

On the Intrinsic Nature of States of Consciousness: Attempted Inroads from the First-Person Perspective

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The Jamesian streams of consciousness are each made up of states of consciousness one at a time in tight temporal succession except when a stream stops flowing momentarily or for a longer time. These pulses of mentality are typically complex in the sense of their possessing, each of them, many ingredients or features. But, also, every state of consciousness is, in a different sense, simple: a unitary awareness, a single mental act. Although unitary, a state of consciousness often has many objects, which have some kind of existence, past, present, or future, or which are nonexistent, merely apparent, only imaginary. The problem concerning the intrinsic nature of states of consciousness is what they are themselves, not what they are about or what they may seem to be about, but what are their own intrinsic properties. For example, in my view, conscious states are, literally, certain occurrent states of the brain. In James's different view, conscious states are mental in the sense of nonphysical yet directly produced by the total brain process or by a substantial part of it. In our attempts to determine the intrinsic properties of states of consciousness, we are well advised to attend to our inner awareness of them. Any true statement about a state of consciousness that we may succeed in formulating from the first-person perspective is, in my view, a fact concerning a brain state and may help us to learn which among the occurrent brain states are actually the states of consciousness. Their being unitary awarenesses is among the facts we know firsthand about the states of consciousness. I can think of no instance of such a state that is missing the property of intentionality, the property of its being at least as though about something. Also, although we may distinguish various ingredients belonging to a state of consciousness — a state can be, for example, an auditory, a visual, a sexual, a memorial, and an anticipatory experience, all at the same time — these ingredients are not apprehended side by side, but as integrated together in a unitary state. It will be argued that how we find firsthand a state of consciousness to be is illusory, that any such state is actually made up of separate processes. But this claim has its own problems, including having to explain the difference between two simultaneous states of consciousness belonging each of them to a different stream and an integral state that includes several different kinds of experience.

Talks to Teachers

Soon after *The Principles of Psychology* (1890/1950a, 1890/1950b) first appeared in print, the author of this extraordinary work began to give a course of lectures on the new psychology to the teachers of Cambridge, Massachusetts and, subsequently, to wider audiences. William James eventually wrote out these public lectures in the form to which they had evolved over the years. His published volume titled *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: And to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (1899/1925) consists of fifteen of them, together with a few addresses that he delivered to students at women's colleges during the same period.

In his introduction, James states that the purpose of his talks is to provide teachers with a description of the mental life of pupils just as the pupils themselves feel their mental life to be. As was the case in his masterwork, James's main approach is again from the first-person perspective, although the brain — whose purely physical activity was proposed to bring the stream of consciousness into existence — is never far from his thoughts. Indeed, in his abbreviated textbook, James wrote, "Something definite happens when to a certain brain-state a certain 'sciousness' corresponds. A genuine glimpse into what it is would be *the* scientific achievement, before which all past achievements would pale" (James, 1892/1984, p. 401).

Of much importance to James's psychological thought at the time of *The Principles* and later was the fact that, from the first-person perspective, mental life does not appear to consist of "distinct processes and compartments"; rather, the subject encounters firsthand an "active unity" going on within him or her (James, 1899/1925, p. iv). Introspectively, our mental life seems to us to belie its proximate source in the physical world, given our understanding of the latter at this point in the history of science.

James's statement about encountering an active unity, found in his talks to teachers, is a familiar one. It recalls the section of Chapter IX in *The Principles* where James argued, now famously, that the stream is "sensibly continuous." The stream of consciousness presents itself to itself not as broken up into bits. It does not apprehend itself in the first instance as something jointed. Implicitly, James (1899/1925) is also referring in these terms to the intrinsic structure of the individual states of consciousness, which, in tight temporal adjacency, constitute one at a time the stream's uninterrupted temporal sections.¹ Consciousness appears to itself to possess a diachronic unity and, also, a synchronic unity that shall occupy us here.

¹The reader will naturally feel a tension to exist between the stream of consciousness's being subjectively continuous and its being made up objectively of one state of consciousness after another. I have discussed this matter elsewhere (Natsoulas, 1992–1993a, 1992–1993b) and it does not figure in the present article.

Having devoted so much productive attention to his general conception of the stream of consciousness in *The Principles*, James returns to discussion of it in the second of his printed talks. Once again, he focuses on the successive mental states that, one after another, *are* the stream. He states that he will only be describing them and will not try to explain how it is that they are as they are.² James believes his direct account to be “secure from positive error” and “free from admixture of conjecture or hypothesis.” That is, his method is quite empirical, his goal being simply the accurate description of the mental just as he finds it to be.

James’s (1899/1925) first general descriptive fact about the states of consciousness is that each of them possesses a degree of internal complexity and is to be best comprehended as having the intrinsic structure of a “field.” The following passage comprises his attempt in the lectures to spell out this first basic fact.

The *immediate* fact which psychology, the science of mind, has to study is also the most general fact. It is the fact that in each of us, when awake, (and often when asleep), *some kind of consciousness is always going on*. There is a stream, a succession of states, or waves, or fields or whatever you please to call them, of knowledge, of feeling, of desire, of deliberation, etc., that constantly pass and repass, and that constitute our inner life These concrete fields are always complex. They contain sensations of our bodies and of the objects around us, memories of past experiences and thoughts of distant things, feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, desires and aversions, and other emotional conditions, together with determinations of the will, in every variety of permutation and combination. In most of our concrete states of consciousness all these different classes of ingredients are found simultaneously present to some degree, though the relative proportion they bear to one another is very shifting. One state will seem to be composed of hardly anything but sensations, another of hardly anything but memories, etc. But around the sensation, if one considers carefully, there will be always be some fringe of thought or will, and around the memory some margin or penumbra of emotion or sensation. (pp. 15–18)

By way of introduction to the topic of the present article, the reader should note especially how, above, James specifies the complexity of the individual states of consciousness — namely, in terms of what each state “contains,” not in terms of their being made up, each of them, of certain components. It will be seen later that talk of the “parts” of a state, if this is intended literally, is inconsistent with James’s considered view. Therefore, James’s acknowledgment that a state of consciousness has “ingredients” needs to be examined and reconciled with the thesis that, although the states of consciousness are complex, they are at the same time simple in a different

²Similarly, James (1890/1950b) had previously stated, “There are, as we know, two ways of studying every psychic state. First, the way of analysis: What does it consist in? What is its inner nature? Of what sort of mind-stuff is it composed? Second, the way of history: What are its conditions of production, and its connection with other facts?” (p. 913; cf. Brentano, 1890–1891/1995, pp. 3–4).

sense. Here is how T. L. S. Sprigge (1993) expresses this thesis of James's in an extended, book-length study of F. H. Bradley and James: "Even if states of consciousness are typically themselves in a certain sense complex, that is not through having parts each with its own distinct felt being" (p. 74).

Spatializing States Into Fields

Two sections of a recent article of mine are titled "Are States of Consciousness Conceivable as Fields?" and "The Integral Nature of States of Consciousness" (Natsoulas, 2000). That article too was concerned with the intrinsic nature of James's states of consciousness. I fully accepted there, as I do here, the fundamental Jamesian notion that states of consciousness are the basic durational components successively constituting any stream of consciousness and that each such state is, for the instant of its existence, all that there is to the respective stream of consciousness. However, I strongly objected to James's view that the states of consciousness can be suitably conceived of as "fields." A theorist is not led inevitably from states to fields, at least not in the present context.

A field conception of the states seemed to me to constitute an undesirable modification of James's view in *The Principles* — although I recognized that "fields" of consciousness were not altogether missing from his masterwork. James's new stress on consciousness's field character seemed to me to constitute a major theoretical move. Put to systematic use, this notion would carry the theorist away from the original succession of pulses of mentality, each of them complex in the sense of possessing numerous features, toward a belief in mental states that each have a certain unwarranted kind of spatiality wherein features of a mental state are lined up side by side.

