The Journal of Mind and Behavior
Spring 2006, Volume 27, Number 2
Pages 121–148
ISSN 0271–0137

On the Temporal Continuity of Human Consciousness: Is James's Firsthand Description, After All, "Inept"?

Thomas Natsoulas

University of California, Davis

Contrary to James's emphasis on the sensible continuity of each personal consciousness, our purported "stream," as it presents itself to us, is not accurately described as having a flowing temporal structure; thus Strawson has argued based on how he finds his own consciousness to be. Accordingly, qua object of inner awareness, our consciousness is best characterized as constituted successively by pulses of consciousness separated in time, one from the next, by a momentary state of complete unconsciousness. It seems at times that one's consciousness is flowing along, but this is an illusion (a) that is owed to taking continuities of content, across pulses, for continuity in the process itself of consciousness, and (b) that can be overcome by the proper mode of reflection upon one's consciousness as it is taking place. With reference to James's original account and to commentaries from Dainton and from Tye on Strawson's claims, the present article examines the latter claims, and proposes that Strawson errs in how he gives expression to what he observes firsthand with respect to his consciousness. His own introspective reports indicate that what he describes to be states of complete unconsciousness that directly precede and follow each of his conscious thoughts, are actually totally qualified states of consciousness and so they are not stoppages in the flow of his consciousness. Also, Strawson's special mode of reflection — which he labels "attentive" and speaks of as one's "reflecting very hard" — likely works not to reveal his consciousness to him but, rather, to prevent his apprehending that "phenomenal background," (a) which is there, perhaps always, while he is in the general state that we call "awakeness" and (b) of which each of his states of consciousness partially consists, including the purported states of complete unconsciousness he truly apprehends but misdescribes.

Is William James's well-known portrayal of consciousness from the first-person perspective, an "inept" contribution to our understanding? So a present-day critic has objected. A philosopher of mind of some note, Strawson (1997) has come to the following startling conclusion. Contrary to the

Requests for reprints should be sent to Thomas Natsoulas, Ph.D., 635 SW Sandalwood Street, Corvallis, Oregon 97333. Email: tnatsoulas@ucdavis.edu

emphasis placed by James (1890/1950, pp. 237–271) upon the "sensible continuity of each personal consciousness," our purported "stream" of consciousness possesses, as a matter of fact, *very little phenomenological continuity or actual flow to it.* What has long seemed to be evident to many of us, is illusory: a product of the faulty introspective activity (or "reflection") in which James and we have been engaged. Strawson's contention is surely arresting. (a) When one first encounters it, one feels compelled to read it over again a few times, together with the statements appended in its support — not because it was James who propounded a different view, but in the light of the strong impression which a whole lot of people have of their own consciousness as it presents itself to them. (b) Meditating on Strawson's claim, one stops once, twice, three times, to consult one's own consciousness — thus to determine that it really is as one has considered it to be all along. (c) Then one attempts, albeit to no avail, to apprehend one's stream of consciousness with a mental set or attitude that will render it, however briefly, compatible with the account of a fragmented mentality that Strawson has put forward.

Admittedly, what seems to us entirely obvious may be a product of systematic distortion. It could turn out that human consciousness does not, in itself, flow or stream. To refuse to allow the latter as a real possibility would surely be irrational and presumptuous. Recall that science, not introspection, will decide the objective facts regarding the temporal continuity of consciousness, not to mention other characteristics that belong to the natural phenomenon consciousness is. It is pertinent and important for us to distinguish human consciousness from how it seems firsthand to us to be: as we distinguish analogously in the case, for example, of the sun round which the earth revolves. We do not insist that the sun possess all of the properties we are perceptually aware of it as having. So also, our consciousness, which is no less a natural phenomenon, may not in some respects be as it presents itself to us. However, firsthand, does not one's consciousness appear to one convincingly to flow? As it presents itself to one, is it not *a unitary process which keeps on continuously expanding in the dimension of time* — even as one sits immobile in a room which is undergoing no change whereof one is aware? All through such a period, is it not true that one's "felt consciousness" (James's term) is *proceeding*? How could Strawson's kind of position apply to this *subjective* consciousness that one knows intimately from the first-person perspective?

A "Continually Restarting" Consciousness

On the basis of his own personal introspective observations, Strawson describes a dissimilar human consciousness from that to which *The Principles of Psychology*, James's introductory text and masterwork, has brought much

serious attention. In his section titled "The Self in Time; The 'Stream' of Consciousness," Strawson (1997) reports, in part, as follows:

> When I am alone and thinking, I find that my fundamental experience of consciousness is one of *repeated returns into consciousness from a state of complete if momentary unconsciousness*. The (invariably brief) periods of true experiential continuity are usually radically disjunct from one another in this way even when they are not radically disjunct in respect of content. (It is in fact often the same thought — or nearly the same thought — that one returns to after a momentary absence.) The situation is best described, it seems to me, by saying that consciousness is continually restarting. There isn't a basic substrate (as it were) of continuous consciousness interrupted by various lapses and doglegs. (p. 422; original emphasis)

Strawson is claiming here that a *basically continuous* consciousness — one that merely suffers a stoppage from time to time — *has no existence*, at least not among human beings. Basically, our consciousness is invariably composed of moments of consciousness *alternating with* moments of unconsciousness. Consciousness is "*continually* restarting," Strawson deliberately declares. The continuity which does characterize human consciousness amounts to the fact that, upon its being extinguished, it usually quickly comes back. Qua object of inner awareness, our consciousness is best characterized — as I understand Strawson's view — to be a *pulsational* phenomenon. And the pulses that successively constitute one's "stream" of consciousness are separated in time, one from the directly next one, by *a state of unconsciousness* ranging in duration from the lengthy to, usually, the very brief. Admittedly, Strawson does make explicit reference (see above indented quotation) to certain "periods of true experiential continuity." However, he describes them to be invariably brief; and the context of his description is an insistence on the continuity of something else: constant interruptions by states of unconsciousness. Thus, Strawson's account would seem to make a highly unstable phenomenon of our consciousness; it is absent again just as soon as it has come into being. Except whenever the state of unconsciousness that directly follows a pulse of consciousness is of extended duration, consciousness is rapidly fluctuating in its availability to introspection and inner awareness.

Thus, an understanding of consciousness, such as that of James, as continually expanding in the dimension of time, is, according to Strawson, contradicted by the firsthand evidence. James and he disagree regarding the firsthand evidence itself; both of them would urge a dubious reader to "look" again, to "see" for himself or herself where the truth lies. The reader needs to attend to his or her "fundamental *experience* of consciousness," since it is deliverances of inner awareness that the disagreement is all about. The issue is consciousness as *experienced firsthand*, not just in the sense of being undergone or lived through, but in the sense of being apprehended or noticed as it is occurring to one. Although Strawson (1997) makes no reference to

Sigmund Freud, Freud advocated a similar view of consciousness at least with respect to its evanescent character. Note first that he held that the states (or "processes") of consciousness occur in a distinct system of the mental (or "psychical") apparatus; they are, in all instances of their occurrence, states of or in the system he called "perception–consciousness." They are caused to take place in that system, they are elicited there, by inputs that arise from the environment, from the body, or from inside of the mental apparatus itself. Now, about the states of consciousness, Freud (1938/1964) wrote,

> Consciousness is in general a highly fugitive state. What is conscious is conscious for only a moment. If our perceptions do not confirm this, the contradiction is an apparent one; it is explained by the fact that the stimuli which lead to perception may persist for considerable periods, so that meanwhile the perception of them may be repeated. (p. 159)

Freud continues by explaining that: (a) non-conscious thought processes as well, not just sensory stimuli, may cause flashes of consciousness to take place in the system perception–consciousness, the only system in which they occur; and, (b) since, as stimulation does, non-conscious thought processes frequently do persist, these processes cause particular conscious thoughts repeatedly to take place, although, as it is always true, each of these occurrences is no less fleeting (cf. Freud, 1939/1964, p. 96). The development of comparisons with Freud's conception of consciousness (Natsoulas, 1984, 2003) would no doubt yield results that are of some interest. But it is not clear that such comparisons would contribute to the present article's goals. My reason for citing Freud's conception is that it suggests that he, like Strawson, may have found his consciousness to lack the temporal continuity that James and others have reported for themselves. As is well known, not only did Freud engage in a great deal of introspection, but he was also especially sensitive to the effects, upon the contents of one's consciousness, of mechanisms of self-deception.

