RECONSTRUCTING (PHENOMENAL) CONSCIOUSNESS

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To Kevin, tireless organizer of philosophical research, tremendously generous supporter of young people, delightful host, brilliant philosopher (in random order). With herzlichen Dank*, for the great sympathy and encouragement he has given me. I hope he will forgive me for dedicating to him this paper, which seems not to be much concerned with his philosophical work; but I am comforted by the fact that his philosophical interests are enormously comprehensive.*
Greetings!

1. A *quasi*-standard distinction

It is well known that the words 'conscious' and 'consciousness' have several uses. For instance, 'conscious' can be predicated both of a person ("she is severely injured, but is conscious") and of a mental state ("she has a conscious experience of redness"); and the property of being conscious can be directed to something ("she is conscious of seeing a red blob") or not; the latter distinction is also expressed by saying that consciousness can be transitive or intransitive. Indeed, the concept expressed by the word 'conscious' is, to say the least, a "cluster concept": different cases fall under the same concept but these differences are subtle and elusive. For this reason many authors have tried to clarify the concept, by drawing some distinctions. Ned Block's distinction between *phenomenal consciousness* (P-consciousness) and *access consciousness* (A-consciousness) has probably been the most influential. This paper is mainly devoted to a discussion of Block's distinction. I will argue that, although Block's proposal has the merit of accounting for some important distinctive phenomena, it should nonetheless be given up, in favor of a single, graded notion of consciousness.

Let us start, then, by quoting Block's distinction (1994, p. 214; see also 1995, p. 231):

- a mental state is A-conscious if and only if its content: *a*) is freely available as a premise in reasoning; *b*) is poised for rational control of action, and *c*) is poised for rational control of speech. Note that, although the ability to report the content of one's own state is certainly not the most important among these features, it is nonetheless the best empirical criterion to establish whether a mental state is A-conscious. Self-consciousness could be regarded as a particular case of A-consciousness (even if, in Block 1994, self-consciousness and A-consciousness are distinguished – this is not at all relevant to my discussion).
- a mental state is P-conscious if and only if it is a state experienced in the first person. That is to say, «P-consciousness is just experience» (*ibid*.). As many, following Nagel (1974), put it, there is something it is like to be when someone is in a P-conscious state.

Block's distinction has played an important role in the debates about the possibility of giving a scientific explanation of consciousness, and was partly motivated by the assumption that P-consciousness escapes functional treatment. Indeed, if one takes seriously Block's distinction between P-consciousness and A-consciousness, then he will be inclined to endorse the view that P-consciousness cannot be scientifically accounted for. Or, at least, there is a very large consensus on the thesis that it is P-consciousness that raises the hard problem in explaining consciousness. Thus, one might even argue that Block's distinction is part of the problem, insofar as it offers some *prima facie* reasons to think that there is a certain kind of consciousness that cannot be scientifically studied – there is no way to address subjectivity in a scientific way. I will come back to this point in the next section.

However, despite the fact that Block's distinction has been quite popular and is admittedly supported by both conceptual and empirical considerations, I think we should resist this idea of a "dual consciousness" and try to sketch instead a *unique* notion of consciousness. Indeed, I will argue that Block's distinction, on the one hand, can be defeated from an ontological point of view, and, on the other hand, does not give us any explanatory pay-off. I will put forward a single concept of consciousness wherein the phenomenal aspect is somewhat prior – there is no consciousness without phenomenal effects--, but, at the same time, involving some of the aspects that Block subsumed under the head of A-consciousness. In other words, my position can be sketchily described by saying that *consciousness is fundamentally phenomenal but there is no phenomenal effect at all without some kind of access*.

Consciousness involves first and foremost the availability of "something" to an organism *as a whole* and this implies both a phenomenal effect –a feeling—and, as I shall explain later, some kind of access.

2. An argument against the distinction

Let me start by pointing out that Block's distinction is unsatisfactory in a twofold sense.

First, Block predicates the property of being conscious, in both its aspects (P and A), of mental states, not of persons or subjects. This is, however, quite counter-intuitive: I would say that it is *subjects* that are in the first place conscious rather than unconscious. One can certainly talk about consciousness as a property of a *mental state*, but this use seems to be parasitic on the notion of a conscious subject[1]. This is apparent in the Blockean definition of P-consciousness: a mental state is P-conscious if and only if *there is something it is like to be* when the subject is in that mental state. Also, note that this definition does not provide any insight into the concept of being P-conscious, which is brought back to the pre-theoretical and quite general concept of a conscious subject – simply conscious –without any further specification. Arguably, it is not by chance that, when Block proposes a definition of a conscious state which is not parasitic of the notion of a conscious subject, as he does in the case of the definition of A-conscious, the alleged states subsumed under the definition can hardly be regarded as genuine conscious states (see below). Without a reference to the subject, the notion of consciousness seems to vanish.

