-consciousness in the one and the absence of p-consciousness in the other human is an empirical question, though one that could not be answered on the basis of current knowledge of the brain's functional architecture. Furthermore, even if this empirical question had to be answered in the way Block seems to expect, this would not rule out the possi-

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bility of a socially constructed consciousness as such. For one might hold (perhaps contrary to Jaynes [1976] and Dennett) that the social "construction" of p-consciousness happened in an archaic society of (pre-)humans who were not genetically identical to us. Block's first point can only be used to appeal to a quite weak intuition, for example, "Don't you think it's implausible to think that earlier people quite similar to us could have lacked p-consciousness completely?" But even if this thought is prima facie counterintuitive, it surely isn't "ridiculous" or even demonstrated to be empirically false.

ad 2. Block then confronts us with the idea that (according to the view ascribed to Dennett) each of us would lack p-consciousness "if not for specific *concepts* we acquired" (see above, our emphasis). But although Dennett (1986, p. 152) indeed claimed that "you can't have consciousness until you have the concept of consciousness," Block's way of making the point is at least misleading. For we would not just have to imagine ourselves *minus* some of our concepts; it is rather that according to Dennett's view, without these concepts (or better: without our cultural history) we simply *wouldn't be* ourselves (that is, the kinds of human beings we now are). And this is precisely what is at stake: whether or not a certain cultural history (and with it the acquisition of certain concepts) can account for the development and existence of a phenomenon like p-consciousness. This question cannot be settled by thought experiments in which "we" are artifically separated from a concept we acquired culturally. To answer this question, we must do more than just appeal to an artificially invoked intuition. As Rorty (1993) has put it, we have to decide whether the property of being p-conscious is an intrinsic or relational property. Rorty gives an epistemological definition of intrinsic properties as "properties which we know things to have, independently of our knowledge of how to describe those things" (Rorty 1993, p. 187) in contrast to relational properties that are dependent on that knowledge. Rorty prefers this definition to a metaphysical one like "property whose presence is necessary for the object being the object it is" because he thinks that holists like Dennett and himself can only accept an epistemological definition that construes identity as "identity under a description." But as we shall see, in the case of p-conscious states, we can well consider both the epistemological and the metaphysical definition without committing ourselves to non-holism.

So, the epistemological quesetion is whether phenomenality is a property we know p-conscious states to have independently of our knowledge to describe p-consciousness, while the metaphysical question would be whether phenomenality is necessary for a p-conscious state to be the state it is. In our view, the metaphysical question is easily answered positively: since phenomenality is what *makes* a p-conscious state p-conscious, this property is metaphysically intrinsic (whatever the p-conscious state "is," metaphysically). This is trivially true, but the crucial question (let's call it the "third question") is one that separates intrinsicality (in the traditional sense) from the metaphysical: given that phenomenality is a feature whose presence is necessary for a p-conscious state to be (in whatever sense) the state it is, is phenomenality a property a p-conscious state has independent of our description/concept of that state? In the context of the problem of consciousness as a social construction, we can even replace Rorty's epistemological question by this third question since the difference between the epistemological and the metaphysical becomes irrelevant in this context: The difference between phenomenality *just being* a description-independent property of p-conscious states and *our knowledge* of its being that sort of property plays no role in our argument for the description-dependence of phenomenality. All we wish to argue for is that phenomenality is description-dependent (if you wish to assume further that it is what it is because of our knowledge of it, then so be it).

Rorty holds that although he himself is convinced by (his interpretation of) the well-known Sellarsian arguments for linguistic nominalism, the issue of intrinsicality versus relationality cannot be solved on philosophical grounds alone, because it requires a metaphilosophical decision to prefer one of two possible explanatory frameworks. In our view, however, there is at least one internal philosophical argument for relationality.

To introduce this argument, we must first consider whether it is certain sorts of entities for which it holds that we cannot have them without having the concept of them. For this, take an example from Dennett (1986, p. 152): you can only have morality if you already have the concept of morality. Since animals don't possess the concepts of right and wrong, morality simply isn't part of their world; they don't do anything right or wrong in their world. It is not before the "conceptual environment" of right and wrong has come into existence that the phenomenon of morality exists at all. Morality (not just the *concept* of morality) is a social construction. The same holds, so Dennett (1986) claims, for consciousness which was created in the context of a culturally evolving conceptual scheme. Dennett mentions Jaynes's (1976) controversial approach to the origin of consciousness as one possible way of telling this evolutionary story. Now there are certainly some entities for which it is true that you can't have them without having the concept of them – and there are others for which it is not true. Entities for which the primacy of the conceptual does hold are abstract entities that are only realized in a community of intelligent beings, for example, freedom, morality, or responsibility. And entities for which the primacy of the conceptual does not hold are concrete states of the natural world such as physical dysfunctions of organisms (e.g., having cancer or elevated blood pressure). You can't have responsibility before you have the concept of responsibility, but you can have cancer before you have the concept of cancer.

