

Subjectivity and its significance

Workshop with Adrian Haddock & Charles Siewert

UNIFR, Beauregard, BQC 11 2.813

Monday 19 September

9:00-12:00 Adrian Haddock (University of Stirling): "On Representing Subjectivity"

According to McDowell, our account of the nexus of mind and world must not be "from sideways on". This paper seeks bring out (a) what this thought comes to, and (b) how it underwrites McDowell's idea that perceptual experience, in us, is an actualization of conceptual capacities.

14:00-18:00 Charles Siewert (Rice University): "Experienced Understanding, Affect, and Well-Being"

My talk will be in three segments, arguing for these claims.

- (i) To exclude conceptual activity from the subjective character of our experience is to make it unfathomable how we could experience interest in what we read or hear said.
- (ii) Experiences of interest, in this sense, belong to the category of "affect," broadly construed.
- (iii) Without affective experience in this broad sense you wouldn't be able to rationally distinguish having what is good for you from your instantiating an intrinsically good thing. So by implication the idea of totally affectless minds whose possessors call for the same moral concern as affective beings is mistaken. It could be good that they exist. But we don't have to worry about what would be good for them.

Tuesday 20 September

9:00-12:00 Adrian Haddock (University of Stirling): "How can I be NN?"

It is possible to experience oneself as transcending anything one encounters in perception--anything that is, in this sense, in the world. This experience is apt to give rise to the question "How can I be this human being?", or (to put it in the form favoured by Thomas Nagel) "How can I be NN?" (where "NN" names a specific human being). This paper seeks to understand this question by drawing on an influential argument of G.E.M. Anscombe's. It suggests that we should think of the statement "I cannot be this human being" as an attempt to express in the material mode a thought whose proper expression is in the formal mode, namely, the thought that "I" is not a referring term. It suggests that Anscombe's argument compels us to take this thought seriously.

14:00-18:00 Gianfranco Soldati (University of Fribourg): "Perception and Self-Knowledge"

I come to know that there is a beer in the fridge by looking at the open fridge. When asked how I know that there is a beer in the fridge, I candidly answer that I see that there is a beer in the fridge. By looking at the fridge I come to know both, that there is a beer in the fridge and that I see that there is a beer in the fridge. Do I thereby know how the beer visually appears to me? Perceptual appearances are often supposed to determine the qualitative features of our experiences. And it is said that we have introspective access to the phenomenal qualities of our experiences. So it seems that I should introspectively know the way the beer appears to me. In this paper I argue that introspection is no better route to knowledge of perceptual appearances than perception itself. When it comes to the way the beer appears to me, there is not much more I can do then looking at, and paying attention to, the bottle of beer. I may introspectively know how it feels to look at it, but this would tell me very little about the way the bottle visually appears to me.

Image: René Magritte, Decalcomania (1966)

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