

WEEK 4 INTENTIONALITY

STEP 4.1. ABOUT “ABOUTNESS” – INTENTIONALITY

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We've said that the mind is something subjective and that it feels like something to be a mind. Let's just say, the mind is capable of consciousness. But we've also said that not all mental states are conscious. There also are **unconscious mental states**.

What is it that differentiates unconscious mental states from other unconscious things? That's the problem I'd like to focus on now. We need another criterion, another defining property of the mental to add to the two that I've introduced you to already.

Freud's philosophy teacher, Franz Brentano, toward the end of the 19th century, he claimed that the defining feature of mental life was **intentionality**. And by the word intentionality, what Brentano meant was that **mental states always intend towards something**. They're always about something. You can't have a thought without it being a thought about something.

I'm thinking. Thinking what? You have to be thinking about something. Or I'm having a memory. A memory of what? The memory's about something, says Brentano. This is the essential feature of the mental.

But now, what about photographs? Aren't they always about something? Or audio recordings? Aren't they, likewise, always about something? It doesn't seem to cut it as something essentially mental.

So what I need to make clear is that this aboutness or intentionality is added to the other two things that I've introduced in earlier lessons. First of all, the mind is subjective. Then secondly, it's capable of consciousness. And then thirdly, it is intentional. It's always about something.

Now, when I spoke to you about consciousness, I said in a previous lesson that consciousness at its core is affective, that is, to say, it's emotion. The core stuff of consciousness is emotion. And I said that this core stuff, this basic property of consciousness, this most primal form of consciousness is about the state of your body. How am I doing within a biological scale of values?

Pleasure means I'm doing well. I want to do more of that. Unpleasure means I'm doing badly. I'd better avoid doing that.

This is the important thing about mental consciousness and mental representation. It's that I feel like this about that. And I extend my consciousness, this basic property of consciousness, which is affective, pleasure and unpleasure, and all of its nuances, I extend it upwards onto my forebrain and outwards into the world. So my consciousness is about these things that I'm perceiving or remembering.

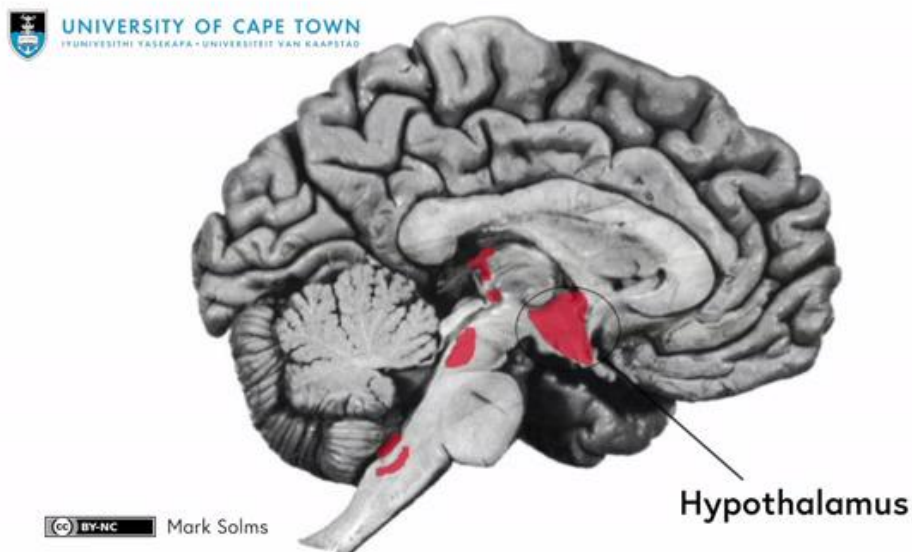
But please notice that what it means is that it's **motivated**. The feelings, the consciousness is what intends toward the objects. This is very different from a photograph or an audio recording.

Now, it's this property, this motivated interest, this motivated intentionality tending towards things in the outside worlds or things in the representational part of my mental apparatus, it's this thing that's not necessarily conscious. That was Freud's great discovery. We can have intentional states, motivated states of mind that we're not aware of.

And nowadays, everyone agrees with that. This is no longer a fringe psychoanalytical claim, as it was in Freud's day. It's now standard cognitive neuroscience. Everybody agrees that **intentional states need not have consciousness attached to them**.

So this is the third property of the mind that we can use to fill the gap, that we can use to cover the unconscious mental states. This is what makes them mental. They're intentional.

But today we can go further than Freud. We can explicate something about what the brain mechanisms are that underlie or that correlate with the mental processes that I'm describing. It starts with a need. In fact, we know there are need detector mechanisms in the **hypothalamus**, one of those core body regulating structures that I've been speaking about.



From those need detector mechanisms, higher **limbic circuits** are activated. And these circuits represent desire or generate desire. So you go from a need to a wanting to do something about the need. And that activates the **forebrain**.

And that starts to-- that's what the feeling like this about that, that's where the "about that" part comes from. So its need, then intends toward the world, because that's the only place that needs can be met. And so we have desire, and we have motivated interest in the things about us, around us.

So now we're beginning to see what the fundamental ingredients of a mental process are. First, their affects. There's consciousness. And that's about the subject. It's the state of the subject, this immaterial stuff of my subjective awareness.

And then it spreads onto representations of objects. It spreads onto or engages with the outside world. So it's affect and idea or feeling about a thing. That's what I mean by intentionality.

I want to make clear something implicit in what I'm saying there, which is that affect is a problem. You feel something within this biological framework or this biological scale of values. It's telling you, something's wrong here. Something unexpected is happening here. Something meaningful is going on here. What am I going to do about it?

And the problem then directs you toward the outside world. The outside world is where the solutions lie. So emotions intend toward ideas and objects, trying to match up with some idea or some action in the outside world that solves the problem that the consciousness, the affect represents in the first place.

So this is what I mean by intentionality. This is why our **consciousness intends toward objects**. And this, I'm saying, is the third defining property of a mind.



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