Strawson maintains that, even if fainting is omitted, along with falling asleep and other such occurrences, still the so-called "stream" of consciousness that remains is made up of *many stops and starts*. Strawson has discovered that his consciousness is not comprised of what he was told, namely, a succession of temporally adjacent states (or pulses), each one of them following tightly upon the one directly before it (James, 1890/1950).[1] Even when

[1]For my understanding of James's (1890/1950) account of the stream of consciousness, one can consult Natsoulas (1992–1993). The latter article is the first one of a series on James's account, a series that appears in the journal *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* in its volumes for 1992–1993 through 2005–2006.

Strawson's consciousness is not interrupted by *extended* periods of unconsciousness, it is succeeded by its absence; and quickly it then comes back, only to be replaced by its complete though brief cessation. Now, there may be instances when it is felt that a notion of consciousness's proceeding in a streamlike manner is truly applicable. Strawson (1997) does consider such instances, contrasting them as follows with what it seems to him goes on in solitary thinking.

> Things are different if one's attention is engaged by some ordered and continuous process in the world, like a fast and exciting game, or music, or a talk. In this case thought or experience may be felt to inherit much of the ordered continuity of the phenomenon which occupies it. (p. 422)

But, this is just illusory, Strawson contends; no such "inheritance" of continuity does in fact take place; during the observation of environmental continuities, felt consciousness does not have any more of a continuous character than it does during observation of environmental discontinuities; in such cases, too, "gaps and fadings, disappearances and recommencements" are revealed *if one engages in reflection with a sufficient degree of attention.*

Although Strawson (1997) does not develop his notion of *attentive reflection* (or the related "reflecting very hard"), this activity, which must be one executed with concentration, or intensity of focus, on segments of the "stream," would seem to be a very important part of his view. I have reason to return to it in the last section of this article. At the present point, before I proceed to my next section, let me mention a slight, relevant hesitation that I feel: perhaps Strawson expects his readers to draw out the implication themselves that, on those seemingly continuous occasions as well, attentive reflection reveals an alternation between moments of consciousness and moments of unconsciousness, just as he says he finds to occur when he is engaged in thinking alone. This implication would carry his view further along than gaps and recommencements do, as he clearly does go further with respect to thinking. There may be no good reason for me to hesitate on this matter, for Strawson informs us that he finds *all of consciousness* to be *continually restarting* not just the process of thinking. I take this to say no extended experience transpires without its being repeatedly broken up by moments of unconsciousness (cf. Tye's, 2003, pertinent comments, later discussed in this article). Thus, Strawson would seem to have in mind something along the lines of the pulses of mentality which James proposed to be constitutive, one at a time, of the stream of consciousness — except that each one of Strawson's pulses is directly preceded and followed by a state of *unconsciousness* and, therefore, a series of conscious pulses cannot make up a continuous consciousness.

What, If Anything, Went Wrong in James's Case?

Evidently, in Strawson's view, one can *systematically* fail to become aware of some of what is happening to one's consciousness. Notwithstanding James's studied and highly sophisticated efforts, he systematically failed all those many times he apprehended his consciousness firsthand (i.e., had "inner awareness" of it), either spontaneously or *as an effect of deliberately engaging in the activity of introspection*, and took his consciousness to be like a stream. A systematic failure of this kind, I take it, is not owed to *an incapacity* — as is our inability to tell firsthand that our consciousness is a brain process, assuming, as I do, that it is. Such a failure, a systematic failure such as James's, would seem to characterize, rather, the *exercise* of an ability one does have. We need to be informed further about James's systematic error, which would not be his alone. Did it really take place? Or was it Strawson himself, rather, who somehow erred? Let me very briefly anticipate as follows a later part of my discussion. It may be that neither of our theorists erred in their introspections. Perhaps it is possible for us to read through, as it were, the statements that comprise Strawson's firsthand reports and thereby reach his inner awareness, and then distinguish what he did or did not apprehend from how he chose to give it expression. Good grounds may be developed to the effect that his reports do not fully correspond to what he found introspectively. Compare: reports do not always properly represent the perceptual awarenesses they are based on. It is not unusual for psychologists to work to decipher what their subjects report concerning their experiences. Maybe Strawson's own phenomenological reports, too, require some decipherment.

Variable Inner Awareness

The reference made here to systematic errors of reflection, is not in order to call attention to the fact that, in many instances, one *does not* have any inner awareness, awareness occurring on the spot of some of one's states of consciousness as they proceed. Time and again, an absence of consciousness in the sense of inner awareness is the case. The fourth one of six meanings listed under *consciousness* in *The Oxford English Dictionary* is inner awareness. When it is only inner awareness that is absent, psychologists may find it awkward to speak of lapses in consciousness, because, in a different sense, a lot of consciousness is still going on. But, there is nothing about one's having occurrent awareness of something else that requires being occurrently aware of that awareness. Even if exceptions to the latter are forthcoming, it will be agreed, I expect, that there take place many instances, for example, of one's perceptual awareness without one's having inner awareness of their occurrence. And this is consistent with James's (1890/1950) view. Thus, what

makes of a state of consciousness what it is, namely, a state of consciousness, is not that it is, too, an object of inner awareness. Whereas states of consciousness take place which are conscious, in the sense of being then and there objects of inner awareness, so states of consciousness occur too that are not conscious, not objects of direct awareness. Consistently with James, we may speak of a state of consciousness, at one time, as taking place consciously and of the same state, at another time, as taking place unconsciously. Most, if not all states of consciousness occur, as it were, in both these modes, on different occasions of course. "Mode" here is a matter of their being or not being objects of inner awareness in different instances of their occurrence. James's conception of inner awareness, as presented in *The Principles*, can be justly expressed as I do now by means of the following set of points (cf. Natsoulas, 1995–1996b, 1996–1997).

1. No consciousness state is an awareness of its own occurrence, though (a) it, individually, may have many intentional objects, or items that it is about, and (b) it is, in every case, a single, unitary awareness of all of its objects, not a number of different awarenesses which are somehow joined together in a single state.

2. Inner awareness is a function which is performed by certain states of consciousness, but no member of the latter set, though they are all instances of inner awareness, has itself among its intentional objects.

3. One might think that a state of consciousness's having itself among its intentional objects should be theoretically acceptable to James; for it is, in his view, the same ongoing brain process that produces both a state of consciousness and any inner awareness of it that may occur. But, he insists inner awareness requires a second state of consciousness, one intentionally directed on the first state, which is thus an object of the awareness that is embodied by the second state.

4. It is not a rarity for a state of consciousness to occur in the company of other such states none of which involves apprehension of the state, though all are constituents of the same stream of consciousness to which it itself belongs. The state could then be described as occurring on that occasion "unconsciously," although it was a fundamental durational component of the respective stream of consciousness no less than if it had been apprehended therein.

