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misinterpret or misrepresent a state of affairs — that is not Mother Nature's mistake. She did not err in making me such that I can err. But if Mother Nature's talents can escape being evaluated by the failure of an individual action I perform, this is because her meanings and reasons do not reach down through all the levels of my performance. I am functioning correctly by *her* interpretation, but incorrectly by *my* interpretation. If I can do that, I have my own intentionality, not just hers.

Dennett seems to think he is solving a problem analogous to St Augustine's problem of reconciling human free will and God's omniscience, and he wants to solve it by the analogue of denying free will. But Augustine has his problem because for him God wills (expressly allows) each individual performance as well as the existence of the performer. That is true because God is an ever-present purposeful observer, interpreter and judge of each performance. But Mother Nature is not like that; there is nothing in her method of endowing the general systems of her creatures with intentionality which would interfere with the functioning of those systems to create subsystems with meanings of their own. They couldn't have those meanings without her, to be sure, but it is they who have them, not she.³

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CARRUTHERS ON NONCONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE

By DALE JAMIESON *and* MARC BEKOFF

IN a recent article Peter Carruthers claims that 'in the case of brutes: since their pains are nonconscious (as are all their mental states), they ought not to be allowed to get in the way of any morally-serious objective' ([5], p. 269). We believe that Carruthers's argument for this conclusion involves both fallacious reasoning and false premisses.

Carruthers holds that the difference between conscious and nonconscious mental states is that '[a] conscious, as opposed to a nonconscious, mental state is one that is available to conscious thought — where a conscious act of thinking is itself an event that is available to be thought about in turn' ([5], p. 262). Since 'no one would seriously maintain that dogs, cats, sheep, cattle, pigs, or

chickens would consciously think things to themselves' ([5], p. 265), Carruthers thinks it follows that the experience of most non-human animals is nonconscious. Nonconscious mental states 'do not feel like anything' and have no 'subjective feel' ([5], p. 258), and are therefore without moral significance. Since only conscious experience is morally significant and since most animals have only nonconscious experience, it follows that the experience of most animals is without moral significance. Hence even the most trivial human interest should take precedence over the interests of animals, and we should seek to eradicate our feelings of sympathy for animals.

We should note first how odd the suggestion is that all of a creature's experiences could be nonconscious. According to Carruthers, many animals may experience pain and pleasure, have beliefs, desires, and intentions, and yet be entirely nonconscious. The experiences of animals, including their pains and pleasures, 'do not feel like anything' ([5], p. 258). The attribution of experience to creatures who are nonconscious may seem to be metaphorical extension — like referring to cameras that see and gauges that have beliefs. It is not clear that the possibility that Carruthers entertains (that there are nonconscious creatures who have experiences) is a coherent one. However, for the purposes of argument we will assume that it is.

Carruthers tries to establish the existence of nonconscious experience by appeal to example. Two of these examples are drawn from ordinary life: steering around a double-parked lorry while fantasizing about next summer's holiday; and placing a glass between two coffee mugs while listening to Schubert, when distractedly doing dishes. These are complex actions that require considerable sensory discrimination, yet according to Carruthers they may be performed without conscious awareness of either the lorry, the mugs, or presumably anything closely related to the actions. The third example is that of blindsight, cases in which subjects claim to see nothing in an area of their visual field, yet can move their hands or eyes to a correct position when a stimulus is presented in that part of the visual field. (For discussion of the blindsight phenomenon see [6], [8], [11], [16], [17], [18], [21].)

The first two examples (steering around a double-parked lorry while fantasizing about next summer's holiday, and placing a glass between two coffee mugs while listening to Schubert) are cases of selective attention; it is not clear that they are cases of non-conscious experience at all. The driver and the dishwasher are having conscious experiences, but not conscious experiences of steering around the lorry and placing the glass between the mugs. The criterion Carruthers gives for identifying these cases as ones of nonconscious experience is failure of memory ([5], pp. 258–9). The driver's experience of steering around the double-parked

lorry is nonconscious because he does not remember doing it. But failing to remember an experience is not a reliable criterion for the experience's being nonconscious. Most of us forget many of our experiences, and patients with 'amnesiac syndrome' [19] remember almost nothing of their experience. The fact that we (or they) fail to remember an experience does not imply that the experience was nonconscious.

Blindsight is very different from Carruthers's other examples. It is a pathology rather than an ordinary, everyday experience. Furthermore, it is a controversial phenomenon: some researchers have not been able to confirm its existence [8], while others have claimed that it is an artifact of stray light in subjects' environments ([4], but see [17]). Campion *et al.* [4] also point out that the lesions that are supposed to be associated with blindsight have not been located with any confidence, and that patients' accounts of their experiences are inconsistent. Weiskrantz himself draws very different conclusions about conscious experience from the blindsight phenomenon than does Carruthers. Weiskrantz takes this research to suggest that consciousness can be identified with 'monitoring', and that we monitor some of what we do but not all of it. The question about animals, according to Weiskrantz, is whether they ever monitor their experiences. He thinks that they do and cites research which 'in effect allowed laboratory rats to do what they like, and then asked them if they knew what they were doing' ([19], p. 314). His interpretation of this research is that laboratory rats sometimes do know what they are doing — that they monitor some of what they do, and are therefore conscious.