As to p-consciousness, we are at pains to answer the question of what sort of *entity* it is. As a preliminary categorization, one would presumably say that p-conscious states are a subclass of mental states, namely, those that have some experiential character for the beings that harbor them. Their phenomenality, their like-to-beness, their seemingness for the subjects that harbor them is simply all there is to them (at least as far as their phenomenality as such is concerned; of course, p-conscious states can be mongrel states with additional features different from the purely phenomenal ones). If this is so, then phenomenality may be relational – that is, dependent on descriptions – because its *being* is uniquely identical with its *seeming* for the subject of p-conscious states in the above mentioned sense. For tokens of phenomenality are elements of the same total cognitive system (namely, the human mind) that is also the subject of intuitions and judgments about phenomenality. Nor is there any reason to assume that the mind is strictly modular in the sense that "higher" cognitive states such as beliefs could not reach down to the "lower" raw-feels-sections of the mind where phenomenality looms large (think of the cognitive modulation of pain, among many examples).

So, if how some mental entity "seems" to the total subject of mental entities depends on how this subject *takes* that mental entity, then it may well be that phenomenality, with its unique identity of being and seeming, just *is* a certain way of taking certain mental entities, and that it *comes into existence* as a way some mental entities are taken by the mind as a whole. What something is being taken as, however, depends – at least to some degree – on language, social interaction, history, and so on; in sum, it depends on culture. Note that for p-consciousness to be a social construction in this sense, it is not required that the acquaintance of an elaborated *concept of p-consciousness itself* precede the occurrence of p-conscious states: What is required is that *some totality of cultural conditions* (among which there will of course be certain concepts) precede the occurrence of p-consciousness. This is what Jaynes (1976) had in mind when he presented his theory of the historical evolution of consciousness. His theory can be taken as an illustrative example of how the thesis of consciousness as a social construction can be elaborated, taking into account historical, social, conceptual, political, and other issues. It is not required that to harbor p-conscious states, a person be able to define, analyze, and discuss the "concept of p-consciousness" at length. Hence, for us the idea that Block (1995, p. 238) ridicules – namely,

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the idea that we would have lacked like-to-be-ness "if not for specific concepts we acquired" – has to be taken seriously.

ad 3. Block (1995) then seems to provide an argument to support his ridiculousness claim: he wonders that the misguided concept of consciousness as a social construction could trace back to a confusion of "the idea that culture influences consciousness with the idea that it (largely) creates it." It is important to discuss this idea because it might also inspire an objection to the same-subject-argument for relationality we described above. For one might argue: that although it may be true that beliefs and other cognitive states quite directly influence the phenomenality of p-conscious states as states of the same total cognitive system, this does not show that the cognitive influence is powerful enough to literally *create* p-consciousness. As Block (1995, p. 283) remarks with respect to his Himalaya people example: "Culture affects feet . . . but culture does not *create* feet." This analogy can be used to demonstrate that in his argument against consciousness as a social construction, the distinction between affecting and creating is of little help. To use a more neutral language, we have to look at systems and their elements or properties (the organism as a system, the foot as an element of the system, etc.). When an element of a system is already present, cultural influence can only affect it (when there already are feet and consciousness, culture can only modify them). But whether there is affecting or creating also depends on what is defined as a system and its elements. If you define a foot as a system of its own, you can say that culture *creates* horny skin (in the Himalaya) as a new element of the foot-system instead of saying that culture affects the foot (as an element of the organism-system) when it leads to horny skin. If you see the mind as a system of its own, you can say the culture creates consciousness as a new element of the mind-system instead of saying that culture just affects the mind, and so on.

The point is that when you change perspective this way, the difference between affecting and creating becomes a matter of degree. Block's example is suggestive because it considers a situation where feet (consciousness) are already there and thus can only be "affected" by culture. But if culture can create new elements of given systems, then of course culture might have created feet (consciousness) as new elements of the organism system at a time where there were no elements like feet (consciousness). Why should culture not have created human feet out of the pre-feet of pre-humans who lived in trees? This is neither incoherent nor "ridiculous," and in principle, the same holds for consciousness. Indeed, the idea of a cultural construction is much more plausible for more recent evolutionary developments such as consciousness than it is for more basic developments such as feet, since in the course of evolution, cultural features have become more and more influential.