Strawson is not claiming James's adoption of a conception of consciousness as a stream can be explained by reference to an insufficiency of inner awareness on James's part, nor by James's unwillingness to engage in the activity of reflection. James is not to be grouped with the party of revolutionary psychologists who denied they had consciousness of their own consciousness and who strove to eliminate from their objective science every datum drawn from psychologists' or their subjects' introspections. James's purportedly flawed evidence pertaining to consciousness came to him when, on numer-

ous occasions, he did undergo inner awareness of some section of his consciousness stream. Time and again, when he engaged in introspection, James failed to notice something important that his consciousness instantiated, something *he could have been aware of* according to Strawson.

In the science of psychology, old views continue to reassert themselves, and James remains still a desirable predecessor whom to claim. Therefore, once again, someone may be moved to object, as Donald O. Hebb (1974) did, that there is to be found in James's psychological works, very little based on introspective observation. From such a remarkably partisan viewpoint, James would be depicted as having been a sort of early radical behaviorist whose accounts drew mainly upon perceptual observations of behavior, including his own behavior — which, according to the depiction, James knew about perceptually as it went on, that is, much as someone else knew who was so positioned as to be able to observe what James was doing. However, the method radical behaviorists promoted, and claimed was how "good science" is perforce practiced, itself depends on inner awareness, whether or not the latter's essential role is acknowledged. For a psychologist to draw inferences from his or her perceptual experience, he or she must, as every scientist must, be aware of its occurrences. No behaviorist can evade this iron law, except by quitting scientific observation to concentrate on the development and promulgation of behaviorist philosophy. For an instance of "observation" to qualify as such and to be of scientific use, one must know that one perceived that which one perceived. And this is not accomplished by perceiving one's behavior. Forced to "observe" his or her own behavior, a hypothetical psychologist who totally lacks inner awareness of the perceptual experience involved in making such "observations" could not know anything from the behavior. It would be, from his or her perspective, as though the behavior had not occurred (see Natsoulas, 1998).

Much material in *The Principles* can be cited by way of contradicting the view that James's method rarely involved his or anyone's engaging in introspection. Since this material is readily available, both online and in the myriad copies of his masterwork currently in circulation, let me merely call attention to the first paragraph of his section "The Methods of Investigation." In this section, James discusses the methods that are available to psychologists for ascertaining the facts that correspond to their subject matter. He unambiguously asserts there,

> *Introspective Observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always* . . . . All people unhesitatingly believe that they feel themselves thinking, and that they distinguish the mental state as an inward activity or passion, from all the objects with which it may cognitively deal. *I regard this belief as the most fundamental of all the postulates of Psychology*, and shall discard all curious inquiries about its certainty as too metaphysical for the scope of this book. (James, 1890/1950, p. 185; original emphases)

Arguments from Artefacts of Introspection

As a theorist of consciousness, Strawson is obliged to say *what he thinks went wrong in the case of William James*. What is there about consciousness and our firsthand awareness of it that makes possible the commission of such a major error by a conscientious and relevantly educated observer such as James was? Without explicit reference to James, Strawson states that artefacts of inner awareness resulting from the activity of introspection must be taken into account, since they have to do with how consciousness appears to itself. What specific kind of artefact does he have in mind? Strawson mentions an example of the relevant kind of artefact, and allows that it may have affected his own firsthand reports about consciousness: "But perhaps the experience of disjunction is an artefact of introspection. Perhaps unexamined consciousness has true flow, and the facts get distorted by the act of trying to observe what they are" (Strawson, 1997, p. 422). In answer to this possibility, Strawson informs us that he *also* undergoes *spontaneous* awareness of those radical disjunctions occurring in his consciousness; it is not just when he introspects that he notices their occurrence; so, the disjunctions are actual characteristics that his felt consciousness possesses; they are not a mere consequence of his deliberate apprehensions of it; they are not an artefact of how he engages in introspection; the consistency to which he calls attention, between inner awareness that somehow spontaneously transpires in him, and inner awareness effected by his deliberately examining his consciousness, is proposed to count in favor of his proposal.

While this response of Strawson's invites discussion, I include here only the comments of the present paragraph. If one claims James's awareness of phenomenological continuity is artefactual in Strawson's sense, one must propose that introspection makes James *blind to actual gaps* that are occurring in his stream of consciousness. For the activity of introspecting cannot fill in gaps actually occurring in the stream of consciousness, in consciousness itself. From a discontinuous stream of consciousness, introspection cannot create a continuous stream — as it is able to do the converse perhaps, that is, to cause real, not merely apparent, interruptions to occur in the flow of consciousness. If Strawson does have inner awareness of gaps in his consciousness, introspective blindness to them is not universal. And so, he has to explain how it is that some people, such as James, suffer from this blindness under certain conditions. I come back, in this main section, to this precise matter since, for one thing, it is relevant to James's account of "time-gaps" in the stream of consciousness, which I shall be bringing into the picture.

Perhaps, when Strawson (1997) asserts, "It's true that belief in the reality of flow may itself contribute to an experience of flow" (p. 423), he has James's purported systematic error in mind. It is regrettable that Strawson

does not say anything more regarding his claim as to the power of belief. Although the claim could be otherwise understood, it would seem to be an introspective one. Accordingly, a belief in flow cannot cause actual flow but it may affect how consciousness appears to itself. Belief may blind one to the radical disjunctions in consciousness that do really take place according to Strawson. And, in such cases, those disjunctions could be noticed were a suitably different belief in force. Is it implied that James's belief as regards the felt continuity of consciousness had a determinative effect on his inner awareness, or that which he introspectively found? Should we grant that the contrary belief of Strawson's did not generate an introspective distortion? It would have helped if Strawson had made a try at explaining why someone such as James, who engaged systematically in much more than merely "a modest amount of reflection," was not more perspicacious than he was. Let me turn this matter around. In his turn, how would James rejoin concerning why he does not notice what Strawson claims does transpire in James's consciousness? Surely, James would proffer the same explanation he proffered in *The Principles* for why the "time-gaps," which do take place in consciousness, are not noticeable. It will be seen here very soon that James's explanation amounts to the impossibility of noticing what one cannot have awareness of. As I have mentioned, I shall try later on to explain what Strawson's mistake might have been in how he reported his experiences of thinking. I think his mistake lies more in how he came to express what he found than in his finding it. Perhaps my account can contribute to reconciling the disparity between James's and Strawson's characterizations of consciousness in respect to its felt continuity.

Undetected Stoppages in Consciousness Itself

I should bring out that Strawson's objection to James's account of the consciousness stream also does not reduce to *the fact that successive consciousness states of the same stream often do have very different contents (subject matters) and there commonly occur marked changes in the content of consciousness without transitional states in between*. James (1890/1950) was highly cognizant of this fact, and he actually treated of it in his Chapter IX, "The Stream of Thought." Rather, Strawson maintains there takes place often a "sensed temporal gap or felt interruption of consciousness." He disagrees with James concerning whether the stream of consciousness, as it is proceeding, manifests itself to one's inner awareness as unbroken, uninterrupted, in that sense continuous.

In his comments on the "stream" of consciousness, Strawson (1997) brings up a distinction between two categories of consciousness states: some are states of "mere consciousness," others are, rather, states of "self-consciousness" (p. 421). For a moment, it seems that Strawson will be using this distinction

to explicate his introspectively finding an absence of experiential flow. His consciousness keeps slipping back and forth with respect to two foci, between consciousness and the world. Might this be what he intends when he speaks of an alternation between moments of consciousness and moments of unconsciousness as making up the consciousness "stream"? Does Strawson mean consciousness of world and consciousness of consciousness quickly supplant one another? He parenthetically reports, "One can sit through a whole film without emerging into I-thinking self-consciousness." But, it fast becomes clear that the gaps or interruptions that he has in mind are not mere losses of self-awareness. Rather, they are evident and repeated haltings of consciousness itself, followed again by its return. Indeed, as I shall explain next, Strawson is in effect claiming to have self-awareness as his consciousness switches off and on.

