

Is Sensory-Motor Conceptual Grounding Sufficient to Account for Conscious Experience?

*Michael Beaton (ASSC Student Member)
Centre for Research in Cognitive Science
University of Sussex
Brighton BN1 9QH
UK*

M.J.S.Beaton@sussex.ac.uk

Tel: +44 1273 678061

Fax: +44 1273 877873

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Various authors have recently suggested that human cognition essentially involves internal simulation of the sensory-motor loop (Barsalou, 1999; Hesslow, 2002; Prinz, 2002). Hesslow explicitly claims that a complex enough simulation system will, in fact, be conscious. But why? As emphasised by Barsalou and Prinz, simulation architectures allow conceptual (rational, abstract) thought to be grounded in low level action and perception systems. Therefore, one way to claim consciousness for this type of architecture would be to refer to Global Workspace (GW) theory (Baars, 2002). As the relevant conceptual processing is high level and integrative, it will be conscious processing by definition according to GW theory. This definitional approach to consciousness is unsatisfying, but Baars' own account of his GW theory explicitly avoids the conceptual analysis needed to show that processing in integrative areas matches our pre-theoretic notion of consciousness. Hesslow himself argues that an internal re-creation of a sequence of quasi-perceptual states will necessarily result in the experience of an inner world. But Hesslow does not provide an argument as to why either simulated or actual perceptual states should be consciously experienced at all. In this paper I argue that neither the mere presence of information in high level brain areas, nor the mere re-creation of perceptual states in lower level brain areas is sufficient to account for conscious experience. However, I suggest that the real-time grounding of high level, conceptual processing in low level sensory-motor processing is sufficient to account for the supposedly non-naturalisable, subjective features of sensory qualia. I address the notions of privacy, subjectivity, ineffability and intrinsicness and argue that all of these subjective features can be explained objectively in terms of Barsalovian grounded concepts.

References

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