I am, however, a mind-body physicalist (cf. Sperry, 1976, 1977, 1980, 1987; Natsoulas, 1987) and have no doubts that a state of consciousness occurs in physical space and has spatial dimensions itself. Indeed, it may turn out to be scientifically useful to speak even of the *size* of a state of consciousness — meaning by this the amount of the brain's structure that participates in the occurrence of the particular state. However, James conceives of the spatiality of a state of consciousness analogously to the state's objects' constituting together a single array.

In my earlier article, I held that James's spatialization of the conscious states added nothing positive to his main thesis, which was that each of the states of consciousness typically, if not always, possesses a number of "ingredients" and these ingredients vary across the states in their character and degree. In *The Principles*, James himself qualified fundamentally his notion of a halo or penumbra that "surrounds and escorts" every definite image in the mind and thereby bestows meaning on the image. His qualification casts

doubt on whether he was in a theoretical position consistently to take his own spatial metaphor literally.

Accordingly, James rightly explained that this penumbra or meaning is better conceived of as “fused into one with [the image] and has become bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh; leaving it, it is true, an image of the same *thing*, but making it an image of that thing newly taken and freshly understood” (James, 1890/1950a, p. 255). Thus, had an imaginal awareness’s penumbral contents been different from what they actually were, any object of that state would have been, to a greater or lesser degree, apprehended differently. And this not because the contents of a state are among its causal determinants, but because they are dimensions of how, specifically, a state mentally grasps its object.

Some present-day psychologist may well be tempted to spatialize content vis-à-vis the state to which it belongs. I believe it will eventually be recognized, however, that a state’s content is an intrinsic feature of the state, and ought not be treated of as though it were an interacting appendage to the state. What James (1899/1925) calls “ingredients” of a state of consciousness — sensations, memories, thoughts, feelings, desires, emotions, aversions, and conations — are well conceived of as features of how the state apprehends its often many objects, all of them together in mutual relation.

See my previous article (Natsoulas, 2000) for more detail on the above points. However, there will be good reason for me to address James’s notion of state as field in the present article as well.

Wundt’s Confession

James (1899/1925) finds support for his basic thesis concerning the states of consciousness in an “unusually candid confession” from Wilhelm Wundt himself, whom James describes as the founder of the new psychology. James’s thesis to which I am referring is that the structure of an individual state of consciousness typically is, in different senses, both complex and simple. James’s second lecture to teachers is titled “The Stream of Consciousness” and concludes with a long footnote consisting of a part of a passage of Wundt’s in which Wundt was assessing the progress that psychology had made in the last thirty years of laboratory studies with introspective methods. The quotation, as translated from the German by James, reads in substantial part as follows.

If I were asked in what for me the worth of experimental observation in psychology has consisted, and still consists, I should say that it has given me an entirely new idea of the nature and connection of our inner processes. I learned in the achievements of the sense of sight to apprehend the fact of creative mental synthesis From my inquiry into time-relations, etc., . . . I attained an insight into the close union of all those psy-

chic functions usually separated by artificial abstractions and names, such as ideation, feeling, will; and I saw the indivisibility and inner homogeneity, in all its phases, of the mental life. The chronometric study of association-processes finally showed me that the notion of distinct mental "images" was one of those numerous self-deceptions which are no sooner stamped in a verbal term than they forthwith thrust non-existent fictions into the place of reality. I learned to understand an "idea" as a process no less melting and fleeting than an act of feeling or of will, and I comprehended the older doctrine of the association of ideas to be no longer tenable . . . Besides all this, experimental observation yielded much other information . . . but I hold all these more special results to be relatively insignificant by-products and by no means the important thing. (W. Wundt quoted by James, 1899/1925, p. 21)

Thus, support came from an unexpected quarter for the kind of conception of mental life that James had been advocating. James interprets Wundt's passage, from which the above sentences are quoted, to be an espousal of the stream of consciousness in accordance with James's account of it and a full renunciation of the dominant kind of conception of mental life that treats of it as made up of distinct elements or functions.

In speaking of mental life, James consistently had in mind the states of consciousness, the basic durational components that, exclusively, make up the stream of consciousness one after another. "Mental life" did not include the distinct and, for James, purely neurophysiological processes that bring the successive pulses of mentality into their very brief existence. James's claims regarding the mental were restricted therefore to these latter states of consciousness and to the mental states that make up any secondary stream of consciousness that may also proceed in the same person (see, e.g., James, 1890/1950a, p. 227).³

The proposed simplicity of the states of consciousness — that is, their each being integral, their not being compounded of smaller units — does not imply that what is not conscious and determines proximately the occurrence and character of those states is also not compounded. Rather, the "ingredients" of the conscious states have various causal bases; different sets of processes, albeit overlapping, are the proximate causes of different states of consciousness. Thus, for example, James (1890/1950a, p. 176) stated that the qualities of states of consciousness vary depending on whether the occipital lobes or the temporal lobes of the cerebral cortex play the larger role in producing them.

³James's secondary streams of consciousness are not to be thought of as made up of a different kind of mental state than primary streams are. In the year of *The Principles's* publication, James wrote, quite consistently with his book, as follows in a letter: "As for mental states that are not states of consciousness, I don't know what can be made of them. Brain-states I know, and states of consciousness I know, but something that is more than a brain-state yet less than a state of consciousness I know nothing about, nor do I see the use of discussing its existence" (James, 1890/1999, p. 109).

Two Kinds of Anticipated Objections

1. *The Present Understanding of James*

In response to the points to be made in the present article, two kinds of objections, among others, may be forthcoming. The first of these would take issue with one or another part of my understanding of James. It may be argued, for example, that James did assign, and especially so in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1982), a causal role in the production of the main stream of states to a stream he called "secondary" in *The Principles* and he later proposed is a "subconscious self" that proceeds within every one of us. Thus, not all of the proximate determinants of the occurrence and character of states of consciousness are, according to James, compounded of smaller units. The total brain process — which, was said in *The Principles* to produce, pulse by successive pulse, our primary consciousness — has a part that manages to produce a second stream and this second stream, which also consists of integral states, has effects on the first stream.

Here is my formulation of a response to this potential objection.

Or is it the neurophysiological causes of the second stream that also affect the primary stream? The latter notion would seem to be more consistent with *The Principles*. James speaks in *Varieties* of a second world of experiences that sometimes impacts on the world of ordinary consciousness. And he is now able to say that some of our states of consciousness that make up our primary stream "come" from a certain mental source external to that stream. More consistently, however, I should think, states of consciousness do not literally incur, or run in, from outside a stream, but the part of the total brain process that produces the secondary stream is a determinant as well of which states of consciousness are produced in the primary stream. (Natsoulas, 1999b, p. 12)

Of course, I cannot enter here into all possible objections concerning my understanding of James. Fortunately, a substantial part of my case for interpreting James as I do can be found in a long series of articles all of which have "The Stream of Consciousness" as their main title and are published in the journal *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*. The article in the latter series that has been published most recently as of this writing bears the subtitle "James's Concept of Appropriation" (Natsoulas, 1998–1999). I shall be referring to a few of the other installments as I proceed from here.

2. *Impossible in Principle?*

A second sort of objection will focus on whether a mind–brain view of the physical-monist variety can deal with the integral character of the states of consciousness. James proposed that the states individually possess an integral character on introspective grounds. Such grounds are not necessarily incom-

patible with a physical-monist understanding of the relation between the mental and the physical (see, e.g., Armstrong, 1968, 1979, 1984; Natsoulas, 1987; Sperry, 1976). However, James was in a theoretical position to hold against the individual compounding of states of consciousness whereas a physical-monist view, it will be objected, is not in any such position.

