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Thomas Natsoulas

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: concepts of consciousness

As it exists at this juncture, the science of psychology would be well advised to apply the following requirement to such a work as the present volume means to be. Such a book should be expected, at least at the start, to give special attention to the concepts whereby we commonly think about the topics to be addressed therein. Moreover, at this early stage in the development of psychological science, authors of such works should not be too eager to abandon the commonsense framework: upon which, perforce, we are all conceptually dependent, whether or not we fully realize as much.

Present-day psychologists stand to lose much more than they have to gain by seeking to start afresh: with conceptual constructions, or technical concepts, that break away from the thinking that has gone on from long before their introduction. I have in mind a refusal to take certain methodological actions. These would replace what has brought us this far along – in respect to our understanding, albeit limited as it is – with dogmatic assignments of meaning, such as some operational definitions that, motivated by newly minted principles, are touted to transport us faster than we are currently proceeding towards our epistemic goals.

From such drastic actions there will likely result, as Wilfrid Sellars (1965) has cogently argued, “serious methodological and conceptual loss.” Indeed, as Sellars well explained, “The rock bottom concepts and principles of common sense . . . are binding until a total structure which can do the job better is actually at hand – rather than a ‘regulative ideal’” (p. 189). Persuaded by the case Sellars developed in this connection, I embark here independently of any single theoretical approach or special scientific ideology. And, I continue to tread lightly even beyond this chapter: wary of views incompatible with principles manifested by our experiences in common.

This book’s main topic consists of consciousness kinds that are implicated, though not exclusively, in our having perceptual occurrent

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awareness. Therefore, before I turn more theoretically partisan, I discuss in this first chapter six concepts *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines in its entries for *consciousness* and *conscious*. All six of these *OED* concepts are central to my general purposes as a psychologist of consciousness: though they will not all be playing equally important roles in this book. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize this view of mine: it is not the case that any of them fails of relevant disciplinary reference.

There is no need to choose among these ordinary senses those that are faithful to the phenomena of current interest to the psychological sub-field of consciousness. In the present instance, simplification by narrowing down the range of pertinent phenomena is not desirable, as psychologists sometimes assume. Of course, to address less is simpler, but simpler does not make it better. Thus, I expect it to prove difficult ever to reason effectively to the conclusion that some referents of the six *OED* concepts are less than substantial parts of the subject matter the psychology of consciousness must address to avoid incompleteness.

I. The concept of consciousness: an interpersonal cognitive relation

The first of those particular six concepts of consciousness identified in the *OED* diverges from the remaining five concepts as follows. All of the latter have reference to mental states belonging to a single individual without their implying that there has to be someone else involved in the very event together with that individual. In the case of all actual instances of consciousness, however, the words *conscious* and *consciousness* do not refer merely to certain processes that are transpiring in a single person; much the same process, to be described here, must also be taking place at least in one additional person.

Thus, well before me and quite relevantly to the latter point, John Dewey (1906) consulted an early version of the *OED* and thereupon stated as I shall next be quoting. He called the first dictionary concept of consciousness “the social, or joint, use” of the word, while he deployed as well two of the five other *OED* concepts to spell out that first concept. Note, too, in the following quotation from Dewey’s (1906) article, my own insertions in brackets. I am thus calling attention, in effect, to two of my five other sections that make up the present chapter.

An early use emphasizes the “con-” factor: a social fact. Consciousness means joint, or mutual, awareness [awareness = consciousness₃]. “To be a friend and to be conscious are terms equivalent’ (South, 1664).” While

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this use is obsolete, it persists in poetic metaphor as attributed to things, e.g., the “conscious air,” etc. It also clearly influences the next sense which is . . . that of being “conscious *to one’s self*,” having the witness to something within one’s self [= consciousness₂]. (p. 39; original italics)

Instead of what Dewey suggested above, William James (1890, p. 304) had given to the “con-’factor” involved in consciousness, an interpretation that implicated the personal phenomenon of inner awareness (= consciousness₄), rather than the interpersonal phenomenon of consciousness₁. I return soon to this difference between the two American pragmatists; see my section in this chapter about the *OED*’s fourth sense of *consciousness*. But, I should quickly say the following: I employ *inner awareness* throughout this volume exclusively to refer to the non-inferential awareness that a person may at the time have of a mental-occurrence instance of his or her own.

