

Reference and Consciousness. JOHN CAMPBELL. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002. Pp. ix, 267.

In a crowd you make a remark about ‘that woman’, but in the sea of faces I am unable to visually locate the woman you are talking about. I don’t know who you mean. Then, as I follow your gaze, I am able to single her out visually. I attend consciously to the person you referred to, and I now know who you mean. This sort of episode—how to understand it, what it reveals about knowledge of reference and its connections with conscious attention, and what it reveals about the nature of experience of objects, and the contact of the mind with the world—is the subject of this ambitious book by John Campbell.

The book’s main theses are these:

- 1) Conscious attention to an object (esp. visual attention) affords knowledge of reference.
- 2) Thought about an object’s properties presupposes knowledge of reference.
- 3) Knowledge of reference is achieved by the integration of various streams of information at the subpersonal level through a binding parameter that associates them all with the same object—centrally, though not exclusively, location.
- 4) The object of attention and its properties partly constitute the experience of consciously attending to it.
- 5) This relational character of experience accounts for our capacity to conceive of a world of mind-independent categorical objects.

The book divides into 12 chapters. Chapters 1-4 concern the functional role of conscious attention—how it mediates sensory information about the world and action. Chapter 5 discusses the sense of perceptual demonstratives. Chapters 6 and 7 introduce and defend the relational view of experience. Chapters 8-12 trace out ramifications of this view in a number of areas.

More specifically, chapter 1 concerns how information processing subsystems subserve knowledge of reference, and concludes that location of an object is a central parameter used to “organize the information-processing procedures that you use to verify, and to act on the basis of, judgments involving the demonstrative” (pp. 18-9). Chapter 2 argues that conscious attention to an object “causes and justifies the use of particular procedures for verifying and finding the implications of propositions containing the target” (p. 26). It does this by identifying “which thing is the target, in such a way that the information-processing subsystems can ... keep track of it over time, act effectively on the object, or verify propositions about it” (p. 38). The harmony of these procedures at the level of information processing with conscious attention to an object constitutes knowledge of reference to it. Hence knowledge of reference precedes conceptual thought about objects. Chapter 3 concerns how to identify locations so as to keep track of objects. Chapter 4 maintains that “grasp of sortal concepts is a more sophisticated matter than is the mere capacity for demonstrative reference” (p. 62), and

that it is not grasp of sortal concepts but different styles of attention we pay to objects that explains our grasp of their identity conditions over time.

Chapter 5 identifies the sense of a demonstrative with what causes and justifies one's use of the associated introduction and elimination rules, i.e., conscious attention. Thus, we look to how conscious attention to an object causes and justifies both a set of "information-processing procedures to verify a proposition involving the demonstrative" and a set of "information-processing procedures to act on the basis of a proposition involving the demonstrative" (p. 88) to understand the sense of a demonstrative. In the course of discussion Campbell explains why we are immune to error through being mistaken about which object is at a particular location: namely, location is used as the binding parameter for features of the object.

Chapter 6 argues that "the qualitative character of the experience is constituted by the qualitative character of the scene perceived" (p. 115); and that "only this view ... can characterize the kind of acquaintance with objects that provides knowledge of reference" (p. 115). Campbell defends, then, a disjunctive view of experience on which veridical experiences and hallucinations have no common element. Veridical experience puts us directly in contact with the world by being constituted in part by its objects. Campbell argues that: "Experience of objects has to explain how it is that we can have the conception of objects as mind-independent"; yet, on the common factor view, "experience of objects could not be what explains our having the conception of objects as mind-independent" (p. 121).

Chapter 7 claims that experience is of the categorical, and, on this basis, that "we cannot think of experience of the object as consisting merely of grasp of a demonstrative thought about the object; it has to be what explains our capacity for demonstrative thought about the thing. ... we have to think of experience of the object as a primitively relational state, with the object itself as figuring as a constituent of the experience" (p. 145).

Chapter 8 provides an account of joint attention to an object. Chapter 9 discusses memory demonstratives. Chapter 10 argues against 'anti-realists' that knowledge of reference of a demonstrative must explain patterns of use rather than the other way around. Chapter 11 argues that the role of conscious attention in knowledge of reference enables us to respond to the charge of inscrutability of reference and indeterminacy. Chapter 12 argues that we understand dispositions as grounded in categorical properties, and that experience must be of the categorical for us to have the concept of categorical properties.

There is far too much in this book to do more than touch the surface in this review. I concentrate on three basic interconnected questions. (1) Why think 'perceptual demonstratives' are connected to a psychologically fundamental form of contact with the world? (2) How does attention to information processing help explain knowledge of reference? (3) How is the relational view supposed to provide the explanatory power its rival is said to lack?

A perceptual demonstrative is a demonstrative used on the basis of perception. This is not a semantic category. 'That' means the same whether it is used as a demonstrative in a perceptual context or a non-perceptual context (demonstrating an abstract object, for example). The meaning rule is this: 'that' as used by a speaker refers to the object its speaker intends to be referring to with it. One understands a perceptual demonstrative if one knows what its speaker intends to

be referring to with it. This does not require paying conscious visual attention to that object. It is a mistake then to say conscious attention to the demonstratum is necessary for understanding visual demonstratives.

