

The Concrete State: The Basic Components of James's Stream of Consciousness

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The basic components of James's stream of consciousness are considered concretely and in a way that tends to be relatively neutral from a theoretical perspective. My ultimate goal is a general description of the states of consciousness, but I try here to be more "observational" than "theoretical" about them. Giving attention to James's reports of his personal firsthand evidence, I proceed as though I were conversing with this most phenomenological and radically empirical of psychological authors. I disagree with James on some points but, also, I find many of his claims acceptable and base my own view on a thesis fundamental to his perspective: a stream of consciousness consists of a succession, one at a time, of unitary states and all of the other mental occurrences that are conscious (e.g., thoughts, feelings, perceptual experiences, or intentions) are features of such states. This is an effort to see more clearly together with James, not an exercise of correcting errors in how he treated of our topic.

I attempt in the present article to approach the states of consciousness, which are the basic durational components of William James's (1890/1950a) stream, with something that resembles a theoretically neutral attitude. I want to consider them in what James would call a concrete way as distinct from an abstract or inferential way. However, I cannot proceed as I would like, that is, in a purely empirical way, without the use of concepts. As James (1902/1982) rightly states: "The whole universe of concrete objects, as we know them, swims . . . for all of us, in a wider and higher universe of abstract ideas, that lend it its significance" (p. 56). Using as few technical concepts as I can, I seek to be more "observational" than "theoretical" regarding the occurrences that states of consciousness concretely are. At the same time, my main goal is to move toward a general description of the states of consciousness, one that will adequately apply to every one of them.

I develop my points as though I were listening closely to one of the founders of our science and replying carefully to this most phenomenological and radically empirical of psychological authors. Consistently with the above approach, I make special use of those of James's claims that have their basis in his personal firsthand evidence concerning the states of consciousness. But it is not my intention that this "conversation" between James and myself be any kind of "debate." It is not to be an exercise of correcting errors in how James treats of our topic. Rather, I want to see more clearly along with him than I might see on my own. In my opinion, present-day psychologists do not make as much use of past work as would be the most beneficial to our science, perhaps because a reliance on the writings of others may detract from the originality of one's own contributions.

The Empirical Self or Me

Right at the beginning of his long, book-length chapter titled "The Consciousness of Self," James (1890/1950a) spells out what he means by the *empirical self or me*. Then, he describes in some detail his three proposed large constituents of this "me," which are the material self, the social self, and the spiritual self. The total empirical me comprised by these selves is equivalent to

- (a) all of whatever a person is tempted at any moment to call "me," together with
- (b) all of whatever, with much the same feelings and motivations, the person is inclined to call "mine."

A person's empirical me varies in composition from time to time and, therefore, James decides to speak henceforth of the empirical me in the widest possible sense. That is, the spiritual self will be for James all of whatever a person is able to call "me" or to call "mine" in identifying with it, although the person may often not be actually doing so. That is, he or she may be at a particular point in time concerned with something else.

I need to give attention in the present article only to the third one of the three selves that make up James's empirical me, namely, to the spiritual self. It will be seen that, concretely, the spiritual self is none other than the conscious stream of mental life. The spiritual self concretely considered is the stream of consciousness that James (1890/1950a) explores from the first-person perspective so memorably in his ninth chapter, which bears the title "The Stream of Thought."

Chapter X tells us that the person, whose spiritual self it is, is in a position to consider this self in various ways, not all of them being equally concrete. Of interest in the present article are only the ways called concrete because,

when the person is so engaged, he or she is, as it were, at his or her most empirical with respect to the spiritual self. Considering one's spiritual self in a concrete way would seem to involve one's taking this self on its own terms: that is, taking it in terms of its properties as these appear firsthand to be, not by reference instead to something else, however intimately this other matter may be related to the spiritual self.

Stating that one can take various "views" of one's spiritual self, James quickly adds to this that, in taking any one of these views upon it, one's spiritual self must be apprehended firsthand at the time and discriminated from its objects. In other words, there is a direct dependence of all "views" of the spiritual self, as James means these, on the occurrence of a "reflective process" that yields or consists of apprehensions of the spiritual self as this self is actually proceeding (cf. Wild, 1969, p. 85). According to James (1890/1950a), the reflective process that he has in mind is "a momentous and in some respects a rather mysterious operation, of which we need here only state that as a matter of fact it exists" (p. 296). I return to this process very soon.

No Direct Awareness of Mentality as Immaterial

Before continuing with the spiritual self according to James, I must mention a significant divergence from him. I am a physical monist with respect to the relation of the mental to the physical. The actually occurring mental consists entirely, in my view, of physical events and properties (cf. Feigl, 1981; Sperry, 1980). In contrast, James holds the mental and the physical to be existences distinct from each other although intimately connected in the sense that the brain is what produces anything that occurs and is mental, and produces it directly, not by mediation of another mental occurrence.

When concretely considered, the spiritual self is "spiritual" only insofar as it is taken to be so on ulterior grounds — that is what I hold. It appears to be "spiritual" only if, at the time when the person is considering it, he or she is occurrently believing it to be immaterial. I mean that there never does transpire any direct awareness of mentality as being immaterial. To use another author's expression, the spiritual self does not "wear on its sleeve" the fact of its being mental as opposed to physical.

A different position than mine is developed by Gustav Bergmann (1956, 1964, 1967–1968, 1981), the great advocate of methodological behaviorism. It seems to me that, if firsthand evidence contradicting my view did exist, the strongly motivated and phenomenologically sophisticated Bergmann would surely have found it. Instead, in the process, Bergmann arrives at a conclusion that I welcome for being consistent with my position.

As James is, Bergmann is a mind–body dualist. But Bergmann maintains, as James does not, that a full explanation of behavior can ultimately be

achieved in purely physical terms, that is, without any mention of anything mental. Whereas Bergmann is, by his own description, a psychophysiological parallelist, James in *The Principles* unequivocally chooses to adopt an interactionism that resembles substance dualism. I do not pursue here the various mind-body positions, but move on instead to the immediately relevant point.