James conceived of the states of consciousness as pulses of mentality, and the features of such pulses characterize them through and through and without the pulses' having parts different from their other parts. Consider, for example, the ingredient, or intrinsic feature, of a pulse of mentality that is one's having the auditory feeling of a particular musical pitch. According to James (1890/1950a), this auditory feeling is a direct effect, of "some simple and massive process in the auditory centres of the hemispherical cortex" (p. 176). The auditory feeling is proposed to be mental, but it is not proposed to be itself a mental state. It is, rather, one feature of a state of consciousness that also possesses other intrinsic features. There are no auditory feelings that are not features of states of consciousness. For, James insisted, only the states of consciousness — no unconscious mental states — exist on the mental side of the mind-body divide.

Moreover, the state of consciousness of which an auditory feeling is a feature does not have an auditory feeling among its parts. Thus, although different parts of the total brain process may be responsible causally for different features of a state of consciousness, this does not result also in states of consciousness with different parts, each of them possibly owed to a different part of the brain process. Somehow, the parts of the total brain process combine together in producing their mental effects. They produce a state of consciousness that is unitary, that is complex without its consisting of elements.

Better to say that the state is an auditory feeling, provided one means the state is other things as well, including probably a visual feeling as well (see example from Puccetti below). We often speak of a state of consciousness as being an auditory experience, or of ourselves as undergoing states of consciousness that are auditory experiences. But such cases are just ones in which the state is, as James would say, more about things heard than it is about things seen (etc.).

Can a physical-monist account of the states of consciousness allow their evidently integral character? Or, if it did, would such an account fall perforce into internal inconsistency? To be consistent, must it hold that a momentary phase of any stream of consciousness will normally consist — insofar as such phases are normally complex — of more than just a single mental state?⁴ Must

⁴According to a physical-monist view, a state of consciousness, or any other actually occurring mental state, is a brain state of some kind. But, in such a view, not all brain states are mental. Thus, I distinguish between the mental brain-states and the nonmental brain-states. The former are those brain states whose properties include mental properties — although I do not suggest that these states have any properties that are not in principle identifiable with third-person properties.

a physical-monist view deny the synchronic unity of the stream because of the nature of the constituents that must be posited to make up a brain state?

In Defense of a Possible Physical-Monist Account

In the most basic respect, the states of consciousness are not as James holds: nonphysical and merely caused by brain processes to take place. The states of consciousness are actually in themselves, literally and intrinsically, states of the brain. If so, some way needs to be found to conceive of a kind of brain state that does not break down, as it were, into distinct parts. A brain state that is unitary would be one possessing its features as a unified whole: just as the states of consciousness introspectively seem to be.

A Speculation

In a different context I sought to conceive of such a state as being peculiar to a structure in the brain. This kind of state would take place in what I called a "cerebral integrative conscious focus or center" (Natsoulas, 1993a). This center would function, not necessarily uniquely, in such a way that its activity would possess at any point in time the required kind of unity, that is, the unity required by how a state of consciousness seems from the first-person perspective.

My context was an argument of Roland Puccetti's contra the "committee" conception of mind. According to the latter kind of conception, multiple brain centers of consciousness send information to a "chairperson" whose job it is to integrate together all the information received from them but who has no experience of its own. Puccetti (1981) argued in opposition,

Take any three friends and ask them to imagine being, respectively, visual cortex, auditory cortex, and a limbic center Then entertain the picture of all three attending to, say, an attractive member of the opposite sex slowly disrobing to the music of bongo drums. One friend sees the dancer disrobing, but hears and feels nothing. Another friend hears the music, but feels and sees nothing. The third feels sexually aroused but, seeing and hearing nothing, hasn't a clue why. This is absurd, yet it is the committee model of mentality. I for one know it does not model my mind, for in the imaginative exercise I would be seeing, hearing, and feeling aroused. And not as some kind of committee chairman receiving reports from members, but as the original subject of these experiences. (p. 117)

I therefore suggested that there might be a locus in the brain where there occurs a single, unitary experience that, *inter alia*, is visual, auditory, and sexual all at once (Natsoulas, 1993a). At this center, the states of consciousness proceed and they possess ingredients of all three of the latter kinds, and of other kinds as well. Each of the states is a pulse of visual, auditory, and sexual experience.

And more. Let me give an important example of this “more” based on my conception of inner awareness as intrinsic. In my view, each one of many states of consciousness has itself among its several objects.⁵ These many states are, in this latter sense, self-apprehensions as well as having a qualitative character: that is, in the example, visual, auditory, and sexual. My view resembles in some ways Franz Brentano’s (1911/1973) self-intimational understanding of inner awareness.⁶ Barry Smith (1981) stated as follows Brentano’s notion of the form that the inner awareness of a state of consciousness takes: “a merely abstractly distinguishable moment or constituent part of the [state of] consciousness, a moment of the type that can of necessity exist only as embedded within such a larger, circumcluding whole” (p. 120).

What applies to inner awareness applies to all of the other experiences of which the same state of consciousness consists. But these are not distinct mental acts, which take place, as it were, alongside each other. They are not so much constituents of a state of consciousness as they are features of it. When a state of consciousness occurs that belongs to a certain stream, the only mental act that can rightly be said to occur in that stream at the time is only that state of consciousness. This mental act is, for example, a visual perceptual awareness and also an awareness of itself as such — not to speak of its also being quite possibly an auditory and a sexual experience as well. A state of consciousness is single and unitary and yet normally a multimodal experience.

How?

For physical monism, the problem “How?” remains. How can the states of consciousness — as picked out by James — be conceived of as brain states in a way that is empirically faithful yet does not grant them any mental features not identical to certain of their physical properties? To many, this will certainly seem an insurmountable problem. At this point in the history of science, it is natural to think of brain states as made up of neural impulses or of some other kind of occurrence at the same level of analysis. And such occur-

⁵My view is not an appendage conception of inner awareness — according to which a separate mental occurrence is necessary for there to be firsthand awareness of a mental occurrence; a mental occurrence cannot be its own object or even one of its objects. James’s conception of inner awareness was of the appendage type (see Natsoulas, 1995–1996, 1996–1997).

⁶One way in which it does not is with respect to Brentano’s insistence that, in fact, all states of consciousness are inner apprehensions each one of itself. I have no problem in countenancing a state of consciousness whose structure does not include any awareness of itself. Indeed, perhaps most of our states of consciousness are actually of this kind. We should not generalize what we find during introspection to the entire stream of consciousness, including those many temporal sections of it, of shorter or longer duration, that happen not to include any state of consciousness having awareness of itself.

rences as the latter do not have, individually, the kind of complexity that, firsthand, a state of consciousness seems to possess.

Some theorists propose that certain more molar processes take place in the brain that do possess properties that are plausibly identical to intrinsic features of states of consciousness; each one of these posited brain processes involves many neural impulses and its experiential features are supposed to be identical to *pattern properties* of the total neuronal activity that comprises such a process. With such properties in mind, Roger W. Sperry (1969) wrote, "A full explanation of the brain process at the conscious level will not be possible solely in terms of the biochemical and physiological data such as we are now perforce engaged in gathering" (p. 535).

However, a simple reference to the existence of pattern properties is not an adequate solution to the problem "How?" Indeed, it is no more clear how a complex pattern of neuronal activity can be a state of consciousness. And so, the absence of an adequate physicalist account leads people to jump to the conclusion that states of consciousness must be nonphysical or, at least, it is impossible to conceive of states of consciousness without introducing non-physical terms and acknowledging their nonphysical referents as real.

But abandonment of physical monism for some sort of substance or property dualism seems to me premature. Indeed, it seems a perverse willingness to embrace failure at too early a point in scientific history. I suggest, instead, that our problem lies with how little we know, as yet, about the brain itself. In relation to what we will know, we know so little that what we know should not be used to rule out either a brain locus for the states of consciousness nor their fully physical nature. Here is how I expressed this point in an earlier article.

