ONLINE CONSCIOUSNESS CONFERENCE 4

Rocco J. Gennaro, University of Southern Indiana, rjgennaro@usi.edu

Comments on Miguel Sebastian "Experiential Awareness: Do you Prefer *It* to *Me*"?

Miguel Sebastian puts forth an interesting and useful framework with which to understand the differences and similarities among various theories of consciousness. The framework is orthogonal to the one between first-order (FO) and higher-order (HO) theories of consciousness. Sebastian nicely distinguishes between two senses of "self-representational":

(SI) **Self-involving**: "those theories that maintain that a sense of self is required to characterize the…content…of experiences," and

(MSI) **Mental state involving**: "those theories that maintain that it is merely the state itself that enters the content of experience" (p. 4).

So SI is meant to reflect the idea that a conscious state is accompanied by "self-awareness" that is directed at *oneself* in some sense. MSI is meant to reflect the notion that a conscious state is accompanied by "self-awareness" that is directed back at *itself*, i.e. the conscious state, in some sense.

Thus, according to Sebastian, we have four possibilities:

HO-MSI (where he puts my view),

HO-SI (Rosenthal),

FO-MSI (e.g. Kriegel, Brentano), and

FO-SI (e.g. Zahavi)

I will focus on four areas of criticism and discussion. First, I explain how my theory, which I have called the wide intrinsicality view (WIV), actually incorporates both SI and MSI

elements. Second, I further distinguish between those MSI views which treat the self-awareness in question as directed at *part* of the overall conscious state and those which hold that it is directed back at the *entire* conscious state. Third, I contend that Kriegel's view also incorporates both SI and MSI elements. Fourth, and perhaps most important, I distinguish between those theories that construe the self-awareness that accompanies conscious states as *unconscious* (USA) and those theories that treat such self-awareness as *conscious* (CSA). I also argue that USA is superior to CSA, and that USA cuts across both kinds of HO theories. Let us also keep in mind throughout that we are not normally referring to the more sophisticated introspective states, which, according to HOT theory, involve *conscious* HOTs directed at mental states. Overall, then, I argue that there are other useful, and even, superior ways to fill out the taxonomy of theories considered by Sebastian.

First, my own theory, the wide intrinsicality view (WIV), actually incorporates both SI and MSI elements (Gennaro 1996, 2006, 2012). It is an "intrinsic version" of Rosenthal's theory, if you will. Sebastian has it only in the HO-MSI category, but it should also be under HO-SI because my view is not only that a conscious state involves some reference back to the conscious state itself but also that it makes reference to oneself ("I"). Like Rosenthal's view, the self-awareness (normally an unconscious HOT) that accompanies all conscious states has the content "I am in mental state M." Sebastian is right, however, that Rosenthal's view lacks the kind of self-awareness and self-reference *within* conscious states that is present in my view (and in Carruthers' for that matter).

I have more formally described each theory as follows (Gennaro 2006, 2012):

Rosenthal's HOT theory: A mental state M of a subject S is conscious if and only if S has a *distinct* (unconscious) mental state M* (= a HOT) that is an appropriate representation of M.

Gennaro's WIV: A mental state M of a subject S is conscious if and only if S has a suitable (unconscious) meta-psychological thought, M*, directed at M, such that both M and M* are proper parts of a complex conscious mental state, CMS.

Second, one should therefore also distinguish between those MSI views which treat the self-awareness in question as directed at *part* of the overall conscious state and those which hold that it is directed back at the *entire* conscious state. This latter view is what I called "pure self-referentialism" (PSR) in Gennaro 2006 and 2012. It can be put as follows:

PSR: A mental state M of a subject S is conscious if and only if S has a mental state M* that is an appropriate representation of M, and M = M*.