Second, it is the distinction itself, however reasonable it may be, that gives the impression that P-consciousness cannot be scientifically explained, to the extent that the content of a P-conscious state is identified with a collection of "third type *qualia*", that is, with some alleged qualitative, intrinsically private properties that can be neither functionalized nor communicated. In other words, the widespread belief that there is an irreducible (phenomenal) residue could exactly be produced by the dissociation between access properties and phenomenal properties: if one defines phenomenal consciousness "by subtraction" (of functional properties), then the result he should expect is just something elusive. Postulating an *independent* P-consciousness from the start is starting on the wrong foot or, at least, putting the cart before the horse. As we shall see, if we give up the distinction, then the perspectives for a scientific explanation of consciousness are better.

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[1] Recently, Simone Gozzano (2009, p. 10) has argued for the opposite view: 'conscious' denotes first a property of a mental state. However, his main reason for this thesis is that saying of someone (a person, or an animal, or, maybe, a robot) that he is conscious does not make any clear sense, and that this way of speaking is actually elliptical – there is a specific, though unexpressed, mental state that we have in mind when we attribute consciousness to someone. I agree on the point that to say that someone is conscious is quite vague; but this does not undermine the fact that what we mean by saying that a mental state is conscious is that the *subject* is conscious (of something) when he is in that mental state. The vagueness of 'conscious' is one thing, the core sense of 'conscious' is another. It seems to me that what Gozzano's argument shows is that when we are speaking *theoretically* (when we are theorizing about consciousness), we do better to talk about conscious (or unconscious) *mental states*.

Of course these considerations are not conclusive *per se* – they do not amount to an argument. Here is mine.

The basic reason underlying Block's distinction is that our intuitions concerning the appropriateness of taking certain phenomena as conscious rather unconscious are wavering. And the only way to account for that would be to distinguish two kinds of consciousness. The relevant phenomena would in fact amount to cases of dissociations between the two afore-mentioned kinds of consciousness: A-consciousness without P-consciousness and the other way around. What I am going to do is to discuss these alleged dissociation cases and assess whether we can find a different interpretation for them.

Let us consider, first of all, the case of P-consciousness without A-consciousness. According to Block, this can easily be found both in experimental conditions and in ordinary, daily situations. As an example of ordinary situation, take the case of a person concentrating on a certain task who does not realize that there is a noise --is not aware of the noise— but a few minutes or so later, when she eventually comes to be aware of the noise, realizes that the noise was already there before: she heard it before also, but she did not notice it**.** As Block put it, «you were aware of the noise all along, but only at midnight were you consciously aware of it. That is, you were phenomenally conscious of the noise all along, but only at midnight did you become access-conscious of it.» (1994, p. 215). There are many other examples of this kind (see Tye 2005, pp. 2-4).

As an example of experimental case, consider Sperling's (1960) classic experiment. An array of twelve letters (4x3) was shown to subjects for 50 ms; then subjects were required to report which letters they had seen. They were able to tell correctly, in average, four, though they reported having seen many more. However, if, before being shown the array, subjects were alerted to focus on a certain row (for instance, by means of a distinct kind of sound: low=first row: medium=second row, etc.), they were able to report correctly all the letters in the relevant row (for a discussion, see Block 2007).

Block interprets both the experimental situation and the ordinary situation as cases in which persons do not *cognitively* access, either because of lack of attention or because of spatial and temporal limits of the working memory, some information that, however, is phenomenally available.

A problem with this description is that it is not clear what it means that someone should be *phenomenally* conscious of a content that, at the same time, is not "present" to the agent's consciousness, at least in an intuitive sense of consciousness. Admittedly, Block's distinction is conceived of exactly to account for this ambiguity: something is at the same time present and not present to consciousness. However, as Crane (2002) has argued, these cases can be accounted for more easily, without duplicating the concept of consciousness. For example, they can be described

as cases of consciousness without attention. If we accepted, as indeed we shall do, this interpretation, the concept of A-consciousness could turn out to be an idle wheel. Before drawing this conclusion, however, we must also analyze the converse case: A-consciousness without P-consciousness.

