

## **McTaggart and Neurophenomenology**

### **How to relieve an Angst-ridden world of the problems of McTaggart**

Following our previous blog, we do want to relieve everyone of the Angst that McTaggart's ideas seem ineluctably to lead to, just as Einstein relieved the world of Buber's Angst, and in an earlier blog we mentioned that a sort of 'precognition' might be definable in terms of our new and less Angst-ridden description of physics. Now 'precognition' or if we want to call it that 'presentiment' is a very popular (or populist) notion but one that is, for very good reasons a notion which is almost anathema to current highly respectable physics literature (Note 1), though not to the philosophy literature to the same extent. Precognition served as a useful tool for Swartz in his comments on Kant. So does precognition fit neatly into our program, or perhaps more to the point, can the concept of precognition enlighten us as to the possible direction of any programme? Can precognition at least serve as a torchbearer during a relay on the long road to enlightenment?

As I mentioned in the last blog, Paul Churchland (1985) pointed out that, for instance, precognition is occasionally cited in favor of dualism. Now today when we think of dualism we may want to cast the net somewhat wider than that if we can, and indeed the obvious approach to consider may well be the reflexive model of Velmans (2000,2006), and that or something like that seems worth considering. In the sections below we attempt to follow Velmans's approach.

As Velmans (2006) points out cogently, ideas like his about the spatially extended nature of the experienced phenomenal world "fit in with common sense and common experience and they will come as no surprise to those versed in European phenomenology have many theoretical antecedents ...for example in the work of Berkeley, Kant, and Whitehead, the neutral monism of James, Mach, and Russell, and the scientific writings of Köhler and Pribram".

Now to test this to see how it works out: I won't repeat the exposition of Velmans (2006), (which is also referred to in Velmans (2000)), but Figure 1 of Velmans (2006) describes dualism, Figure 2 describes reductionism and Figure 3 describes the reflexive model. In the reflexive model, and there is a dynamic interaction between the observer and the observed.

In dualism (Figure 1) a percept simply occurs in the mind. Precognition can be incorporated by leaving it open as to what goes on in the mind of the individual, for example they could be mentally incompetent during an imagined or real precognition experience.

In reductionism (Figure 2) it is (normally) argued that the percept in the brain is simply a function of the brain and whilst it is separate from the brain, it can still be described in a way (straightforward in principle scientifically) in terms of what goes on in the brain. So the same position arises for precognition. Neuroscience can show that it may occur in the brain, for example due to mental incompetence or possibly simple lack of understanding or naive behaviour.

Velmans justifies his reflexive monism (Figure 3) and points out that it has falsifiability as well as reasonably claiming that physicalism lacks it. Also, he takes pains to point out that he is not an epiphenomalist. These matters are covered in some detail in Velmans (2000, 2002,2002a).

Before we go any further I want to make two points.

1. Velmans M., (2001a) states "Definitions need not be final for research to get under way. It is enough that, for given investigative purposes, definitions are sufficiently similar for different investigators to be able to agree that they are investigating the same thing. As science begins to unravel the causes of consciousness ....and so on".

2. Velmans (2001) says, whilst describing a discussion with Dennett "it does not follow that conscious qualia have no useful place in "first-person" accounts, nor that they do not exist." This would seem to be a position retained to the present time in using the reflexive model and so we may still use qualia to consider such reflexive models at least for explanatory purposes.

On page 240 Velmans (2000) suggests that attentional processing is closely related to consciousness so that the contents of consciousness become a kind of "psychological present" which is immediately accessible for processing, including the relevant sections for current action, suggesting that input analysis becomes conscious when its products are being disseminated. Consciousness of the past may be through some kind of long term autobiographical memory and consciousness of the future by some form of speculated brain-computer interaction or through a brain mechanism related to planning and evolving which could contain a series of explicit or implicit rules and interactions, such as the saw "red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning, red sky at night, shepherd's delight". Much of what is perceived by the brain is known not to be overtly conscious. In some cases attentional processes are partly dissociated from consciousness, and in such cases perception and how it could be occurring can often be measured or noted, as in blindsight and dreams. So we may be already getting somewhere near where we may be able to consider empirical problems and not conceptual problems, indeed 'easy' problems rather than 'hard' problems. And indeed Velmans says essentially that on p241.

If we wished to describe the consciousness of one individual at one time, for example, we could have a narrow attentional section at about that time, an at least partly autobiographical past section and a 'possibly speculative' future section, not just a single dot. The unconscious section would be far more complex and certainly we do not know it all at this time. We are not talking here about the physical state correlates.