I've argued at length that PSR is a particularly untenable version of self-representationalism (Gennaro 2006, 2012, chapter five). For example, it is more susceptible to the charge of circularity, it does not provide an account of introspection, and cannot be a plausible naturalistic theory of consciousness. I won't elaborate on PSR here but some authors in Sebastian's FO-MSI category are explicitly opposed to a reductionist, and even naturalist, explanation of conscious states. On the other hand, those in the entire HO row are at least partly motivated by the desire to offer a reductionist account of consciousness, at least in mentalistic terms.

Interestingly, while Kriegel himself seems to have argued for PSR in some earlier work (e.g. Kriegel 2003a), a noticeable shift in emphasis to parts and wholes of conscious states appears in his more recent writings. In addition to the part–whole language explicitly used throughout Kriegel 2006 and 2009, he had even previously said that "a brain state can be said to represent itself if *one part* of it represents *another* part of it" (2003b, 493; italics in original). This comes in the context of attempting to preserve a naturalistic self-representational view, but it also sounds much more like the WIV than PSR. Moving more clearly away from PSR, Kriegel also said that "the mental state yielded by that integration may not actually represent itself . . . . At most, we can say that one part of it represents another part" (2005, 48). Much of the same shift even seems to take place within Kriegel 2009 book; that is, in the early part of that book, he is more concerned to distance himself from Rosenthal's HOT theory but then he later explicitly explains that only an *indirect self-representation* is applicable to conscious states (2009, 215–226). Thus talk of state-parts is much more prominent in the later chapters of Kriegel's book, and it becomes clear that what he calls "direct self-representationalism" just is PSR. Kriegel then explicitly says that "there is no direct self-representationalism in conscious states" (224).

Although the move to indirect self-representationalism is welcome to me (since it is closer to the WIV), Kriegel has abandoned PSR and direct self-representationalism.

Sebastian seems to recognize this to some extent (p. 12, note #9) when he explains that Kriegel's view actually is, for example, that "a phenomenally conscious state…is a complex state that has two states…as proper parts…" However, he still lumps Kriegel's view in with Sartre and Brentano under FO-MSI. Strictly speaking, Kriegel's current view is not merely FO-MSI as such, but rather a sub-variety which we might label as *FO-MSI-with-state-parts*, as opposed to Brentano's *FO-MSI-without-state-parts*. Bringing in parts of conscious states seems unavoidable if one wants to preserve some kind of naturalistic notion of self-reference in mental state consciousness.

Third, it is not at all clear to me that Kriegel's view is only FO-MSI and not also FO-SI. Why not also FO-SI? After all, Kriegel clearly invokes a "for me" element in his theory under the name "subjective character" of conscious states. Doesn't this involve some reference to oneself? We are also told that this "sense of self" is phenomenologically manifest and Sebastian quotes Kriegel (p. 7) as holding that that "my peripheral awareness of my current experience is awareness of it *as mine*" (italics added). Doesn't the "as mine" imply the SI view?

Sebastian ultimately agrees that a SI element *should* be present in the FO theories, for example, when briefly addressing infants and animals (pp. 7-9). Indeed, one purpose of the remainder of his paper is to make room for a FO-SI view. Indeed, I have argued that most animals are conscious and are capable of having some degree of I-concept, which would also seem to be "self-involving" (Gennaro 2009, 2012, chapter eight). For example, most animals have some form of episodic memory which must include some degree of self-awareness and self-concept. I have proposed that there are degrees of self-concepts (initially in Gennaro 1993; Gennaro 2012, chapter seven). We should, for example, distinguish among the following four I-concepts, moving from the least to most sophisticated:

Level 1: I *qua* this thing (or "body"), as opposed to other physical things.

Level 2: I *qua* experiencer of mental states.

Level 3: I *qua* enduring thinking thing.

Level 4: I *qua* thinker among other thinkers.