The functioning of the brain is not as mundane as think the critics who compare it with their highly meaningful and luxuriant mental phenomena. It is often such a comparison between something rich and vibrant and something else of an uninteresting basic simplicity that decides the question of whether experiences could be brain processes The erroneous nonphysical characterization of mental occurrences is . . . due [in good part] to our inability imaginatively to grasp the unique kind of brain-functioning that possesses among its properties the qualities we experience. (Natsoulas, 1987, p. 19)

The First-Person Perspective

In my physical-monist view, every true statement about a state of consciousness that we may succeed in formulating is a statement about an occurrence in the brain.⁷ And it is well worth it for us to try to say about such

⁷The following sentences well accord with my mind-body view. "A state of consciousness may be a small bit [of experience], but it is a solid bit as long as it lasts; not hollow, not a mere abstract element of experience It is a full fact, even though [in the particular instance] it is an insignificant fact; it is of the kind to which all realities whatsoever must belong; the motor currents of the world run through the like of it; it is on the line connecting real events with real events" (James, 1902/1982, p. 499).

states as much as possible that has a good chance to be true. Such attempts are worthy of our efforts for two reasons.

1. States of consciousness are of crucial importance in the psychological explanation of behavior. Much of what we do has a basis in what, at the moment, we take ourselves to be experiencing. We have inner awareness and we act according to how we find our states of consciousness to be. For example, if you have visual experience of a painting on the wall of a new room into which you enter and are unaware of having any such experience, your behavior will be, in many if not all ways, as if you had not seen the painting. I do not suggest that your visual experience cannot have behavioral effects unless you are aware of the experience. But having inner awareness of the experience makes possible, if not likely, engagement in deliberate behavior with respect to its object.

2. Description of states of consciousness as they seem firsthand is worth our effort also because such description can serve to guide us in the search for the intrinsic nature of states of consciousness as physical states. If a scientist (e.g., Weiskrantz, 1997; Natsoulas, 1999a) is looking for such states in the brain, the more he or she already knows about them, the better the chances of finding them among all of the many other kinds of brain states that are not states of consciousness. It would be most unwise for us to turn our backs on the special access that we have to our states of consciousness because this access may involve error. Every way in which we learn about reality is susceptible to error yet we have not ceased to distinguish between the illusory and the real. Nor will we ever cease to distinguish between them notwithstanding our periodic fits of skepticism.

A Unitary Feeling of a Cluster of Objects

Now, if states of consciousness are as James described them — noncompounded, integral, unitary in the sense adumbrated above — what more can be said about them as wholes from the kind of phenomenological perspective that James (1890/1950a) adopted? For James, as I have discussed elsewhere (Natsoulas, 1998), all of the states of consciousness are “feelings” in a certain generic sense. This does not mean simply that all of the states have features ordinarily referred to as feelings — although it is true that James (1890/1950a, p. 241) claimed that bodily feelings are among the features of every state of consciousness. Every state of consciousness is a “feeling” in James’s generic sense no matter what its objects happen to be or whether it has any actual objects, that is, whether its apparent objects have any kind of existence: past, present, or future.

Even if states of consciousness existed that were purely perceptual experiences of a part of the environment or were purely thoughts about, say,

nonexistent, unimaginable geometric forms, these states would still be “feelings” because of their intrinsic nature. No matter what other categories states of consciousness may fall under, all of them are “consubstantial in their inward nature, as modes of feeling” (James, 1884, p. 19). I have stated elsewhere that, according to James’s conception, all states of consciousness possess a “feeling aspect.” I identified this aspect as “the experiential, qualitative way — or form by which — a state of consciousness feels the totality of items, properties, events, relations, and so on, that it apprehends or seems to apprehend” (Natsoulas, in press-a).

Whenever it flows, a stream of consciousness is a “feeling of the cluster of [its] objects [of the moment], however numerous these may be. The whole cluster, if apprehended at all, is apprehended in one *something*. Why not as well in one subjective modification or pulse of feeling, as in one Ego?” (James, 1884, p. 7). To feel a state of consciousness’s cluster of objects is not merely to apprehend each of them. They are not individually isolated items felt, but are felt as part of a whole to which they belong. They are not apprehended, so to speak, in parallel, as they would be if each of them were the object of a different one of a cluster of simultaneous feelings.

Thus we seem to be led to a natural question: What is this whole that also gets apprehended and to which all of the objects of the state of consciousness are apprehended to belong? After all, a state of consciousness may have as a feature a thought of something that in fact has no existence and could not exist along with the objects that one simultaneously perceives. Yet all of the objects of a state of consciousness are felt not merely simultaneously but together.

In what sense are they experienced “together?” F. H. Bradley (1914) had this to say in response to the problem that I am raising.

Every distinction and relation . . . rests on an immediate background of which we are aware, and every distinction and relation (so far as experienced) is also felt, and felt in a sense to belong to an immediate totality. Thus in all experience we still have feeling which is not an object, and at all our moments the entirety of what comes to us, however much distinguished and relational, is felt as comprised within a unity which itself is not relational. (p. 178)

As Phillip Ferreira (1999) points out, Bradley was suggesting that the apprehended or felt whole that is the total object of a state of consciousness is a “seamless” whole. The totality experienced is a continuum; it does not amount merely to a collection of items that the state distinguishes and certain of their mutual relations.

This brings to mind James’s (1899/1925) notion, which I have previously mentioned in this article, of states of consciousness as being fields in a sense analogous to an imagined single array of all of a state of consciousness’s

objects (see Natsoulas, 2000). However, it would seem that Bradley was trying to take a further step. He wanted to say how, more specifically, all of the objects of a state of consciousness are objects of a unitary awareness.⁸ I shall return very soon to his effort.

The Form of a Much-at-Once

"A Suggestion About Mysticism" is the title of one of James's essays that was published in the year of James's death. He there described the mystical states as "very sudden and great extensions of the ordinary 'field of consciousness'" (James, 1910/1978a, p. 157). Whenever ordinary consciousness is replaced by a mystical episode, James explained, there transpires an "immense spreading of the margin of the field."⁹ That is to say, the "width" of the individual's successive fields of consciousness during the duration of the episode is considered by James to be much greater than is normally the case for the particular individual.

Better to say, I believe, that more matters are apprehended in each of the successive fields of consciousness comprising a mystical episode than are apprehended in ordinary consciousness. According to Richard M. Gale (1999, p. 297), the field's expansion that James was proposing in the case of mystical episodes is not simply as I have described it. Rather, James saw this change as one in which more than just a great enlargement occurs. There occurs a widely distributed attention over the entire expanded field, wherein no one of the objects of awareness attracts special attention and the sense of relation is consequently much greater than ordinary, as well as the sense that much is therein revealed. Gale goes further than my latter statement, which I am basing directly on James's characterization of the expanded states. Gale suggests that James meant the "mushing" or melting together during a mystical episode of items that were previously taken as discrete.

Be the latter point as it may, James was referring in his late essay to what he had called in *The Principles* the states of consciousness, that is, the basic durational components of a stream of consciousness that exclusively constitute it. And he was trying to tell us something concerning the "form" that the states of consciousness take. This can be seen in the following passage from his essay.

⁸Sprigge (1993) identifies four important positions that Bradley and James take in common. The first is: "Our states of consciousness at any moment are wholes such that every element within them is so coloured by the totality that they could not occur again without difference in any other state of consciousness" (p. 2).

⁹I use the phrase *mystical episode* because the kind of condition to which James referred as a "mystical state" lasts over a temporal section of the stream and consists of a number of states of consciousness.

