Introduction

I Concepts of consciousness are distinct from those proper parts of the real world whereto those concepts, as exercised, may have their reference

Psychological scientists too may come to concern themselves in the same way other categories of scientists do. Other scientists are well known for their interest in the intrinsic natures belonging to the subject matters whereof their respective portion of reality consists. Ontological questions sometimes exert attractive force upon scientific psychologists as well. Their assigned portion of reality is the respective domain they have inherited by having become the specific variety of scientist they now are. There is a real world out there all scientists inhabit along with the rest of us and which they investigate albeit only in certain respects.

Psychologists may sometimes come to be of a mind to engage in systematic inquiry for example regarding what that part of the real world is whereto they are making reference when they speak qua scientists of particular occurrent instances of consciousness (e.g., Natsoulas 1987; Sperry 1992). Of course this question may be treated of as having to do instead with concepts and meanings. Accordingly in a particular instance of usage of the word, which one of several available concepts of consciousness is the speaker exercising? One may answer correctly notwithstanding a common scarcity of knowledge regarding the referent consciousness itself.

Inquiring into the ontological question would be motivated by a desire to learn what consciousness itself in fact is. One would want so to know however this presumably occurrent existent happens to be thought of by the respective person whose consciousness it is or by anyone else who has an opinion about it. A major contemporary philosopher of consciousness, Brian O'Shaughnessy (1987), begins his essay "Consciousness" with what consciousness is. Psychologists will want to know his answer in the hope

that he has succeeded in coming one or more steps closer to what the basic facts of the matter are.

> Clearly, as its verbal roots suggest, it must have intimate links with knowledge. Thus, one supposes that it must be a psychological state that puts one in a position to know about the environment, and in the self-conscious to know about one's own mind as well under the widest possible headings. But what exactly does consciousness do for its owner? And what is its relation to sleep, anesthesia, coma, hypnotic trance, and so forth? (O'Shaughnessy 1987, p. 49)

Not unusually, O'Shaughnessy employs *consciousness* consistently with the subentries *The Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED* 1989) provides for the word. In the previously quoted passage and beyond, the kind of consciousness whose true nature he seeks to describe is the real referent corresponding to the *OED's* sixth definition under *consciousness*. Thus, O'Shaughnessy is adverting to a kind of general state of the person he has consistently identified also as "the state consciousness" (O'Shaughnessy 2000). In its import and duration this state is no less than a certain general operating mode wherein a person commonly and persistently functions as a unified whole.

So, too, perception theorist James J. Gibson (1979) considers this operating mode a "psychosomatic [state], not of the mind or of the body, but of a living observer" (pp. 239–240). O'Shaughnessy does not claim consciousness itself has those verbal roots mentioned in the preceding indented quotation from him. Rather, the English word derives from the Latin *scio* and corresponds to *I know.* Drawing the links O'Shaughnessy does between for example consciousness qua one's normal waking state and having knowledge of the environment and of one's own mind, is likely on the right track toward correctly describing the state consciousness itself.

However, I must bring out the following broader point. It applies not only to the general state or operating mode of the person which the state consciousness is but also to the real referents of each of the *OED*'s (1989) six basic concepts of *consciousness* exercised in ordinary discourse. Those real-referent instances of consciousness itself corresponding to any one of the six kinds the *OED*'s entry for *consciousness* distinguishes, are quite distinct from any concept which one may choose to apply to them. It does not matter how advanced and sophisticated or primitive and raw such a concept may be.

My latter statement is intended to include any technical concept of consciousness already constructed or under construction or as yet to be

constructed. Neither nature nor science can transform a concept of consciousness into its present or past or future referent. It does not matter if a concept is the ultimate concept of consciousness already designed or to be designed by scientists to their own satisfaction. How we are conceiving of the respective consciousnesses may correspond more or less to how they are conceiving of them. But in neither case are there properties that are shared between concept and referent.