For Bergmann, the nonphysical nature of mental occurrences is no less than obvious. It is obvious simply from one's having direct awareness of them. When one is aware directly of a mental occurrence, one is "presented with" it, that is, with its having certain features. Among a mental occurrence's presented features is its being mental as opposed to physical. Bergmann (1967–1968) states, "When I am presented with a thing, I am also presented with its type. This is a phenomenological claim. So I would not know how to argue for it" (p. 23).

Thus, Bergmann does not allow that there is any firsthand basis on which to judge a mental occurrence to be mental. This is not a contradiction. Bergmann distinguishes between one's being presented with a fact and one's being presented with evidence supporting a fact. He holds that mentality is a "simple character." Which means that this character cannot be described and, it would seem, we cannot ever know what it is that makes a mental occurrence mental.

Bergmann admits to having no argument to make in support of his position that the mental is not physical. Although we are supposed to know this firsthand, so far as mental occurrences themselves are concerned, there is nothing present to us, he points out, to which we can point that is evidence of their being nonphysical. Thus, the empirical situation is as I maintain. That is, no property of a state of consciousness is directly presented to us that could not be among the properties belonging to a physical state or process of the brain.

Faculties and Dispositions

According to James (1890/1950a), a person can take firsthand his or her spiritual self in an abstract way or in a concrete way. One such abstract way James prominently mentions adverts to the person's psychic faculties or dispositions: including, among others, one's ability to argue and discriminate, one's moral sensibility and conscience, and one's indomitable will (all James's examples). Experientially, the spiritual self is much more concrete than any of these faculties, or so it seems to me. As I see it, the spiritual self is distinct from any and all faculties that one may possess. Taking one's spiritual self in terms of psychic faculties and dispositions, even those that stand in close relation to it, is to operate inferentially with reference to one's spiritual self.

However, James (1890/1950a) appears to adopt a different thesis. He states that "a plurality of such faculties are always to be simultaneously found" in the spiritual self, firsthand, "as it actually presents itself" (p. 296). This would seem to imply that a faculty is an actual occurrent part of the spiritual self or, at least, that it is a directly apprehensible feature of the spiritual self. As though faculties were themselves objects of inner awareness, James goes on to speak of our dividing the spiritual self into various faculties, of our isolating them from each another, and of our identifying ourselves with each of them in turn. Just as we identify with our possessions or our body, so we identify with our faculties, which we also apprehend firsthand.

The difference in concreteness to which I am calling to your attention comes into sharper focus when, next, James characterizes as follows the concrete way of considering the spiritual self:

Or we may insist on a concrete view, and then the spiritual self in us will be either the entire stream of our personal consciousness, or the present "segment" or "section" of that stream, according as we take a broader or a narrower view — both the stream and the section being concrete existences in time, and each being a unity after its own peculiar kind. (p. 296)

Thus, it is not James's actual view that taking a purely concrete view of the spiritual self will find it to include within it faculties and dispositions. One does not encounter in one's spiritual self any ability, moral standard, or one's indomitable will. Of course, at the same time as one is considering the spiritual self, one may have thoughts regarding one's faculties and the like, but to have such thoughts is hardly the same thing as to be noticing mental activity now proceeding in one.

The above quoted sentence of James's helps us to make sense of his initial specification of the spiritual self as "man's inner or subjective being, his psychic faculties and dispositions, taken concretely" (James, 1890/1950a, p. 296). One can see that, although we may seem to ourselves "most verily to be" our psychic faculties and dispositions, although these may seem to us to be, as James also says, the "most enduring and intimate part" of ourselves, they are still abstractions from the stream of consciousness. More accurately, they are not to be found in the stream at all. They are neither segments nor sections of the stream. Nor are they ingredients or features of the basic durational components of the stream that are actually found there. What one finds in one's stream of consciousness firsthand, that is, by inner awareness alone, is a succession of conscious states. This is not to say that these states do not provide one with good reason to believe that one possesses one or another particular disposition or faculty.

Inner Awareness

My term for that reflective process which James calls "momentous" and "mysterious" is *inner awareness* (cf. Brentano, 1911/1973). In both our views, inner awareness is a feature that is intrinsically possessed by some of our states of consciousness. As will be seen, James and I differ concerning which state of consciousness is the object of an instance of inner awareness. In my view, the object of any instance of inner awareness is always the state of consciousness itself whose feature that instance of inner awareness is. James holds instead that any inner awareness's object is always another state in the same stream.

This process (of inner awareness) is said by James to be, among other things, the process by which we discriminate between the following two things:

- (a) the states of consciousness, the concrete pulses of mentality that successively constitute, one at a time, our stream of consciousness,
- and
- (b) their objects, what our states of consciousness are of or about insofar as they have one or more actual objects, as opposed to merely apparent objects.

Not only do we discriminate states of consciousness from their objects. According to James, we tend to identify personally with our stream of consciousness more so than with those many of its objects that are not themselves parts of the stream. (This last statement is relative for we may identify equally, for example, with our body and our mental stream.) Again, there is a distinction that James is drawing between the spiritual self encountered firsthand by inner awareness and other items that, although they stand in important relation to the spiritual self, are not themselves parts of that self.

