

Workshop: Empirical Data and Philosophical Theorizing (EDPT)

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‘The Experience of Reading’

Abstract: At this moment, you are engaged in the act of reading, so introspect, what are you experiencing right now? It seems like the answer should be obvious, but philosophers and psychologists give contradictory descriptions of their conscious experience while reading. This study looks to experimental subject to shed light on the disagreement. Subjects reported on their experience while reading, and these reports were compared across time and with performance on subsequent questions. Subjects radically altered their introspective reports over the course of the experiment, so much so that reports did not form a coherent picture of inner-life. This suggesting that the experience of reading is highly variable and that certain forms of introspective reports are not an accurate measure of experience. The absence of agreement regarding the phenomenology of reading, among experts and naive subjects alike, restricts the domain of experience that should be investigated using armchair reflection.