When a stoppage is in effect, one does not have awareness of anything. Consciousness is for the moment nonexistent. According to Strawson, consciousness switches on and off a great deal. Indeed, his proposal suggests it could be the case that, normally, one is unconscious more of the time than one is conscious. However, I place the full sentence just above in italics because I wish to connect with James's view that, when consciousness stops, one does not have awareness of its absence. This may not be a view attributable to Strawson as well. *For Strawson speaks of states of complete unconsciousness as though he does have inner awareness of them.* Might it be true that Strawson does not really mean that consciousness itself often stops altogether? Rather than answering this question at this point, I proceed as though his view is as radical as it sounds. I do not believe this is unfair to him. To see it is not unfair, one need only note his firsthand reports of consciousness as interrupted constantly by states of *complete unconsciousness*. It is therefore fair to understand him as leaving behind, when such states are said to occur, no kind of consciousness. However, I shall inquire in my final section into whether some way exists to construe the so-called states of complete unconsciousness — which I grant he is aware of — so that his consciousness is not required to stop altogether for these states to occur. The key to a suitable interpretation may amount to the ability that Strawson in effect claims to apprehend via inner awareness, states of complete unconsciousness, along with states of consciousness.

James's "Time-Gaps" in Consciousness

Students of James's conception of the stream of consciousness usually acknowledge his full acceptance of the existence of "time-gaps" in that flow. It will be seen that his claim of the felt continuity of consciousness, is compatible with a theoretical acknowledgement of time-gaps that take place in

the experiential flow. He defined such a gap to be the duration between a cessation of consciousness ("altogether") and its next resumption, whether it resumes again sooner or later (Natsoulas, 1992–1993). Throughout any time-gap, all consciousness is extinguished; no state of consciousness takes place during a time-gap — except if, in the same person, a second stream of consciousness flows as well, and this stream has not also stopped.[2] In such a case, any state of consciousness that occurs within a time-gap belongs to that second stream, not to the stream that has stopped. Furthermore, like Strawson (yet also unlike him, as will be seen), James allows that *many more breaks of the stream of consciousness may take place than are commonly recognized.* Thus, James (1890/1950) states,

> The life of the *individual* consciousness in time seems, however, to be an interrupted one, so that the question: *Are we ever wholly unconscious?* becomes one which must be discussed. Sleep, fainting, coma, epilepsy, and other "unconscious" conditions are apt to break in upon and occupy large durations of what we nevertheless consider the mental history of a single man. And, the fact of interruption being admitted, is it not possible that it may exist where we do not suspect it, and even perhaps in an incessant and fine-grained form? (p. 199; original emphases)

Did James have a reason to try to reject the latter possibility? Did his theory require a more continuous consciousness stream than if the latter were true? His main claim regarding conscious continuity pertained to how consciousness *seems firsthand to itself.* Did James propose as well a temporal continuity for consciousness *in itself*: that is, its having an objective continuity, "from the psychologist's point of view," as he would say, which he distinguished from the first-person perspective upon consciousness? In the paragraph right after the passage I just quoted from his book, James himself spelled out my latter question, and then indicated uncertainty with regard to what the right answer to that question is:

> Is consciousness really discontinuous, incessantly interrupted and recommencing (from the psychologist's point of view)? and does it only seem continuous to itself by an illusion analogous to that of the zoetrope? Or is it at most times as continuous outwardly as it inwardly seems? It must be confessed that we can give no rigorous answer to this question. (p. 200)

At this point, James appends a footnote in which he cites, without disapproval, two authors who proposed — on the basis of "neural vibration," which they held to be the physical condition for consciousness — that there transpire incessant interruptions of consciousness, owing to what is happen-

[2]About secondary streams of consciousness in James, see Natsoulas (1994–1995, 1995–1996a). In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James (1902/1982) advanced the more extreme thesis that a secondary stream of consciousness exists in all of us (Natsoulas, 2005b).

ing to the brain process that produces consciousness. This process is characterized by a continuous flux with respect to, among other things, its ability to bring consciousness into being.

James's admission that he has no "rigorous" answer implies, no doubt, that the existence of those fine-grained interruptions and recommencings, if they do characterize consciousness, must be established not introspectively, but via the route of scientific inference (cf. James, 1890/1950, p. 213). Evidently, their occurrences are not among the deliverances of inner awareness. James would reject Strawson's (1997) introspective report that one's consciousness seems to be made up of a "series of radically disjunct irruptions . . . from a basic substrate of non-consciousness. It keeps banging out of nothingness; it is a series of comings to" (p. 423). Even when a time-gap occurs in his consciousness of the kind James knows something about, it seems to him that a felt continuity is still the case. That is, the succession of consciousness states taking place right after the gap is felt to be continuous with the consciousness states that transpired just before the time-gap started (James, 1890/1950, pp. 238–239).

With regard to the temporal continuity of consciousness, deference to future science is given expression as well by Strawson (1997):

> There's a sense in which this issue is undecidable, for in order to settle it one would need to be able to observe something while it was unobserved. Nevertheless, the view that there is radical disjunction might receive independent support from experimental psychology, and also, more indirectly, from current work on the non-mental neural correlates of consciousness. (p. 422)

Strawson is responding to a possible objection that I have already mentioned here to his firsthand description of consciousness. Let me repeat the objection in my own words: "The discontinuity that Strawson is reporting results from his effort to observe. A consciousness that is continuous is in fact what he is observing. Introspection can make it seem as if the flow of consciousness is interrupted repeatedly." Strawson replies: even when he is not introspecting, spontaneous inner awareness sometimes is of the kind of temporal structure for consciousness that he is reporting. The two sentences comprising the above indented quotation also are part of Strawson's reply to the objection. And they too would seem relevant to his implicit claim of having inner awareness of states of *un*consciousness that precede and follow the thoughts that come to him. As will be seen, James argues contra the occurrence of any awareness of anything when one is in a state of unconsciousness; there might be awareness going on in a second stream, but the first stream, *ex hypothesi*, has come to a complete stop, whether briefly or for a longer interval.

Returning to James's admission that he has no rigorous answer to whether consciousness is actually interrupted by time-gaps much more often than we

think, I need to mention that James seems not to have remained agnostic on this matter. The same book suggests his faith lies in the temporal continuity of each of both the mental and the physical, which he understands to interact causally with each other. At this point in his career, James (1890/1950) is a dualist interactionist, although years later, he will champion a form of neutral monism: all that exists consists of "pure experience," which is neither physical or mental (e.g., James, 1904/1912; Natsoulas, 2003–2004, 2005a, 2005–2006). Indeed, his position in *The Principles* is that the felt continuity of the stream of consciousness is to be explained *as owed to the objective continuity of the brain process that produces or evokes consciousness*. James would seem to hold an objective continuity, not just a felt continuity, is a characteristic of the consciousness stream. This is the view I have understood James (1890/1950) to be expressing in his section entitled "Within Each Personal Consciousness, Thought Is Sensibly Continuous" (Natsoulas, 1992–1993, pp. 6–7). He there turns, once again, to the brain — which is responsible for the moment by moment existence of consciousness. It is, he says, "an organ whose internal equilibrium is always in a state of change, — the change affecting every part." And he describes the consciousness stream, which consists of a tight succession of pulses of mentality, as "corresponding" to these physical pulses of change. Argumentatively, he asks if these changes in the brain do not stop, if they keep on taking place, then "why . . . should consciousness ever cease?" In this regard, and certainly in certain others, the brain process and the consciousness which "corresponds" to it share properties with each other. Here is how James (1890/1950) closes the paragraph, and section: "As the brain-changes are continuous, so do all these consciousnesses [which correspond, one for one, to those pulses of change] melt into each other like dissolving views. Properly they are but one protracted consciousness, one unbroken stream" (pp. 247–248). James would seem to have chosen in favor of the temporal continuity of consciousness in itself, or how it is objectively — except insofar as time-gaps occur because, at such points, the brain has stopped functioning in the way that results in states of consciousness; there occurs a break in the process and, consequently, a time-gap in the stream of consciousness. James does not choose to address at this point whether incessant interruptions and recommencing of the brain process take place, though he does countenance a succession of changes in the brain process that, usually, extends continuously for some time.