And here is the major problem: there are not indisputable cases of this kind. According to Block, the only case of A-conscious and not P-conscious state is the "super-blindsight", a fictitious syndrome very similar to the real blindsight. In real blindsight (see e.g. Weiskrantz *et al.* 1974) subjects affected by (even massive) damage in the primary visual area (V1) are successful in visual discrimination tasks despite being unaware of the presented stimuli: they report being totally blind. They say to the experimenter, with understandable irritation, that they are unable to accomplish the requested task, but, when asked to try anyway, they present surprisingly good performances.

This description seems to fit what Block is looking for: there is a visual content, processed somewhere in the brain, which is available for other cognitive processes, but this content is not subjectively (i.e., phenomenally) conscious. There is some information that the subject is not subjectively aware of, but that is poised for judgments. However, strictly speaking --so Block points out--, the patient has no A-consciousness of the stimulus either, because, until she hears her own guess, she cannot use the information *freely* in reasoning or in rational control of action (Block 1994, p. 215). In fact, Block's definition of an A-conscious state requires that information be *freely* brought to bear on cognitive processes (as we saw above). That's why Block puts forward the case of super-blindsight, wherein the relevant constraint turns out to be satisfied.

Super-blindsight, however, is not real. Subjects need a cue, in order to make actually poised the visual content for their cognitive processes. Thus it seems, after all, that there are not, actually, cases of A-consciousness without P-consciousness, even if, of course, this situation is metaphysically possible.

On the other hand, according to Carruthers (2005), there are *real* cases of subjects who are in a A-conscious but not P-conscious state. These would be the subpersonal states of vision-for-action (Milner & Goodale 1995), in which a person exerts the ability to coordinate her movements appropriately following perceptual information. Indeed Carruthers seems to think that even ordinary blindsight is actually a case of A-consciousness. What matters is the availability of information for other cognitive processes, rather than the free exploitation of it.

Moreover, one might mention other cases of alleged selective impairments of P-consciousness. For instance, the neglect syndrome, where subjects are successful in giving the appropriate

interpretation of a visual scene despite being consciously blind to them. Why not take neglect as a case for Block's distinction too?[2]

Admittedly, it is hard to tell what happens in these puzzling diseases. But it seems to me that Carruthers' interpretation, according to which both the visuo-motor states and the dissociative syndromes are cases of A-consciousness without P-consciousness, is wrong, because if we regarded these kinds of states as (in some sense) conscious, then *every* subpersonal state or process could be considered as A-conscious, making the notion of A-consciousness empty.

To this one could reply that there is a requirement to be satisfied in order to be an A-conscious state: the availability of information for cognitive processes. But the difficulty with this requirement is that it is too easily satisfied by plenty of subpersonal processes. Carruthers is much more liberal than Block in ascribing A-conscious states: Block is not committed to the thesis that subpersonal visuo-motor states are A-conscious, since according to his own requirement, in order for a mental state to be A-conscious, its content must be poised for the *rational* control of action (see §1 above), whereas sensorimotor coordination is an ability also possessed by pre-rational creatures. Carruthers' interpretation may be rejected, since, even if Block's notion of A-consciousness did make sense, there is no plausible sense in which a person entertaining an A-conscious mental state could be said to be conscious *tout court* (simply conscious).

Block was clearly sensitive to the problem of specifying requirements on the notion of A-consciousness which were narrow enough to discriminate between "pure" subpersonal processes and A- and not-P-conscious processes; however, as we saw, no empirical, concrete case matches the constraint: he needed to devise the "super-syndromes". So, we are faced here with a dilemma of a familiar kind: either we are very liberal in ascribing A-consciousness (as Carruthers is), and in this case too many brain processes turn out to be conscious; or we appeal to Block's constraints, and in this case it is hard to show that there actually are cases of A-consciousness without P-consciousness, unless one is prepared to include, among the genuine empirical cases, such "semi-fictitious" cases as super-blindsight or super-neglect. Since I am not, my conclusion is that there is no such thing as a non-phenomenal access-consciousness.

Note that this conclusion is also closer to the pre-theoretical intuition, to the extent that we should take note of it: the layman would hardly say that subjects affected by the neglect or blindsight syndrome are conscious. Intuitively, it is hard to see why a person in a phenomenally non conscious state should be said to be in a conscious –simply conscious-- state.

[2] The neglect experimental condition is very similar to blindsight condition; so Block would say that it is in the "super-neglect" syndrome, rather than in "real neglect", that there is A-consciousness without P-consciousness.