In the above indented passage taken from Dewey, his quotation from South contained therein is less complete than when the same quotation appears in the first *OED* sub-entry under the word *conscious*. “Nothing is to be concealed from the other self” precedes it there and is another part of the quote from South. Accordingly, all knowledge of facts that each one of two friends possesses should be readily and freely shared between them. And so, if no such fact has deliberately been made an exception to the rule, two friends would be considered fully conscious₁ with each other.

Consistently with the Latin, wherefrom the words *conscious* and *consciousness* derive, the meaning of the concept of consciousness₁ is as I have indicated it to be, that is, interpersonally relational. The character of the togetherness instantiated by such relations between people as consciousness₁ requires some further specification. Accordingly, whenever it is the case that an exercise of this concept does possess an actual referent, this referent is always a special kind of persons’ being-occurrently-aware-together-with-each-other. And, the meaning of the concept requires two or just a few people to stand, briefly or longer, in the latter relation to one another.

I should emphasize that no instance of consciousness₁ has existence without there being in the instance at least two parties appropriately involved one with the other. That is, one cannot be conscious₁ with oneself. It does not constitute an exception that, in fact, there is an extended meaning of *conscious* and *consciousness* in which one can be, analogously, conscious together with oneself; see the next section of this chapter about that other (intrapersonal) relation. That an extended meaning of this kind does exist does not imply one can stand to oneself as to another person in the relation called “consciousness₁.”

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Occasions will arise in this book for me to make a similar sort of point about all real relations' requiring for their instantiation a second term. For example, contrary to how it may seem to one, one cannot be in any kind of such relation with a fire-breathing dragon. It does not matter how vivid one's pertinent visual, auditory, and olfactory experiences may actually be when one is hallucinating. This is not to deny, of course, that one may have consciousness₄ that is occurrent awareness of one's having such experiences when they are features of one's current stream of consciousness.

So too, an imaginary companion together with whom one is ostensibly conscious₁, cannot be party to the real thing. Owing to their non-existence, imaginary people cannot serve as terms of a relation such as consciousness₁ is. This is not to deny, of course, that the occurrent awarenesses in themselves that one has in such cases are no less real than are the awarenesses that one has of real items. Indeed, one will have in many such instances inner awareness of those apprehensions that make it seem to one as though there is someone else there who is interacting with one.

Dewey (1906) reports that his editor called to his attention as relevant the following sentence from Thomas Hobbes: "When two, or more, men know of one and the same fact, they are said to be Conscious of it one to another; which is as much as to know it together (1651)." Although Dewey includes this sentence in a footnote to his comments on the first *OED* sense of *consciousness*, Hobbes's definition of the concept is not a good one. The togetherness relation Hobbes's definition points to is insufficient, since it constitutes far too broad a category given what consciousness₁ requires.

Thus, as is not consistent with the true sense of consciousness₁, someone sitting in Carnegie Hall and listening to music being performed there would qualify as being conscious₁ together with the rest of the audience. Hobbes's definition corresponds more closely to a different consciousness concept (= consciousness₃). Dewey (1906) well expressed the third *OED* concept of consciousness: "'Conscious' means *aware*: 'consciousness,' the state of being aware. This is a wide, colorless use; there is no discrimination nor implication as to contents, as to what there is awareness of, – whether mental or physical, personal or impersonal, etc." (p. 40; original italics).

Sighted members of an audience, like the audience whom I just mentioned, would have visual-perceptual occurrent awareness, which is a subcategory of consciousness₃, of a speaker on the stage who was holding something up and urging people to bid for it. Although all members of the audience would simultaneously be seeing the same thing, they would not

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necessarily be “conscious of it one to another,” as Hobbes puts it. Clearly, Hobbes is trying to define the concept of being conscious_i. Thus, he describes consciousness to consist of two or more people having joint and mutual knowledge with each other.

They do not simply know a fact but know it together with each other; more, they are conscious of it *to* one another. The *OED*'s compilers recognized this to be what Hobbes meant; they included his sentence as the earliest they had found in print to illustrate an exercise of *conscious*'s first sense defined as “knowing, or sharing the knowledge of anything, together with another; privy to anything with another.” How many people can be in a particular consciousness_i relation before it conceptually turns into something less? Note in the definition the allusion that “privy to” would seem to carry.

