Taking Phenomenology at Face Value: The Priority of State Consciousness in Light of the For-me-ness of Experience

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Abstract

An important distinction lies between consciousness attributed to creatures, or subjects, (creature consciousness) and consciousness attributed to mental states (state consciousness). Most contemporary theories of consciousness aim at explaining what makes a mental state conscious, paying scant attention to the problem of creature consciousness. This attitude relies on a deeper, and generally overlooked, assumption that once an explanation of state consciousness is provided, one has also explained all the relevant features of creature consciousness. I call this the priority of state consciousness thesis (PSC). In this paper, I want to explore how the renewed centrality bestowed to phenomenology in contemporary discussions on consciousness challenges PSC and, consequently, the standard way of framing the problem of consciousness. More precisely, I examine PSC in light of a view about the structure of phenomenal character that is paradigmatic of the approach above. This is subjectivism about phenomenal character (SUBJ), according to which a mental state is conscious when it acquires the property of forme-ness. I argue that PSC and SUBJ are incompatible because the latter implies that creature consciousness is explanatorily prior to state consciousness. Consequently, if SUBJ is true, then PSC is false, and what constitutes the problem of consciousness is primarily a problem of explaining (a kind of) creature consciousness. I conclude by defending my claim from a pair of possible objections and drawing some implications for the discussion of for-me-ness and the debate on the explanation of consciousness.

Keywords: Phenomenal consciousness, Creature consciousness, State consciousness, For-me-ness, Subjective character.

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that an important distinction lies between consciousness attributed to creatures, or subjects, and consciousness attributed to mental states. The first concept has been referred to as *creature consciousness* and the second as *state consciousness*. When such a distinction is made, having in mind the

experiential dimension of consciousness—captured by Nagel's (1974) famous expression 'something it is like' and, more generally, by the notion of phenomenal consciousness (Block 1995)—two distinct questions are raised.

First, what makes a mental state a phenomenally conscious state (an experience)? Second, what makes a creature a phenomenally conscious creature (an experiencer)? We might call the former the question of phenomenal state consciousness and the latter the question of phenomenal creature consciousness.

The question of phenomenal creature consciousness is rarely explicitly addressed in the contemporary philosophy of mind. Within the context of the explanation of consciousness, developing theories regarding what makes a mental state a phenomenally conscious state is standard. Typically, this question is ultimately recast in terms of the distinctive properties that conscious mental states have and nonconscious states do not have—that is, in terms of the properties that constitute the mental states' phenomenal character. Thus, according to mainstream philosophy of mind, the problem of consciousness is fundamentally the problem of understanding how mental states acquire phenomenal character.

However, this way of framing the problem of consciousness relies on a deeper, and generally overlooked, assumption concerning the relationship between creature and state consciousness, according to which, once an explanation of phenomenal state consciousness is provided, one has also explained all the relevant features of what makes a creature phenomenally conscious. Accordingly, state consciousness is explanatorily prior to creature consciousness. Let us call this the priority of state consciousness (PSC) thesis.

In this paper, I want to explore how the renewed centrality bestowed to phenomenology in contemporary discussions on consciousness challenges PSC. More precisely, I will examine PSC in light of a view that is sometimes run together with the latter and that is paradigmatic of the attitude above concerning the role of phenomenology in theorising about consciousness. Such a view is so-called subjectivism about phenomenal character (SUBJ)—the view according to which the subjective character, or for-me-ness,2 of the experience is the property that makes a mental state a phenomenally conscious state. I argue that PSC is incompatible with SUBJ because the latter implies that a kind of creature consciousness is explanatorily prior to state consciousness. Consequently, if SUBJ is true, then PSC is false, and what constitutes the problem of consciousness is primarily a problem of explaining (a kind of) creature consciousness³. The route I take to these conclusions is as follows. In Section 2, I outline PSC in more detail, clarifying both the notions of creature and state consciousness and the relationship between them that PSC advocates. In Section 3, I examine SUBJ and the role played by phenomenological observations in motivating it. In Section 4, I present my argument against PSC based on SUBJ. I begin by clarifying what phenomenon is supposed to constitute the for-me-ness of experience. Then, I argue that the latter, combined with PSC, produces a vicious circularity in which creature consciousness is explained in

¹ cf. Kriegel 2009: Chpt.2.