Moreover, even if we wish to grant Block that the "super-syndromes" are genuine cases of "access without phenomenology", we could still forgo the distinction between P-consciousness and A-consciousness, provided that we are able to account for the same kinds of phenomena by a single notion of consciousness, one that fits common sense more closely. This is the aim of next section. My thought is that the notion of A-consciousness is the outcome of an abstraction process carried on to match certain theoretical goals; but if one is able to show that we do not get any particular theoretical pay-off from this abstraction, then we have no reason anymore to maintain the concept of an A-conscious state.

To sum up. My argument against Block's distinction is the following: the alleged instances of A-consciousness without P-consciousness are not conscious states at all; and the alleged cases of P-consciousness without A-consciousness can be re-described as cases of consciousness (simply consciousness, which necessarily involves a "phenomenal return" – some phenomenal effect) *without attention*. Therefore we do not need to duplicate the notion of consciousness.
Yet, a question is still open. The mental states regarded by Block as P-conscious and not A-conscious are also somewhat puzzling: in what sense can we regard them as conscious if subjects are not *currently* aware of it? (they report they were aware of it only after a while). That is to say, is consciousness without attention consciousness enough? Or, from a slightly different point of view: If one does not seem to have currently an access to an alleged phenomenal state, how can the thesis be vindicated that this state is conscious? My proposal starts precisely from reflection on this problem: I will assume that there is no phenomenal consciousness without some kind of access. Importantly, I mean here by 'access' that the whole *person* has access to the state.

3. From "pure" phenomenal consciousness to ordinary consciousness

As I noted above, Block's cases of P & not-A consciousness can be re-interpreted as follows. A piece of sensorial information (about either the external world or our own body), supposedly processed by "low-level" systems, is not available for high-level processors, for different reasons (remember that there are both the ordinary case and the experimental case): either attention is focused elsewhere, so that the information does not get through the attention filter, or the sensorial data exceed the capacity of working memory. In both cases the relevant information cannot be processed by high-level systems – as Block would put it, is not poised for cognitive processes (inferential or linguistic).

The crucial question is how to vindicate the claim that we are conscious or aware of something in these cases. Clearly, the availability of information to low-level processors is not a sufficient condition. Indeed, the relevant question is not whether a certain piece of information is available somewhere within the system; what we want is that the information is available to the system *as a whole* – this is, plausibly, the meaning of 'being conscious'. Curiously, we are faced here with the same problem we had with the alleged cases of non phenomenal A-consciousness: we are looking for a way to draw a distinction between conscious states –conscious in the sense we are trying to characterize-- and the subpersonal states postulated by cognitive science. We think that a clear statement of this distinction is mandatory, on pain of losing any plausible notion of a conscious state. Clearly, the brain/computational processes which never emerge to awareness are one thing, and the states or processes above described that appear to be conscious to a certain extent (or in some sense) are quite another. There are cerebral states we cannot access at all, but this is not the case of the states we are discussing.

The main reason for arguing that these are *bona fide* conscious states is the subject's witness: subjects report to have *seen* the letters, in Sperling experiment; you claim to have actually *heard* the noise in an ordinary situation like the one described by Block. However, it is well known that the reliability of reports must be carefully assessed. Many experiments (whose paradigm is constituted by Nisbett & Wilson 1977) have shown that persons are often or even systematically mistaken in describing the mental causes of their behaviour; they confabulate and provide ex-post rational reconstructions which do not match what had actually gone in their minds.

Nevertheless, it would seem preposterous to deny *any* degree of trustworthiness to what subjects report. On the one hand, it is worth pointing out that confabulation typically concerns the mental causal antecedents of behavior: experiments have not shown that subjects were systematically wrong in reporting their conscious contents. On the other hand, subjects can better be said to be inaccurate, perhaps even *very* inaccurate, rather than plain wrong[3].

Moreover, at least in the case of Sperling's experiment, even if subjects were not able to recall some details of the stimulus, they were well aware of certain aggregates of letters, that is, of Gestaltic chunks present in the stimulus. In other words, there are different degrees of *fineness* or accuracy in their access to (conscious) contents, but it is hard to put in question their consciousness of certain contents. Different contents in a given instant are potentially available to subjects, but not all the contents can simultaneously be under the focus of attention; however, small shifts of attention are sufficient to make phenomenally salient a piece of information that was not some ms. before.