Consciousness_i is diluted as the number in the relation increases. Being conscious_i is not equivalent to commonly held knowledge, and it requires that just a few people be involved if even that many. It must come to each mind repeatedly that the other or others are occurrently aware that one knows, and vice versa. My construal is compatible with Hobbes's (1651/1914) mention of a conceptual extension: “Afterwards, men made use of the same word metaphorically, for the knowledge of their own secret facts and secret thoughts; and therefore it is Rhetorically said, that the Conscience is a thousand witnesses” (p. 31).

I shall comment on this extension in my section, next, on consciousness_e, but I shall mention earlier the connection Hobbes makes to an inner witness, plus the relevance of secrecy as supporting the understanding that the consciousness_i concept was used to refer to a relation among a very few people. But, I do not suggest that a relation of consciousness_i requires an active exclusion of others than the participants, by withholding information or the like. This does happen, of course, but is not a necessary feature in order for people to be counted as their being conscious_i with each other.

The definitional requirements outlined here can also be fulfilled merely in passing. For example, complete strangers, who have not otherwise communicated, may nevertheless exchange knowing glances upon realizing what it was that they were both witnesses to. In order to acknowledge the range of possible referents for the concept of consciousness_e, I have elsewhere discussed what I called “shallow and transient” cases of being conscious_i (Natsoulas 1991). Among others such, I mentioned cases where a quick silent mutual agreement is achieved as to who should pass through a door first or help someone else to get up from the pavement.

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Discussing *conscious*, *consciousness*, and *conscience*, C. S. Lewis (1967) brought to the fore two relevant senses that go back to the Latin and Ancient Greek. He explained that a “together” branch and a “weakened” branch of meaning can be traced with reference to the derivations of the three English words from their source. That source is the Latin verb *conscio*, meaning either (a) “I know that . . . together with . . ., I share with . . . the knowledge that . . .,” or (b) “I know (vaguely intensively) or know well that . . .” In the first of these senses, one may be *consciūs* or *conscia* to someone else or to oneself.

One can also be in a “consciring” relation (Lewis’s coinage) with oneself. The process of self-consciring is understood to be like consciring with another person. In Lewis’s view, being conscious₂ is tantamount to a variety of consciuousness₁. I will examine this proposed sameness in my consciuousness₂ section. For now, let me say the analogy extended to a solitary person may not be as first it may seem: inconsistent with consciuousness₁’s two-party requirement. The following passage from Lewis (1967) may help in seeing this; after all, being aware of oneself is not like falsely apprehending the presence of an imaginary companion.

Man might be defined as a reflexive animal. A person cannot help thinking and speaking of himself as, and even feeling himself to be (for certain purposes), two people, one of whom can act upon and observe the other. Thus he pities, loves, admires, hates, despises, rebukes, comforts, examines, masters or is mastered by, “himself.” Above all he can be to himself in the relation I have called consciring. He is privy to his own acts, is his own *consciūs* or accomplice. And of course this shadowy inner accomplice has all the same properties as an external one; he too is a witness against you, a potential blackmailer, one who inflicts shame and fear. (p. 187; original italics)

Both *OED* sub-entries that are pertinent to the concept of consciuousness₁ refer to the possession of “knowledge” of a kind. “Joint or mutual knowledge” is the dictionary’s definition for the noun; and, the only illustrative quotation is “consciuousness, or mutual knowledge of persons and their worship.” Being consciuous₁ is “knowing, or sharing the knowledge of anything, together with another; privy to anything with another.” The sentences from Hobbes and South already quoted here are appended there. Therefore, consciuousness₁ might be inferred to be no more than possessing the mentioned knowledge and, thus, a passive condition of the mind or brain.

However, if the concept does not refer to a merely passive condition, then it may well be definable as follows. For two people to be mutually

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in a consciousness_i relation, the following set of features would seem to be necessary.