Presumably, the reason that we tend to identify with our stream of consciousness more so than we identify with its objects has to do with how the components of the stream are revealed to us. Yet inner awareness is for James only a "mediate immediacy" in William P. Alston's (1991) sense. James clearly does not claim that inner awareness is an "absolute immediacy," as Alston and others do (e.g., Natsoulas, 1993; Woodruff Smith, 1989). In the latter authors' contrasting view, every last instance of one's having inner awareness of a mental occurrence is an absolute or unmediated immediacy. That is, when a mental-occurrence instance is conscious, awareness of that instance takes place without the involvement of any mediation. The immediacy of the inner awareness is "absolute" in the sense that the respective mental occurrence has itself as an object, normally among other objects. Inner awareness does not occur in the form of an "appendage" (cf. Freud,

1895/1964, p. 311), that is, in the form of a separate mental occurrence — as it does according to James and others (e.g., Armstrong, 1968; Rosenthal, 1993).

Inner awareness is accomplished, according to James, not by the state of consciousness itself but by a subsequent state of consciousness in the same stream that has, among other things, the state in question for its object. Identifying ourselves so readily with our stream of consciousness must be owed, therefore, to something else, to something other than the means whereby states of consciousness reveal themselves to us. We have a mediate immediacy of awareness of many different things, for example, of our perceptual objects, only with some of which do we identify ourselves. From the Jamesian perspective itself, our especially identifying with our stream must have to do, rather, with the states of consciousness themselves. It must have something to do with how these states concretely seem to us, in our firsthand encounter with them. I shall return to this point in the separately published second part of this article.

At an early age, James (1890/1950a) argues, we are already distinguishing between our states of consciousness and their objects. We know already that our “thoughts” (meaning: states of consciousness) are “a different sort of existence” from their objects because, for one thing, “we can feel, alongside the thing known, the thought of it going on as an altogether separate act and operation in the mind” (p. 297). Thus, whether we consider our states of consciousness in an abstract or a concrete way, we do not conflate them with their objects, not even when we know that a certain apparent object of a state of consciousness does not possess actual existence, past, present, or future. Why do we not so conflate them? The answer must lie in the fact that these states present themselves, even as we may be taking them abstractly, in some concrete way that distinguishes them as states of consciousness.

Skepticism and Postulation

James speaks of inner awareness as being, in some respects, a rather mysterious operation. He is evidently not thinking of that other momentous property of a state of consciousness, now often called “intentionality,” which makes it possible for the state to be about something, even perhaps about itself. In Chapter VIII, he describes “the relation of knowing” as being the most mysterious thing in the world. But now something else is puzzling James: “The deeper grounds for this discrimination [between states of consciousness and what they are “of” or “about”] may possibly be hard to find” (James, 1890/1950a, p. 297). And he refers at this point to the states of consciousness as being “a different sort of existence.”

Many pages later, in his Chapter XXVI, James (1890/1950b) makes clear what exactly the above statements mean:

I cannot see my way to so extreme a view [i.e., the stream of consciousness's consisting of motor events in the breathing apparatus, face, and throat]; even although I must repeat the confession made on pp. 296–297 of Vol. 1, that I do not *fully* understand how we come to our unshakeable belief that thinking exists as a special kind of immaterial process alongside of the material processes of the world. It is certain, however, that only by *postulating* such thinking do we make things currently intelligible; and it is certain that no psychologist has as yet denied the *fact* of thinking, the utmost that has been denied being its dynamic power. (pp. 570–571)

James too, like Bergmann, cannot find firsthand any feature belonging to a state of consciousness that might serve as evidence for the mental, meaning nonphysical, nature of the states of consciousness. James is suggesting above that the nonphysical nature of the states of consciousness can only be postulated. Moreover, explanatory reasons exist for this postulation; the theoretical introduction of an immaterial process somehow carries James further along in the direction of desired explanation than any material process might do.

This brings us back to how James's discussion of the spiritual self develops in Chapter X. He comes to a point where he must say the following, in order to get on with the chapter and the book as he does: "I will continue to assume . . . a direct awareness of the process of our thinking as such, simply insisting on the fact that it is an even more inward and subtle phenomenon than most of us assume" (James, 1890/1950a, p. 305). This latter statement is made necessary by James's expressed skepticism, which pertains not simply to

- (a) the issue of whether the states of consciousness are nonphysical, but also to
- (b) whether the states of consciousness are in fact given to inner awareness, as opposed to their being instead, all of them, postulations for explanatory purposes.

The latter may be a surprising alternative to encounter in the present context, but the issue is very clearly a live one from James's perspective.

Nevertheless, James will be assuming throughout his book that the states of consciousness are in their nature nonphysical and that each of us possesses an access to one's own such states that is a mediated immediacy. Although *assuming* is the right word here, James will not go back on the following promise concerning the concrete way of taking the spiritual self firsthand: "The actual 'section' of the stream will ere long . . . play a very important part" (James, 1890/1950a, p. 297). Were James to eschew, as he is tempted to do, every reference to inner awareness and all of the evidence that inner awareness purportedly delivers, the present section of the stream could not play the important role that James assigns to it as he proceeds. This last point becomes clearer as James's characterization develops of the concrete way of taking the stream.

But what could be responsible, what is responsible, for this major bout of skepticism? Can the thesis that people are actually blind to their own mental life be an attractive one to James of all people, to that great master of phenomenological description? A quite obvious discrepancy exists here from what we have been led to expect. At least two things will come vividly to mind by way of contrast: (a) James's (1890/1950a, p. 185) emphatic methodological statement that introspection is what psychologists must rely on "first and foremost and always" and (b) his superb chapter on the stream of thought, which is thoroughly phenomenological. Moreover, the very path that leads James to his skeptical thesis crucially involves an attempt by him to come to "the closest possible quarter with the facts" pertaining to one kind of state of consciousness, which he describes as being "more incessantly there than any other element of the mental life" (p. 298). Coming as close as possible to the facts about the states that make up the self of selves entails having inner awareness of them.

Before bringing out how James arrives at his skeptical thesis, I should mention that, after briefly considering it, he sets the thesis aside for the reason that it contradicts common sense and the basic assumption of "spiritualists, transcendentalists, and empiricists [, who] alike admit in us a continuous direct perception of the thinking activity in the concrete" (James, 1890/1950a, p. 305). James seems to be saying that he would proceed consistently with this radical thesis if he could expect some agreement from other psychologists.

