Self-Based Notions of Consciousness

Don Perlis

University of Maryland
Phenomenal consciousness is often studied in terms of its (perceptual) contents: objects, colors, sounds, pains, etc. (One then usually asks how the subject happens to be conscious of these.)
• But the subject itself is conscious, even without such contents.
• Imagine, one by one, all perceptual items of which one is conscious disappearing.
• When all those are gone, one is not unconscious: one’s conscious self is left.
An elemental conscious self may be the most basic form of consciousness, an Ur-consciousness.

Not to be confused with consciousness of an autobiographical self, or an examined self, or self-consciousness in the colloquial sense of heightened social sensitivity.
• Rather it is simply the awake state, being at home, the lights on, the what it’s like to be, *simpliciter*. 
• Self-based treatments of mental states arise in various settings, from natural language (Grice), to belief (Perry), sensation (Humphrey), perception (Peacocke), understanding (Searle), as well as consciousness.

• This communality may suggest a deeper connection, the primacy of a self-notion in all mental states.
• Ur-consciousness may provide a handle on the hard problem; at the very least it provides an experiencer (to whom perceptual contents, if present, may appear).

• What does the experiencer experience, in the absence of perceptual contents?
• Sensations? (Humphrey); but these can be absent as well.
• Perhaps the passage of time (Elman, Lloyd), as would be needed in a subject that takes — and monitors — actions.
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- But such time-passage is *in the present subjective moment*, processual.
- Experience is always passing, never frozen.
- Humphrey calls this *thick time*, the sense of the present moment as a moment in flux.
• Newton suggests thick time as the defining characteristic of the *hard problem*, why it is hard: it does not correspond to ordinary notions of physical time-instants.

• But thick time is characterized by its self-experientiality; it might be (the ur- quale of) ur-consciousness.