

MINUTES: A PRIORI, 04.05.18: Chudnoff, Awareness of Abstract Objects (2013)

Present: Peter, Giacomo, Giovanni, Sam, Xintong, Josh, Paul, Indrek, Crispin, Jonathan, Carrie

Presenter: Sam

Giovanni wonders why Chudnoff focuses on awareness *of* objects, rather than on awareness *that* [i.e. propositional awareness]. Why does he take the detour? **Peter** responds that C seems to see propositions as a species of abstract objects, and that the primary relation of awareness concerns objects. Also, C works with a notion of awareness as a two-place extensional relation. Certain propositions being forced upon us as true is evidence of extensional awareness. **Carrie** notes that, given Gödel's quote in the paper, it seems that, although a proposition gives us awareness of a set, awareness of a set need not give us the proposition.

Josh notes that, given C's existence question, when we have experiences of people telling us about abstract objects we also become aware of abstract objects. **Sam** responds that being told about abstract objects might not give you the right kind of awareness. **Jonathan** notes that the relevant awareness must involve more than it being *about* abstract objects, it must result in propositions forcing upon us as true; the awareness must be *of* abstract objects—someone telling me *about* a dog does not give me awareness *of* the dog. **Josh** responds that there is a sense in which I do become aware of your dog by you telling me about it. **Carrie** formulates the issue as follows: the relevant awareness on C's view does seem to require some kind of direct contact with the relevant object of awareness, which is missing in others telling us about abstract objects. But what does the metaphor of propositions being forced upon us as true give us?

Peter notes that Jonathan is right: awareness must figure in the story more like experience of something than knowledge about something. A kind of contact is needed between subject and object. Peter then flags a potential worry that might arise later on: one might cut the objects in such a way that the extensionality of awareness comes cheaply, but then awareness would not be so impressively like perception.

Crispin wonders whether the awareness relation has to be extensional from the start. Given Gödel's view, the awareness of an object must already be conceptual to give one the right result. **Peter** notes that Gödel is not really a representative of C's view, since C is explicit that awareness, as he understands it, is extensional. The extensionality of awareness is the main

point of the paper: awareness of abstract objects is like a visual experience of an apple, where propositions force themselves upon you as true.

Carrie wonders how useful the extensional view is. Seeing Superman dressed as Clark Kent gives one no awareness of Superman. Going straight to extensional accounts of awareness seems to be at odds with propositional awareness. **Peter** responds that bumping into a table has a role in the story of one's knowledge of the table, likewise for abstract objects. This is the sense in which the epistemology of abstracta is supposed to be similar to perception.

Giacomo notes that you are not aware of everything that forces itself upon you as true. In response, **Sam** wonders whether this also answers Carrie's Clark Kent/Superman objection. **Giacomo** responds that reflection is supposed to play an important role in C's view. And **Carrie** adds that awareness is then no longer extensional. Reflection involves lots of intensional lenses. **Peter** notes that C draws a contrast between hallucinations and intuitions—the latter are object dependent experiences. **Giacomo** wonders whether both kinds of experience play an epistemic role or only the good ones (as in a disjunctivist account). **Peter** suggests that C is proposing a disjunctivist account, as he later develops his view using naïve realism.

Giovanni notes that just being aware of the object is not an epistemically good state, if you intuit wrong things about the object. **Peter** notes that, given C's view, in that case you are not right because there is nothing there (the "awareness" is a hallucination). **Giacomo** notes that, since C only discusses good cases, we don't know what he would say about a bad case, e.g. when you fold the circle in the wrong way and conclude weird things about diameters of circles.

Carrie wonders about the idea of awareness as differentiation from a background. It is plausible for visual awareness, but for any other modality? Unless it involves no more than that things seem different from anything else, then it is not clear what background or differentiation from a background is. **Crispin** suggests that the core notion is that of selective attention. **Carrie** wonders whether, in the case of abstract objects, it amounts to focusing on e.g. the number 7 as opposed to the rest of the number line.

Giovanni wonders whether awareness of an object should also involve a distinctive phenomenology accompanying the object of attention. He then expresses a worry that this would be in tension with C's disjunctivist spirit.

In response to Carrie, **Peter** asks whether we smell the dog or the dog's smell. A background as C discusses it matters in that it enables us to have thoughts of the object of our awareness as

opposed to something else. Smelling the smell of the dog presumably does not help you pick out the dog from the background. **Carrie** suggests that it does. **Crispin** responds that in that case one would need independent evidence that the smell is the smell of that object, whereas in the case of sounds one does not. **Jonathan** notes that these differences between modalities are contingent.