However, I cannot believe that the thesis of inner blindness is a real alternative for James at this point. For he would have to write a very different book than the one which he does write. This other book would not have for its basis, as the present one does, the distinction — that is introspectively discovered and felt — between the states of consciousness as instances of "inward activity or passion" and "the objects with which they cognitively deal" (James, 1890/1950a, p. 185).

Instead, in order to go on, James would have to construct a new and different science of psychology in which cognitively dealing with anything at all would perforce occur in the "dark." That is, in every one of its functions, one's mind would be in a continuous condition analogous to and more extreme than blindness. Recall that patients with blindness, when they report not having visual experience of the items about which they are at the moment accurately guessing, are able accurately to describe on a firsthand basis many of the other experiences that they have (Natsoulas, 1997; Weiskrantz, 1997). This would be impossible if the thesis of inner blindness were true. Regarding anything at all that was experienced, the blindsighted individual — and all of us — could only issue, at most, guesses or inferential conclusions that it was experienced.

Concrete Encounters

I want to call your attention next to the concrete encounters with states of consciousness that would seem to be clearly involved in the very process of James's coming to conclude skeptically as he does. Although he does not seem to recognize these encounters as their contradicting his conclusion, they occur all along James's path and, in my view, they constitute good reasons for his returning, as he does, to the more conventional path.

From among all of the states of consciousness that literally are, one after another, a person's stream of mental life, James picks out certain ones of them that are widely dispersed throughout the stream and that, from the person's own perspective, make up his or her "self of all other selves." Although James describes the person as taking the stream in an abstract way when the person singles out states that make up this totality, James also implies an empirical ground for this act of abstraction from the stream. That is, there is a concrete mode of apprehension that is involved in taking individual states of consciousness in one way or another; indeed, abstraction to a special self depends on this concrete mode's direct effects.

Otherwise, James would not pick them out as he does. Abstracting the self of selves requires "*directly feeling*" the states of consciousness to be abstracted. The concrete mode of apprehension brings the person into close contact with each of the picked-out states — although this mode falls short, presumably, of that absolute (unmediated) immediacy of which Alston (1991) and others speak; for James (1890/1950a) emphasizes in Chapter VII, "No subjective state, whilst present, is its own object; its object is always something else" (p. 190). Yet those individual items that are recognized to be part of the self of selves are "felt," which means that they are not just thought about but are objects of what James speaks of later in the chapter as "direct feeling." They are not simply posited to occur; nor are they brought to mind as a result of one's having heard about them. Rather, they are taken notice of directly.

Here is how James (1890/1950a) begins to describe these concrete, directly apprehensible states:

If the stream [of consciousness] as a whole is identified with the [empirical self or me] far more than any outward thing, *a certain portion of the stream abstracted from the rest* is so identified in an altogether peculiar degree, and is felt by all men as a sort of innermost center within the circle, of sanctuary within the citadel, constituted by the subjective life as a whole. Compared with this element of the stream, the other parts, even of the subjective life, seem transient external possessions, of which each in turn can be disowned, whilst that which disowns them remains. (p. 299)

This passage speaks for itself with respect to my present point. These introspective reports do not seem to have reference simply to a process of reason-

ing about the states of consciousness. Certain states or sections of the stream are felt firsthand to be as stated above.

And this is only the start of what James has to say about these basic durational components of the stream of consciousness. He continues describing them phenomenologically, emphasizing how they seem firsthand, rather than merely in terms of a psychological theory of their functions. The concrete components of the stream of consciousness that qualify as abstracted components of the self of selves are characterized, for example, as states that welcome or reject, own or disown, the other states of consciousness of which they are apprehensions. Again, the singling out of these states and describing them as the "active" element in the stream of consciousness and as the evident "junction" between inputs and outputs, is not just a theoretical response to a required explanation but an empirical finding. And this finding is not likely to be challenged, according to James, by future surveys of firsthand reports regarding the stream of consciousness.

Against potential critics, James insists that the self of all selves is not merely thought about but found in the stream and is an object of "direct sensible acquaintance." The self of selves is made up abstractly of certain states of consciousness but these states, like other categories of states of consciousness, are "felt." James means by *felt* the apprehension individually of these states by other states of consciousness, for he draws an analogy to the mediated immediacy of feeling one's body, which perforce takes the form of states of consciousness having the body for their object. Just as we commonly distinguish between feeling our body and having thoughts about it, James holds that states of consciousness too can be felt.

Two states of consciousness that are respectively, in a particular instance, inner awareness and the object of that inner awareness are successively produced, according to James, by the ongoing total brain process. They are produced in such a way that to have the second of them is to feel the first: this inner awareness being more than the exercise of concepts, a more intimate contact with a state of consciousness that enables one to have firsthand knowledge of it. Which is the kind of knowledge about his self of selves that James acquires introspectively in his own case. Accordingly, upon setting himself to introspect his self of selves, here is what he finds to be taking place in his stream of consciousness:

First of all, I am aware of a constant play of furtherances and hindrances in my thinking, of checks and releases, tendencies which run with desire, and tendencies which run the other way. Among the matters I think of, some range themselves on the side of the thought's interests, whilst others play an unfriendly part thereto. The mutual inconsistencies and agreements, reinforcements and obstructions, which obtain amongst these objective matters reverberate backwards and produce what seem to be incessant reactions of my spontaneity upon them, welcoming or opposing, appropriat-

ing or disowning, striving with or against, saying yes or no. This palpitating inward life is, in me, that central nucleus which I just tried to describe in terms that all men might use. (James, 1890/1950a, p. 299)

Let us consider this description, which James characterizes as “general” and contrasts with the grappling with particulars to which he immediately goes on (see later). I believe the above level of description is important because it picks out more specifically what James wants next to look at more closely, as it were.