The field is composed at all times of a mass of present sensation, in a cloud of memories, emotions, concepts, etc. Yet these ingredients, which have to be named separately, are not separate, as the conscious field contains them. Its form is that of a much-at-once, in the unity of which the sensations, memories, concepts, impulses, etc. coalesce and are dissolved. The present field as a whole came continuously out of its predecessor and will melt into its successor as continuously again, one sensation-mass passing into another sensation-mass and giving the character of a gradually changing present to the experience, while the memories and concepts carry time-coefficients which place whatever is present in a temporal perspective more or less vast. (James, 1910/1978a, p. 158)

Again, we have James giving expression to his notion of the ingredients of a state of consciousness as being features of a unity, rather than their being components of the state that simultaneously exist alongside each other. But there is, James contends, a richness and complexity to this unity. Although the ingredients of a state of consciousness "coalesce" and "dissolve" all together within the state, these ingredients are such as are distinguished from each other and separately named. Here he is speaking not of the objects of the state of consciousness (as "mushing together," to use Gale's phrase) but of the mental features that the form of a state of consciousness instantiates. It is a pulse of feeling that possesses intrinsic properties that we identify as various kinds of experiences.

Surely, given their purposes, psychologists of consciousness want to know the form in which these ingredients constitute a single unit, a unitary awareness. Of what kind of state are they, all of them, the ingredients? What, after all, is a state of consciousness itself beyond its being something that possesses the kind of ingredients that James mentions in the above passage and elsewhere?

It would seem that a state of consciousness has, according to James, the form of a "much-at-once." James repeatedly uses this phrase and, sometimes, he seems to apply it to the intrinsic character of individual states of consciousness. So applied, it must mean more than just simply that such a state has many objects, all at once, and that it may include different modes of grasping some of them.

Reality or inner flux? James made use of the phrase *much-at-once* in another essay that he published in the same year (James, 1910/1978b). He compared the views of Bradley and Henri Bergson there, and described Bradley as holding that "the flux of feeling" encounters reality in the form of the latter's having "the continuity and wholeness of a transparent much-at-once." But then James described Bergson as holding the same view in treating of "the minimum of feeling as an immediately intuited much-at-once." Thus, it is the feeling itself that would seem to possess the form referred to. Does the notion of the much-at-once have any application to the totality that is apprehended by the state of consciousness?

Is this "form" a characteristic of the state itself or only of that which it gives awareness of? The right answer may perhaps be that both of them instantiate this characteristic. Thus, it might be suggested that a fine distinction is unnecessary in reply to the latter question. One need only recognize that all of the muchness that is all at once apprehended by the state is apprehended because the state has a certain form and, absent that form, the muchness could otherwise not be apprehended. That is, the form of the state is being described by reference to all of that which it apprehends.

In a posthumously published volume, James (1979, p. 53) stated that there always is much-at-once of the aboriginal flow of feeling. This sounds like it is feeling that has that kind of form. But James added to this statement that the much-at-once provided by feeling is never enough for us — meaning that all of that which feeling reveals is always less than all of that which we wish to know. The "more" that we try to know consists of matters existing in time or space outside the much-at-once. Thus, it would seem that the much-at-once is none other than the totality of the objects of the feeling. The feeling does not have that form itself but the feeling is such — it has its own form — whereby it is able to apprehend what is properly characterized as a much-at-once.

Both the state and its objects. But in the same book, James (p. 32) described the immediate flow of conscious life as a much-at-once, no matter how brief a temporal section of the flow one may choose to consider. I am tempted to interpret James along the lines of the following independently attractive notion, although I do not assume that this notion would be an attractive one to James. Again, the answer would be "Both."

David Bohm (1957) has argued that every segment of nature, however one may choose it, has perforce an infinite number of facets; thus, every part of nature is, in this sense, a much-at-once, although it need not be apprehended as such. Our states of consciousness are selective and thus simplify what is actually there. In my view, all states of consciousness are occurrent parts of the natural world, rather than their possessing some kind of existence externally to this world (e.g., Bergmann, 1956, 1962; Natsoulas, 1984). And a state of consciousness is, therefore, itself no less a much-at-once in Bohm's sense, as any of the parts of nature in fact are that may be included among the objects of the state. If the objects of a state of consciousness always include parts of nature, then it would follow from Bohm's generalization that a state of consciousness and the totality that it is about are both a much-at-once.

However, a state of consciousness is nonphysical according to the James of *The Principles*. Its having an infinite number of facets may well not be what James had in mind in speaking of a much-at-once. Yet I believe he had in mind both the objects and the states apprehending them as instantiating the

characteristic much-at-once. A pulse of feeling would have a phenomenological structure that is itself a much-at-once. The pulse has a complexity of features that is difficult to conceptualize, to indicate their number, and to spell out their mutual relations within a state. There is, as it were, an overabundance of content that belongs to many if not all of the stream of consciousness's successive pulses of mentality. Their own structure makes it possible for each of them to grasp so much of reality all at once. And the part of reality that they respectively grasp is a much-at-once too — although it cannot be rightly said that the totality of a state's objects is always a unity independently of its being grasped.

The Objective Unity of a State

Let me return to Bradley's (1914) effort to say how, specifically, all of the objects of a state of consciousness are objects of a unitary awareness. Quoting Bradley (p. 178), I described him as holding that the total object, or cluster of objects, of a state of consciousness is a "seamless whole." It seems to me to be obvious that, to the contrary, there can be many discontinuities and gaps between the items of which we are aware in having a particular state of consciousness. The objects of a single state of consciousness can be items having, respectively, past, present, and future existence. This occurs, for example, when we are mentally comparing states of affairs that existed at different points in history.

However, as James was, Bradley was speaking not only of the continuity of the objects of the states of consciousness but also of the states themselves. A state of consciousness is "an awareness that — although containing internal distinctions — is essentially *seamless*" (Ferreira, 1999, p. 157) in itself. There is much less to disagree with here because we do not encounter gappy kinds of states of consciousness. Every state of consciousness of which we have inner awareness is evidently continuous.

Psychologists interested in the states of consciousness will want to know in what a state of consciousness itself consists. This includes not only what internal distinctions are contained but also what about the state is continuous, what about it is suitably described as a continuum. In the above quotation from Bradley (1914, p. 178), we find stated that any distinction a state of consciousness makes is also itself felt, as is its apprehending any relation. Bradley conceives of each such state as consisting of a feeling mass. Also, in his view, the state's act of apprehending is felt to belong to a certain totality, which is the state of consciousness. Thus, a state's unity is both a matter of the state's actually being a unitary, continuous feeling and a matter of the state's ingredients, in James's sense, being felt to be ingredients of such a feeling mass. There occurs awareness of the state as a certain happening having those ingredients.

Again, I cannot fully agree. A state's unity is not reducible to how it is taken. In the case of those states of consciousness of which one has inner awareness, I acknowledge that Bradley may be right concerning their individual apparent unity. But there is also the distinct problem of the actual, factual, objective unity of a state. In general, I suggest that we must resist the temptation to interpret objective characteristics of the states of consciousness as though they are explainable by how the state, or parts or ingredients of it, are taken in inner awareness. This would be no less of a mistake for those who, as Brentano (1911/1973) does, assume that all of the states of consciousness are objects of inner awareness. In the present instance, we need to inquire into the intrinsic unity of that feeling mass which Bradley proposes to be a state of consciousness.

Contra the Intellectualists

Bradley emphasized that in speaking of the feeling mass that is a state of consciousness — “immediate experience” was his name for it — he was not speaking of a stage through which we pass early in life. As late or as early in our life as they may occur, our states of consciousness are all of them constituted of immediate experience. Bradley so means in the above quotation at the point where he says, “In all experience we still have feeling which is not an object.” James (1890/1950a, Ch. XII) held the same: all of our states of consciousness are intrinsically feelings no matter how advanced and abstract our thoughts may be or become.