As James begins, in the section under discussion, to make a case for consciousness's being "sensibly continuous," he reminds us of his acceptance that time-gaps in consciousness do exist, "and that they might be more numerous than is usually supposed" (p. 237). The time-gaps that he accepts, and allows might be more frequent than we suppose, are objective time-gaps, defined as

brief or long durations of consciousness's complete cessation and then its return to existence. His use of the word *altogether* to characterize the extent of the cessation is important, since James is claiming *there is no firsthand awareness of the unconsciousness which constitutes a time-gap in consciousness.* I believe his argument amounts to: consciousness cannot possibly detect its own absence since there is awareness of *nothing at all* when all consciousness is absent. Better to say that, during a time-gap, *no awareness occurs of anything present, past, or future, real or unreal.* While James held that consciousness is produced by an entirely physical brain process — which in itself does not contain awareness of anything, not even of the mental stream it is bringing into existence — the states of consciousness that successively constitute the stream of consciousness do not at any point, in his view, apprehend themselves as produced by the brain process, neither individually nor each other. They owe their existence to the brain, but this is not evident to them directly.

Note in this connection Strawson's phenomenological report that, when he is thinking alone, his thoughts seem to "keep banging out of nothingness." The term *nothingness* would seem here to refer to the same objects of inner awareness Strawson calls "states of unconsciousness." And if Strawson's references to "states of complete unconsciousness" are to the brain states that are the sources of the states of consciousness, then Strawson, as James would view it, *does not have any direct awareness of them. He must be talking of something else.* Those states of unconsciousness he reports should not be understood as states of complete unconsciousness (see later). James adds that consciousness's absence when the stream of consciousness is interrupted, means there occurs no awareness of anything, including those interruptions. The basic durational components of any consciousness stream are states of consciousness in succession (also called "thoughts" by James). The inner awarenesses that transpire — for example, when one is engaged in introspecting — are a matter, according to James, of one state of consciousness's being such as to have another state of consciousness included among its intentional objects. During any interruption of a stream, no state of consciousness occurs belonging to that stream, nor does any awareness occur that this is the case. No time-gap can be itself apprehended, however brief or long it may be, since the brain process that evokes the state of consciousness is incapable of evoking an inner awareness of the brain process's stoppage or its resumption. States of consciousness are the only objects of inner awareness there can be.

"When We Stop Thinking About Something, It Is Not As If All Goes Dark!"

Strawson's radical claim as to the discontinuity of consciousness has drawn the attention of other authors as well; see Michael Tye's section with the title of "Some Mistakes, Historical and Contemporary" in his chapter called "The Unity of Consciousness Through Time." Tye (2003) mentions first the occurrence in a person of two successive extended experiences separated from each other temporally by a state of unconsciousness; one of them takes place immediately before the state of unconsciousness intervenes, and the second experience begins to occur as soon as the state of unconsciousness ends. He uses the example of falling into what is commonly referred to as "deep sleep." "My life is made up, at the psychological level, of consciousness punctuated by unconsciousness" (Tye, 2003, p. 104). This is not the same constitution of consciousness that is proposed by Strawson; consciousness has the form, rather, of the *extended* experiences that were just mentioned, which Tye describes as two streams of consciousness. Absent the intervention of deep sleep or a different state of unconsciousness, they would constitute together one continuous experience and, thus, a single stream of consciousness. In an appended note, Tye allows that his example of punctuation of consciousness by unconsciousness may not turn out to be valid. Thus, it may be true that, while we sleep deeply, our consciousness does not come to a halt at any point. And if consciousness is ongoing without a break, never stopping until the close of one's life, there would be only "one extended period of consciousness throughout the person's lifetime, and one stream of extended experience, the content of which during deep sleep is vastly impoverished in comparison to its content during normal waking moments" (Tye, 2003, pp. 181–182). Suppose deep sleep includes no interruption in the flow of our consciousness; Tye would certainly accept that we may yet live through other general states in which our stream of consciousness does not flow. It is not clear how Tye would treat of the possibility, admitted by James, that consciousness suffers myriad interruptions that are undetectable firsthand. But it is clear that, for Tye, as many consciousness streams (extended experiences) could occur as occur stoppages of consciousness, if the successive stoppages are not so close in time that moments of consciousness cannot qualify as extended, being replaced too quickly by a state of unconsciousness.

Tye's reason for addressing Strawson's discussion of continuity in felt consciousness is Tye's conception of the two experiences separated by a state of unconsciousness, as being two streams of consciousness. Strawson's introspective reports are an obstacle Tye's account must overcome. If no streams of consciousness ever take place, there are no extended experiences in Tye's sense. Tye rightly comprehends Strawson to hold we normally undergo so

many lapses in consciousness it is misleading to call it a stream. Recall: even when Strawson's consciousness is having a stable or predictable sequence of contents, he is aware anyway of "gaps and fadings, disappearances and recommencings" of consciousness itself. In speaking of time-gaps, Strawson's intended referents are not merely changes in the contents of consciousness; he means consciousness itself ceases and then restarts.

Tye states (a) that Strawson is correct to hold that human thinking is full of starts and stops, but (b) Strawson is in error that the same is true of consciousness. The latter is not equivalent to the process of thinking, and is relevantly different from thinking in some of its properties. Tye is suggesting, in effect, that, whereas thinking constantly alternates with not thinking, the same does not apply to consciousness and unconsciousness. Rather, our consciousness "is largely a matter of perceptual experience, bodily feeling, and mood," which is thinking's "phenomenal background," and, for as long as one stays awake, the phenomenal background is always there. It certainly goes on while thinking is in progress; and, perhaps, during sleep, albeit not as richly as during waking. The phenomenal background differs from thinking in that it "has a kind of continuity or flow to it." It would seem that, according to Tye's account, some of our streams of consciousness include the phenomenological aspect of the process of thinking; but, unlike consciousness as a whole, the phenomenology of thinking, which is distinct from the phenomenal background, does not possess a flow to it. While thinking does not go on constantly as part of consciousness, the phenomenal background is a constant part of it, whether or not we pay any attention to it, and at least as long as we are awake. The three sentences of Tye's (2003) quoted next are ones especially pertinent about thinking in which he expresses what is basically right about Strawson's view:

> A better way, I suggest, to describe the facts to which Strawson is trying to draw our attention is to say that thinking involves a kind of turbulence within the overall stream. Where it occurs, there is no extended continuity as far as the phenomenology of the thinking process is concerned. But the stream of consciousness is still there, flowing on from moment to moment. (p. 107)

This statement expresses agreement: the conscious part of the process of thinking, the part of the process that is part of the consciousness stream, comes and goes. Indeed, if it has "no extended continuity" to it, then it would seem to consist of thinking followed very quickly by not thinking and so on; thus, it is perhaps the kind of pulsational phenomenon which I have mentioned. The phenomenology of the process of thinking is not continuous. According to Tye, judging based on what one finds firsthand, the process of thinking appears to start and stop, although, of course, it may be going on continuously outside consciousness. For Strawson, a state of unconsciousness

supervenes whenever the thinking process stops manifesting itself consciously. Whenever one's consciousness is free of thinking, according to Tye in contrast, the flow of consciousness goes on as it does whenever conscious thought is proceeding; for consciousness does not need conscious thought; it does not require thinking to transpire in such a way that inner awareness can notice it, nor perhaps in any other way.