There seems to be good evidence that infants and most animals do have, at minimum, a Level-1 self-concept. Sebastian uses a somewhat different strategy and invokes *de se* content combined with a teleological account of content. I am personally more partial to a causal account of content such that mental states acquire their content by standing in appropriate causal relations to objects and properties in the world (Gennaro 2012, chapter two). Sebastian seems more sympathetic to this view later in his paper, but, more importantly for my purposes here, Sebastian proposes an interesting use for Damasio's notion of a "proto-self" in order to account for inner-directed mental states and related brain functions. But then we must remind ourselves that Damasio may often simply have in mind a level-1 self-concept, for example, when he speaks of the more biological notions of a "self-maintaining system" and "living organisms" (p. 11).

I do not think that a teleological account is necessary in order to explain how SI might be present in conscious states. Nonetheless, despite this difference, I found some of Sebastian's remarks regarding his own view (especially on pp. 12-14) to be interestingly related to the WIV. For example, he explains that "we can offer an account of such *de se* content by characterizing a *conscious state as a complex of two states* that I will call the proto-self and the proto-qualitative state" (p. 12, second emphasis added). The proto-qualitative state is outer-directed, e.g. directed at properties of a red apple. According to Sebastian, then, neither the proto-self state nor the proto-qualitative state is individually conscious; however, "it is the interaction between both of them that gives rise to a phenomenally conscious mental state…" (p.12). This sounds strikingly similar to the WIV and to the extent that it is, I of course agree. For example, on the WIV, I have pointed out that essential and mutual interaction occurs between the relevant neuronal levels. Edelman and Tononi (2000), for example, emphasize the more global nature of conscious states, and it is reasonable to interpret this as the view that conscious states are composed of both the higher- and lower-order components. Edelman and Tononi refer to the neural "dynamic core" of a conscious state as generally "spatially distributed and thus cannot be localized to a single place in the brain" (Edelman and Tononi 2000, 146). They mainly locate reentrant cortical feedback loops in thalamocortical systems. The brain structures involved in these loops seem to resemble the structure of at least some form of HOT theory; namely, lower-order and higher-

order states combine to produce conscious states. More specifically, such evidence seems to support the WIV because of the intimate and essential relationship between the "higher" and "lower" brain areas involved. There is mutual interaction between the neuronal levels. (I say much more on this theme in Gennaro 2012, chapters four and nine). One key point of disagreement between myself and Sebastian, however, is that I think it is much more natural to construe such a theory as a version of HOT theory as opposed to a FO view. That is, I suggest treating these theories more like "intrinsic" versions of standard HOT theory, such that the self-awareness is itself part of the overall conscious state and that there is dynamic interaction between the neural areas of realization. Perhaps Sebastian opts more for a FO theory because he is thinking of the self-awareness in question as itself conscious.

Fourth, given the above, I suggest yet another, and perhaps most important, division among the theories considered by Sebastian, namely, those views that treat the self-awareness of a conscious state as *itself* conscious and those that treat it as unconscious. We thus have *conscious self-awareness* (CSA) or *unconscious self-awareness* (USA). This now allows us, for example, to more clearly distinguish between views such as my own and Rosenthal's, on the one hand, and Brentano and Kriegel's, on the other. However, it is also necessary to recognize that some FO theories (e.g. Zahavi's) agree with Rosenthal and myself on this point, so we need to subdivide FO theories further in order to separate out CSA views (Kriegel, Brentano) from USA views (Gennaro, Rosenthal, Carruthers, Zahavi). Thus, the distinction between CSA and USA cuts across the FO-HO distinction. Sebastian glosses over this difference among theories by, for example, using the ambiguous terminology of "a *sense* of self" (p. 4). But is this sense conscious or not? If so, then one agrees with Kriegel and Brentano. If not, one agrees with myself, Rosenthal, and Zahavi, despite the other differences among us.