² In the literature, subjective character and for-me-ness are synonymous. Therefore, in this paper, I will use them interchangeably.

The reasons why I added the bracketed specification will be clear in due course.

terms of state consciousness, but, in turn, the latter is explained in terms of the former. As such, if one would maintain SUBJ, PSC must be rejected. Finally, in Section 5, I discuss, and dismiss, a couple of potential objections to my case based on a family of positions that account for the phenomenon constituting *for-me-ness* ultimately in terms of a mental state's self-awareness.

Naturally, the concerns of the present paper will primarily be of interest to those who have at least some *trust* in SUBJ. However, I hope the discussion will also interest those who possess no sympathy for it, if only because they can quickly overturn the result of this work. If PSC is supposed to be non-negotiable, one can use its conflict with SUBJ to argue *against* the latter.

2. The Priority of State Consciousness (PSC) Thesis

As I mentioned, PSC holds that state consciousness is explanatorily prior to creature consciousness—that is, once one has explained what makes a mental state a conscious state, one has also provided an account of what makes a creature a conscious creature. This thesis is likely the most held view regarding the relationship between creature and state consciousness, although it is not always expressed explicitly.⁴ This is because the very issue of the relationship between the properties in question is often neglected.⁵ Nevertheless, PSC is usually implied in most contemporary theories of consciousness, playing a prominent role in the account of consciousness they provide.⁶ As I hope will become clear by the end of this Section, indeed, such a view is almost a necessary move for those who consider consciousness fundamentally a property of mental states and who consider an account of state consciousness to be an *exhaustive* theory of consciousness. In this Section, I outline PSC in a more detailed way. I begin with the clarification of the notions of creature and state consciousness.

⁴ Philosophers who formulate PSC explicitly include, among others, Block (1995), Dretske (2005), Gennaro (2012) and Kriegel (2009).

⁵ Peressini (2018) represents a valuable exception. He explicitly recognizes that Nagel's notion 'something it is like'—'SIL' in his terminology—is applied both to entities and to such entities' mental states. He also claims that SIL for mental states is the starting point for most theories of consciousness and seems to embody the assumption that one can reduce SIL for entities to SIL for mental states (*ibid.*: Sec. 3). Terminological differences apart, such an assumption is PSC.

⁶ One might grant that PSC is the most popular view on the relationship between creature and state consciousness, but, nevertheless, it does not make a substantial difference in discussions about consciousness. The fact that most theories consider consciousness primarily as a property of mental states is, as it were, something incidental in the literature. The order of priority can be easily reversed without a substantial loss for theory of consciousness. Such a thought, however, is misleading. For one thing, different conceptions of the structure of a phenomenon can yield very different explanations of it (cf. Bayne 2007; Nida-Rümelin 2017). In this regard, Kriegel points out that "one's conception of the explanandum often bubbles up to the explanans-level surface, so that one's explanatory theory is just the outer expression of one's prior commitments about the nature of the explanandum" (Kriegel 2009: 166). Arguably, since PSC is a view that claims for a specific—and surely not neutral—conception of the structure of consciousness, it drives some explanations over others.

