

The Role of Unconscious Seeing in Action and Knowledge Acquisition

1. The objective of the project.

I consciously see a mug on my desk. There is a certain amount of truths I can come to know thanks to seeing this mug. These truths constitute *the epistemic import* of my current experience. Seeing the mug also enables me to embark on a certain amount of actions. The epistemic import of my experience and the action opportunities my experience makes perceptually available to me add up to *the cognitive import* of my visual experience of the mug. Now, would this cognitive import be different if my seeing of the mug was unconscious? If yes, would the difference be significant, and if so, in what way? Are conscious and unconscious seeing on a par in terms of knowledge-conduciveness? Are there any actions that can only be performed if preceded by conscious seeing? This project seeks answers to questions like these. Its goal is to assess the cognitive import of unconscious seeing. The expected end result of the project is a theoretical model of the role unconscious seeing plays in action and knowledge acquisition.

2. The research to be carried out.

The project is located at the intersection of philosophy of perception, epistemology, philosophy of action, and philosophy of consciousness. A distinctive trait of its methodology is inserting up-to-date and well-established empirical evidence into the premises of philosophical arguments. Accordingly, the cognitive import of unconscious seeing will be investigated by assessing selected philosophical theories in terms of how well they fit and predict the relevant empirical data gathered by perceptual psychology and cognitive neuroscience. The theories that will fare best on that assessment will be refined and enhanced in order to further extend their explanatory power. The end result of the research is supposed to exhibit the best possible way in which findings from all relevant research areas complement each other.

3. The reasons for choosing the research topic.

While there is a lot of psychological literature about unconscious seeing, so far much less has been said about this phenomenon from a philosophical point of view. In particular, not enough work has been done to determine how well the leading philosophical theories of perception, knowledge, action, and consciousness square with empirical data concerning unconscious seeing. Because a great deal of evidence concerning the putative cases of unconscious seeing has been already gathered, and they continue to be intensely studied experimentally, the time is ripe to put them under closer philosophical scrutiny. The assessment of the cognitive import of unconscious seeing will make a substantial contribution to philosophical debates about perception, knowledge, action, and consciousness.