Corresponding to any one of the six *OED* concepts, every real referent of theirs is currently or has been at one time or will be an occurrent part of that world whereof we, too, are among its proper parts. And each of those referents goes on for as long a time as it lasts whereas no concept or construct is rightly considered to be in its nature a kind of occurrence. Our activity of thinking may proceed, as we say in terms of concepts but this does not make our thinking activity at all equivalent to the concepts deployed therein.

Nor does it make our concept of a thought in itself be equivalent to a thought. I am brought up short when psychologists explicitly hold consciousness to be a "construct" or an "inferred concept"; they are making a serious mistake. They mean to say that consciousness is something they are positing for explanatory purposes. However, it is not that they are thus positing a concept; rather, it is something of a sort that may be a part of the world. Inconsistently they then proceed to promote the place of research on the grounds of its capability to reveal the properties consciousness itself possesses.

That is, they proceed as though consciousness were not a concept, as indeed it is not, but as though it is something actually itself transpiring in the person, as in fact it does. How psychologists assign relative respectability to topics comprising their research domain may result indirectly in conflation of concepts with their referents. They may seek to prevent being objects of negative collegial reaction by deliberately appearing to claim less than they want to claim. Engaging in self-censorship, a psychologist may speak instead of wielding a certain "conceptual tool" rather than of inquiring into a controversial segment of reality.

The psychologist may thus reassuringly appear to qualify after all as being a solid contributor to the joint effort together with his or her colleagues, by not harboring any undesirable ontological commitments. In my view, how we think about consciousness will perforce ramify and have wide-reaching effects well beyond the borders of psychological science just as both behaviorism and psychoanalytic theory continue to be influential in our culture. After all, is it not true that a good portion of

psychologists' cogitations proceed in public so that even thoughts in passing may get picked up and have effects upon the world?

I favor freedom of expression almost always. But I do sometimes wish psychologists, because they are widely considered to be scientific authorities, would refrain from advertising their wares. At the same time, I have to realize less knowledgeable commentators with their own claims about similar matters would likely fill the resulting silences left by psychologists. Indeed, we are living in a period of massive propaganda wherein one must make efforts to avoid the many salespersons around us who are declaring for our consumption what purports to be truth itself. I have in mind first of all the newspaper of record.

II It is advisable at this early point in investigating consciousness to rely on the common-sense framework wherewith we cogitate about such matters

Who among psychologists is prepared to express doubt regarding the reality of the great advances in knowledge already accomplished by the physical and biological sciences? These genuine advances of our knowledge in common concerning the one and only existing world present certain difficulties for present-day psychologists. The many media of communication bring those achievements constantly to our attention, as do members of our own respective families and friends and neighbors and colleagues. Even when we are immersed in our own special studies, we cannot manage to forget the scientific accomplishments that have transpired in scientific fields other than our own.

Moreover, those impressive advances have been forcing us to face reality as it actually is and not as we would like it to be. They have made it much harder for us to reduce, as some of us would have it, the one and only world simply to that stream of one's experiences which each of us is privately undergoing. Indeed, the advances taking place elsewhere than within our field of science are of such tremendous magnitude that they constitute a constant pressure upon us toward modesty with respect to the rightful place of our own science within human history.

Notwithstanding some of the advertising, we psychologists have come onto this current great scene of scientific industry at a rather immature stage of the development of our chosen field. Consequently, new psychologists and others who are, as it were, new to consciousness would do well to exercise a certain amount of caution as they prepare to join in the pursuit of a scientific understanding thereof. As the disciplinary restrictions within

psychology continue to recede, how more specifically should new investigators, of whom there will be many, embark upon the study of those subject matters comprising the phenomena of consciousness?

Whether they be psychological scientists or scientists who are non-psychological, I strongly recommend their eschewal of any strategy vis-à-vis consciousness which would at all be a discounting of our ordinary common-sense perspective. Concerning this recommendation of mine to all scientists of consciousness, I would urge you to consult for greater detail than I will be providing here a journal article of mine with the title "On the Intrinsic Nature of States of Consciousness: Attempted Inroads from the First-Person Perspective" (Natsoulas 2001b). Regarding the common-sense framework, the Australian philosopher J. J. C. Smart (1966) for example gave the following useful characterization.