Sebastian understandably puts considerable weight on Kriegel's (2009) distinction between what he calls "qualitative character" and "subjective character" under the larger umbrella of "phenomenal character." Kriegel explains that "a phenomenally conscious state's qualitative character is what makes it the phenomenally conscious state it is, while its subjective character is what makes it a phenomenally conscious state at all" (Kriegel 2009, 1). So, on Kriegel's view, the phenomenally conscious experience of the blue sky should be divided into two components: (1) its qualitative character, which is the "bluish" component of the experience

(or the what of the experience), and (2) its subjective character, which is what he calls the "for-me" component (or what determines that it is conscious).

I have argued that Kriegel is mistaken in thinking that subjective character is itself phenomenally conscious (Gennaro 2008, Gennaro 2012, chapter five). Kriegel's position can be characterized by the claim that outer-directed (or focal) conscious states are always accompanied by inner-directed (or peripheral) awareness. Perhaps most important is that the alleged evidence for such conscious peripheral self-awareness is phenomenological. However, it seems to me that the clearest examples of "peripheral" consciousness are *outer* directed, for example, awareness in one's peripheral visual field while watching a concert or reading a book. But this obviously does not show that any such peripheral consciousness is self-directed *at the same time* when there is outer-directed consciousness. Moreover, I do not find such peripheral or inattentive consciousness in my experience, which should presumably show up in the Nagelian sense if it is based on phenomenological observation. Conscious experience is often so clearly and completely outer directed that I deny we have such marginal self-directed conscious experience when in first-order conscious states. It does not seem to me that I am consciously aware (in any sense) of my own experience when I am, say, consciously attending to a movie or the task of building a bookcase.

When Kriegel and others claim to find such peripheral self-directed consciousness in their experience, a case can be made that they are really philosophically "reflecting" on their experience. But then they are consciously attending *to their experiences*, which is really *introspective* consciousness. Thus we no longer have a phenomenological analysis of first-order conscious states. David Woodruff Smith is a good example of someone who seems to struggle with the CSA-USA views. In earlier work (1986, 1989), he is clearly in the CSA camp and seemingly very close to Brentano and PSR. Even in Smith (2004), he continues to insist that "the formal analysis of inner awareness…is a task for phenomenology" (2004, 80). However, this actually leads him to abandon his earlier view that all first-order conscious states have such inner awareness (109–116). Smith now allows for basic levels of outer-directed consciousness that lack such self-awareness, for example, when "I am unselfconsciously hammering a nail, or driving down the highway, or choosing to hit the tennis ball crosscourt rather than down the line" (109). Thus "On the view now emerging, inner awareness is an integral part of higher levels of

consciousness, realized in humans and perhaps other animals, but it is not present in lower levels of consciousness in humans and other animals" (110). To the extent that Smith no longer advocates PSR or CSA, then I agree. I suggest that what he should really give up is the view that "inner awareness" is phenomenologically revealed. If he had done so, then he would have recognized that all outer-directed conscious mental states can still have a WIV-like structure without giving up the belief that inner-awareness (of some kind) is indeed built into the structure of those states. Smith is correct, however, in allowing for conscious mental states not accompanied by *conscious* self-awareness.

The main point that emerges is that if one wishes to hold that some form of self-awareness accompanies all outer-directed conscious states (as I do), one is better off holding that this self-awareness is itself unconscious, as is held, for example, by standard HOT theory and the WIV. I confess that I do not ever find inner-directed peripheral consciousness alongside my outer-directed attentive experience.

Kriegel (2009, esp. 377–379) has responded to some of my previous arguments along these lines (e.g. in Gennaro 2008). Perhaps his most important and interesting line of argument is that there may be a very good reason why introspection does not reveal peripheral inner awareness. According to Kriegel, this is because when one introspects one's current conscious experience, that inner awareness "displaces" or "annihilates" any peripheral inner awareness that was present. The previously existing peripheral inner awareness is transformed into a focal inner awareness. Part of Kriegel's motivation is to show that the transparency of experience is compatible with his view, as well as to explain why we cannot "catch ourselves" in a state of inner peripheral awareness.