Of course, according to James, any thought in the ordinary sense of someone's having an occurrent thought, is an ingredient of a state of consciousness.¹⁰ A thought is a feature of a state of consciousness, just as perceptual experiences and inner awarenesses are. No thought occurs independently of a state of consciousness. There are no unconscious thoughts in the sense of a thought that is not an ingredient of a state of consciousness and that is therefore occluded in principle from inner awareness. A subconscious thought is a feature of a state of consciousness that belongs to a secondary stream of consciousness. A secondary stream exclusively consists, no less than the primary stream does, of states of consciousness that in their intrinsic nature are feelings.

In two recent articles (Natsoulas, in press-b, in press-c), I discussed James's (1890/1950a, 1890/1950b) objections to those theorists whom he called the

¹⁰Thus, just as any state of consciousness must belong to a stream of such states, any thought or feeling in the ordinary sense must belong to a state of consciousness. But neither of these two kinds of belonging nor the kind of item that belongs, respectively, are the same. States of consciousness are literal parts of a stream; at the instant of their occurrence, they are the entire stream. The same cannot be said of thoughts and feelings in the ordinary sense. These are merely features belonging to the whole of a particular state of consciousness.

"Intellectualists."¹¹ They held that the kinds of states of consciousness that James identified as, exclusively, the basic components of any stream of consciousness — and therefore, in his view, the only mental states that exist — could not do all of the jobs required of them, such as apprehending relations and universals. The Intellectualists introduced mental states of a purely conceptualizing nature to do these jobs from on high and contrasted these pure states to mere feelings, whereas James insisted that "immediate feltness" is an actual property of every mental state intrinsically; it is a mental state's own "sensitive body." James (1884) stated,

The feltness which is [a mental state's] essence is its own immanent and intrinsic feltness at the moment of its being experienced, and has nothing to do with the way in which future conscious acts may feel about it. Such sentiri in future acts is not what is meant by its esse. (p. 1; cf. p. 19; Natsoulas, 1998, in press-a)

According to the Intellectualists, there is another kind of mental state. This does not belong to James's stream of consciousness but is something performed by a "supersensible Reason" or "Ego, self, or me" (James, 1884, p. 8). The latter entity is not to be equated with a secondary Jamesian stream of consciousness. It is of a higher order than the mundane matter that any ordinary stream of consciousness is described to be and unique in its ability to perform purely conceptualizing mental states.

I have discussed elsewhere James's arguments against the Intellectualists. I have modified some of his arguments and added others to his list (Natsoulas, in press-b, in press-c). I shall not discuss the Intellectualist kind of view here. My purpose in bringing up this opposition in views is to emphasize James's commitment to the thesis that the essence of the mental is feeling and that feeling — in James's generic sense that would include, among much else, "feeling" of the visual, auditory, and other sensory kind — is essential to all that mental states accomplish.

All of those mental states that are held to possess greater meaning or value than the quite ordinary qualitative/cognitive Jamesian states of consciousness are no less "modifications of subjective sensibility" (James, 1890/1950a, p. 478). They necessarily possess a concrete form and are not reducible to any of their functions. Even in those (many) cases where a state of consciousness is the vehicle of an apprehension that has among its objects some relation of the highest order or a universal, that state can be no more or less than "a perfectly determinate, singular, and transitory thing . . . a perishing segment of thought's stream, consubstantial with other facts of sensibility" (p. 474).

¹¹Among other names, such as the "Platonizing schools" and the "Rationalists"; see James (1884).

I mentioned a late essay of James's (1910/1978b) in which he contrasts the views of Bradley and Bergson. James comes out strongly in agreement with Bergson because he agrees that we acquire our deepest knowledge by means of states of consciousness in our firsthand encounter with the world. Bradley too agrees that the flux of feeling encounters reality directly and joins Bergson's movement in the right theoretical direction by arguing that knowledge by means of conceptual mediation introduces distortion and, indeed, reduces the world's intelligibility. James (1979) describes Bradley as thus being a "traitor to orthodox intellectualism in holding fast to feeling as a revealer of the inner oneness of reality" (p. 52).

However, Bradley soon takes a quasi-Intellectualist turn. He insists that, whereas judgment depends on the flux of feeling, judgment must transcend the deliverances of feeling in an effort to make full contact with reality — although this effort too must be, in his own view, inadequate to reality. Leaving Bradley's capitulation to (inadequate) concepts aside, these three theorists would seem to be united in their locating cognition right there within the states of consciousness themselves qua feelings. Indeed, it is the states of consciousness that are our very apprehensions of the world, the best knowledge that we can possibly have of it.¹² As Bradley (1914) maintains, our states of consciousness may always be self-transcending; each of them may have among their objects always one or more of them whose existence does not reduce to their being felt. But our states of consciousness never transcend themselves in another sense; they never have objects that are not felt, whose apprehension is something other than a feeling.

What does Bradley mean by the "feeling mass," or a state of consciousness's being such a mass? And can his statements concerning this feeling mass contribute to our understanding of the intrinsic nature of the Jamesian states of consciousness? Let us consider a relatively simple example: someone's looking at a tree. When a person engages in this visual perceptual activity, the succession of states of consciousness that make up his or her stream are each of them a form of feeling and they include among their features visual experiences of the tree and much more. The person's visually experiencing of the tree is an ingredient of those states of consciousness. And the objects of these states are, as is typically true of all of the states of consciousness, many more than just the tree. But multiple objects does not necessarily mean multiple awarenesses. A state of consciousness is always a single awareness, not a cluster of awarenesses that all of them occur at once.

¹²Cf. Gibson's (1979/1986) discussion of a new theory of cognition implied by the ecological approach to perception. He states that there are other kinds of knowing but that "perceiving is the simplest and best kind" (p. 263). See my discussion of Gibson's proposed new ecological science of the environment, in competition with physical science as it exists today (Natsoulas, 1994).

As I argued a short while ago, the notion of a seamless unity has application to a state of consciousness not because its objects objectively constitute such a unity, for they often do not, but because the state itself is a unitary awareness. Bradley (1914) expresses as follows this point about any state of consciousness: "It is an experienced non-relational unity of many in one" (p. 175). That is, any state of consciousness is lived through (experienced, undergone) as a unitary apprehension simultaneously of many items (including relations) and not by virtue of being itself an object of relational awareness.

In a chapter with the title "On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience," Bradley continues the latter thought with the following sentences, which are very much to the present point. One does not distort Bradley's meaning when one understands that the objects of his references to experience in the following passage are Jamesian states of consciousness.

At any moment my actual experience, however relational its contents [i.e., what it is about], is in the end [itself] non-relational. No analysis [of the experience] into relations and terms can ever exhaust its nature or fail in the end to belie its essence. What analysis leaves for ever outstanding is no mere residue, but is a vital condition of the analysis itself. Everything which is got out [i.e., apprehended] in the form of an object implies still the felt background against which the object comes, and, further, the whole experience of both feeling and object is a non-relational immediate felt unity. The entire relational consciousness [of its objects], in short, is experienced as falling within a direct awareness [i.e., a feeling mass]. This direct awareness is itself non-relational. It escapes from all attempts to exhibit it by analysis as one or more elements in a relational scheme, or as that scheme itself, or as a relation of relations, or as the sum or collection of any of these abstractions. (p. 176)

Bradley is suggesting that a state of consciousness is a concrete mass of feeling and a kind of occurrent entity.¹³ It is not reducible to a pattern of relations between itself and other items or to any other pattern of relations.

Bradley warns that thinking of states of consciousness even only as *terms* in a relation is dangerous. We may thus be distracted from a grasp of their true nature: which is that of a unitary totality of feeling with a number of objects. Conceiving a state of consciousness as a relational term, one makes the state seem as though it is like its objects, when it is not. This point can be made useful sense of as follows: characterizing the state's awareness of its objects as relational, we treat of the state as standing in a number of relations and risk wrongly conceiving of it as if it were made up of a cluster of awarenesses existing side by side.