[3] Reports are inaccurate probably because of the limits of working memory: subjects saw some letters but they forgot them. Although the data are compatible both with this explanation and with the denial that subjects were conscious of the stimuli, the former is better. Indeed, if one endorses the latter explanation, it is hard to escape the consequence that there was no consciousness in every circumstance in which there is no memory.

This sort of "weakened", somewhat elusive consciousness suggests another interpretation, different from Block's. I think that it does not make sense to talk about a phenomenal consciousness that is completely detached from some kind of subject's access. In the previous section I said that non-phenomenal consciousness is not consciousness; here I add that an alleged state of consciousness without any access by the subject is not conscious either (a similar point of view is defended by Levine 2007, p. 514). To say that a subject has a conscious experience (the specification 'conscious' is indeed redundant, since the conscious character is internal to the concept of experience) *is* to say that he has some kind of access to some information, even if, in the elusive cases under discussion, the access is weak – that is, the cognitive-behavioural effects are modest or totally absent – and fundamentally passive.

Some authors express the view I am outlining by resorting to the notion of non-conceptual content. The idea, as it is stated for instance in Dretske (1997), is that there are phenomenally conscious states with a non-conceptual content, that is to say, one can be in these states without possessing the relevant concepts. In particular, in the cases discussed above, the subject does not bring to bear the relevant concepts (even if she happens to possess them). Thus, in the case of Sperling's experiment, subjects have the visual experience of all the letters, but are unable to conceptualize most of them as letters of a certain kind. Likewise, when you "hear" a noise without realizing (being aware) you are hearing it, you are entertaining a phenomenal state in which the relevant information is processed at a non-conceptual (or non-epistemic) level.

I do not believe that the notion of non-conceptual content gives us all we need to single out the class of phenomenal states we are trying to characterize, for at least two reasons. First, the notion of content is notoriously elusive, especially in the cases of perceptual experience. Second and more important, at least some authors (for instance, Bermúdez 1995) claim that even subpersonal states have a (non-conceptual) content, so we would be faced again to the problem of discriminating a certain class of conscious states from the very large class of (non-conscious) subpersonal states. By contrast, the notion of non-conceptual content is employed to draw a distinction between two other classes of mental states, which can be characterized, *grosso modo*, as thoughts, on the one hand, and experiences, on the other hand.

I am sympathetic with this distinction, but the reader must be warned against taking the conceptual/non-conceptual distinction as a difference between two different kinds of *conscious* states. That is not my point. What I am interested to is to vindicate the conscious character of the alleged P-conscious but not A-conscious states (on Block's view). The notion of non-conceptual content could help to clarify why, but I prefer to put things in the following way.

When a subject is in the relevant kind of state, the lack of a higher processing level makes quite fleeting and elusive the first-person effects that are joined to perceptual or somato-sensorial representations. However, as soon as higher processing is activated (that is, as soon as these representations fall again under the focus of attention), the first-person effects become palpable again. To put it in a slogan, if, on the one hand, feeling does not require thinking, on the other hand, thinking makes feeling more. Of course this description is very approximate: our ignorance of the perception/cognition *interface* mechanisms, if it makes sense to talk this way, makes it very hard to say anything more precise. Even the idea that the perception/cognition borders depend on the focalization of attention is to a large extent speculative, although the distinction between early vision and high-level vision is characterized, *inter alia*, this way.

A good way to understand better the nature of these states, as I have called them, of weakened consciousness is to compare them with experiential states in non-human animals and infants: these are cases of feeling without knowing that one is feeling. In animals and infants there is evidence of the feeling state: an infant cries when she has a colic; a dog whines when its tail is trampled on. On the assumption, which I take to be not too committal, that these behaviors are mediated by painful states "experienced in the first person", non-human animals and infants can be ascribed consciousness in a certain degree. In other words, the idea is that these conscious states can be properly assessed as the first-person correlates of low and intermediate perceptual and somato-sensorial processing levels.

These states are not totally non-accessible (hence, they can be distinguished from pure subpersonal states): we realize, to a different extent and in different ways, that we are in these states: likewise, a dog is conscious of (= feels) its pain when its tail is trampled on, and an infant is conscious of (= feels) her pain when she has a colic. But this access is rough and not intellectually mediated; no concepts or categories and reflection are involved here. Nevertheless, it is a kind of access. We could call it "bare-consciousness", or, maybe, "0-consciousness" (consciousness of degree 0)[4]. Focusing attention improves the degree of access, but there are different degrees at which one can "inspect" or access a "content" of consciousness. Everybody knows that different persons have different abilities of reporting and explaining their own affects and feelings. At least in some cases, differences in this ability amount to differences in the fineness of discrimination of a content: for a child, all wines seem alike – wines are all equally bitter--, whereas I am able to grasp certain differences, but by no means all the differences that a wine taster is able to detect. In sum, one can make "half-conceptual" or fully conceptual discriminations that correspond to more or less "rich" states of consciousness or awareness.