As James himself further describes, the paragraph that I just quoted has James being aware of, witnessing firsthand, certain “acts of attending, assenting, negating, [and] making an effort” that are taking place in his stream of consciousness. It is states of consciousness that he is talking about in these terms and as their involving thought and desire. James begins the above paragraph by saying that he is aware of certain matters that are going on in his stream. The “tendencies” he mentions in the first sentence bring to mind his important section on the “feelings of tendency” in the chapter titled “The Stream of Thought.” There, James (1890/1950a) points out that some of our conscious states are introspectively found to involve such tendencies, among others, as (a) “a sense of the direction from which a [sensory] impression is about to come, although no positive impression is yet there” (p. 251), (b) the vague anticipation of a name that one is trying to recall, which is definite enough for one to know that specific other names do not qualify, and (c) specific intentions that are “rapid premonitory perspective views of schemes of thought not yet articulate” (p. 253).

The attribution of these tendencies and many others to a person are not merely objective descriptions of the person but are, James claims, “among the *objects* of the stream, which is thus aware of them from within.” As he later explains, he is using the word *object* for what is usually called content. This point is immediately intimated when James states that the tendencies under discussion are largely constituted of feelings. In other words, these feelings of tendency are among features of states of consciousness and, therefore, apprehensible by inner awareness.

A similar statement can be rightly made regarding the approval or disapproval of other states of consciousness that components of the self of selves bestow upon them. However it may be based, the owning or disowning of what other states assert would seem to be a content of one state of consciousness having reference to the content of another state of consciousness. One state is an inner awareness of another state and in the act of apprehending the latter state judges its content against standards of belief or value.

James’s (1890/1950a, p. 299) “general” description quoted above implicates what I tend to call “tertiary consciousness” (Natsoulas, 1998). It is *tertiary*

consciousness that is implicated because, as they are reported firsthand by James, the so-called active states are awarenesses of something and they are countable as constituting the primary level of consciousness. (However, I qualify the latter level immediately after the following two enumerated paragraphs). James is reporting on his firsthand awareness of states that abstractly make up his self of selves. In order to issue such reports, he must not only be aware of those states, he must be wittingly aware of them. That is, his awarenesses of those states, on which his reports are based, must themselves be given to his awareness. Thus, there occurs inner awareness at, at least, the following two levels beyond the primary level:

1. James has inner awareness at the level of the states of special interest to him, which he is attempting to describe "in terms that all men might use." He wants to inform us regarding how these components of the self of selves seem to him firsthand. They are the specific states that he is introspecting and he is hoping that his description of them will accord with his readers' own experience.

2. Also, James's firsthand awarenesses of the states of special interest are themselves, too, objects of inner awareness. Imagine what would occur if they were not such objects, that is, if they occurred unconsciously. It would be as though neither they nor their objects existed, and James could not issue the report that he does as quoted above.

However, there would seem to be in this case a still further level of complexity, because James finds that the states of consciousness of special interest perform certain functions with respect to other states of consciousness: namely, "welcoming or opposing, appropriating or disowning, striving with or against, saying yes or no." The states of consciousness that are abstractly constitutive of the self of all selves are also, among other things, instances of inner awareness. I spoke of them three paragraphs back as their making up the "primary" level of consciousness. However, the more primary level truly belongs to the conscious states that are their objects. For they are the states having for their objects "objective matters," whereas the states that are doing the welcoming, and so on, have as their objects other states of consciousness (i.e., "subjective matters").

Feelings of Adjustment

Having provided the above "general" description of the latter states, James starts to question what exactly it is that he has been taking notice of, the empirical grounds for his description. He introspectively attempts "to catch one of these manifestations of spontaneity in the act." One might well think that James has already done that, his "general" description of the self of selves

being a direct product of his having done so. For example, he told us that he is aware firsthand of a "palpitating" inner life in which feelings of tendency occur that run along with or oppose certain specific cognitive contents.

Are the actual referents of James's description something else? Are they something other than occurrences of a certain kind that belong to James's stream of consciousness and are among the objects of his witting inner awareness? Has he not in fact caught states of consciousness in the act that approves or disapproves the deliverances of other states of consciousness? In another context, James (1890/1950a, p. 227) expresses himself in a way that I can apply here: Are not certain of the states of the procession of mentality that is the stream *the very* "originals" of the welcoming or opposing, appropriating or disowning, and striving with or against of which James speaks? Is it not certain of the states of consciousness themselves that are the original source of our notions of welcoming and the like?

However, upon "coming to the closest possible quarters with the facts," James finds that he cannot detect "any spiritual element at all" in the kind of state that makes up the self of selves. All that his "introspective glance . . . can ever feel distinctly is some bodily process, for the most part taking place within the head" (p. 300). However, James does not mean brain processes by the latter, but rather muscular movements in the head. He describes the motor accompaniments that he detects of various mental activities and he then gives the following summary of his most concrete introspections of the self of all selves: "When carefully examined, [it] is found to consist mainly of the collection of these peculiar motions in the head or between the head and throat" (p. 301).

James adds to this the qualification that the states of consciousness comprising the self of selves do not seem firsthand to him to consist completely of motor movements. There are also portions of the individual states that are "dim." Of these portions, he is less distinctly aware, and he cannot identify them firsthand as motor. However, he suggests this remainder belonging to the self of selves might prove actually to be occurrences like the distinct ones. In that case: "It would follow that our entire feeling of spiritual activity, or what commonly passes by that name, is really a feeling of bodily activities whose exact nature is by most men overlooked" (pp. 301-302).

