

A DETOUR THROUGH SOME TRADITIONAL QUESTIONS

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Robert Hanna and Michelle Maiese. *Embodied Minds in Action*.
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Robert Hanna and Michelle Maiese have written a challenging book. It's challenging in two ways. First, it challenges the received and current opinions on topics such as consciousness, emotion, and action. Second, it is a challenging book to read, just because it is challenging of the established views. It requires a new way of thinking about some of the old problems of philosophy of mind, and this new way of thinking is not always easy.

I, for one, am in favor of the recent move toward an embodied view of the mind, and I think one of the most challenging aspects of this move is to say clearly what the new conception of the mind should be. That is, in order to cash out the implications of the embodied mind it is not sufficient simply to think of the mind in terms of the traditional framework, and then simply add all the complexities that come along with the body. Rather, the task is to try to rethink the mind from the ground up. One has the sense that this is what is at stake in *Embodied Minds in Action*. Hanna and Maiese's chosen strategy, however, and the set of problems they have decided to address raise a number of questions. Simply put, they set out to address a set of problems that derive from some traditional conceptions of the mind, e.g., the mind-body problem, the problem of mental causation, and they start by addressing the topic of consciousness – one of the most difficult of metaphysical, not to mention neuroscientific and psychological, problems. The problem of consciousness is already a well-established part of the traditional and current conceptions of how we consider the mind. As they put it: "Let us begin at the beginning – with consciousness" (p. 19). But it is not clear why consciousness is or should be the beginning point – and they don't explain why it is – or that it is the best beginning for their task.

Furthermore, some of the claims they make about consciousness are not always clear. They specify that they are talking about a consciousness-like-ours (which they consistently abbreviate to consciousness₁₀ – likewise mind₁₀, intentionality₁₀, etc., for "terminological convenience"). Then, at the very start of their analysis, they suggest that not only do we (human adults) have conscious-

ness,_o but so do, for example, infants, cats, dogs, horses, mice, and squirrels (p. 19). This immediately suggests that the details of embodiment don't seem to matter at all for consciousness,_o since there are some radical changes of embodiment as we move from squirrels and mice to adult humans. Some stronger claims follow: "You spontaneously move your own living body because of your feelings, and by means of those feelings, and you thereby express those feelings. And they [the squirrels, etc.] do too. ... We perceive this, and affectively respond with some further bodily movements of our own. To the extent that we are all doing this, we are all empathically mirroring each other" (pp. 19-20). Hanna and Maiese seem to be suggesting here that not only do we empathize with mice and squirrels, but they also empathize with us. Their evidence is an appeal to mirror neurons; but setting aside some recent skepticism about whether MNs exist in humans, there is no evidence as far as I know of MNs existing in cats, horses, mice, or squirrels, and more generally, even if mirror activation works across species (e.g., monkey - human), there is some evidence against the idea that they work for, e.g., human - dog (see Buccino et al. 2004).

Hanna and Maiese also propose the "Deep Consciousness Thesis" (p 28). This is the idea that all mental states are conscious: "consciousness penetrates into *every* aspect of our mental lives" (28). This includes non-conscious states, which involve some degree of deviation from normal waking consciousness. The authors state this thesis and then make the following claim: "Therefore, relative non-consciousness in this sense implies the existence of occurrent consciousness. So the Deep Consciousness Thesis is saying that even relatively non-conscious states in minded animals are necessarily at least *minimally* occurrently conscious in some definite way or another" (29). They continue to draw a number of implications from this thesis, for example, that information processing is minimally and occurrently conscious; that "all neurobiological processes in minded animals" are also minimally and occurrently conscious. That is, what we normally call 'sub-personal' processes are conscious, and indeed what we normally call 'sub-personal' processes are for this reason 'personal' processes – first-personal and conscious. Although they do not mean that we are conscious of such (sub)personal processes, the claims seem controversial, and if a non-conscious process is conscious, it's not clear what this could mean.