2.1 Two Problems of Phenomenal Consciousness: Conscious States and Conscious Creatures

In some instances, we speak of mental states, such as perceptions or feelings, as being conscious. In sentences such as 'Marco's desire is conscious' and 'I have a conscious memory of the incident', for example, 'is conscious' and 'conscious' are being used to refer to a mental state of a person. On the other hand, we also refer to persons or creatures as being conscious. In sentences such as 'Smith is conscious', 'Smith is conscious of the warmth of her body' or 'dogs are conscious', for example, 'is conscious' is being used to refer to a creature. Since Rosenthal (1986), it is accepted that these different uses underpin two different properties: respectively, *state consciousness* (*SC*) and *creature consciousness* (*CC*).⁷ Thus, CC is a property of a creature, person—or, in less metaphysically demanding terms—a *subject* considered as a whole; whereas SC is a property of particular mental states.

Worth noticing is that such a distinction primarily describes a difference between *types of conscious entities*. That is, the stress of the distinction is put on *who* or *what* is conscious and not on the kind of consciousness at stake. As such, the difference between CC and SC should be neutral regarding the various senses in which a creature and a mental state can be considered conscious—e.g., access conscious, phenomenal conscious, self-conscious. Instead, some philosophers use the distinction at issue by embedding into it an assumption regarding which sense of consciousness CC and SC indicate. According to such philosophers, CC is intended to denote the property of *wakefulness*—the property of being awake, as opposed to being asleep—and SC, the property of *phenomenal consciousness*.

This is not how I will use the notions in question. Although it might be that wakefulness is a variety of CC, it is undoubtedly not the only sense in which a creature can be said to be conscious. ¹⁰ Thus, to avoid further ambiguities, I follow Kriegel (2009: 26) in defining CC as whatever consciousness property that it would be *a category mistake* to attribute to something that is not a subject (such as a mental state), and SC as whatever consciousness property that it would be *a category mistake* to attribute to something that is not a mental state (such as a creature).

The result of these definitions is that the nature of the 'consciousness properties' that CC and SC pick out will be fixed by the sense of consciousness one is interested in investigating. If, for example, the inquiry is about the access sense of consciousness, CC will pick out the property of being an access-conscious subject and SC the property of being an access-conscious mental state. As for the

⁷ Philosophers who explicitly employ the distinction include, among others, Bayne (2007), Block (1995), Carruthers (2000) Dretske (2005), Gennaro (2012), Kriegel (2009), Levine (2001), Rosenthal (1986, 1997), Tye (2000) and Zahavi (2005).

⁸ The distinction between access and phenomenal consciousness is due to Block (1995). ⁹ Philosophers who interpret the distinction in this way include, among others, Carruthers (2000), Gennaro (2012) and Rosenthal (1986, 1997).

¹⁰ In dreaming, for example, people are likely not awake. Nonetheless, they seem to be conscious in the phenomenal sense (cf. Bayne 2007: Sec. 1). At the same time, due to the sleep-wake cycle, a person in a vegetative state can be considered awake, but they are unlikely to be conscious in the phenomenal sense.

present paper, the relevant notion of consciousness is phenomenal consciousness. Accordingly, CC shall be understood as a phenomenal consciousness property that it would be a category mistake to attribute to something that is not a creature; and SC as a phenomenal consciousness property that it would be a category mistake to attribute to something that is not a mental state. Such an applied use of the notions of CC and SC can be regimented by calling the former phenomenal creature consciousness and the latter phenomenal state consciousness. In any case, for practical reasons, I will keep using the terms 'creature consciousness' and 'state consciousness' as shorthand for the abovementioned notions.

Before moving on, another point concerning creature and state consciousness is worth making to avoid potential misunderstandings. In the consciousness literature, especially the literature on monitoring theories of consciousness, it is common to further specify the two consciousness properties at issue by drawing the parallel distinction between *transitive* and *intransitive consciousness*. The former is a relational property expressed by the transitive locution 'x is conscious of y.' The latter is an intrinsic property expressed by the intransitive locution 'x is conscious.' Accordingly, it is customary to say that creature and state consciousness admit intransitive and transitive subtypes. I will not question this way of articulating creature and state consciousness in what follows. However, a *caveat* must be added to it and, more precisely, to the notion of transitive consciousness when applied to mental states.

