



Martine  
Nida-Rümelin

## Philosophical Fundamentals for Scientific Studies of Consciousness

Conférence du 10 mai

### **Fixing reference to the phenomena we are interested in**

I am going to argue in the first part of the lecture that in many cases phenomenological reflection is necessary to establish two preconditions for rational discussion within philosophy of mind: the pre-condition of shared reference and the pre-condition of sufficient pre-theoretical understanding. Philosophers must ensure that in their discussion about a specific subject matter they are talking about the same phenomena in order not to talk past each other. Using a few examples, I will argue that in many cases one must engage in serious phenomenological reflection in order to establish a situation of shared reference. Arguably, this is even so in the most general and fundamental case: the discussion about the nature of phenomenal consciousness. Furthermore, philosophical accounts of and/or philosophical claims about a given phenomenon must be tested against our pre-theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. In many cases in philosophy of mind, one can only acquire that pre-theoretical understanding based on careful phenomenological reflection. In the second part of the lecture, I will try to explain how the argument carries over to scientific studies of consciousness.

Conférence du 14 mai

### **Introducing subject-presupposing concepts into scientific vocabulary**

In ordinary life, we are constantly aware of the fact that we are confronted with an experiencing subject when we interact with other human or non-human animals: we presuppose that there is someone in front of us for whom it is like something to perceive, to act or to think. The vast majority of the concepts we use when thinking about the 'mental life' of others are subject-presupposing in the following sense: we use them to attribute properties an animal can have only if it is an experiencing subject. Contrary to this, scientific vocabulary used in cognitive science is not or at least not explicitly subject-presupposing. Functionally defined vocabulary is not subject-presupposing. Many philosophers and scientists appear to believe that cognitive science does work or should work with functionally defined vocabulary. They thereby accept that subject-presupposing concepts should play no role in science. I will argue that, quite to the contrary, empirical science must use subject-presupposing concepts for two reasons: to ban them from scientific vocabulary is to change the subject and it makes it impossible to use the results of such sciences in order to achieve legitimate epistemic goals. I will illustrate the latter point using examples taken from color vision science (pseudonormal vision, daltonism, tetrachromacy).

Conférence du 17 mai

### **Identity and Unity of Consciousness – Clarifying scientific terminology based on substantial philosophical reflection**

Split brain and multiple personality cases raise intriguing issues about the identity of the people or subjects involved. Both, philosophers and scientists have considered the possibility that there are two people in one body in split brain cases and that there are different people across time with one human body in cases of multiple personality. One may and should wonder: what exactly is it we wish to know when we wonder whether the subject 'corresponding' to the left hemisphere is identical with the one 'corresponding' to the other hemisphere? And: what is it we wish to know when we wonder if the person at issue at a given moment is identical with the person involved at a later moment in cases of multiple personality? I am going to argue that in these cases only substantial philosophical work can lead to clarifying the content of the relevant competing hypotheses. Conceptual clarification often is nothing more than introducing careful distinctions in order to avoid common confusions. Not so in the present case. One cannot achieve the required conceptual clarity, or so I will argue, without taking decisions about the deepest and most controversial philosophical problems. If this is so then to get clear about who is who in split brain or multiple personality cases requires substantial cooperation between philosophers and scientists. I will explore if and how adopting a non-reductive understanding of personal identity can help to get clear about such real life cases.

Conférence du 20 mai

### **Agency and being active in what one does – philosophically motivated agenda for future empirical research**

Neurons when considered in isolation are mere mechanisms: their reaction to physico-chemical inputs is microphysically determined. A whole – no matter how complex – composed of such mechanisms should be a mere mechanism as well. Based on these premises one is led to the conclusion that human beings and, in general, all conscious animals are biological robots: their behavior is microphysically determined. On the other hand, as I will argue, there are strong philosophical reasons for disbelieving the robot hypothesis. I will focus on reasons related to agentive phenomenology. Careful reflection reveals, as I will try to show, that the content of agentive experience is incompatible with the robot hypothesis. If so, then the robot hypothesis implies that we are victims of a radical and fundamental illusion in the way we experience our own active behavior in daily life. In that situation it is rationally required to wonder how the above argument might be mistaken. Could it be, for instance, that neurons work in a different manner when integrated into a system giving rise to consciousness? Can one make sense of so-called top-down causality in a way which escapes the above argument? It seems obvious that answering questions of this kind requires rich expertise in neurobiology which perhaps, however, is not yet available today.

Née à Munich, de nationalité allemande et suisse, Martine Nida-Rümelin est professeur ordinaire à l'Université de Fribourg en Suisse depuis 1999. Elle a fait ses études de philosophie, psychologie et mathématiques à Munich en Allemagne où elle a défendu sa thèse de doctorat sur l'argument de la connaissance ainsi que sa thèse d'habilitation sur l'identité personnelle. Elle s'intéresse surtout au statut particulier des êtres conscients. Elle cherche à développer une théorie non-matérialiste de la conscience qui évite les faiblesses du dualisme traditionnel et qui peut servir comme base pour l'étude scientifique de la conscience. Dans son approche philosophique, la réflexion phénoménologique ainsi que les intuitions rationnelles réflexives jouent un rôle central. Ses travaux cherchent à intégrer trois thématiques dans une seule approche théorique qui met le sujet de l'expérience au centre de l'analyse: la conscience phénoménale, l'agir et la capacité d'être actif, l'identité et l'individualité des êtres conscients.

### Sélection bibliographique

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## MARTINE NIDA-RÜMELIN

### PHILOSOPHICAL FUNDAMENTALS FOR SCIENTIFIC STUDIES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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#### philosophie cognitive

Conférences Jean-Nicod de

L'esprit humain, son organisation, sa nature, ses relations avec le corps et avec le monde sont depuis toujours parmi les thèmes centraux de la philosophie. La psychologie contemporaine elle-même a pris naissance au sein de la philosophie. Elle s'est émancipée, mais l'émergence des sciences cognitives consacre d'une certaine façon le retour de la philosophie dans ce champ de recherche. Les développements de l'informatique et des neurosciences, en jetant une nouvelle lumière sur les phénomènes mentaux, ont eu pour effet de relancer le débat philosophique. La « philosophie de l'esprit » est ainsi plus florissante que jamais. Ce retour n'a rien d'une régression, car la philosophie dont il est question est en phase avec la recherche scientifique, informée par elle et en constante interaction avec elle.

Les Conférences Jean-Nicod visent à promouvoir les recherches philosophiques se rapportant à la cognition et à faire connaître en France les travaux réalisés à l'étranger dans ce domaine. Le conférencier présente ses recherches au cours d'un cycle de conférences qu'il rassemble ensuite en un livre.

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