[4] I prefer "bare", since "0-consciousness" could give the misleading idea that it is possible to fix exactly a minimal point of consciousness.

In what I called above "bare consciousness" agents feel a "first-person effect", but they do not possess or they do not bring to bear any conceptual resource in order to fathom their conscious state. Their perception of their own experience is vague and indistinct. They are not able to report anything about the experience; they can just produce the behavior "appropriate" to that experience and to the causal source of the experience, for instance to the physical injury that has caused a painful experience. Nevertheless, they can be said to have some kind of access to something that has happened to them or to their body. This access capacity can be improved and refined, thanks to interactions with the world and, most importantly, with other people (of course I am referring here to the human case), so that agents can gradually develop higher degrees of access, up to what we use to call "self-consciousness", or "sense of self".

Therefore, my proposal consists in replacing Block's neat divide between two kinds of consciousness with a fuzzy distinction among many phenomenal states that we can access in a more or less fine way. Though phenomenally different, these states are all *conscious.*

This concept of a hierarchy of access degrees fits well those theories that try to explain consciousness in evolutionary terms, both in the phylogenetic and in the ontogenetic sense (see e.g. Damasio 1999). Consciousness is not an all/none matter, it is rather a matter of degree. The development of higher degrees requires the lower ones. The self, the self-conscious I, appears gradually, completing its development only in the adult, but in order to have a self-conscious I, one needs to have a proto-self, both in ontogenesis and phylogenesis. Being a proto-self (or to have a proto-self) is basically to experience feelings and raw affects.

Let me conclude with the following remark. According to Neisser (2006), Block's distinction has to be read as a distinction between conscious subjectivity and non-conscious subjectivity. This way, there is room for the intuition that, if one does not notice something, he cannot be said to be aware of that thing (as Kriegel 2004 points out in a line similar to mine, if one is totally not aware of something, how can she have a *conscious* experience?). At the same time, the importance for the subject's agency of the states called by Block "pure phenomenal states" –and that I re-interpret as "bare conscious states"—is acknowledged[5]. Thus, according to Neisser, these states are not conscious, but are nonetheless states of a *subject*, that is, *personal* states.

Well, I have no serious objection to the idea of distinguishing subjectivity and consciousness. Clearly for Neisser genuine consciousness must involve full awareness, that is, a sort of epistemic access. It seems to me that here we are dealing more with a terminological matter than with a substantive issue. Even if we do not want to call "conscious" Neisser's "subjective" states, still

[5] Neisser points to an interesting link between these states and the notion of unconscious in psychoanalysis.

these are important for the study of consciousness, since they are the basis for the emergence of full conscious states (cf. Damasio's distinction between nuclear end extended consciousness).

Be that as it may, my point is: 1) to account for the difference between a second-order state of awareness (for instance, to reflect on one's own painful experience) and lower-level phenomenal states (the bare feeling of pain) but 2) to deny that there is a *neat* distinction between these two kinds of states, insofar as the difference is just a matter of degree. The difference is just a difference in the "fineness" of access. I say "No phenomenology without access" (and no consciousness at all without a certain degree of phenomenology), but I could also say, in a Neisserian vein, "No subjectivity without bare consciousness". The emergence of subjectivity requires at least what I call "bare consciousness".

To take stock, a subject can be conscious (conscious *tout court*, we do not need any more the qualification "phenomenally") in different degrees. There are not two (or more) *kinds* of consciousness: consciousness is one and is distributed along a *continuum*, following the degree of phylogenetic development, of ontogenetic development and, in the case of adults, trivially as appropriate (I happen to be "hardly conscious" of some things, and "very conscious" of others).

What are the explanatory pay-offs of this way of putting things? The advantages turn out to be most conspicuous if the thesis of the graded approach to consciousness is combined with some more or less reductionist account of bare consciousness states, according to which, *these* kinds of state strongly supervene on neurophysiological states. But this is a matter for another paper. It seems to me important enough to have a unique concept of consciousness, which at least fits better our pre-theoretical intuitions about consciousness and the available empirical evidence.

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