"[It is] our ordinary everyday conceptual scheme . . . the conceptual structure in which we naturally think, and in which we cannot help thinking so long as we do not consciously and deliberately determine to think in terms of scientific theories" (pp. 165–166). At least in part our common-sense framework may be understood to consist of or to be informed by a certain complex structure of highly familiar concepts. A large part of our own conscious life is proceeding in terms of this conceptual structure of ours, which does not need to be bidden by us but comes into play on its own.

The latter is particularly the case when we are functioning in that general operating mode which is commonly spoken of as "the state of consciousness" or "the normal waking state" (Hebb 1972, p. 248; O'Shaughnessy 1987, 2000; Natsoulas 1999b on consciousness$_6$). Thus, the best starting point for aspirants to the investigation of consciousness is likely to be from a conception of consciousness implicit in the common-sense framework. Admittedly more than a single such conception per any aspect of consciousness may be implicit in our common-sense framework, just as within a science alternative, accounts of the same natural phenomenon may co-exist.

Nevertheless, to resort to the common-sense framework is a reasonable methodological strategy for psychologists to adopt. As a strategy, it is anything but defeatist and should be readily countenanced in the psychological sciences as suitable to our particular purposes. I should think it would obviously be a good choice to be making in light of the special circumstances of our short history as a science and the condition in which it has left us. The approach in question does not derive from a scientific fashion that has come into prominence owing to transitory factors of political or economic or other such nature.

It takes advantage instead of a long, gradual, formative process of a duration probably extending over the entire course of human history. The common-sense strategy would be a desirable conservative approach for a psychologist to take since it would not be ignoring what people have learned concerning themselves over the many centuries of their engaging in the psychological processes of observing each other and of self-awareness and of deep thought regarding psychological matters inter alia. Of course, such inquiry did not get its start only as late as the nineteenth century with the formal advent of the science of psychology.

Compare, for example, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Nussbaum 1994). The latter book discusses in enlightening detail schools of thought in Ancient Greece and Rome, whose adepts applied their sophisticated discipline as a rigorous science to the understanding of mind and the improvement of mental health. Yet, desirous as present-day psychologists are of the kind of progress in knowledge more advanced fields of science have demonstrated and are demonstrating every day, it is true they have been generally disinclined to consider as useful the common-sense perspective for the purposes of the scientific study of consciousness.

Of course, the common-sense framework is not a framework that was created by design in order to treat of experimentally developed facts. It does not happen to coincide with the concrete present-day research requirements for a conceptual basis. Therefore, it may be argued that such a perspective cannot possibly be useful. I will return to the latter argument critically in a later section of this introductory chapter. But the obstinate facts do remain. Psychologists very effectively employ the common-sense framework – not only outside their psychological roles. They also do so within these roles, whether or not they realize or admit it.

This state of affairs reminds me of certain psychologists who would actually go so far as to deny their having conscious experiences at all (Natsoulas 2011). Not only are their experimental subjects zombies too so they are themselves zombies. They would deny the kind of experiences about which William James, Sigmund Freud, and Edmund Husserl had so much of value to contribute. But their denial of experiences as real has not at all succeeded in their abolition. Those behavioristic psychologists continue to have such experiences whether or not in their weaker moments they step up and acknowledge as much.

They go right on with their lives, which includes their undergoing the very experiences about which they have concluded owing to philosophical commitments possess only an unreal character. In their view, such

experiences are not occurring there to them or anywhere else to anyone else. Such experiences do not have existence any more than a hallucinatory fire-breathing dragon can be rightly said to possess any kind of existence even when one is having impressive visual experiences as though of it. At most, experiences of theirs are all claimed to amount only to the illusion they are undergoing the respective experiences.