James's point would seem to pertain not to the locus of the so-called spiritual activity, that is, whether this activity is overt or peripheral versus central, but rather to whether the activity is of a spiritual or immaterial nature. Moreover, the basic thesis James is trying out at this point is simply with regard to those "manifestations of spontaneity" attributed to the self of selves, that is, only certain mental actions. He is suggesting that these may be no more than adjustments, no more than preparations for overt response. James speaks of them as being themselves, therefore, of little interest except

as they perform the functions of furthering or inhibiting the presence before consciousness of other things. The mind has other contents and is not reducible to motor adjustments.

Nevertheless, as James emphasizes earlier in the same chapter, the self of all selves holds a special place in people's apprehension of their stream of consciousness. Those conscious states that discharge into the adjustments mentioned by James are identified with more than with any of the other parts of the stream. This is now explained by the fact that these adjustments, although simple, are highly reliable primary reactions:

In the midst of psychic change they are the permanent core of turnings-towards and turnings-from, of yieldings and arrests, which naturally seem central and interior in comparison with the foreign matters, *apropos* to which they occur, and hold a sort of arbitrating, decisive position, quite unlike that held by any of the other constituents of the Me. (James, 1890/1950a, pp. 302–303)

Thus, James seems to be suggesting that something of an illusion is at work. Presumably, the inner awareness that we have of our states of consciousness is not illusory, nor is the direct approving or disapproving of them or their contents that occurs therein an illusion. The illusion is limited to such a state's being also a kind of mental action that affects what happens in the stream of consciousness. "To feel them as the birthplace of conclusions and the starting point of acts" (p. 303) is an introspective illusion.

Recall, however, that James is only tentatively proposing that no spiritual activity does take place. Recall that he admits the existence of dim portions of these states that may be irreducible to feelings of motor adjustment. And notice that he is not rejecting cognitive contents' belonging to states of consciousness. James makes no effort here to reduce these states to behaviors and feelings that are produced by behaviors. Indeed, James suggests that those primary reactions to which he refers and the inner adjustments that occur preparatory to those primary reactions are "the result of sensorial and ideational processes discharging either into each other within the brain, or into muscles and other parts outside" (p. 302). Thus, to this point, James has not set aside the stream of consciousness as a reality. He has only denied the spiritual activity that is commonly attributed to it firsthand.

The Sciousness Hypothesis

Before returning to the relatively conventional view in terms of which he works in all other parts of his masterwork, James's final step is the conclusion that not only the self of selves but perhaps *everything* of which we take ourselves to have inner awareness is actually objective; *none* of it is spiritual. That is, we suffer a general, systematic introspective illusion: we believe our-

selves to be introspecting but, in every such instance, we are doing no more than perceiving something objective or, at most, hallucinating something that is not actually there. Even in the latter case, that of which we are hallucinating is either objective or nonexistent; for example, one may hallucinate the presence in the immediate environment of a long-lost relative or of a fire-breathing dragon.

On James's general conclusion based on his firsthand encounters with the self of selves, even hallucinating does not give us awareness of any part of our stream of mentality. From this implication, the following question may spring to a reader's mind: How then do we know that we are hallucinating? James's answer at this point would have, it seems, these two parts:

1. We know from the object's behavior whether it is real or, if already knowing it to be real based on its past behavior, whether it is really there at this particular moment.

2. That some evident parts of the objective world are not real or not really there must be explained. This is accomplished by postulating a stream of sciousness, that is, by means of the hypothesis that something must be going on in me that is responsible for the illusory parts of the makeup of the objective world.

However, James gives no detail regarding this explanation. Particularly desirable would be a logical demonstration that we can know that we are hallucinating without having any inner awareness of our perceptual experiences. This may well turn out to be a major difficulty for the sciousness hypothesis. However, I leave it for a different occasion, when I hope to devote an entire article to how we know, when we do know, that we are hallucinating.

James's skeptical hypothesis is not that we do not possess a mental life. It does not go so far as to deny thoughts, wishes, perceptions, and so on. It only denies that states of consciousness exist. Thus, for example, no thought is a feature of a state of consciousness and, therefore, no thought is open to inner awareness. The hypothesis only goes so far as to suggest that our mental life is entirely closed to us and is a matter of postulation. This is the meaning of *sciousness*. James is substituting streams of sciousness for streams of consciousness. The only difference between them is that as streams of sciousness proceed, although we have awareness of the environment and of our body, we have no direct awareness of the states of sciousness themselves that make up our stream of mentality.

I must emphasize that the sciousness hypothesis is not a behaviorist conception. The occurrence of experience or thought within us is not reduced to motor activities. Objects of awareness exist among which we are able to discriminate, either as being part of our empirical self or me or as being part of the "not-self" instead. We literally have awareness of them, but this aware-

ness is, so to speak, of a truncated sort. That is, it does not involve any kind of direct awareness of the states of sciousness or of any of their features, such as thoughts, intentions, sensory experiences, desires, and so on.

On James's tentative sciousness hypothesis, I should think that one implication is that, after all, the spiritual self cannot be viewed firsthand either concretely or abstractly. The spiritual self would have to be inferred on some other basis, such as from making behavioral observations that suggest it to exist behind, as it were, the behaviors that are observed. James (1890/1950a) states the following about the two parts, the self and the not-self, of the purely objectively experienced world:

Over and above these parts there is nothing save the fact that they are known, the fact of the stream of thought being there as the indispensable subjective condition of their being experienced at all. But this *condition* of the experience is not one of the *things experienced* at the moment; this knowing is not immediately *known*. (p. 304)

The self and not-self are known, but the part of the self that is described earlier in Chapter X as the spiritual self concretely considered is not known except indirectly. Thus, the spiritual self is that wherein things are experienced, or it is the mental states themselves that have experiences as among their features. But the experiencing of anything at all is, from the person's own firsthand perspective, purely a matter of the postulation of experiences and the like, presumably to make sense of behavior that is executed upon the parts of the objective world that are the self and not-self. James moves on very quickly and does not devote any space to meeting obvious criticisms, such as those that I formulate below.