To return to our earlier same-subject-argument, we can now say that it is quite conceivable that p-consciousness as a new element of the mind-system was once created out of earlier culturally influenced elements of the human mind. What else should have created a new element of the mind-system, if not the system itself, interacting with and responding to the demands of its natural and cultural environment? Phenomenality is just the way the mind-system has come to take some of its own states. That the development of this taking is mainly due to cultural factors has not yet been shown, but this idea is at least by no means incoherent or "ridiculous."

Why is it so important to stress the possibility of consciousness as a social construction? In Block's target article, the critique of Dennett (1991 and 1986) is just one of a series of examples of how the concepts of a-consciousness and p-consciousness have been conflated. But the question of consciousness as a social construction is much more significant, since it may lead to an alternative path to the *dissolution* of the explanatory gap if current naturalistic theories of mind turn out to fail with regard to the *solution* of that problem. Although space is limited in a commentary like this, we want to sketch that possible dissolution. In fact, it is not one path but at least two: (1) If we accept that consciousness is a social construction, that it changes "under descriptions" (as Rorty said), then p-conscious states no longer appear as stable elements of our mental lives and thus as mental subentities with a constant constitution at all. Instead, p-conscious states are rather ephemeral phenomena dependent on cultural, historical, evolutionary, etc., preconditions – and they may change with any modification of those preconditions. If this is so, we may simply lose interest in (the explanation of) these phenomena, realizing that we have just been dazzled by the subjective impressiveness of phenomenality. It may no longer be desirable to struggle for a solution of the explanatory problem at all (see Kurthen 1995 for a detailed discussion). This change of attitude is something that Dennett (1991) also strongly recommends, perhaps even more than the sheer "quining" of qualia. (2) If culture created consciousness in the past, it may just as well make it disappear again in the future. As a result of cultural influence, the mind as a system has come to take some of its substates as "phenomenal," and due to further cultural influence, the mind may come to take these substates as something else. To take Jaynes's approach as an example, the voices of our gods have turned into our own phenomenal states. Why should these states not again turn into something different, something with characteristics other than phenomenality? One could speculate as follows: the "pre-conscious" states of the *Iliade* heroes mainly had the character of auditory *input* from outside the individual, a character that leaves the individual in a rather heteronomous state. Our current conscious states have the character of a somewhat self-generated *inner experience.* Why should the respective states of our descendants not have the character of an active *output* to their natural and social world, thus illustrating man's development towards autonomy? Phenomenality would then appear as an intermediate stage between heteronomy and autonomy.

Although this is highly speculative, such speculation is required in order to become familiar with the prima facie counterintuitive claim that p-consciousness has not only been created by culture, but it could fade away due to further cultural development. Anyway, if the phenomenal aspects of our mental states disappeared, then the explanatory gap would also vanish, and one would instead have to look for a naturalistic theory of our active cognitive output-states and processes. You may call this approach "eliminative," but note that we do not hold that p-consciousness does not exist; we just think that if it is coherent to claim that consciousness is a social construction, it must also be coherent to imagine the cultural deconstruction of consciousness.

Author's Response

Ridiculing social constructivism about phenomenal consciousness

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Abstract: Money is a cultural construction, leukemia is not. In which category does phenomenal consciousness fit? The issue is clarified by a distinction between what cultural phenomena causally influence and what culture constitutes. Culture affects phenomenal consciousness but it is ridiculous to suppose that culture constitutes it, even in part.

Kurthen, Grunwald & Elger often speak as if the issue between us is whether it is *coherent* to claim that phenom-

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enal consciousness is a cultural construction. For example, their commentary closes with: "we do not hold that p-consciousness does not exist; we just think that if it is coherent to claim that consciousness is a social construction, it must also be coherent to imagine the cultural deconstruction of consciousness." But I never said the cultural construction view was incoherent. It is as coherent as the view that human phenomenal consciousness depends on the proximity of beetles or that peanuts are surreptitious Martian spies. (This is not intended as hyperbole.) Like these theses, the view that phenomenal consciousness is a cultural construction is *coherent* but *ridiculous.* So even if Kurthen et al. are right (that coherence of the social construction doctrine implies coherence of the possibility that p-consciousness can be deconstructed), there is no more need to examine this claim than the claim that if peanuts are Martian spies, then one should eat as many peanuts as possible.

