

WEEK 4 – ASK MARK, QUESTION 4

We will move on to question four which goes like this, could you please explain unconscious intentionality? I am having difficulty understanding how intention can be unconscious. When I think of being intentional or doing things with intention I'm conscious of it. I know you are, we all are, we all think we are. That's the great surprise, starting with Sigmund Freud who first introduced the idea that we think we're masters of our mental house when in fact we are not.

We think that what we do is governed by conscious intentions but in fact what we do is governed by intentions in many instances of which we know nothing in consciousness. In other words we have unconscious intentions which is what the source of this question is. What do you mean by unconscious intentions? That's not how I experience it. Well yes, it isn't how you experience it and you've learnt something new that the way you experience it isn't the way that it is.

Now what's the evidence for that? Freud started over 100 years ago with very simple evidence derived from post hypnotic suggestion. That is the patient is placed under a hypnotic trance, while they're under hypnosis they are told when I wake you up you must do such and such. Then the person is brought out of the trance they then do such and such. But when the hypnotist asks that person why did you do what you just did because they were under hypnosis and therefore don't have conscious access to what they were instructed to do under the hypnotic trance they don't know why they're doing what they're doing.

So they make up an explanation as to why they're doing what they're doing. That's what we all do, we make up explanations all the time for what we do but those explanations are not necessarily meritorical. They don't necessarily really account for why we're doing what we're doing. So people in the audience can see why the hypnotised subject did what they did, they're just following the unconscious instruction but the subject of that action has no knowledge of it.

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That's the sort of paradigmatic evidence for unconscious intentionality but there's many other instances of that drawn from other sort of methodological traditions and I spoke to you about the famous case of the patient of [unclear 00:02:25] who refused to shake his hand because the day before she had had the unpleasant experience of being pricked with a pin when she shook his hand. She doesn't consciously remember that but unconsciously she does remember that.

So unconsciously she makes the decision, she forms the intention, I am not going to shake this bugger's hand, but she doesn't know consciously that this is what her intentionality is so she comes up with this general explanation, does a lady not have the right to withhold her hand from a gentleman. She has the reference to this general sort of semantic cultural rule and she thinks that's why she's doing it but it isn't why she's doing it. We, those of us who have conscious memory of the events know that she's doing it for reasons quite other than what she thinks; she's doing it for reasons of intentions which are unconscious.

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That's the sort of evidence we have and if you look at the review of all the evidence, and there are oodles of evidence derived from a multiplicity of research traditions reviewed by Bargh and Chartrand, they're sort of experts in this field, Google their work. They, on the basis of reviewing the evidence come to the conclusion that something like 90% of our voluntary acts are unconsciously motivated. And I suspect that's probably an over estimation of how much of our intentionality is conscious; I suspect it's less than 10%.

But the evidence that they review points to the fact not only that we have unconscious intentions but that most of our intentionality, 90% or more of our intentionality is unconscious. And remember please why I am introducing this third factor into my definition of what a mind is is because we had to find some property of the mental which is not conscious, and I'm saying that that property of the mental that is not conscious, which nevertheless makes it mental is that it's intentional.

In other words that it's motivated, it has to do with meeting your needs in the world. It has to do with the basic embodied of the mind that I've been describing to you. This intentionality which governs our unconscious information processing is what distinguishes us from computers and other such non biological devices. They are processing information galore and they do it very well but it's not mental. This information processing and manipulation of facts and figures that computers and cell phones and what not are capable of are not mental acts because they are not intentional.

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They are unconscious like much of our information processing but our unconscious information processing is motivated, is intentional, and in this way it's mental. So thank you very much, those are the four questions for week four and we can now move forward, thanks a lot.



Mark Solms, 2016

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