By the time he gets to p243 Velmans in fact points out that each individual has his own consciousness. Thus each individual has his own past-present-future and to conflate each and every individual's past-present-future is not a recipe for accurate physics! In short, the space time cones which relativity uses are actually not good enough to use for a number of people interacting or just existing. Certainly we can treat the people as if they are inanimate objects (who can for instance signal mechanically one to the other) but we must not confuse this with an accurate physical (or NCC) picture involving their own thinking. I have tried to indicate in previous blog entries how this may be done, however. It certainly is possible to lay down the mathematics but it does probably require each individual to have at least their own past-present-future (PPF). Clearly there could be similar looking regions in various people's PPF and these could be possibly approximated to carefully using category theory. An analogy might be the common symmetry structures of models of benzene with and/or without sidechains, for the purpose of bulk determinations like UV spectroscopy. But Velmans carefully distinguishes the cat (of his example) as seen in the brain (which for the subject is the 'real' cat) from the NCC which occurs in the brain. It seems to me that the 'real' cat contains the qualia whereas the NCC are an objective map. We can deal with either, and the NCC will, we presume, be relatively observer-independent but the 'real' cat as observed will vary a lot from subject to subject. So we now have the added complication of TWO plans or maps.- the very likely relatively invariant NCC map and the subject-'real' map which will alter from subject to subject., This subject-'real' map could possibly be approximated to however, in the way just described and then may seem more like a NCC map.

I am not sure that Velmans's wave/particle duality comparison (on p250) can be pursued as other than an analogy and I think the whole reflective monism description is best described in category theory terms rather than initially as quantum mechanical terms, as the effect may well not even need a quantum mechanical explanation. Effects such as the Kanisza triangle and other optical effects such as the well known line drawings of cubes with a corner which seem to stand in wards or

outwards from the page almost at random, may be helpful in describing what is happening. These effects are so far more commonly personally observed rather than automatically through NCCs (though the effects could be simulated by a computer, they would generally have to be very contrived for simulation). It seems to me, also, that the 'unconscious' effects (page 253) which Velmans considers are allied to the conscious subject-'real' world may have to be allied to the subject-'real' map though would clearly not appear in the subject consciousness, as they are unconscious. So now we have at least the following items to consider.

1. The cat as consciously perceived by S (in Velmans (2000), fig 6.3 or Velmans (2006) fig 3)
2. The NCC of S (in Velmans fig 6.3)
3. A mapping of the cat in #1 (One such mapping would literally be the picture of the cat in figure 6.3)
4. A mapping of the NCC in #2
- 5 A mapping of the conscious and unconscious perceptions of the subject S whilst the subject observes the cat.

It all sounds worse than the Danzig corridor and the 'corridor within a corridor' but it probably cannot be helped and the functors need to be considered in detail also.

We also have

6. The cat as it is generally understood objectively
7. A mapping of the cat in #6.

and mappings being what they are, there are probably others as well. We may wish to assume that #4 does not need a further mapping of "the NCC as objectively understood" and so on.

On page 253 Velmans gives a plausible enough 3 step solution of his own 'causal paradox'. Importantly he points out (page 277) that in his scheme "consciousness is the creator of subjective entities" . We are quite happy that Velmans insists on the inclusion of a large number of subjects as individual parts of his overall pattern though he himself feels that some philosophers may find difficulties with it. Mathematically it looks no worse in principle than accounting for individual particles of differing structure in a Boltzmann gas. Though we may for example have to have two categories (say, MacA and MacB) to account for and this fact in itself concretises the system as a possibly conscious one, as it can become conscious once it transcends punctal time ! Without such transcendence, #1 and #3 above will not contain adequate factors to describe human consciousness. We know that humans certainly do not observe time as punctal. Psychologists today seem to want to exhibit a form of scotomisation and refer to 'human time' as 'specious time' but it is still is a clear attribute of consciousness. It may be that other factors may later have to be added, but these have not yet apparent and the scheme can be altered to fit them. We really want to keep it as simple as we can.

As Velmans points out on page 278, 'if all humans were removed from the earth, only a mechanical earth without consciousness would remain'. It is essential that an earth with humans should have a different description to an earth with humans, or the physics would be wrong. We could of course generalise the above statement, if we needed to refer to 'an earth without life in any form'.

So we certainly include factors here which should make the physics better than simple Einsteinian physics, include human beings and sort out MacTaggart's paradox. That is not to say that we have gone far enough yet but it looks like a fairer starting model than we presently have with the efforts of Einstein and more contemporary thinkers. Velmans ends his book by fairly quoting an apothegm of Jung "man is indispensable for the completion of creation - in fact he is the second creator of the world, who has given the world its objective existence" and we know that Velmans's basic ideas tend to agree with those of Sri Aurobindo (p167).

Crucially, unlike the variants of physicalism and functionalism defended by Torrance, Van Gulick, and Chrisley & Sloman, the dual-aspect theory of Velmans also conforms closely to the evidence of first-person experience and it thus suits the present category-theoretic formalism.

### ***References***

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### ***Notes***

1. This short blog will not intend to outline the reasons for this - as an analogy, think of previous "discoveries" of "low temperature nuclear fusion" to obtain the kind of problems which could be needlessly caused to the establishment - time should not be wasted on tilting at windmills quixotically.