Most philosophers of mind will find these hard claims to accept, since many of these distinctions are basic to ongoing work on consciousness. The more basic question, however, is why Hanna and Maiese adopt this starting point, and all of the basic vocabulary that belongs to the traditional and standard accounts of the mind. We seem to find ourselves again working with models of information processing (albeit now oddly conscious in some way or other), and

representational content (43) – and all of this before we hear anything about embodiment – although there is a proviso tagged onto the Deep Consciousness Thesis: “if conscious, intentional minds_{io} are essentially embodied” (31).

This leads us to a second thesis: the Essential Embodiment Thesis which consists of two parts: the Necessity Thesis – the necessary embodiment of conscious minds; and the Completeness Thesis – the complete neurobiological embodiment of conscious minds (35-36). Within a discussion of an embodied approach to consciousness one might expect to find an analysis of intentionality that is somewhat embodied – if not something like the recent views expressed by Robert Brandom about our pragmatic engagement with the world, then certainly some established phenomenological views like those of Merleau-Ponty on motor intentionality. Instead, in *Embodied Minds in Action*, we find the authors agreeing with the internalist views of Horgan and Tienson, i.e., that mental states have intentional (representational) content inseparable from their phenomenal character (p. 43). They further propose, or actually they “suppose” that “*all* intentionality necessitates consciousness_{io}” – and, as they put it, “since [these two views] are both correct,” then a functionalist approach to the hard problem will not work (45).

All of this is pursued in the first chapter. In Chapter 2, entitled “Consciousness_{io} and Essential Embodiment II: Types and Structures,” we begin again with consciousness, and specifically ten types of consciousness. Almost all of these types can be found discussed in the standard literature on consciousness – phenomenal, access, transitive, intransitive, etc. From a phenomenological perspective one could argue that all of these different “types” of consciousness involve temporality – this would certainly be the view of Husserl. Hanna and Maiese, however, list “temporal consciousness” as another type of consciousness not shortlisted in the list of ten. That motivates us to ask what they mean by ‘type’. Is phenomenal consciousness a different type of consciousness from intransitive consciousness? Or is first-order transitive consciousness a different type from temporal consciousness? Or are we simply picking out different structural possibilities of consciousness in general?

Hanna and Maiese put their Deep Consciousness Thesis to work on blindsight. They suggest that blindsight subjects are pre-reflectively visually conscious, and that they lack reflective consciousness for that experience. On this view, then, blindsighters aren’t blind. They do see what is in front of them, but they simply don’t know that they do since “downstream mechanisms for processing self-conscious or self-reflective visual information have broken down” (63). So blindsighters are pre-reflectively sighted, but reflectively blind. This raises two questions: first, why this kind of explanation is better than an ex-

planation in terms of non-conscious processes that are indeed non-conscious; second what precisely is the conception of pre-reflective consciousness at stake here?

In regard to the first question, Hanna and Maiese suggest that an explanation that makes the blindsighter's behavior a matter of non-conscious and sub-personal processes is paradoxical since such processes are not unified and are purposeless (63). It's not clear why they think that, since such processes are generally thought to be sufficiently ordered to partially underpin all kinds of behavior. Their view, that such an account would make of blindsight subjects "mere robots" (63) is telling, however, and one wonders whether, if they had a better account of embodied operative intentionality they might then see such processes as more purposeful and intentionally unified. The second question goes to the issue of how they understand pre-reflective experience. On this score they cite Evan Thompson's notion of "sensorimotor subjectivity" (31). The examples they cite seem right, and consistent with the phenomenological conception found in Thompson – bodily self-awareness, proprioception, kinaesthesia, with egocentric spatial organization. But they want to push this concept of pre-reflective consciousness further than I think Thompson or other phenomenologists would want to take it, to include what are usually considered to be sub-personal neural processing. Accordingly, in the blindsight case, the fact that dorsal-path sensorimotor activation may be informing the behavior of the blindsighter is, on their reading, a pre-reflective conscious vision. This same reading informs their conception of the body schema which they equate with a kind of representational content (69) – a form of non-conscious dynamics that is at the same time pre-reflectively conscious. In this connection they mistakenly suggest that the case of Ian Waterman (who lost proprioception and touch from the neck down – see Cole 1995) is much like the case of Schneider (a severely brain-damaged patient of Goldstein, much discussed in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*) – that is, Hanna and Maiese suggest that Waterman is severely apraxic like Schneider (72). In fact, entirely unlike Schneider, Waterman has no problem accomplishing a motor task to command.