So far I have not mentioned any grounds Tye gives for his thesis that, while one is awake, the phenomenal background is always there, and that it has a continuity or flow to it. When Strawson argues consciousness is not continuous, he includes under that description the phenomenology of thinking and what Tye is calling the phenomenal background. Tye (2003) brings up in support of his different view, something which should be familiar to his readers, which he believes that all of us know firsthand, and which seems obviously to contradict Strawson's account of consciousness: "When we stop thinking about something, it is not as if all goes dark! We do not thereby slip into a state of unconsciousness" (p. 105). It would appear a reasonable construal of Strawson to say that, whichever temporal segment of a person's consciousness that we may select to consider, it is described well using James's phrase "incessantly interrupted and recommencing." And this means that our consciousness does go "dark" repeatedly, contrary to Tye, not only when our conscious thinking stops, but even as we continue to engage in thinking consciously about the same matter. Tye insists that, during awakeness, the phenomenal background, at least, is "still certainly there," contrary to Strawson who reports that his consciousness too is repeatedly stopping and restarting. In contrast to what an absence of consciousness means according to James, Tye implies we would notice it if all went dark for us, as Strawson reports it does for him. Both authors seem to allow a noticeable mental darkness. Tye does not argue, as James would, that Strawson purports to notice what he could not notice if he were really in a state of complete unconsciousness. A time-gap is a stoppage of consciousness and is complete for James; one does not know it happens or happened, except by inference from signs that may be available after the fact.

Here are some questions that arise when I attempt to make sense of the notion of a noticeable mental darkness:

1. What might the meaning be of *everything's going dark in such a way that one is aware of it?*

2. If there still is *some* awareness of something, does this not entail *all has not gone "dark"*?

3. Does the notion of a noticeable mental darkness mean that there occurs a kind of *awareness without an object?*

4. Does it mean something like consciousness's seeking, to no avail, to have an object beyond itself?

5. Does it mean a subjective kind of objectless intentionality, that is, an appearance of the latter?

6. Does it mean one judges oneself to be in a state of full unconsciousness since one is aware but not aware of anything?

7. Are my last four questions on the wrong track because they involve reference to awareness of something, such as oneself or consciousness? Suppose a kind of awareness sans object does occur and this is what being aware of *all having gone dark* is supposed to amount to. This awareness cannot suffice, I should think; one must have inner awareness of the objectless awareness; if only objectless awareness occurs, one is not aware of anything at all, which includes, of course, having no awareness that everything has gone dark.

Of course, Tye may be speaking at this point from Strawson's viewpoint, which relies upon our having some ability to detect states of unconsciousness. Tye may be implicitly rejecting that Strawson has awareness of states of unconsciousness, challenging Strawson's firsthand evidence, not finding such states to be present in his own case. When Tye's thinking seems to him to stop, he is still aware of the consciousness that is still going on. Strawson holds that his introspections reveal to him states of consciousness emerging out of states of unconsciousness, as though he has access to his states of unconsciousness as well. One needs to know more about what he means by states of unconsciousness. According to Tye (and to James), we do not detect a time-gap, only a continuation of our stream of consciousness, when we stop thinking about something. And this is only to be expected since our consciousness is largely made up of "perceptual experience, bodily feeling, and mood." The latter applies not merely following (and prior to) an episode of thinking, but as the episode of thinking is proceeding as well. All through our waking hours, a "phenomenal background" is there. It comprises perceptual experience, bodily feeling, and mood, and it "has a kind of continuity or flow to it" (Tye, 2003, p. 105). Tye thinks Strawson expresses himself partly in such a way as concurs with Tye's view regarding the continuity of consciousness; however, in the same paragraph, Strawson (1997) insists that continuity "is not supported at the level of detail by any phenomenon of steady flow" (p. 422). Tye attempts to show an inconsistency by quoting this from Strawson: "One is experientially in touch with a great pool of constancies and steady processes of change in one's environment including, notably, one's body . . ." (p. 422). However, the rest of the paragraph does not bear out the claim of inconsistency. What Strawson is doing is proposing that certain perceptual constancies may effect an introspective distraction away from noticeable time-gaps that do exist in consciousness.

"How Can It Also Seem One Is Constantly Plunging In and Out of Periods of Total Unconsciousness?"

Barry Dainton (2000), too, discusses Strawson's (1997) position concerning the continuity of human consciousness. Dainton devotes to that position a section, titled "Continuity in Question," in his chapter "Phenomenal Time: Problems and Principles." The attempt to evaluate Strawson's view provides Dainton with an opportunity to "clarify . . . the manner in which our consciousness is indeed continuous" (p. 117). He has been taking the latter as a given, to that point in his book. A basic claim of Dainton's is the following: one undergoes an uninterrupted flow of experience that extends from the termination of each of one's periods of dreamless sleep to the start of one's next period of dreamless sleep. Thus, the metaphor of a stream for consciousness would seem "apt," although, in his section, Dainton does not refer explicitly to James — except for one passage from *The Principles* which he reproduces in an endnote (see below). Just as we have seen Tye (2003) do later, Dainton (2000) sharply distinguished between consciousness and thinking, and he stated his agreement with everything Strawson (1997) states regarding the phenomenology of thinking. The latter may be something of an overstatement of Dainton's. For example, Dainton reports that he has inner awareness of occurrences of experiential continuity within short bursts of thinking, while Strawson (1997) speaks of "trains of thought [that] are constantly broken" (p. 421). As I pointed out, the constancy characterizing a course of conscious thinking according to Strawson is a constancy of fissures. Whereas Dainton agrees that the conscious manifestations of the thinking process are "usually fragmented, full of detours and dead-ends," he proposes this discontinuity is "quite compatible with the claim that there is continuity elsewhere, most notably in perception, mood and bodily feeling, which together constitute the bulk of our experience" (p. 118). Thus, what Dainton finds unacceptable in Strawson's introspective reports is Strawson's description of what, as it were, *surrounds* his conscious thinking. Conscious thinking introspectively seems to Strawson (1997) to be made up of occurrent parts best described as "a series of radically disjunct irruptions into consciousness from the basic substrate of non-consciousness" (p. 422). Dainton comprehends Strawson to mean that these irruptions *arise out of a background of "experiential blankness."* Dainton does not find anything like that takes place when he is consciously thinking. In effect, Dainton argues that, whereas thoughts do come from "out of the blue" — James would say, from the totally physical brain process whereof we have no awareness — they do not come to us on their own, by themselves, in the "dark." That is, they *appear to us instead in a context of consciousness.* Indeed, our thoughts come to mind as fea-

tures of consciousness states with more complexity than the thoughts themselves possess. This is where, quite rightly, Dainton sees the relevance of the following passage from James (1890/1950):

> Our own bodily position, attitude, condition, is one of the things of which *some* awareness, however inattentive, invariably accompanies the knowledge of whatever else we know. We think; and as we think we feel our bodily selves as the seat of the thinking. If the thinking be *our* thinking, it must be suffused through all its parts with that peculiar warmth and intimacy that make it come as ours. Whether the warmth and intimacy be anything more than the feeling of the same old body always there, is a matter for the next chapter to decide. *Whatever* the content of the ego may be, it is habitually felt *with* everything else by us humans, and must form a *liaison* between all the things of which we become successively aware. (pp. 241–242; original emphases)

Notice James's view that the successive pulses of consciousness that make up one's stream are in themselves awarenesses of more than just a focal object. A state of consciousness that involves a thought in its structure is not only followed directly by a consciousness state that is an awareness of other things; already, there are other things that are objects of awareness, along with whatever the focal object may be of the preceding state of consciousness. Dainton (2000) certainly seems in agreement with James, for Dainton stresses the presence throughout — that is, before, during, and after an episode of conscious thinking — of the following: "a fairly constant and continuous mass of peripheral experience, bodily, emotional and perceptual, which together constitute the phenomenal background" (pp. 118–119).