Paul wonders whether, given the analogy with perception, a background of abstract objects would have a phenomenology as well. **Crispin** responds that there is, presumably, no abstract field, like there is a visual field. **Carrie** notes in response that just because the abstract objects themselves are not like that, one's experience of them might still resemble vision or other modality, e.g. there are cases in psychology where people are very good at distinguishing between numbers and report to do so based on the colour or smell of the numbers.

Concerning the principle of unity as discussed by C, **Peter** notes that e.g. the frame of a bicycle, on C's view, is part of the principle of unity of the bicycle—X is connected by a frame to Y. Likewise, in saying how one bit of an experience is connected to another involves referring to an object. We would describe the experience *as* an experience *of* an object, i.e. in terms of what it is an experience of. The principle of unity between aspects of my experience e.g. a smell, a visual experience of a white oblong, etc. is that they are all aspects of an experience of the cigarette in my hand. The cigarette is involved in the principle of unity. **Carrie** wonders whether the principles of unity are on the world or the mind side. **Peter** responds that they are Russellian condition, which means that not all of the objects are replaced by variables. Some are still in there.

Crispin notes that in causal cases it is possible to have veridical hallucinations. There presumably is no counterpart of that in the abstract case. But if we press the analogy, we should say that there is. Moreover, from the point of view of epistemology, we want to say that there couldn't be. In the mathematical case, one still, it seems, gets to know, even if one is hallucinating, but in the veridical hallucination case one does not—there is no epistemic flow in the case of veridical hallucination. Crispin adds that, if there is too much disanalogy with the perceptual case, the attraction of C's view disappears. **Paul** suggests that the abstract cases might be similar in this respect to cases of immunity from error through misidentification.

Peter responds that, a veridical hallucination according to C would not be an intuition of an abstract object. What C would have to say is that my justification is not defeated by the thought that if I misperceive an actual cube. The fact that there is no actual cube should not matter for

my geometrical experience of a cube. **Jonathan** suggests that this depends on how we spell out the case. If the person has a systematically unreliable tendency to find two objects similar, e.g. the person might take areas to always be equal but get it right in this case because they happen to actually be equal. C wants to say that that's a different kind of case, since it is not the good case. Thus, it is not the workings of the intuition involved in knowledge of abstracta that's explanatory but whether an intuition is involved.

Crispin suggests that we at one point work out the best version of the intellectual seemings view to see what weaknesses or strengths it really has.

Handout

Chudnoff (2013) – Awareness of Abstract Objects

Awareness of Abstract Objects

- A two-place determinable relation between agents and objects, with determinates such as: seeing, feeling, hearing...
- Abstract objects (typically) “lack spatiotemporal locations and do not stand in casual relations.” (706) Tentatively, they are things such as: universals, propositions, numbers, functions, sets...

Existence Question

Are there any experiences that we (routinely) have which make us aware of abstract objects? (706)

Historically, Godel and Husserl thought that beyond having thoughts about abstract objects we also have awareness. In the case of awareness (as opposed to mere thoughts) a proposition ‘forces it upon us as true’. (707-8)

Phenomenological analogical argument

Thinking about a tree ‘forces’ no propositions as true; whereas being aware of a tree (e.g. by seeing it) does. Seeing a tree makes seem true propositions about its shape, colour, etc.. By analogy, just thinking about sets might not deliver the Extensionality Axiom, or at least not make it seem true, but careful reflection on what it is to be a set may deliver precisely some propositions about sets which do seem true

Epistemic supplementation

“Some intuition experiences put you in a position to know the propositions that intuitively seem true in them” (709)

Grounding Question

“Supposing subject S is aware of abstract object o by having an experience e of the particular sort we have assumed, then in virtue of what does e make S aware of o?”(706)

Not: conceptual analysis, reduction, (individually) necessary and (jointly) sufficient conditions.

Aim: “identify the facts which necessitate and make it the case that e makes S aware of o, given that e does make S aware of o” – assumes a positive answer to the existence question.

Awareness: ideas from visual awareness

Casual dependence: If S sees o by having visual experience e, then e causally depends on o.

Dependence Argument:

- (1) If S is aware of o by having experience e, then e depends on o.
- (2) Casual dependence is the only kind of dependence.
- (3) Nothing casually depends on an abstract object.

Therefore

- (4) No intuition experience casually depends on an abstract object, and so no intuition experience makes its subject aware of an abstract object.

Visual differentiation: If S sees o by having visual experience e, then e’s phenomenology differentiates o from its background.