Up to this point the reader will not have a clear sense of how embodiment fits into the story, but this is cleared up as Chapter 2 continues. Here we can see part of the reason for focusing on consciousness and sorting out its various types and structures. Embodiment as defined here means "the immediate sense of a unique continuing essential embodiment" (87). Immediate sense means primitive bodily awareness. In other words, embodiment is equated with a pre-reflective awareness of the body. Moreover, Hanna and Maiese equate this with

a structure of consciousness which is closely associated with the body schema. The idea that embodiment is a structure of consciousness, the result of a primitive bodily awareness, suggests that if cognition is embodied, it is so only via consciousness. Perhaps this is why Hanna and Maiese consider consciousness to be the starting point.

My remarks have focused on the first two chapters, and on what the authors have to say about consciousness. There is much more at stake in this book. The authors go on to discuss agency and emotion, among other topics. I have an equal number of questions about what they have to say about emotion, but not enough space to raise all of them. Perhaps the central one focuses on their definition of an emotion as a “set of pre-reflectively conscious first-order desires, together with a meta-representational superstructure of hierarchically-ordered desires, normally also together with a further pre-reflectively conscious effective first-order desire to impulsively move one’s body in such a way as to express the relevant desire-set” (221). Sadness, they suggest, is a kind of desire to have the world or oneself or others be a certain way. This is a suggestion worth pursuing, but I have a difficult time working out the third part of the definition – the pre-reflective desire to move one’s body to express this. There are clearly some emotions, such as embarrassment, where we seem to have a pre-reflective desire not to have our bodies express this – I may not want to blush, for example, but this seems to be a bodily process that I cannot control – pre-reflectively or otherwise.

Let me conclude with an even briefer word on agency. The authors spend a good amount of time digging into the details of how we raise our arms, an example of basic action that is close to ubiquitous throughout the philosophical tradition. That is, their account, as they indicate, shares something with classical accounts of action and agency – a focus on the concept of mental causality, and the question of how conscious trying links up with motor control. I have argued elsewhere that these kinds of accounts of motor control of bodily movement cannot add up to an account of action (see Gallagher 2006). I can put the issue in terms of basic acts. Hanna and Maiese accept Danto’s distinction between basic acts and non-basic acts (104). Raising an arm is a basic act. On a different view, however, such basic acts are simply abstractions from complex intentional actions. One can, of course, point to the phenomenology of action – i.e., that some actions seem to be unmediated and directly willed – or offer arguments involving avoidance of infinite regress – i.e., that not all actions can be mediated (see. e.g., Danto, 1979, p. 46). But if basic acts are abstractions, then the phenomenology of such acts is a reflective abstraction that leads to a particular theoretical analysis of action. Furthermore, the avoidance of infinite

regress does not entail that bodily movements should be considered actions *per se*. Basic acts, such as moving one's arm, are only actions in a derivative sense insofar as actions are defined as intentional, and the intentionality in most cases lies elsewhere. Specifically, the intentional status of arm raising, and important aspects of the relevant motor control, derive from the complex intentional actions that they serve. An account of action and agency that begins with basic acts, or takes a basic act as a paradigm of action, tends to get caught in metaphysical problems concerning mental causation or end up providing an impoverished account of action.

I think this book is a long detour that takes embodied theories back into some of the problems set by traditional dis-embodied accounts of the mind. My reservation about the authors's strategy and some of the details of their analysis should not overshadow what is clearly a rich discussion of some of the major issues in the philosophy of mind.

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