- (a) A and B both know some thing or things about O, which can be anything or anyone, including A, B, or A and B.
- (b) A (B) knows B (A) knows those facts about O.
- (c) A (B) knows B (A) knows A (B) knows those facts about O.
- (d) A and B have occurrent awareness (= consciousness₃) corresponding to their respective knowledge just listed.
- (e) Not being mind-blind regarding this activated knowledge, A and B have occurrent inner awareness (= consciousness₄) of their respective occurrent awarenesses that I just mentioned.

Under (d), I have added to the definition of consciousness_i that A and B have occurrent awareness based on their knowledge identified under (a), (b), and (c). Under (e), I have added that A and B have occurrent awareness of awarenesses of their own that are, respectively, part of the pattern constituting their consciousness_i relation. I have made these additions so as to activate or actualize what would be merely a latent relation consisting of knowledge states belonging to A and B. Insofar as such activations fail to transpire from time to time, the relation remains a solely potential one.

I do not imply that A and B must together have in the same place or simultaneously the requisite occurrent awarenesses. The consciousness_i relation does not require close coordination except for the contents of their occurrent awarenesses as outlined above. After A and B committed their joint crime, they may not have seen each other for a good while, but neither of them could not but think about what they had done. I use a collaboration for an example but I could equally relevantly use a case in which the relation is about certain actions performed by either party alone.

Another example of A's and B's being conscious_i together would be one that has to do with A's repressed wishes, which have led A to become a patient of psychoanalyst B's. Both must indirectly acquire any knowledge that they come mutually to share about those wishes. According to psychoanalytic theory, no unconscious wish is ever an object to its owner's inner awareness (= consciousness₄). Nothing can be known about such a wish except by knowing other things and inferring from the latter, such as A's observed or reported conduct and what is transpiring in A's stream of consciousness (James 1890).

Much relevant information about Freud's conception of consciousness is provided in thirteen articles of mine that have been published as a series

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in a psychoanalytic journal (e.g., Natsoulas 2003a). Let me therefore just add the following here. As psychoanalytic therapy proceeds successfully, joint knowledge of A's repressed wishes is achieved; and, thus, the existence of these wishes becomes O to A's and B's being conscious₁ together. Not only do A and B acquire that knowledge, but, especially in their many psychoanalytic sessions together, they are occurrently aware of themselves and each other as their being occurrently aware of that knowledge.

II. The concept of consciousness₂: the intrapersonal together sense

Is the *OED*'s concept of consciousness₂ actually as I have briefly indicated it to be in the preceding section of the present chapter? Is the concept of consciousness₂ an extension to the individual person of that interpersonal sense of *consciousness* that is the *OED*'s concept of consciousness₁? Still speaking conceptually, I ask what features, then, does someone's being conscious₂ necessarily involve? Does an instance of consciousness₂ involve being in a certain special relation wholly on one's own: that is, with respect to oneself alone, and without another person's being necessary at the moment for such an instance to be actualized?

Is being conscious₂ nevertheless like one's being in the kind of interpersonal relation between A and B that I have somewhat spelled out in the previous section? George Herbert Mead's (1934; Natsoulas 1985) social approach to the topic of consciousness provides an answer to my question. This derives from what he proposed that all of our instances of occurrent awareness (= consciousness₃) essentially are. However simple some such awarenesses may otherwise be, all of them perforce include, according to Mead's proffered conception, a making of reference individually to oneself, that is, to the one who is thereby being occurrently aware.

In this regard, it does not matter what kind of item it may be whereof one is having occurrent awareness. In one's very apprehension of that item, whatever it is, there is involved as well, crucially and bodily, a kind of reflexive awareness. For Mead, all of our occurrent awarenesses are cognitive kinds of occurrence; they are what James (1890) called "intellections" or "thoughts." Moreover, Mead also held to be true that an occurrent awareness "always has implicitly, at least, a reference to an 'I' in it" (Mead 1934, p. 165), in addition to the awareness's applying other concepts too.

One can rightly put it as follows on Mead's behalf: An occurrent awareness is an actualization of conceptual capacities. These capacities are brought to bear upon the world. A consequence is one's cognitively

apprehending matters that are experientially present to one. More specifically, these items that are so present to one, one indicates them to oneself, just as though one were indicating them to some other person. Note my advertence here to the phenomenon of experiential presence, which will naturally occupy us at other points in this volume. Thus, Mead's account proposes a second, non-cognitive sort of consciousness as well.