"Self-conscious awareness," too, in addition to conscious thinking, contributes to the stream of consciousness "frequent discontinuities and many a sudden eruption" (Dainton, 2000, p. 120). It so contributes, according to Dainton, in the same way the individual conscious manifestations of the process of thinking do, namely, by suddenly occurring and quickly ceasing to occur. For example, consider the phenomenal background. It is "rarely noticed," though, Dainton maintains, "it is nonetheless a constant — and constantly flowing — presence in our consciousness" (pp. 118–119). From time to time, there occur brief bursts, as it were, of self-conscious awareness of the phenomenal background, but it may remain unnoticed for good stretches of time.

Arguing in effect with Strawson, Dainton uses the example of what he finds when he begins to daydream and so stops trying to formulate the sentence that he wants to write: "I do not find myself in total silence or darkness or bereft of any bodily feeling; the course of my thinking alters, my mental imagery alters, perhaps the focus of my attention alters, but everything else remains the same" (p. 119). Does such inner awareness reveal the phenomenal background is flowing, that it is not, itself, constantly stopping and start-

ing? The constancy or similarity in the contents of the acts of inner awareness well may be impressive. However, Strawson is not rejecting that there is sameness of content during thinking, nor when there is consciousness with no conscious thinking. Dainton asks rhetorically, in disbelief of Strawson's firsthand reports, "How can it also seem that one is constantly plunging in and out of periods of total unconsciousness?" (p. 119). However, it is not Strawson's view that environment and body do not provide continuous stimulation of a kind that yields perceptual awareness of the same body and the same environment. The familiarities we are aware of, the recognitions that repeatedly occur, do not entail that our felt consciousness too is continuous, though they may lead us to want to infer that such continuity is the case. Strawson (1997) proposes that, notwithstanding "constancies and steadiness of development in the *contents* of one's consciousness," if we "reflect very hard" we will become aware that these characteristics of content are not "fundamental characteristics of the *operations* of one's consciousness" (p. 423; original emphases). Strawson would answer Dainton's rhetorical question by arguing: contents of consciousness can serve to distract us from the properties that are instantiated by the process our consciousness is. According to Strawson, people are drawing conclusions from the continuities of content, not from how consciousness actually appears to itself. Dainton (2000) gives an answer to his own rhetorical question, an answer that refers us to how Strawson is employing certain terms in the present context:

> I do not see how it can [seem that one is constantly plunging in and out of periods of total unconsciousness], if by "consciousness" we mean experience in all its forms, and take "unconsciousness" to refer to the absence of experience in all its forms. Consequently, I can only assume that in these passages Strawson is using the terms [sic] "consciousness" in a restricted way, sometimes meaning conscious thought, sometimes reflective self-conscious awareness. Perhaps, in talking of the *contents* of consciousness, he is referring to the non-introspected phenomenal background, and by the *operations* of consciousness he means self-conscious thought or introspection. (p. 119; original emphases)

As it stands, Dainton's explanation of Strawson's introspective reports as to the felt continuity of consciousness, suggests Strawson misuses the terms *contents* and *operations*. This seems to me unlikely because Strawson displays more than the usual care in drawing that very distinction with respect to consciousness. Note his clear insistence: it is not shifts in contents that he is reporting but haltings of the process itself of consciousness. He states unequivocally that "experience in all its forms" is being repeatedly suspended; and, in addition, some of the contents of consciousness often undergo marked change.

An Alternative Reading of Strawson's Introspective Reports

Strawson is saying, in my view, just what he seems to be saying; but, his reports do not fully correspond to how his consciousness appears to him or how it would appear to him if he reflected in a different manner. In this final section, I shall attempt to make a case that my latter statement about his introspective reports is correct. I want to proffer a different reading of Strawson on the radical disjunctions that he finds to characterize the temporal structure of his consciousness. Quite relevant is a piece of implicit advice that Strawson (1997) extends to readers who, on the basis of their own introspective observations, have some doubts about the validity of his firsthand reports. The following passage contains that advice.

> And yet one is experientially in touch with a great pool of constancies and steady processes of change in one's environment including, notably, one's body (of which one is almost constantly aware, however thoughtlessly, both by external sense and by proprioception). If one does not reflect very hard, these constancies and steadinesses of development in the *contents* of one's consciousness may seem like fundamental characteristics of the *operation* of one's consciousness, although they are not. (p. 423; original emphases).

In order to determine certain facts concerning your felt consciousness, you need to cause yourself to function — in relation, for example, to the process of your thinking as it manifests itself in your consciousness — in an introspective mode involving much concentration to the exclusion of other dimensions that belong to your felt consciousness and that are no less introspectible. Strawson's specific advice above is that you "*reflect very hard*" upon your consciousness so as to forestall the occurrence of a particular error in your inner awareness, an illusion of continuity in the *operation* of your consciousness, that results from those many "constancies and steady processes of change" instantiated by the *content* of your consciousness.

Evidently, there is a particular mode of introspection that Strawson is able to direct upon his consciousness to produce the accurate inner awareness that his introspective reports express. Not every mode of introspection works to do so. Which is the mode that does? Well, it must be one that causes certain awarenesses to be ignored that make up his consciousness stream. Perceptions of one's body and environment are among these awarenesses — not that the special introspective mode can block their occurrences; it just does not have as product inner awareness of them. From the indented quotation above in this section, I gather the effective introspective mode bypasses all inner awareness of the phenomenal background that both Dainton and Tye specified. According to Strawson, if one is to notice what actually is going on with one's consciousness, one's reflection must proceed "thought-

lessly" with respect to the phenomenal background. Otherwise, it will seem that one's felt consciousness is continuous, it will seem it is not interrupted repeatedly by states of complete unconsciousness.

When Strawson is engaged in reflection, or introspection, in what he holds to be an especially informative mode, some potentially felt features of his consciousness are ignored. Does this mode cause his consciousness to appear discontinuous when it is, actually, no more discontinuous than James's is? Strawson's notion of a highly focused kind of introspection can help to make sense of those states of unconsciousness which he finds, as James does not, to be constantly interruptive of his solitary thinking. I do not want to raise any doubts concerning the occurrence of those states of unconsciousness Strawson insists on, but I must reject the notion that, at the points when they occur, all of Strawson's consciousness is extinguished. My grounds are as follows.

When those so-called states of unconsciousness are consciously taking place, Strawson must be undergoing some awareness of them, for, according to his own reports, he notices them as they occur. I grant that, at such points, Strawson may be unaware of himself as thinking; during his so-called states of unconsciousness, there is a halt in the process of thinking that was proceeding, or, at least, this process is no longer manifesting itself in his consciousness. However, I must ask, is Strawson, *unaware of himself*? Judging from his reports, when those states of unconsciousness take place, he is very much aware of himself. He may be anticipating that his thinking will again emerge in that "bitty, scatty, and saccadic" way that he describes. Or the state of unconsciousness that just interrupted his thinking, causes him to think no relevant thoughts will be coming to mind, none that might contribute to the thinking he has been doing and wants to pursue. At such points, as all of us do, Strawson, "draws a blank" and, by inner awareness, *he knows he does*. While the particular process of thinking may seem to him to be over, his felt consciousness is still going on.

