

Attention and attentiveness

The Argument for Adverbialism

Friends of Attention 'First Friday', December 2022: Christopher Mole (University of British Columbia)

Processes vs. Adverbial Phenomena

- What is it for there to be an instance of X?
- What is it for something to be happening Xishly?

Processes vs. Adverbial Phenomena

- What is it for there to be an instance of combustion?
- What is it for something to be happening combustively?

Processes vs. Adverbial Phenomena

- What is it for there to be an instance of haste?
- What is it for something to be happening hastily?

Process-first phenomena:

- Combustion
- Life
- Baking a cake
- Remembering
- Perceiving

Adverbial phenomena:

- Haste
- Acceleration
- Play
- Practice
- Ritual

Breakout I:

- Think of two examples of adverbial phenomena.
- Think of two examples of process-first phenomena.
- Make a particular note of any difficult cases.

Allport (1993)

“[E]ven a brief survey of the heterogeneity and functional separability of different components of spatial and non-spatial attentional control prompts the conclusion that, qua causal mechanism, *there can be no such thing as attention*. There is no one uniform computational function, or mental operation (in general no one causal mechanism) to which all so-called attentional phenomena can be attributed.”

(‘Attention and Control: Have we been asking the wrong questions’ p. 203)

X

Y

7



1



7

1

X



Y

7



1



- When subjects are told to pay attention to the numbers, they report :
 - ‘illusory conjunctions’ on 18% of trials
 - ‘intrusion errors’ on 6%.
- When subjects are told to pay attention to the shapes, binding errors and intrusion errors occur at about the same rate (10% and 12%).

The Argument Against the Process-First View

1. If attention is a cognitive process, then, for all events x and y , if x and y instantiate the same cognitive processes, then if either one of them is an instance of attention, the other is too.
2. There are some events that are instantiations of the feature-binding process and that are instances of attention.
3. There are some events that are instantiations of those same feature-binding process and that are not instances of attention.

Therefore:

4. Attention is not a cognitive process

The Cognitive Unison Theory

A (the agent) is performing τ (the task) attentively if, and only if:

there is some task s that A understands to be a way of performing τ ,

and the set of cognitive resources that A can, with understanding bring to bear in the service of s does not contain resources that are occupied with activity that doesn't serve τ .

Breakout II:

- Are there instances of cognitive unison that are not attention?
- Are there instances of attention that are not cognitive unison?

“The mythical world is full of meaning. Gods are nothing but eternal bearers of meaning. They make the world meaningful and significant, let it make sense. They tell us about the way things and events are related to each other, and these narrated connections create sense. Out of nothing, narration makes *world*.”

(Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time* (2009). p 12. Trans. D. Steuer)

“The Introduction presented five basic questions about attention:

Metaphysical: What is attention?

Function: What role does attention play?

Properties: What are the characteristic features of attention?

Mechanism: How is attention implemented?

Consciousness: What is the relation between attention and consciousness?

To begin the discussion of the psychology of attention, consider the function question. There is widespread agreement among cognitive scientists that attention is a process of selection.”

(Wayne Wu, *Attention*, (2014). p 12.)