Mead states that consciousness "in the broadest sense" includes this primitive or pure form distinct from the cognitive variety. He assigns to this other consciousness the name *field of consciousness*, and claims it to be uncontaminated by our conceptual capacities. Mead (1925/1968) speaks of that primitive consciousness as "the presence of objects in experience." Also, experienced objects are said therein to stand over against the organism "not in a relation of awareness, but in that of conduct" (p. 53). Indeed, experience is held always to be non-conscious except as it may be object to the inner awareness kind of occurrent awareness.

This non-cognitive concept that Mead developed is clearly not to be understood as equivalent to the concept of consciousness₂, nor to the concept of consciousness₃. Nor is it equivalent to any of the three further concepts that the *OED* defines under *consciousness* and that I shall come to in this chapter. But, the experiential presence of environmental and bodily features, which we owe to the activities that we engage in with our perceptual systems, will enter the present discussion often in future chapters. It will enter both as a concept needing development and as an indubitable phenomenon demanding explanatory attention.

For example, the concept of experiential presence pertains to Brian O'Shaughnessy's (2000) proposal that the process of perception be understood to involve "an extensional consciousness of concretely and pre-interpretationally given mental objects" (p. 17). As can be quickly gathered simply from O'Shaughnessy's latter statement, this posited consciousness of his that is theoretically distinguished from the cognitive or intentional kind very much resembles Mead's notion of the field of consciousness. However, let me return now to the concept of consciousness₂, while keeping in mind the self-referential requirement that Mead insisted upon in the instance of every awareness of ours that occurs.

I am calling the concept of consciousness₂ the "intrapersonal together sense" for good reason: in order to emphasize its factual similarity to the concept of consciousness₁. Three of the *OED* sub-entries under either *consciousness* or *conscious* speak directly concerning consciousness₂, and they provide us with an abundance of illustrative quotations from which to learn, in which the concept of consciousness₂ is being exercised. As can

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be readily seen in the following complete list of those *OED* quotations, which I have assembled together in completely unmodified form, nearly all of these quotations have reference to one's witnessing something of or about oneself.

Being so conscious vnto my selfe of my great weakenesse; wherin a Man is Conscious to himselfe, that he is most Defectiue; if they say, That a Man is always conscious to himself of thinking; their own Medicines, which they must needs be conscious to themselves, were good for nothing; if I were not conscious to myself of having done every thing in my power, to warn the nation; a pardon, Sir! Till I am conscious of an offence, I will not wrong my innocence to beg one; Satan . . . with Monarchal pride Conscious of highest worth, unmov'd thus spake; I am easily conscious that I have omitted many things; we are secretly conscious of defects and vices which we hope to conceal from the publick eye; a proof how conscious they were of their own unfitnes; he must have been conscious that, though he thought adultery sinful, he was an adulterer; the consciousness of mine own wants; had not their consciousness to themselves of their ignorance . . . kept them from so idle an attempt; an honest mind is not in the power of a dishonest: to break its peace, there must be some guilt or consciousness; there is . . . a palpable consciousness of guilt; Bentley . . . was supported by the consciousness of an immeasurable superiority; happy in the consciousness of a well-spent life.

Each of these people brought what they respectively witnessed to bear upon a judgment about themselves. To do so requires inner occurrent awareness (= consciousness₄) of one's relevant acts of witnessing or of one's acts of remembering having so witnessed. Being conscious₂ is impossible in the absence of inner occurrent awareness. However, judging from the illustrative quotations the *OED* provides, the evidence one witnesses is of an objective sort, occurrences of the kind that others too could witness. Although there may well be different opinions and standards applied, one's judgments are subject to challenge from others who have relevantly witnessed.

Similarities to the interpersonal concept of consciousness₁ include that both others and oneself can have firsthand knowledge regarding oneself and bring it to bear in judging. From Mead's perspective, we might put it, one is thus in a relation to oneself as others too can be to oneself since in both cases the facts in question are objective. Like the concept of consciousness₂, a double perspective characterizes the *OED*'s second consciousness sense: that of an agent plus that of an observing judge, though the sole person in this relation plays both roles – as though one, too, were external to oneself.