
Abstract:

The belief that language is a necessary condition for consciousness is common within psychoanalytic literature. This, in turn, has led to accounts of 'passive primal repression', where pre-verbal mental content cannot become conscious at a later time. This paper discusses consciousness and unconsciousness as certain relations rather than as qualities of mental processes. On this view, to be conscious of mental content requires taking it as the object of a second mental act. The view that language is a necessary condition for consciousness is rejected on the basis that applying language to mental content requires knowing the mental content first (i.e., being conscious of it). Implications for primal repression theory, and the manner in which language may facilitate becoming conscious awareness, are discussed.