One or more of James's time-gaps might have taken place sometime during Strawson's recent bout of thinking, but he would have been completely unaware of them since consciousness stops whenever there is a time-gap. The same does not apply to his reported states of unconsciousness that interrupt his thinking, although he avers, "My fundamental experience of consciousness is one of repeated returns into consciousness from a state of complete, if momentary, unconsciousness" (Strawson, 1997, p. 422). Strawson is referring here to the inner awareness he has when he is all alone and thinking. His phrase *my fundamental experience of consciousness* is equivalent to *how my consciousness presents itself to me*. When thinking returns, he has awareness not only of the thought that occurs right after the gap, but also of the state out of

which that thought appears to him to come. And he describes it as being a momentary state of *complete* unconsciousness. But how completely devoid of consciousness can such a state really be since Strawson's consciousness includes awareness of it as occurring, as occurring to him, as being a different sort of state from the one succeeding it, and as being momentary?

Strawson's "states of complete unconsciousness" that interrupt his thinking would seem to be, rather, *fully qualified states of consciousness*. And they should be described as such if one's goal is an accurate account of one's felt consciousness. Being such states, they therefore do not, as it were, break up Strawson's consciousness. They add to his stream, they are accretions to it, and they contribute to its continuation and continuity in every instance. Strawson has not fallen into a conceptual confusion as between the content and operation, or process, of consciousness, but he does fail to take a kind of state of his consciousness for what it obviously is. Instead, he classifies it separately as though it did not instantiate consciousness. And he consequently believes he has grounds for rejecting views of the felt continuity of consciousness of the kind James advanced in *The Principles*.

About Strawson's "states of complete, if momentary, unconsciousness," I say they should be described as the states of consciousness that they in fact are. Let us attend next to how Strawson himself describes them specifically, to see that he treats them as consciousness states, despite his implication that they are not. Strawson (1997) starts off as though the terms *stream of thought* and *stream of consciousness* are equivalent to each other, as they are for James, and then objects to James's account by reporting that, in his (Strawson's) case, consciousness or thought is "always shooting off, fuzzing, shorting out, spurting and stalling" (p. 422). These are colorful terms and not terms one would use to describe mental states of which one does not have a direct awareness. Strawson puts them to use to characterize the replacement of consciousness states, in the stream of consciousness, by the so-called states of unconsciousness that succeed them — as he uses the following three terms to describe what happens to his "thought or experience." This may "seize up, fly off, or flash with perfectly extraneous matter from time to time" (p. 422). Of these eight terms above, none is applicable if what happens, so far as inner awareness can tell, is that states of consciousness are followed, briefly or for longer, by complete unconsciousness and then the series begins again. Indeed, an intervening state of complete unconsciousness would pass unbeknownst and, so, it would not serve to qualify inner awareness of the states of consciousness that preceded or followed it. The same is true of the colorful phrase Strawson applies to his conscious thought when he not only says it consists of a series of "radically disjunct irruptions into consciousness," but also that thoughts "keep on banging out of nothingness" (p. 422). It is by

virtue of his having ordinary inner awareness that Strawson reports his states of consciousness are preceded by states so totally lacking in consciousness that they qualify as a felt nothingness.

I have suggested that a major cause of its seeming to Strawson that consciousness consists of moments of consciousness alternating with moments of complete unconsciousness is his ability to introspect with a great deal of concentration, or in such a way as produces a highly selective inner awareness. Suppose that James is correct when he insists that, usually, our states of consciousness individually have many intentional objects and individually consist of a variety of different kinds of experience. It does not follow that one's inner awareness of such complex states is complete, in the sense that everything detectable about a state is apprehended by the inner awareness that one has of it. One's mode of introspection can affect what gets noticed among the features belonging to one's consciousness states. Suppose it is true that, as Dainton and Tye claim, the phenomenal background is always there, at least when we are awake, and probably in certain other general states as well. In that case, from James's viewpoint, the phenomenal background is among the constituents of each and every state of consciousness that occurs during awakeness, including Strawson's so-called states of complete unconsciousness, which I have argued here are actually states of consciousness. What is going on, I believe, when Strawson is introspecting, is a very hard concentration that functions to limit drastically how much of the individual states that he has inner awareness of, how many of their individual features, are apprehended. Note that he is able to do the same with respect to the phenomenal background; recall his advice that one must *reflect very hard* to find the phenomenal background, too, is made up of repeated haltings and immediate restarts of consciousness.

References

Dainton, B. (2000). *Stream of consciousness: Unity and continuity in conscious experience*. London: Routledge.

Freud, S. (1964). An outline of psycho-analysis. *Standard edition* (Volume 23, pp. 144–207). London: Hogarth. (Original work published 1938)

Freud, S. (1964). Moses and monotheism. *Standard edition* (Volume 23, pp. 1–137). London: Hogarth. (Original work published 1939)

Hebb, D.O. (1974). What psychology is about. *American Psychologist, 29*, 71–79.

James, W. (1912). Does "consciousness" exist? In W. James, *Essays in radical empiricism* (pp. 1–38). New York: Longmans, Green and Company. (Original work published 1904)

James, W. (1950). *The principles of psychology* (Volume 1). New York: Dover. (Original work published 1890)

James, W. (1982). *The varieties of religious experience: A study of human nature*. Harmondsworth, United Kingdom: Penguin. (Original work published 1902)

Natsoulas, T. (1984). Freud and consciousness: I. Intrinsic consciousness. *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought, 7*, 195–232.

Natsoulas, T. (1992–1993). The stream of consciousness: I. William James's pulses. *Imagination, Cognltion and Personality, 12*, 3–21.
Natsoulas, T. (1994–1995). The stream of consciousness: VIII. James's ejective consciousness (first part). *Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 14*, 333–352.
Natsoulas, T. (1995–1996a). The stream of consciousness: IX. James's ejective consciousness (second part). *Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 15*, 171–191.
Natsoulas, T. (1995–1996b). The stream of consciousness: X. A critique of James's appendage theory of consciousness (first part). *Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 15*, 365–384.
Natsoulas, T. (1996–1997). The stream of consciousness: XI. A critique of James's appendage theory of consciousness (second part). *Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 16*, 63–82.
Natsoulas, T. (1998). Tertiary consciousness. *The Journal of Mind and Behavior, 19*, 141–176.
Natsoulas T. (2003). Freud and consciousness: XIII. Seeing in the unconscious!? *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought, 26*, 517–564.
Natsoulas, T. (2003–2004). The stream of consciousness: XXVIII. Does consciousness exist? (first part). *Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 23*, 121–141.
Natsoulas, T. (2004). The case for intrinsic theory: X. A phenomenologist's account of inner awareness. *The Journal of Mind and Behavior, 25*, 97–112.
Natsoulas, T. (2005a). On the intrinsic nature of states of consciousness: A thesis of neutral monism considered. *The Journal of Mind and Behavior, 26*, 281–306.
Natsoulas, T. (2005b). *The Varieties of Religious Experience* considered from the perspective of James's account of the stream of consciousness. In R.D. Ellis and N. Newton (Eds.), *Consciousness and emotion: Agency, conscious choice, and selective perception*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
Natsoulas, T. (2005–2006). The stream of consciousness: XXIX. Does consciousness exist? (second part). *Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 25*, 69–84.
Strawson, G. (1997). The self. *Journal of Consciousness Studies, 4*, 405–428.
Tye, M. (2003). *Consciousness and persons: Unity and identity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press (Bradford).