Differentiation Argument

- (1) If S is aware of o by having experience e, then e’s phenomenology differentiates o from its background
- (2) Unlike the objects of visual aware, the objects of intuitive awareness – e.g., properties and functions – do not have backgrounds
- (3) Unlike visual phenomenology, intuitive phenomenology is not the sort that could differentiate an object from its background

Therefore

- (4) For no intuition experience e and abstract object o does e’s phenomenology differentiate o from its background, and so no intuition experience makes its subject aware of an abstract object.

“Playing a role in anchoring *de re* mental states to their objects provides a positive characterization of awareness. If one is aware of an object o, one can form a *de re* mental state about o, or demonstratively refer to o, just by exercising whatever general apparatus is needed for *de re* mental states or demonstrative reference.”

This characterisation, a generalisation of Siegel’s account of object-seeing, provides an understanding of the relevant determinable relation of awareness for abstract objects.

Intuitive Dependence

Naïve Realism about intuitive dependence:

“If S is intuitively aware of an abstract object o by having intuition experience e, then e depends on o, in that: in accordance with the essence of e, o partly constitutes e and thereby determines e’s phenomenal character.” (713)

- Partial constitution

- Phenomenal character
- The essentiality of the other two

BUT: intuition experiences do not seem apt to having phenomenal characters themselves. Compositeness, oddness, or circularity seem of a different phenomenal character than their perceptual ‘counterparts’: colour, shape, arrangement in space.

Material Naïve Realism about intuitive dependence:

“If S is intuitively aware of an abstract object o by having intuition experience e, then e depends on o, in that: in accordance with the essence of e, o is a part of e and thereby determines e’s phenomenal character.”

BUT: It is unclear that experiences have objects or properties as parts, plus the parthood relation (alone) gives no reason for the determination of one phenomenal character over another.

Formal Naïve Realism about intuitive dependence:

Principle of Unity: arrangements in which parts must stand for an object to be composed by its parts, e.g., a bicycle’s pedals must be arranged to permit locomotion for a bicycle to be just that.

“If S is intuitively aware of an abstract object o by having intuition experience e, then e depends on o, in that: in accordance with the essence of e, o is part of the principle of unity that e’s (material) parts instantiate and thereby determines e’s phenomenal character” (715)

- Structures of an experience are of a kind apt to affect that experience’s phenomenal character.
- Abstract objects stand in the appropriate kind of (non-casual) relation to structures of experiences to determine an experience’s phenomenal character.
- Parthood, principle of unity, and phenomenal character are antecedently familiar and have application outside of intuitive dependence on intuitive awareness.
- The possibility that intuitive awareness is grounded on intuitive dependence is left open.

Intuitive differentiation

The background against which intuitive awareness is differentiated is supposed to be an entire cognitive field: the property of being a diameter is picked out from the other chords considered in thinking about the symmetry of a circle. In considering the symmetry of a circle, it is only the diameter which stands out.

PA Thesis: The structure of an intuition experience is exhausted by its propositional attitude structure – i.e. it is exhausted by its attitude and its propositional content. (718)

Chudnoff denies this, instead accepting the thesis Sui Generism:

“Intuition experience are sui generis propositional attitude, intuitive (or intellectual) seemings.”(718)

He further adds that intuition experiences are composed of “reflections,” which are a kind cognitive and imaginative experiences, and are mental states.

Grounds of Intuitive Awareness

Formal Naïve Realism requires some supplementation. It neglects to say what figures in parthood relations with intuition experiences, and neglects how it is that abstract objects relate to “an intuition experience’s principle of unity.” From his denial of the PA Thesis, Chudnoff gives that the reflections (thoughts and imaginings) are the composites of intuition experiences. He further proposes that it is part of what is it to be a principle of unity (for intuition experiences)

This all gives the following as a ground of intuitive awareness:

“If S is intuitively aware of an abstract object o by having intuition experience e, then e makes S aware of o *because*: in accordance with e’s essence, e’s (materials) parts are so arranged that e’s phenomenology differentiates o from its background, and o thereby plays a role in determining e’s phenomenal character.” (721)

- Captures intuitive dependence and intuitive differentiation without opening the proposal up to the respective arguments above
- Fits as a model for introspection: reflection on, say, a proposition in introspection has it that “reflections coalesce into a new experience in which my thoughts and imaginings are lined up”
- Possesses metaphysical familiarity and credibility. Essence, parthood, phenomenology, etc. are familiar. It implies nothing new or strange about our cognitive faculties, or how abstract objects must be.
- It has generality: for “goodness, knowledge, and logical implication in moral, philosophical, and logical intuitions, then there must be some facts in virtue of which such intuitions make us aware.”