To begin with, the reader might be puzzled about such a property. If it makes perfect sense to say that creatures can be conscious of things, the same cannot be said for mental states. To some extent, the puzzlement is well-grounded. It is simply a fact about how 'conscious of' works in English that mental states cannot be conscious of anything. In fact, some scholars restrict the transitive/intransitive dichotomy to creature consciousness, by maintaining that state consciousness is always intransitive (cf. Bennett and Hacker 2003; Janzen 2008). Others, however, have a more liberal attitude and ascribe transitive consciousness also to mental states. Typically, they do not claim that mental states can be conscious of something, but they consider a mental state transitively conscious when its subject is transitively conscious in virtue of being in that mental state (cf. Kriegel 2009: Chpt. 2; Rosenthal 1990: 743). On this view, thus, transitive state consciousness is a philosophical term of art, used to denote the property a mental state does have when it makes its subject conscious of something.

There is nothing wrong in using this term of art, provided that we recognise it for what it is: a *façon de parler*—i.e., a convenient way of speaking of the mental states we are in *while* we are conscious. Hesitations on this fact are in danger of overestimating the philosophical significance of transitive state consciousness, leading one to think that the latter is a substantive kind of consciousness. However, that things are otherwise is particularly evident when the phenomenal sense of consciousness is considered. Given the definition of SC offered above, one can appreciate how the alleged property of transitive state consciousness does not qualify as a kind of SC, as it is not a *phenomenal* consciousness proper-

¹¹ However, in Section 5.1, I will discuss some philosophers that seem to literally ascribe the predicate 'is conscious of' to mental states.

ty. 12 To put it differently, unless substantive claims are made, phenomenal state consciousness is only intransitive, that is, mental states can bear just the property of being phenomenally conscious (to be experiences), and not also the property of being phenomenally conscious of something. As such, only creature consciousness admits *bona fide* intransitive and transitive subtypes. More precisely, intransitive creature consciousness is the subject's property of being phenomenally conscious (to be an experiencer), while transitive creature consciousness is the subject's property of being phenomenally conscious of something (to experience something).

2.2 A Reductive Account of Creature Consciousness

To distinguish between CC and SC is not to say that they can manifest themselves without one another. According to many philosophers, it would be quite odd if a conscious creature existed, but no one of its mental states was conscious or if there was a conscious mental state without the creature who harbours that mental state being conscious.

Nevertheless, the logical interdependence between CC and SC neither means that the distinction is unreal nor that it has irrelevant implications for discussions about consciousness, particularly concerning the issue of explanation. Indeed, for the very fact of being properties of different entities, CC and SC raise two different questions about consciousness: for CC, the question is what makes a creature a phenomenally conscious creature; for SC, it is what makes a mental state a phenomenally conscious state.

No guarantee exists that the answer to one question will assist much with answering the other. Arguably, what makes a creature a phenomenally conscious creature requires a different explanation from what makes a mental state a phenomenally conscious state; at least, the two explanations do not transparently entail one another. We can say, therefore, that CC and SC set out two distinct *explananda* of consciousness.

The presence of two distinct *explananda* of consciousness introduces a complication in the explanatory project. As long as phenomenal consciousness can be viewed as both a property of mental states and a property of creatures, an account of one property will only partially explain it. An *exhaustive* theory will require an account of what makes a creature a phenomenally conscious creature and what makes a mental state a phenomenally conscious state.

To remove the complication above, philosophers typically appeal to PSC. According to PSC, SC is explanatorily prior to CC. Thus, if apparently two "mysteries" related to consciousness exist, what is required to explain what

¹² By being the property that a mental state has when its subject is conscious of something, transitive state consciousness can be hypothetically ascribed even to intransitively unconscious mental states. This is effectively the view advocated by proponents of so-called higher-order theory of consciousness, who maintain that intransitively unconscious states can make their subject conscious of things. However, there are philosophers, notably Kriegel (2009), who take transitive state consciousness to be dependent upon intransitive state consciousness. Accordingly, cases in which a subject's mental state is transitively, but not intransitively, conscious are not possible.