Whether or not we accept Weiskrantz's interpretation of his own research, there are three reasons why Carruthers's examples shed very little light on whether the experience of animals is non-conscious. First, as we have suggested, his examples are a heterogeneous lot and it is not clear that he has succeeded in identifying a well-defined class of experiences. Second, although Carruthers claims that the experiences he mentions 'do not feel like anything' and that they have no 'subjective feel' ([5], p. 258), he does nothing to show that this is the case. Indeed Weiskrantz notes that some patients with blindsight have 'a "feeling" that something is there, and sometimes . . . may . . . achieve a strange kind of visual experience' ([19], p. 314). Finally, even if we accept Carruthers's interpretations of these examples and also grant that these experiences 'do not feel like anything', it still may be that the possibility of non-conscious experience in some way depends on an organism's conscious experiences. It is a logical error to infer that there may be organisms all of whose experiences are nonconscious, from the fact that some organisms that have conscious experiences also have nonconscious ones. Moreover Carruthers's view is in tension with an emerging empirical account of how and why we have experiences of selective attention. On this view cognitive opera-

tions that initially require conscious attention can become 'automatized', thus permitting several tasks to be performed simultaneously ([13], [14]). If this sort of account is correct, it may be that nonconscious mental states begin as conscious ones and only later become nonconscious. While there may be good reasons for cognitive operations to become automatized, it is difficult to see why this should be so for states involving pleasure and pain. Yet Carruthers treats these affective states in the same way that he treats cognitive states.

There also may be a difficulty with Carruthers's definition of conscious mental states as mental states that are 'available to conscious thought' ([5], p. 262). This definition is circular, for what is to be defined appears in the definition. Whether or not this is a vicious circularity depends on what one wants the definition to do. (The definition also leads to an ambiguity between 'not ever available' and 'not currently available'. The experiences of animals are supposed to be not ever available to conscious thought, but the dishwasher's experience of placing a glass between two coffee mugs, though not currently available, will leap into consciousness when something goes wrong — e.g. he breaks grandma's precious china.) Carruthers's definition will not help us pick out conscious experiences, but presumably Carruthers believes (along with Descartes) that 'we know them when we have them'. (John Dupré [7] notes that in isolating the conscious/nonconscious distinction from any behaviour tests Carruthers seems to embrace a Cartesian conception of the mind that is vulnerable to the objections of Wittgenstein, Ryle, and the subsequent tradition.) We might also wonder whether it is possible for anyone to have conscious experiences at all on this account. For in order to have a conscious mental state it must be possible for one to have a conscious thought about that mental state. But in order for the second-order thought to be conscious, it must be possible for one to have a conscious thought about that thought, and so on, *ad infinitum*. How damaging one regards this result depends on larger views about the mind that cannot be explored here. (Allen [1] makes a similar point.)

Finally, Carruthers assumes without argument that non-conscious experiences are without moral significance. Carruthers's claim is not universally shared: many believe that nonconscious states, at least within the course of a life which includes conscious experiences, may have moral significance ([15], see also Glover's discussion of Moore and Sidgwick [9]). Furthermore, it seems at least possible that a creature's life may go better or worse for it in a way that matters morally, even if it doesn't matter to the creature [12]. More generally, some writers in environmental ethics have defended the idea that something can be morally valuable even if it has no interesting relation to consciousness [10]. It would at least take an argument to show that nonconscious expe-

riences are without moral significance – and this Carruthers does not provide.

Carruthers begins with a heterogeneous collection of examples from which he draws unwarranted conclusions in support of a view that may not be coherent. Without further argument, he goes on to infer a moral conclusion of questionable plausibility. Our conclusion is that contrary to what he claims, Carruthers has given us no rational grounds for eradicating our moral sympathies for 'brutes' (for further discussion see [2], [3]).¹

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'THICK' CONCEPTS REVISED

By STEPHAN L. BURTON

THE SORT of analysis of so-called 'thick' ethical concepts usually proposed by non-cognitivists has given rise to a problem for their account of ethical evaluation, since it is by no means clear that such an analysis can always be carried out. This problem can be overcome by a simple revision of the usual sort of analysis.

I

Ethical non-cognitivists seek to maintain a strict distinction between description and evaluation. To the extent terms have evaluative force, they seek to construe them as merely expressing approval, commendation, or endorsement, as opposed to conveying cognitive content. Thick ethical concepts like 'courage' have thus seemed to some to pose a challenge for non-cognitivists due to their obvious element of descriptive content.

The challenge has usually been met by analysing such terms into strictly separate descriptive and evaluative components. Thus courage involves, perhaps, sticking to one's guns (literally or figuratively) despite great personal risk, among other possible purely descriptive elements of the concept. To such elements those cultures that share our concept of courage attach an additional note of approval, which constitutes the separate evaluative element.

In general, on the usual view, thick concepts are basically descriptions to which evaluative force has been tacked on for good measure. As Bernard Williams puts it, '[a]ny such concept, on that account, can be analysed into a descriptive and a prescriptive element: it is guided round the world by its descriptive content,