Later in Chapter X, when discussing the notion of a pure ego, which he emphatically rejects, James repeatedly insists that no thinker is required, that the present state of consciousness is the only thinker that there is, and that it performs the functions of a thinker just as well, if not better, than the pure ego that is postulated in other theoretical accounts. In the section of the chapter that I am now discussing, James states similarly that, on his skeptical hypothesis, the stream of sciousness would be the thinker. Each basic durational component of this opaque stream, too, would be an act of awareness. This stream too apprehends parts of the me and not-me, but it does not apprehend its own subjective being. Indeed, it is what chooses which parts of the objective world are me or mine and which parts of it are not. Having discriminated them accordingly, the stream of sciousness contemplates them, as "objects which work out their drama together."

Criticism

I want next to address the question whether states of sciousness can (a) *pick out* some part of the environment or body and (b) *identify with* it or (c) *contemplate* it even if without identifying with it. Such mental actions as these three seem to me to require that their objects be objects of inner awareness. Can states of sciousness actually accomplish that which James suggests that they do? By his definition and hypothesis, they are completely blind to themselves and to each other — “blind” in the sense that inner awareness of any of them is impossible.

I do not consider perceptual awareness here. Without reluctance, I agree that some instances of perceptual awareness do take place within us entirely without our having any inner awareness of states of consciousness instantiating perceptual awareness among their features and without our having inner awareness of any features belonging to these states. Based on evidence that we do consciously observe, we judge it to be the case that such perceptual awareness has taken place in us. We infer, for example, our having experienced a certain particular something in the environment by judging from how we managed to avoid it. We walked around a boulder in our path although we were intent at the time on something else.

In contrast, the kind of “picking out” or “contemplating” to which James is referring is such that it can result in identification with the item apprehended. And so, James is suggesting that a completely objective reference without any inner awareness can be somehow converted into a subjective reference — this is me, or this is mine just as though it were me. The following three subsections briefly address, in turn, those three mental actions that I italicized above and that James has attributed to the stream of sciousness.

Let us keep in mind that the existence of the stream of sciousness is a postulation; without any exception, there is supposed to be neither absolute nor mediated immediacy of awareness of any state of sciousness. Keeping this in mind as the following discussion proceeds is important because it is so natural for us to think in terms of states of consciousness whenever an instance of feeling, thought, or perceptual experience is mentioned. Contrary to the sciousness hypothesis, we believe that it is by having inner awareness of these mental occurrences that we know of them in the first place.

1. *Picking Out a Part of the Objective World*

How would a state of sciousness (“ so_s_n ”) apprehend a certain particular something (“X”) that is a part of the objective world and claim it to be oneself or to be one’s own, a part of one’s empirical me? Suppose that so_s_n is a perceptual awareness and has among its features or ingredients some kind of

sensory experience of X . And the next state of sciousness (sos_{n+1}) and some of the states that succeed it in the same stream may have sensory experience of X as a feature as well. But, by definition, no state of sciousness can include inner awareness of any sensory experience or of any state of sciousness.

All of this proceeds in the dark: at no point in the stream is there sensory experience of X that wittingly takes place, that is, with direct awareness of its occurrence. All of the states of sciousness in the stream are devoid of cognitive content that pertains to a sensory experience of X : both those states of sciousness that have a sensory experience of X as a feature and those states of sciousness that do not have such a feature but follow those that do in the stream. From the perspective of each of them, it is as though no such experience is occurring or has occurred. The states of sciousness are all concerned with other matters; some of them are concerned with X but none is concerned with one's experiencing X . Thus, one is unconsciously aware of X .

I should enter a qualification before proceeding. I just stated that, in accordance with the sciousness hypothesis, the states of sciousness are all of them concerned with other matters, other matters than one's experiencing of X . An exception to my statement occurs when there are states of sciousness in one's stream that are part of a process of postulating or reasoning to the occurrence within one of experiences of X . Such a postulation may occur, for example, in the case that I mentioned in the preceding section, namely, in the case of one's knowing that one is hallucinating. In order for one to explain the presence in the environment of both real and unreal items, one may assume that the presence of the unreal items is a kind of error that is owed to certain unconscious experiences that are going on within one. Some of these experiences are veridical; others of them are not. But none of one's states of sciousness is an inner awareness of these experiences, because such inner awareness does not exist according to James's skeptical hypothesis.

In effect, one's situation is proposed by James to be like that of a blindsighted person with respect to those parts of the environment that are projecting to the area of his or her visual cortex that is damaged. The blindsighted person reports that he or she has no inner awareness of any visual experience of those environmental parts. Such visual experience may be occurring in the individual, but he or she does not provide evidence of this by acting spontaneously with respect to its object in the environment. In laboratory tests, however, evidence of some unconscious effects of the visual experience is found, including substantial effects on the patient's often reluctantly produced guesses concerning the object presented.

The laboratory trials with such patients that are of special interest here are those trials in which the latter effects occur and the patient insists that he or she is purely guessing, that is, guessing on no basis at all because, in his or her view, no experience of the presented object is occurring in him or her. Let us

call such trials "the blindsight trials." Based on certain of his introspections that I have described, James takes quite seriously the possibility that the entire stream of mental life is devoid of inner awareness of any of its components. This implies that, analogously to the blindsight trials, the effects of our mental states on our behaviors are all unconscious. None of our behaviors is based on our awarenesses, although James does not deny that we have experiences. Indeed, he refers to those mental states of which our experiences are features as being states of sciousness.

As do the states of consciousness in James's Chapter IX, the transiently proposed states of sciousness presumably have many objects all at once. But then, I ask, how could one pick out X from all of the other objects of the particular state of sciousness? If X is a particular part of the environment, note that there are other parts of it that one is apprehending simultaneously. How can one pick X out from among them, in order to classify it in one way or another, as its being part of the self or part of the not-self, if one has no inkling at all of even being aware of X — nor any inkling, for that matter, that it is present before one's senses?

