Consciousness and Content

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Frege's well-known argument for Fregean senses posits senses to account for the cognitive significance of certain true identity statements, for example "Hesperus is Phosphorus". This paper begins with the observation that this argument faces a dilemma. Cognitive significance has idealized and non-idealized definitions. Roughly, it can be defined either as being a posteriori or as being actually non-obvious to certain thinkers. The dilemma is that Frege's argument fails on non-idealized definitions (as Fodor and others have pointed out) and is circular on idealized definitions (a new claim I defend). After sketching this dilemma, I suggest an alternative way of introducing and defending the existence of Fregean senses: introspection. I suggest that introspection provides considerable evidence for a consciousness-centric conception of a layer of content akin to Fregean sense.

The Meta-Problem, the Meta-Question, and the Hard Meta-Problem.

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The meta-problem of consciousness is the problem of explaining our phenomenal intuitions -- our dispositions to make reports and judgements about phenomenal consciousness (Chalmers, 2018). But the meta-problem prompts the meta-question: Is it the only problem consciousness poses? If we could explain all our phenomenal intuitions in topic-neutral terms, would anything remain to be explained? Realists say yes, illusionists no. In this paper I defend the illusionist answer. While it may seem obvious that there is something further to be explained -- consciousness itself -- this seemingly innocuous claim immediately raises a further problem -- the hard meta-problem. What could justify our continued confidence in the existence of consciousness once all our intuitions about it have been explained away? The answer would involve heavy-duty metaphysical theorizing, probably including a commitment either to substance dualism or to the existence of a mysterious intrinsic subjectivity. A far less extravagant option is to endorse the illusionist response and conclude that the meta-problem is not a meta-problem at all but the problem of consciousness.