

Self-Based Notions of Consciousness

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1

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.)

2

- 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.

3

- 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.

4

- Rather it is simply the awake state,



being at home, the lights on,



the what it's like to be, *simpliciter*.

5

- 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.

6

- 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?

7

- 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.



β past β à present β à future à
me becoming me becoming me

8

- 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.

9

- 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.