Title: Perception and the Problem of Attribution

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Abstract:

What are the necessary conditions for personal level attribution? Ever since Dennett (1969) introduced the personal/subpersonal distinction, opinions have varied as to when, exactly, a perceptual state is attributable to the personal level. This lack of clarity has resulted in problems for the unconscious perception debate. Indeed, both advocates and critics of unconscious perception agree that perception is a personal level phenomenon, however, they disagree on the conditions needed for personal level attribution. Block (2017), for instance, claims that in the case of DF (from Milner and Goodale 2005), we have “as definitive an answer to the personal/sub-personal question as one is going to get for this question: her unconscious visual representations are “her” representations because they guide her actions.” (8). Whereas Phillips (2018), on the other hand, claims that “availability to central agency comprises our best evidence for attributing a representation to an individual” (33).

These differences in conception are substantial because where one stands on the unconscious perception debate largely hinges on one’s criterion for personal level attribution, and no agreed-upon metric has been forthcoming. Therefore, my paper aims to elucidate and settle the necessary conditions for personal level attribution by offering a criterion which states: the content of a representation C is attributable to person P if and only if the use of C for intentional coordination is available to P. I argue for and expound this criterion as the most plausible conception for personal level attribution. Consequently, if successful, then this criterion will show that the alleged instances of unconscious perception—instances such as blindsight, DF’s visual form agnosia, and CFS—are not, in fact, instances of personal level perception. However, I finish the paper by suggesting ways that current or future alleged instances of unconscious perception may satisfy the criterion for personal level attribution.