

What Is It Like to Be a Mental State? Some Considerations on The Creature/State Consciousness Distinction

Alberto Barbieri (IUSS, Pavia)

It is widely acknowledged that there is an important distinction between consciousness attributed to creatures, or subjects, and consciousness attributed to mental states (Manson, 2000). The first use of the concept has been called ‘creature consciousness, and the second use ‘state consciousness’. These two ‘level of consciousness’ are undoubtedly interconnected, and a theory of consciousness must state which of these concepts is its primary *explanandum*. Indeed, most philosophers of mind have favored state consciousness, thinking that it grounds, or is at least prior to, creature consciousness.

The aim of this paper is twofold: 1) showing that, despite the clarificatory intent of its introduction, the distinction at issue is ambiguous and produces terminological and conceptual confusion; 2) putting pressure on the idea that state consciousness is prior to creature consciousness.

As for point 1), I point out the existence of two different ways to understand the distinction, namely i) as a difference between *types of consciousness* (Dretske, 1993; Gennaro, 2012; Rosenthal, 1986, 1993), and ii) as a difference between *types of conscious entities* (Bayne, 2007; Block, 1995; Kriegel, 2009b). It follows that many theories, although claiming to explain the same property, target different phenomena, generating a confused debate.

As for point 2), I assume ii) as the most useful reading of the distinction at issue, and, taking the literature about the subjective character of the experience as a case study, I claim that *for-me-ness*, usually construed as a kind of state consciousness (Kriegel, 2009b; Levine, 2001), is a phenomenon we encounter at creature level. More precisely, I analyze the phenomenological data supporting the existence of *for-me-ness* (Kriegel, 2003, 2009a; Zahavi, 2005), and I argue that phenomenological intuitions about the structure of experience, if right, are derived from the level of creature consciousness, and not from the one of state consciousness. If this reasoning is correct, there are phenomenological reasons to consider creature consciousness as the primary *explanandum* for most theories of consciousness.

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