Still, visual attention is a fundamental way of locating objects around us, and the project may be recast as an inquiry into the role of conscious attention in our referring in thought to objects on the basis of visual experience.

When we think about objects on the basis of visual experience, generally we think that we know what we are referring to. What is it that we think we know? How do we know this? Campbell thinks that the knowledge is analogous to what Russell called 'knowledge by acquaintance'. But it was wholly unclear in Russell's writings what this epistemic relation to an object as such amounted to. So the analogy does not help to make clear what Campbell has in mind as the target of explanation. When we explain what we mean, we use a declarative sentence such as 'I was referring to ...' where a referring term or description replaces '...'. This, however, expresses propositional knowledge. I confess, dogmatically, to doubting that anyone has any clear (non-stipulative) idea of what non-propositional knowledge of an object could be.

We may still ask how we can think about objects in a way that allows us to gather information about them and act appropriately in response. One could call this capacity 'knowledge of reference' if one liked, and seek an account of it. It seems right to accord conscious attention a central role in this with respect to observable objects. It seems right also that we must be so constructed that our information processing systems (in the causal transmission sense) are attuned to (perceptually accessible) objects in some way that allows information to be associated with them and appropriately integrated with how conscious experience presents them. Campbell argues persuasively that location is used both at the level of information processing and at the level of conscious attention in identifying objects.

I doubt that any of this shows that conscious attention to an object is more primitive than, and what makes possible, thought about it. Contrast two conceptions of thought about an object. First, the internalist conception: the mind sets internal conditions for something to be the object of a thought. This can be expressed as a not necessarily purely qualitative description (it can directly refer to the thinker and time to anchor reference). But as internal conditions they do not directly refer to any contingent object besides the self or a part of it. One thinks about an external object if a unique object meets the condition set. Second, the externalist conception: we take up the third-person stance and ask what relation has to be in place between the person and the object for him to have a thought about it. For objects located perceptually, there have to be appropriate causal relations to the object which activate information processing procedures that lead to conscious attention to the object. Internalism takes the external conditions to be conditions on there being an object that fits an internal condition specified in terms of the content of conscious perceptual experience. Internalism views this as part of what makes thought about an object possible, but not as what makes object-directed thoughts possible. Externalism in contrast takes the external conditions to be constitutive of object-directed thoughts being so much as possible.

Internalism is supposed to be unable to explain how thought about a mind-independent world of categorical objects is possible; yet, "... a characterization of the phenomenal content of experience of objects has to show how ... experience

... can be what makes it possible for us to think about those objects demonstratively" (p. 114). Here the idea that there is a demonstrative way of thinking about objects assumes a large role. If at a fundamental psychological level we are able to think thoughts that are directly about external objects, then that the thought is about an object will not be explained by the object being one that meets some internal descriptive condition.

I return to this in a moment. But, first, does the externalist view explain how thought about such objects is possible? No. It simply postulates that demonstrative thought is fundamental.

Yet, explanations must end somewhere. If there are good reasons to think that there are psychologically fundamental demonstrative thoughts about external objects, then we should reject internalism. But that we announce some thoughts based on perception using demonstratives, and that we attribute thoughts using demonstratives in the complements of attitude reports, does not show that such thoughts are psychologically fundamental. When we use a demonstrative, or a proper name, we do so on the basis of intending to refer to some thing which we can identify independently of our choice of term to refer to it. Often enough it is the object to which we are consciously attending. But this provides *prima facie* an internal condition for the object to meet, namely, that it is the object to which I am paying conscious attention.

Is there a problem about having the concept of a mind-independent categorical object? Why should there be? What exactly is the demand on making sense of this that internalist views fail to meet? Furthermore, why should the experience being constituted by mind-independent categorical objects with their properties be any help in giving us the *concept* of mind-independent categorical objects? Campbell does not say what demand is not answered by internalists, nor give an account of concept possession that would explain why saying an experience was constituted in part by the objects and properties it was about would provide us with the concept of mind-independent categorical objects.

The relational theory of experience requires defense of the disjunctive view of experience, according to which the veridical experience puts us directly in contact with the world and its properties (somehow) through being constituted by them; while non-veridical experience indistinguishable from the subject's point of view involves nothing of the sort. However, this last bit gives the game away. If the veridical experience and the non-veridical experience will strike the subject the same way, then its seeming to the subject that the world is a certain way is common to the two. One might deny the seeming is the experience in veridical perception, but this would be a shell game with words.

Reference and Consciousness contains a great deal more argument and discussion than I have been able to comment on here. Notwithstanding my doubts about some elements of the framework and some of its central conclusions, it is an important exploration of the neglected link between conscious attention and reference to objects in thought, which deserves to be read by those interested in the role that perceptual experience plays in thought about the world.

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