Philosophy of Consciousness

Topic 2
Direct Knowledge of Consciousness
Investigating Consciousness

• This course is primarily concerned with what it means to be conscious
• To begin, we are not looking at what others have said or conceptualised (that comes later)
• We are looking at consciousness itself
• So how is this to be achieved?
Immediate Consciousness

• Immediate consciousness is immediate because no mediating reflection is occurring
• That means there is no thinking, no commenting, no imagining, no reflective knowledge
• From the perspective of reflective consciousness immediate consciousness can only be indicated negatively (i.e. as a complete negation of reflection – a state of knowing nothing)
• Only by suspending reflective consciousness can immediate consciousness emerge
Withdrawal of Identification

• Entering a state of immediate consciousness can be achieved by withdrawing identification with the active intentionality of thought
• One no longer takes oneself to be the thinker of the thoughts that pass through consciousness
• The necessity to think is dissolved – thought is refused access to consciousness
• The very fact that I can dis-identify with thought reveals the identification that usually occurs
Direct Knowledge

• Reflective knowledge is knowledge-at-a-distance:
  • You can’t reflect on consciousness ‘now’ – whatever you reflect on is a former or imagined consciousness
  • You have become split into a reflecting consciousness (a subject) and that on which you reflect (an object)
  • On pain of infinite regress you can’t catch yourself in the act of reflection ‘now’ – because you are turned away from ‘now’

• And yet, in the moment ‘now,’ without reflecting, there is still consciousness of the room, of the people in it, of the meaning of these utterances – and behind this is an encompassing direct knowledge of what it is to be conscious
‘Looking’ and ‘Seeing’

- The key question is how to bring direct knowledge of consciousness to language
- Answer: I ‘look’ and ‘see’
  - I (reflectively) pose a question of the pre-reflective state
  - I ‘hold’ the question as a pure meaning within a state of pure pre-reflective consciousness and I ‘look’ and ‘see’ how it stands
  - No reflection (thought) is needed, I either see the answer or the question remains opaque
  - E.g. I hear a noise in the garden, I pose the question: ‘is it a cat?’ I go to the window, I look and see...
  - Now I ask: Do I know (directly) what it means to be conscious?