Another preliminary remark: I ridicule the claim that *phenomenal* consciousness is a cultural construction, but I do not ridicule Dennett's and Jaynes's view that consciousness, simpliciter, is a cultural construction. Dennett rejects a distinction between phenomenal consciousness and what I have called cognitive forms of consciousness such as access-consciousness, reflective consciousness, and self-reflective consciousness. (A state is access-conscious if it is poised for global control; a state is reflectively conscious if it is accompanied by another state that is about it; and a state, for example, a pain, is self-reflectively conscious if it promotes an accompanying thought to the effect that I, myself, have that pain.) But Kurthen et al. do not object to my separating out phenomenal consciousness from other forms of consciousness. Indeed, they regard phenomenality as an essential or intrinsic property of any p-conscious state, a property without which the state would not be the state it is. It is their concession that there is such a thing as phenomenal consciousness that puts Kurthen et al. on unstable ground and makes their view ridiculous.

Leukemia is not a social construction or creation – and Kurthen et al. would agree. By contrast, love, marriage, money, property, and chess are plausibly social constructions, at least in part. What's the difference? Money is, but leukemia is not, wholly or partly constituted by social norms, principles, practices, myths, institutions, and so on. Leukemia is, of course, affected by cultural factors. The medical community has amassed much evidence that temperament and attitudes (which are influenced by cultural practices) affect the course of many forms of cancer. And cultural phenomena – war, weapons testing, etc. – have produced cases of leukemia. Cultural phenomena produce cancers including leukemia and affect their course, but they do not even in part constitute leukemia.

This distinction between what culture affects or produces and what it creates – in the sense of constitutes – is viewed by Kurthen et al. with suspicion. They seem to think that if culture modulates something, then it must create some component of it. I noted in the target article (Block 1995a) that culture affects feet without creating them. Kurthen et al. say that culture affects feet by, for example, creating horny skin. One could note by way of an initial response that if I affect the growth of a plant either by depriving it of water or by watering it well, I don't thereby produce any component of it, no part of a leaf or stem. But this is an unimportant flaw in their argument compared to what comes next. They conclude that the difference between affecting and creating is a matter of degree. But they have lost sight of what it means for something to be a cultural creation. A cultural creation is *constituted* by something cultural, not just *produced* by it. Horny skin is like leukemia, not like money; it is not constituted by anything cultural. (Do not be misled by the fact that the concept of horny skin (like the concept of leukemia) is a cultural construction and that there can be cultures that do not have that concept. The *fact* picked out by that concept is culture-independent, and could have existed even if the concept had never been produced. (So animals might have had horny skin even if there had never been people.) The distinction between what culture affects and what culture creates sounds to the unwary like a difference in degree, a difference in *how much* of an effect culture has. But note that cultural phenomena can produce leukemia even though culture is not even part of what constitutes leukemia. All money is alike in that what makes something money is cultural. But the effect of culture on some kinds of money is stronger than others. Sea shells are not much changed from what is found in nature – at least compared with the tree pulp and pigment that constitute dollar bills. So degrees of cultural effect have nothing to do with cultural creation in the sense relevant here (namely cultural constitution).

What is cultural constitution? Searle's 1995 book on the topic argues persuasively that the core of a culturally constituted fact is "collective intentionality" involving, most importantly, a collective agreement (albeit usually tacit) that a certain item has a certain function. The fact that you can buy things with dollars is constituted by a network of functions tacitly agreed to by all members of the relevant community. Collective intentionality underlies facts about money, but not the existence of leukemia. My leukemia is not constituted partly by the activities of other people (though those activities might have produced it or affect it). If people had never existed, there never would have been any money, even if particles from the swamp had by chance come together to form an exact molecular duplicate of a dollar bill. By contrast, if people had never existed, animals would still have died of leukemia. No doubt, people had leukemia before anyone had any concept of it.

So let's finally ask the question: Which category does p-consciousness fit in? With leukemia or with money? Is my pain partly constituted by facts about you (as with money)? Does my pain depend on a tacit agreement that something has a certain function? Could animals have had pain even if no humans had ever existed? I ask these questions rhetorically. They answer themselves. Of course the pain of one person does not depend on tacit agreements involving other people that something has a certain function. (Though I hasten to add that such agreements could affect pain.) Of course animals had pain before there were any people. There were chimp-like creatures before there were people. Does anyone really doubt that they had pains, just as chimps do today? Does anyone doubt that children who are deaf and blind and hence have difficulty absorbing the culture have p-conscious pains and sensations of touch? Helen Keller recalled her p-conscious sensations after she had absorbed the culture. Were her p-conscious states as a child constituted by the rest of us? That would have to be the view of those who think that p-consciousness is a cultural construction. Since *she* hadn't absorbed the culture, if her p-conscious states are constituted by culture, they have to reside in the rest of us.