They do not actually have any experiences, but they may sometimes come under the illusion as though they were having some. From time to time, what is going on does take them in as in other respects, too, they may be taken in. But plenty of evidence is available showing that their having experiences goes on regardless of how convinced to the contrary they may be. The relevant evidence is in the form of what nevertheless the behavior of such skeptics takes into account as it is proceeding. Even self-reports about their undergoing the most outlandish imagery constitute such evidence.

These are truly reports. There is a basis for their being issued. The basis is one's apprehending something rather than one's not apprehending anything at all. What are those apprehended somethings? To their owner these are rightly so as though they are experiences of non-existent states of affairs. But that is not grounds to claim the mentioned experiences themselves did not occur and are non-existent. The existence of experiences can be demonstrated to a skeptic by asking him or her to close and open his or her eyes repeatedly while looking at a scene or room.

In accordance with common-sense thought, there is something experiential that comes and goes as a direct consequence of the latter, voluntary activity with the eyes. But the room in which the skeptic is sitting, for example, does not along with vision interrupted thereby go out of existence and then come back again into existence when vision is resumed. To so propose would be extravagantly and incredibly to claim the room in which one is sitting is not a part of the one and only existing world. The room's existence would depend, instead, upon whether or not it was being observed.

III Behaviorist revolutionaries caused dissociation between the phenomena of consciousness and the scientific vocabulary psychologists were allowed

Is employment of technical concepts possible in the total absence of the common-sense framework? It would be pertinent to consider as well whether a psychologist who successfully avoided the common-sense framework in his or her functioning as such would be personally in a condition

which would allow the construction of technical concepts. Anyway, if research is to proceed as comprehensively as possible much preliminary conceptual work is necessitated whenever a psychologist turns to the investigation of such a topic as consciousness is. Otherwise kinds of tragic loss will transpire, which philosopher of science extraordinaire Wilfrid Sellars (1965) characterized as follows.

> The *abandonment* of the common sense framework would result in serious methodological and conceptual loss . . . I distinguish between common sense *beliefs* and common sense *principles*. The former are in no way binding on the scientist. Nor are the conceptual *constructs* of common sense binding on the scientist. It is the rock bottom concepts and principles of common sense which are binding until a total structure which can do the job better is actually at hand – rather than a "regulative ideal." (p. 189; original italics)

In addition an epistemological straitening is then effected. There is inevitable loss and neglect of portions of the very subject matter which the respective researcher wants to improve our understanding of. Indeed even coming to know more and more about less and less may evade the empirical researcher. In contrast a founder of present-day cognitive psychology Ulrich Neisser (1979) acknowledged the subject matters commonsensically listed under the heading consciousness to be clearly among the "chief responsibilities" of psychology. Scientific psychology must embrace those listed psychological phenomena as their being among the worthy objects of its efforts to describe and explain.

The inclusion of the phenomena of consciousness as subject matters which lie within the domain of the science of psychology has evidently now become otherwise the right thing to be doing. That is to say, so to do is already considered right well before the advanced psychological theory of the day is in any position to prepare the way into the science for those previously excluded phenomena. Indeed, and after all, one is now entitled argumentatively to demand to be informed as to what other discipline has as great a responsibility as psychology to develop a scientific understanding of consciousness.

Apparently this issue is not to be decided in the privacy of psychology's own home simply as it there seems fit. Acceptance that a science is first of all a social institution with obligations to the society whereof it is a living part calls for judging and estimating the effects the particular science will have outside the science's boundaries as well as within them. The responsibility Neisser mentioned is a social fact that should be widely recognized as well within psychological science itself. And in its own turn it should be interrogated as to whether it is worthy of consciousness.

