

WEEK 2 ANSWER TO QUESTION 2
STEP 3.3 ASK MARK

Now for the second question. In fact it flows on very well from the first question. I'll read it.

Question two: “Please expand on what subjectivity means. This week we have, for example, looked at colours, at computers trying to be human, carpets cannot do these, yet they have subjectivity? There is my subjective experience of a carpet, but I can't see the carpet itself exhibiting its own subjectivity. If we can only know our own minds, how can we recognise the subjective aspect of another entity?”

So here's an attempt at an answer. And again, I am happy to be asked the question, because I think it gives me an opportunity to clarify what really is a very difficult point. The point that I made, and which this questioner is picking up on, was that everything has both a subjective and an objective aspect. Everything.

There is such a thing as a carpet “as an object”, or a computer “as an object”. That is to say, these are things that you can see with your eyes, that you can touch with your hands. It's something out there in the world. It's not a subject, it's an object.

But then there is another aspect to these objects, and that is the being of those objects, The being of the carpet, or the being of the computer, is not a psychological term so much as a sort of geometric one. It has to do with the observational perspective. From what point of view are you describing the computer, or the carpet, or the anything else for that matter?

If you're describing it from the outside, if the perspective that you're taking on it – the observational perspective – is an external one, then it's an object. If the observational perspective is the being of the thing itself – in other words observing from the point of view of the object, from the point of view of the computer, or the carpet – then you're speaking of the subjective aspect of those things. It's only in this sense that everything has a subjective aspect.

But precisely the point that the questioner makes, “how can you speak of the being of a carpet?” is why I don't think that it's enough of a definition of a mind to say that it is a subjective thing. A mind is subjective in the sense that the mental perspective is the subjective perspective. It's a perspective from the being of a thing.

As I said in response to the first question, from the external point of view you see yourself as a body or a brain, as an object. But from the subjective point of view, you *experience* yourself as a mind. And the operative word there is experience.

The question is pointing to the fact that a carpet doesn't have any experience, that a computer doesn't have any experience. That's why we have to move on to other defining properties of the mind, and next week I'm going to speak about the second defining property of the mind, which is capacity for consciousness.

I think that although everything has a subjective aspect, only those things which, from a subjective point of view, *feel* like something, can be said to have a mind. So because it makes no sense to speak of what it feels like to be a carpet, or what it feels like to be a computer, because it makes no sense to say such things, this points to something that's missing in those things. What's missing is the second defining feature of the mental, which is the fact that it is sentient, that it feels like something, that it's capable of consciousness.

This then leads to a series of other important questions – picked up in the question that I'm answering now – as to how can you determine whether it feels like something to be a computer, or a person, or a bat, and this is a scientific, and indeed epistemological, question. And this is where the neuropsychanalytical point of view comes to our rescue. The whole point of looking at the objective properties scientifically is to try to find a way in which we can determine what qualities must the object have in order for it to be able to feel like something.

Because we human beings know that it feels like something to be me, to be ourselves, each of us knows our own minds and we know what it feels like. Looked at from a neurological point of view we can use modern technology to identify what is going on objectively in your brain when you feel something. And then you can start to generalise by saying every other creature that has that same objective property in its brain, that occurs in our brains when we feel something, this gives us an empirical handle, an objective handle, on what feelings are all about. And that's where we're heading next week.

But for now, just to clarify again, I am saying that everything has a subjective aspect. You can speak of being a computer. But not everything feels like something in its being. And it's this second property, the capacity for consciousness, that we're heading toward next week, which further specifies what a mind is.

So I hope that I've been able to clarify that really quite technical point. Unfortunately there are some technicalities we can't avoid, arising from the very fact that the mind is something subjective. It makes a science of the mind an awfully difficult thing to do. But the alternative, to exclude the fact that the mind is subjective, like the behaviourists did, and say we're only going to define it by objective criteria, is to leave out something absolutely fundamental about the mind, which is that we are our minds, as I picked up in response to the first question. So although it causes us difficulties, we have to sadly acknowledge that fact and move on from there.



Mark Solms 2015

Unless otherwise stated, this material is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). This means you are free to

copy, distribute, display, and perform the work as long as you: attribute the authors of the work; do not use the work for commercial purposes and do not remix or adapt any copies.