¹³Cf. Sperry's (1969) description of those molar brain processes that are mental occurrences as being "entitative," as operating in brain dynamics as a unit.

Relevance of the Cognitive Function

A state of consciousness — such as any one of the succession of them that are an essential part and product of the activity of visually perceiving a tree in a garden (Natsoulas, 1993b) — is intrinsically “nonrelational,” as Bradley states, despite two obvious and, in my view, relational facts: the state is an awareness of a particular tree and the state is an awareness of this tree *in relation* to the surroundings of the tree. Those who would object to a nonrelational conception of the states of consciousness would make use of the latter two facts in their objections.

Aboutness and Intentionality

The states may rightly be considered “relational” because they stand in a relation to the tree (and garden) of which they are apprehensions. I agree that there are *causal relations* wherein trees determine properties of states of consciousness by affecting the pattern of light arriving at points of observation and *aboutness relations* in which states are of or about actual trees and their intentional character is thus satisfied. But the existence of such relations does not mean that the states of consciousness are themselves relations. Compare two physical entities causally, spatially, or otherwise related to each other; their standing in these relations does not entail their being relations. To ignore the relation of aboutness between the states of consciousness and their respective objects that transcend them would be to ignore something (to be identified below) that is intrinsic to each state and that will surely loom important in attempts to understand the unitary nature of the states notwithstanding their often having many objects.

Bradley (1914) does not consider, as I do, the aboutness of states of consciousness to be a relation, but immediately upon making his above statements, he goes on to comment usefully, as follows, regarding the aboutness of states of consciousness.

The relation (so to express ourselves) of immediate experience to its felt contents, and specially here to those contents which transcend it, must be taken simply as a fact. It can neither be explained nor even (to speak properly) described, since description necessarily means translation into objective terms and relations. We possess on the one side a fact directly felt and experienced. On the other side we attempt a description imperfect and half-negative. And our attempt is justified so far as the description seems true, so far, that is, [although] inadequate, it does not positively jar, and again is felt positively to agree with our felt experience. (p. 177)

Neither a state of consciousness nor the specific fact about it to which Bradley is referring can be given proper description in his view. Description

will necessarily distort what is neither an object nor a relation between objects.

Which "directly felt and experienced fact" is Bradley adverting to in the above passage? Which such fact about a state of consciousness must be described inadequately although some descriptions may be felt to agree with the fact? Intentionality is the property intrinsic to a state of consciousness that makes the state be at least as though it is about, if it is not actually about, something. No doubt, Bradley has "intentionality" in mind. Bradley's (1914) statement on the previous page suggests as much: "The *whole* experience of feeling *and* object is a non-relational immediate felt unity" (p. 176; italics added). An instance of intentionality may be consciously experienced and, on that basis, one may try to describe the respective state's possessing that property.

Also from the first-person perspective, what does James (1890/1950a) have to tell us regarding this same property of a state of consciousness? Here are three of James's main points. The third of these is presented in the context of my own position.

1. In his chapter on the stream of consciousness, James at one point concludes, "Thought may, but need not, in knowing, discriminate between its object and itself" (p. 275). In the next chapter, he makes the claim "that in everyone, at an early age, the distinction between thought [i.e., the conscious stream] as such and what it is 'of' or 'about,' has become familiar to the mind" (pp. 296–297). Early on, the mind discriminates between them firsthand, apprehends its objects as being such, as being the objects of the mind's apprehension that they are (pp. 272–273). A basis of this early discrimination is our firsthand encounter with our own states of consciousness. In perception and sensation, we actually "can feel, alongside of the thing known, the thought of it going on as an altogether separate act and operation in the mind" (p. 297). By inner awareness, a state that is of an object is discriminated from its object even as the state is apprehended to have that object, to be directed upon that object. Thus, one is aware of the tree in the garden not only as such but also as now being an object of one's states of consciousness.

2. James (pp. 216–218) distinguishes and mutually relates the states of consciousness, their respective objects, and the "relation of knowing" that exists between a state of consciousness and its objects. At a certain developmental stage, we become aware of our states of consciousness and of their features and properties, including their function of cognition. Apprehension of the cognitive function in specific instances is, in important part, apprehension of a state's being an awareness and so of its having the property of intentionality.

3. In my view, intentionality is a nonrelational property of a state of consciousness, whereas aboutness is a different, relational matter. For aboutness

to be instantiated, the object of a state of consciousness must have existence of some kind, even if only a past existence or one yet to be.¹⁴ I distinguish the actual objects and the merely apparent objects of a state of consciousness. A state that has no object extant in the above broad sense is not about anything at all, although it does possess the property of intentionality in any case. That is, being a state of consciousness, a state is such as to be about any of its objects if they exist, have existed, or will exist. Indeed, that which a state only seems to be about may be complex although nonexistent.

However, James suggests that a state of consciousness not only may not be, in some cases, about anything but it may also lack the property of intentionality when he states, "Many sorts of thoughts are of no things — e.g., pleasures, pains, and emotions; others are of non-existent things — errors and fictions" (p. 297). I have already commented on the latter sort of case. Let me add in good Jamesian fashion that pleasures, pains, and emotions, in any instance of their occurrence, are ingredients of states of consciousness that are no less awarenesses than any other states of consciousness.

I cannot think of any instance in which pleasure, pain, or occurrent emotion occurs without its being such an ingredient. I cannot think of a case in which any one of these occurs on its own. Even when one is experiencing anxiety with respect to one knows not what, the object of one's anxiety is an unspecified something that one fears may or will happen or come to be. "Objectless" emotions are not as they are called. Rather, in their case, the respective states of consciousness represent the object of the emotion vaguely, nonspecifically, or generally. When one is depressed, for example, there may be no end to the states of affairs that one is currently depressed about.

Bradley (1914) seems to disagree with my general point when he states, "The experienced will not all fall under the head of an object for a subject. If there were any such law, pain and pleasure would be obvious exceptions" (p. 159). I would say that when we have pleasure, when pleasure is a feature of our states of consciousness, we may or may not be aware of this feature of the state as such. We may be only aware of the external object or part of the body in which we are taking pleasure, of which we are pleasurable aware. And in the case of, for example, having a toothache, one is pain-qualitatively aware of one's tooth or of a part of one's mouth and, highly likely, aware as well of being so aware, both in the same states of consciousness. Whether, in this case, it is one's mouth that one is apprehending or one's awareness or both of these, the respective state of consciousness would qualify as an experience of pain, and the state is about a part of the body with

¹⁴Cf. my aboutness/intentionality distinction to the intending/intentionality distinction that is discussed by Sprigge (1993, pp. 30–31).

respect to which one is experiencing pain, and likely about the feature or ingredient of the state that is the pain feeling.¹⁵

A Unified Cognition

Perhaps we would do well to seek an account for a state of consciousness's unity in terms of its cognitive function, that is, to try that possible route toward understanding a state's being a unitary awareness. A state of consciousness seems always to operate cognitively as a unit, as a single vehicle of meaning — although each state may well be “an act of compound conception” having for its meaning “a particular thing and a great deal more besides” (James, 1890/1950b, p. 461). That of which any state of consciousness consists, which was proposed by James and Bradley to be feeling in a broad sense, is a singular instantiation of intentionality. The unitary nature of the individual states of consciousness is that they are unitary awarenesses, in contrast to each of them being a cluster of simultaneous awarenesses.

A state involving the application of concepts — which may perhaps rightly be said of every state of consciousness — must exercise all of the concepts that it applies in the form of a single mental act. Whichever the objects of a state may happen to be, however large or small their number, and whatever the degree of their abstractness, James (1890/1950a) insists that the states do not vary from being, every one of them, a “perfectly determinate, singular, and transitory thing . . . a perishing segment of thoughts' stream, consubstantial with other facts of sensibility” (p. 474). The cognitive function is not to be understood as performed by a distinct kind of state, a state that is distinct from feeling. Nor is that function performed by a part of the state that is somehow distinct from its feeling aspect.