Suppose, as a result of your being aware of X, the thought just comes over you, in a kind of automatic associative fashion, that you are here and now having a perceptual experience of X. The kind of thought that I mean is the kind that we would say about it that "it came from out of the blue." We normally say this about a thought that evidently is not a product of a process of conscious inference and is not evidently connected in its content to perceptions or thoughts that occurred to one recently. However, on James's sciousness hypothesis, this thought too, like your perceptual experience of X, would be a feature belonging to one or more of your states of sciousness. Since every one of your states of sciousness necessarily occurs unconsciously, it follows that, although the thought does occur in you, you do not have any inkling of its occurring to you.

Unless you then have a further thought to the effect that the first thought has occurred. Or unless you find yourself producing the following vocal automatism: "I think that I am having a perceptual experience of X." Suppose this automatism does occur. It issues from your lips and you feel and hear it do so. It may be suggested that, although your unconscious thought elicited the utterance, you are nevertheless now informed thereby about something that is taking place in your stream of sciousness, even without your having had any inner awareness of any state of sciousness.

However, although you are doubtlessly aware of the utterance, since you can feel and hear it take place, you are, *ex hypothesi*, blind to your having the awarenesses that are involved in your perceiving sounds and feeling the movements of your body. For, recall, all of your awarenesses are features of states of

sciousness; none of them is a feature of states of consciousness, since the latter states are claimed not to exist. It is as though your informative utterance did not in fact occur, although, like your visual experience, it may have other effects upon you. Merely being aware that something or other is the case, for example, that X is there at a certain location in the environment, does not mean that you are in a position to put this awareness to any kind of deliberate use. You need, rather, to be wittingly aware of your awareness of X.

2. Identifying with a Part of the Objective World

Even though our mental life consists only of states of consciousness, James has us identifying with parts of objective reality and refusing to identify with other parts. How can one identify with X if one has no conscious awareness of X, that is, if one has no awareness of being aware of X? Suppose, for example, that X is your arm and it is currently leaning on a table along with arms belonging to other people sitting around the table. How do you identify with X; that is, how do you view it as part of your me?

First you must pick it out, of course; you must distinguish it from all of the other objects that you are simultaneously aware of. Assume your states of consciousness do manage to pick it out notwithstanding my having cast doubt on whether this is possible in the absence of all inner awareness of one's experiences of the immediate environment. Because you have states of consciousness that pick out this arm from all the others that you are having perceptual awareness of simultaneously, you are able to take note of your arm's properties some of which, *ex hypothesi*, will lead to your identifying with it.

Which of its properties distinguish your arm from the others on the table in such a way that you will identify with it as opposed to any of the others? For one thing, you can see all of the arms that are leaning on the table but you can only feel one of them. For another thing, you can only put to use directly one of the arms of which you are having visual experience. But how do you know that the latter two facts are the case, given your presumed lack of all inner awareness? It is natural to answer by saying, "When your arm moves, you see and feel it move whereas, if someone else's arm moves, you see this occur but you do not feel it." But the consciousness hypothesis claims that, although these perceptual experiences do occur in you, you do not have inner awareness of them. If you are to identify with your arm, these experiences or your arm's movement must affect you in some other way.

It may be suggested that one can move one's own arm in a way that one cannot move the arm of another person, that is, move it from the inside. But then the question becomes how does one know that one has moved an arm from the inside if one has no inner awareness of any event taking place in one's stream of consciousness?

3. *Contemplating a Part of the Objective World*

Spelling out the sciousness hypothesis, James (1890/1950a) writes of the stream of sciousness as follows:

Each "section" of the stream would then be a bit of sciousness or knowledge of this sort, including and contemplating its "me" and its "not-me" as objects which work out their drama together, but not yet including or contemplating its own subjective being. (p. 304)

That is, the stream of sciousness's postulating its own existence and the existence of the states that constitute it is subsequent to the contemplation of the objective world and this stream's making some of the objects it finds in the world into part of the me and others into part of the not-me. James clearly implies above that this inclusion and contemplation does not depend on having any awareness of the stream of mental life or its components.

To contemplate a part of the objective world — I assume this means to engage in a special kind of mental activity. Probably, given the context of discussion, James is thinking of a visual form of contemplation directed on something (X) in the environment that is present before his eyes. He is looking at X with close and sustained attention over a period of time and, while he is doing so, he is considering thoughtfully one or more of X's aspects. Or James may have in mind by *contemplation* someone's musing or meditating on something, an object of thought rather than of perception.

Here is my objection to the notion that a stream of consciousness has, as it were, the wherewithal to contemplate an object in either of these two senses. It would seem to be one thing

- (a) for one simply to be aware of an object, to experience it perceptually or even to have a thought about it, which I am willing to grant to a stream of pure sciousness,
- and another thing
- (b) for one to engage in a mental activity that is directed on this object.

As I understand what James means by *contemplation*, it would seem to require an awareness that one is currently engaged in that activity, not necessarily by that name, of course, but by use of some concept of what one is doing that has an intended reference to the activity. Contemplation, like the activity of visually scrutinizing an object, is purposive and is sustained for a longer or shorter time. It is an activity from which one may lapse and, realizing that one has become distracted, one may resume contemplating in the interests of one's original purpose.

Indeed, it is such an activity that brings one into a position to postulate something more, namely, something that exists behind the directly appre-

hensible and can help one to explain the distinctions within the objective world upon which this particular instance of the activity of contemplation has been dwelling. James likens the individual's positing a "Thinker" (i.e., the stream of consciousness) within him or her to the theoretical postulations of the physical scientist, the purpose of these postulations being to contribute to the explanation of certain observable phenomena.

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