Or should the responsibility be elsewhere assigned? There is historical reason for uncertainty regarding this issue. Surely psychology is better positioned to develop such an understanding than brain science or computer science not to speak of branches of medicine however psychologically oriented they may be or become. Unfortunately however the consequences of major disciplinary errors committed at an earlier time may still be working their effects upon how our field is progressing or failing to progress. Even were psychology unanimously acknowledged the science with the most responsibility for consciousness would it be the right institution to choose for the job?

With respect to the psychology of consciousness, Neisser (1979) pertinently diagnosed the current existence of a fundamental difficulty. It had come recently into operation among psychologists even as they were growing more tolerant and discussion of "the problem of consciousness" was growing more respectable among them. Note the rich and fundamental phenomena of consciousness are still being adverted to as "the problem." People were permitted now to express themselves more freely, but to what effect? Neisser described the difficulty to have come about in the present period and was not a problem in an earlier stage of scientific psychology's development.

It had not been a problem in his view during the decades of psychological science preceding the behaviorist revolution. It was the behaviorist revolution and its regrettable effects upon scientific psychology that made certain crucial states of mind turn out later as they did. These were not any states of mind belonging to the experimental subjects whom psychologists studied, but to the psychologists themselves. Neisser described this further obstacle to psychological progress in what amounted to clinical language (cf. Natsoulas 1983, p. 13: "But the patient struggles on to give to the phenomena of consciousness an enlightened form of expression.").

Neisser was in a position closely to observe as a psychologist his colleagues' behavior and detected thereby the presence within their scientific thinking of no less than a condition of "dissociation." This condition was manifested in how psychologists had been brought up in their discipline to treat of a portion of their potential subject matter which Neisser judged to be among psychology's chief responsibilities. To put it euphemistically, history had rendered psychologists incapable of doing as their disciplinary purposes required them to do. They had become unable referentially to connect between two of a certain pair of very pertinent realms.

One might speak of this psychological condition to which psychologists themselves had devolved as its being one of an acquired linguistic or

conceptual insufficiency. Both of the two realms which were therein rendered mutually dissociated were not strange but have always been highly familiar to every psychologist. Admittedly repression in the classic Freudian psychoanalytic sense was perhaps not actually involved in the production of this instance of a dissociative disorder. Except an absence of repression is generally not likely to be the case. Conscious rational functioning is seldom if ever an adequate explanation for such a dissociation as did occur.

The discipline of psychology had succeeded in so isolating one of those two familiar realms as its constituents could not be characterized in the terms of the other realm. The behaviorist revolutionaries had looked upon one of the realms with great favor but had worked hard as much as they were able to sanitize it or to keep it pure. And so after the revolution had well progressed in achieving its goals, (a) psychologists had little of professional interest to say about consciousness and (b) there was little left within the science with which to give expression to its phenomena.

Neisser identified the two mutually dissociated realms as, on the one hand, the "fascinating phenomena" of consciousness and, on the other hand, what he spoke of favorably as psychology's "hard-won conceptual achievements." In this context it must be awkward to speak in this way of conceptual achievements for which psychologists were credited given the actual history of what was responsible for the diagnosed cases of dissociation. The conceptual developments were not truly "hard won," for the opposition to them was very weak and gradually gained some strength only after a great deal of damage had been done to the discipline.

A participant in the struggle later stated to me that the behaviorist tide had been simply too strong to be turned back by himself and others like him. Someone may want to argue to the effect of something intellectual must have been at stake in psychology over which the revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries struggled. But I doubt it was just about concepts and beliefs and theories as opposed to power and prestige and resources. Even the term *achievements* seems inappropriate. Psychologists' inability to communicate about many phenomena in their domain resulted from disciplinary restrictions on what might respectably be referred to.

On the latter state of affairs, see four pages of my article "Concepts of Consciousness" (Natsoulas 1983, pp. 13–16). In addition, Neisser (1976) anticipated points I would soon be making in an article titled "Consciousness" (Natsoulas 1978a) published no less than in the *American Psychologist* to my own surprise. Neisser had objected to how cognitive psychologists had lately been treating of consciousness, and he