We have taken note above of Bradley's reference to “the felt background from which the object comes.” Literal use of this phrase in the present context would amount to a mistake or a misleading abstraction. Implied thereby would be a factual separation of the feeling aspect from the cognitive function. As though the state apprehended its objects against a mental background that is not itself apprehensive, that is itself noncognitive. This is not what it means for a state of consciousness “to transcend” itself — a term that both James and Bradley use about states of consciousness. A state may transcend but not by somehow leaving behind what essentially it is and becoming something else that possesses new properties.

In the present context, “transcendence” means that the state possesses the relational property of aboutness, its being about something. That is, the state

¹⁵Cf. Natsoulas (1993c, pp. 320–328) and the earlier example, in the present article, of auditory feeling as an ingredient of a state of consciousness.

is an awareness of some item that exists, has existed, or will exist. It is a mistake to think that, when a state of consciousness has, as it were, actually made contact with the world beyond it, when it is actually about something, it has risen above its place in the stream of consciousness. Indeed, a state of consciousness is never anything more than what it is. Not even is a state of consciousness ever any or all of its own objects, whether real or apparent.¹⁶

Bradley (1914), too, corrects the impression that he may have left. He explains that the felt background "from which an object comes" is also apprehended. It too gets felt along with the object. And he adds, "Every distinction and relation still rests on an immediate background of which we are aware" (p. 178). Indeed, parts of this felt background may have served as other than background in the case of past states of consciousness. Parts of the present background will have been among the focal objects of past states of consciousness.

Is the Unity of a State of Consciousness Illusory?

In undergoing a state of consciousness, everything of which we are aware at that moment, including the focal objects and the background objects of awareness, is apprehended together as a unit. The source of the problem of this article is the known source of our conviction that a state of consciousness is a unitary awareness, namely, how we find our states to be firsthand. Some psychologists will want to argue that our present problem does not require a solution because the first-person sense of experiential unity is illusory.

Simultaneous Streams

It may be suggested — rightly in my view — that the following statements of James's (1890/1950a) would also apply to the relation between streams of consciousness that might proceed in a single person.

Each of these minds keeps its own thoughts [i.e., states of consciousness] to itself. There is no giving or bartering between them. No thought even comes into direct *sight* of a thought in another personal consciousness than its own. Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law Neither contemporaneity, nor proximity in space, nor similarity of quality and content are able to fuse thoughts together which are sundered by this barrier of belonging to different personal minds. The breaches between such thoughts are the most absolute breaches in nature. (p. 226)

¹⁶With one exception previously mentioned, if a certain kind of theory of inner awareness is true (e.g., Smith, 1981).

I accept this statement completely, although James qualifies it in his next chapter. Thus, I hold that, in any state of consciousness, only awareness by inference can take place of any state of consciousness that belongs to a different stream.¹⁷

How will this fact figure in opposition to the unitary character of the individual states of consciousness? Here is how the argument might run.

When we claim on introspective grounds that our state of consciousness of the moment is a unitary awareness, we ignore what else, in the way of mental states and awareness, may be taking place in us simultaneously. A secondary consciousness may be going on, just as James suggests. There may be, in some instances if not all, another stream proceeding within us. And neither stream can possibly have inner awareness of the other. The objects, actual and apparent, of our present state of consciousness need not comprise all of that of which we are aware of at the moment. Even if we know that another state of consciousness accompanies any state of consciousness of which we have inner awareness, the two states may have different sets of objects.

In reply, I would call attention to what the original claim of unity pertains to. It does not pertain to the entirety of someone's mental life at the moment, if this is defined as all of the mental occurrences that may go on within the person simultaneously. The claim pertains only to the states of consciousness, to any one of the successive pulses of mentality that make up a stream. The claim is structural, as it were. It is a proposal regarding the nature of each state of consciousness, and derives from how one finds the states individually to be.

Intrinsic Disunity

Also forthcoming may be proposals of disunity within individual states of consciousness. I next express one such potential objection, and I conclude the present article with a Jamesian response.

Some states of consciousness are indeed simple and consist of a single awareness. What such a state is about may be in itself complex, but the state apprehends it in a unitary way, however nonspecifically. Another kind of state of consciousness is no doubt much more common in human beings than the "unirayed" ones, as it were, that I have just mentioned. These other states are "multirayed." Each of them is made up of a cluster of awarenesses, none of which precedes any other one. For example, much as James describes, there may simultaneously occur as part of a single state an auditory experience, a visual experience, an experience of sexual arousal, a memory experience of something similar that took place, and an anticipation of what will happen next. However, in such cases, we often suffer from an introspective illusion to the effect that the respective state is a unitary awareness. Although we may in fact take notice of more awarenesses than just one of

¹⁷Being an intrinsic theorist of inner awareness, I hold an even stronger position: inner awareness is always an ingredient of the state of consciousness that is its object. See, e.g., Natsoulas (1995–1996, 1996–1997).

those several that comprise such a state, our inner awareness of the state will err by taking them to be a single awareness — rather than taking them as they actually are, which is distinct from one another. Or, the qualitative differences (e.g., visual versus auditory) within a state may be noticed along with the multiplicity not merely of the objects of awareness but of awareness itself. In the case of these states, noticing the multiplicity of awareness is not a mere impression. The stream of consciousness in fact reflects, in the structure of its successive basic durational components, the processes that bring these states into existence. The awarenesses that together make up a “multirayed” state of consciousness are the products of different systems of nonconscious neuropsychological activity and therefore belong recognizably to different perceptual and other modalities.

The question that this proposal will bring to mind is why the states of consciousness do not seem broken up into bits. Why do these states seem to take in their objects in a single organized grasp, rather than as though each state consisted of two or more states of consciousness? A theorist who holds as I have just expressed in opposition to my own view needs to dwell on the contrast between two simultaneous awarenesses that belong to different states of consciousness, one in each of two streams, and two awarenesses that belong, *ex hypothesi*, to the same state of consciousness.

In what relation do awarenesses purportedly belonging to the same state of consciousness stand to each other? According to James (1890/1950a, p. 145), a proposal of state disunity places the theorist who makes it into an “unintelligible” position. He or she has the impossible task of having to explain how mental states can be composite in structure, how they can be conjoined of smaller mental states. Simply positing component parts that make up a state of consciousness does not account for the resulting apparent collective consciousness.

A mental state that is purported to be compounded must be a different mental state than the sum of the states said to compound it. States of consciousness exist as integral new mental facts. These states individually cannot consist of a set of awarenesses that is simply analogous to an array of their objects.

In his presidential address to the American Psychological Association, James (1894/1978c) spoke of “the altogether unique kind of complexity in unity” that states of consciousness possess and that is their ultimate essence. And he considered a number of attempted explanations of how this unity is accomplished, including unifying acts performed by the soul, which he found to be less than satisfactory. He finally favored instead his earlier view according to which the complexity of a conscious state is made into a unity by its plural cognitive function, its apprehending each of its several objects in relation to every other one.

However, James was now willing to countenance a notion of the states of consciousness’ having parts analogous to the parts of the complex of their objects. He described this proffered compromise as a “conciliatory” gesture

toward the critical audience that he was addressing. This gesture had a direct connection, I believe, to James's process of coming to conceive of states of consciousness as fields. As I have argued in the present article, this sort of change is hardly an improvement of his view. James might have done better if he had pushed ahead with theoretically unifying the feeling mass by giving attention to its unrayed intentionality notwithstanding its broad scope. Thus, he might have made progress toward explaining (a) how the cognitive function gives to the feeling mass a single unified structure or (b) how the feeling mass performs its cognitive function by taking the form of a single awareness.

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