I largely agree with Kriegel's discussion along these lines, namely, the idea that introspection could not reveal any alleged peripheral inner awareness (accompanying outer focal awareness) because it supplants or annihilates it. I think he is right that any argument that merely attempts to show the falsity of his "self-representationalism" based on the transparency of experience is misguided. However, it is important to recognize that this does not show that any inner peripheral awareness accompanies first-order conscious states in the first place. Moreover, it is revealing that Kriegel has now all but conceded that there is no introspective phenomenological evidence for his position. This is a rather incredible concession given that

self-representationalism is supposedly based on first-person phenomenological considerations. Of course, Kriegel still claims that there is some nonintrospective phenomenological evidence for what he calls the "general impression" of inner peripheral awareness. But if any alleged peripheral inner awareness is as ubiquitous as Kriegel says, one would suppose that thinking of such cases should be fairly easy. I am not unreasonably demanding that there be an entirely uncontroversial case of inner peripheral awareness, but it is reasonable to examine whether or not we have as good evidence for it as we clearly have for other cases of peripheral awareness, especially since it is claimed to accompany *all* conscious states. Sebastian, however, says that MSI theories fail to satisfactorily account for the "phenomenological observation" involving continuous conscious self-awareness. On the contrary, speaking at least for myself, I have considered but then rejected the notion that there is peripheral conscious self-awareness accompanying all conscious states.

In closing, then, there are other useful and superior ways to fill out the taxonomy of theories considered by Sebastian. Although Sebastian raises some very interesting issues, he has also overlooked some very important similarities and differences among the theories in question. Finally, I think it is a mistake to suppose that there is *conscious* peripheral self-awareness alongside world-directed conscious states.

References:

Edelman, G., and G. Tononi. 2000. Reentry and the dynamic core: Neural correlates of conscious experience. In *Neural Correlates of Consciousness: Empirical and Conceptual Questions*, ed. T. Metzinger. MIT Press.

Gennaro, R. 1993. Brute experience and the higher- order thought theory of consciousness. *Philosophical Papers* 22: 51 – 69.

Gennaro, R. 1996. *Consciousness and Self- Consciousness: A Defense of the Higher- Order Thought Theory of Consciousness*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Gennaro, R. 2006. Between pure self- referentialism and the (extrinsic) HOT theory of consciousness. In *Self-Representational Approaches to Consciousness*, ed. U. Kriegel and K. Williford. MIT Press.

Gennaro, R. 2008. Representationalism, peripheral awareness, and the transparency of experience. *Philosophical Studies* 139: 39 – 56.

Gennaro, R. 2009. Animals, consciousness, and I-thoughts. In *Philosophy of Animal Minds*, ed. Robert Lurz. Cambridge University Press.

Gennaro, R. 2012. *The Consciousness Paradox: Consciousness, Concepts, and Higher-Order Thoughts.* MIT Press.

Kriegel, U. 2003a. Consciousness as intransitive self-consciousness: Two views and an argument. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 33: 103 – 132.

Kriegel , U. 2003b. Consciousness, higher-order content, and the individuation of vehicles. *Synthese* 134 : 477 – 504.

Kreigel, U. 2005. Naturalizing subjective character. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71: 23–56.

Kriegel, U. 2006. The same order monitoring theory of consciousness. In *Self-Representational Approaches to Consciousness*, eds. U. Kriegel and K. Williford. Cambridge, MA : MIT Press.

Kriegel, U. 2009. *Subjective Consciousness*. Oxford University Press.

Rosenthal, D. 2005. *Consciousness and Mind*. Oxford University Press.

Smith, D. W. 1986. The structure of (self-)consciousness. *Topoi* 5: 149 – 156.

Smith, D. W. 1989. *The Circle of Acquaintance*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Smith, D. W. 2004. *Mind World: Essays in Phenomenology and Ontology*. Cambridge University Press.