My argument in the target paper was that once one makes the distinction between p-consciousness and various forms of cognitive consciousness, it becomes obvious that p-consciousness is not a cultural construction. By contrast, perhaps some types of self-consciousness are. To take a very extreme case, consider thinking of oneself as the president. A case can be made that no one could think of himself as a president without a cultural milieu that includes a president-like office. Having the concept of a presidency, as with the concept of money, may require a cultural surround. A molecular duplicate of one of us who arises by chance in a culture that has no such institutions or their precursors may not have the requisite concepts. This fact points up the contrast between this sophisticated form of self-consciousness and p-consciousness.

I turn now to Kurthen et al.'s positive argument that consciousness is a cultural construction. They start from a point with which I completely agree, that for p-consciousness there is no appearance/reality distinction. What it *is* like to have a p-conscious state is the same as what it seems like. Being = seeming. Their next step is the claim that as a matter of fact, there are "top-down" influences on sensation. What you believe or expect influences how you sense. Though I have questions about this empirical premise, I will go along with it for the sake of pinpointing the logical flaw in their argument. From these two premises, they draw the following conclusion: "So, if how some mental entity 'seems' to the total subject of mental entities depends on how this subject takes that mental entity, then it may well be that phenomenality, with its unique identity of being and seeming, just *is* a certain way of taking certain mental entities." The final step is that how one takes things is determined by culture. In other words, phenomenality is taking and taking is determined by culture, so phenomenality is determined by culture.

There are two very serious errors here. One error has already been explained. Even if taking is determined by culture – in the sense of produced by culture – it does not follow that it is constituted by culture or cultural facts. The social construction of consciousness is a matter of constitution, not production or creation in any causal sense. But there is another error that is more insidious, an equivocation on the word "taking." "Taking" has both a phenomenal and a cognitive sense. In the cognitive sense, how you take an experience is a matter of your beliefs, intentions, expectations and the like about it. In this sense, to take an experience as a pain is, for example, to believe that it is a pain. In the phenomenal sense, how you take an experience is just what it is like for you to have it. It is the phenomenal sense in which an experience is what you take it to be. There is no difference between appearance and reality for experiences (or rather their phenomenal component) because what it is = what it's like and how you take$_{\text{phenomenal}}$ it also = what it's like. Seeming = taking$_{\text{phenomenal}}$. But in the cognitive sense, there is a great chasm – though not one that is always easy to see – between seeming and taking. One can have a phenomenal state without noticing (and therefore knowing) that one has it, and one can believe falsely that one has a certain phenomenal state. After all, belief involves categorizing and that is a process that can misfire.

I won't try to do much to justify this point, since it was thoroughly aired in the philosophical literature in the 1960s and 1970s. Just one example from Buck (1962): imagine a football player who is injured and obviously in pain, but who so much wants to play that he insists – to the point of convincing himself – that it doesn't hurt. Self-deception can create a gap between the phenomenal character of experience and one's beliefs about that phenomenal character. Seeming $\neq$ taking$_{\text{cognitive}}$. (Of course, the word "seeming" can itself be used in a cognitive sense as well as the phenomenal sense that I am using; I will not complicate the matter by going further into this issue.) [See also Mele: "Real Self-Deception" BBS 20(1) 1997.]

Now we are in a position to see the fallacy. Phenomenal consciousness can be identified with taking in the phenomenal sense. But if there is any sense of taking in which it is a cultural construction, it is the cognitive sense. To suppose that taking in the phenomenal sense is a cultural construction would be to beg the question. That is the overall conclusion of Kurthen et al. So their argument is a classic equivocation. The support for the claim that taking is a cultural phenomenon depends on construing taking in the cognitive sense, but the sense of taking in which it is true that taking = seeming (that is, there is no appearance/reality distinction for p-consciousness) is the phenomenal sense. Being (that is, what p-consciousness is) = seeming and seeming = taking$_{\text{phenomenal}}$. So being = taking$_{\text{phenomenal}}$. But if any kind of taking is culturally constituted, it is taking$_{\text{cognitive}}$, not taking$_{\text{phenomenal}}$. Hence it would be a mistake to conclude that being (what p-consciousness is) is cultural.

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