¹³ However, it could create a *prima facie* reason in favour of it.

¹⁴ Cf. Rosenthal 1997: 730 and Manson 2000.

makes a creature phenomenally conscious is merely an account of what makes a mental state phenomenally conscious. PSC, in other words, makes CC "something of an explanatory free-rider on [SC]" (Bayne 2007: 6). As such, it is this property that a theory of consciousness must account for.

It should be clear that the sense of 'priority' here is not grasped by the loose claim—perhaps motivated by methodological and theoretical reasons—that inquiries into the explanation of consciousness should begin by targeting SC but, rather, by the more demanding claim that inquiries also *end* by targeting it. The mere fact that an explanation of consciousness starts with the question about SC, rather than—say—CC, does not make the former prior to the latter in the sense at stake in PSC.

The question, now, is how to justify PSC. How and why is SC supposed to be explanatorily *prior* to CC? Supporters of PSC usually account for this priority by claiming that CC's notion is analysable in terms of SC. The idea seems to be that by reflecting upon the concept of CC, one realises that the latter is *derivative* on the notion of SC. That is, for a creature to be phenomenally conscious (e.g., a creature that there is something it is like to be) is nothing more than for it to have mental states that are phenomenally conscious (states that there is something it is like to be in). ¹⁵ As such, the notion of SC is more fundamental than the notion of CC, making the former property *prior* to the latter.

Such a reductive account of CC is expressed effectively by Block (1995), who claims that CC is "parasitic" on SC:

What it is for there to be something it is like to be me, that is for me to be P-conscious, is for me to have one or more states that are P-conscious. [And] what it is for a person to be P-unconscious is for his states (all or the relevant ones) to lack P-consciousness. Creature P-consciousness is parasitic on state P-consciousness (Block 1995: 241, my italics).

In the same spirit, Kriegel states that phenomenal state consciousness is more basic than phenomenal creature consciousness (Kriegel 2009: 31 and 133), whereas Gennaro claims that "some kind of state consciousness *is implied* by creature consciousness" (Gennaro 2012: 6). Different formulations aside, the aim of these philosophers is not only to signal that the notions of CC and SC are *somehow* related but also—and foremost—to specify the nature of such a relationship: CC is nothing but the subject's having, or being in, a phenomenally conscious mental state. In line with these considerations, we might shape the definition of PSC in the following way:¹⁶

PSC For any Subject S and a time t, S instantiates a creature-consciousness property at t in virtue of being in a mental state M, such that M has the property of (intransitive) state-consciousness at t,

where 'in virtue of' expresses a non-causal explanatory relation, which means that something is the case because something else is the case. 17

¹⁵ For a similar point, see Peressini 2018: Sec. 3.1.

¹⁶ Adapted from Kriegel 2009: 130.

¹⁷ This is the sense of the expression 'in virtue of' I will use through the paper.

3. Subjectivism about Phenomenal Character (SUBJ)

By claiming that SC is prior to CC, PSC suggests that the primary task of the theory of consciousness is to account for the mystery that—at least *prima facie*—SC raises, namely the fact that when you are in a phenomenally conscious state, there is something it is like to be in it. There is something it is like, for instance, to see a red apple, while there is nothing it is like to have a blood type. As previously stated, such a "what it is likeness" of conscious mental states is often called the *phenomenal character* of the experience. It is phenomenal character that distinguishes conscious mental states from unconscious ones.

This, however, is only the first insight into the nature of the *explanandum*. Indeed, while a broad consensus lies in the fact that phenomenal character is the feature responsible for the mystery of SC, what constitutes it is a matter of renewed debate in philosophy of mind. Until a few years ago, philosophers of mind used to identify phenomenal character with the qualitative character (or dimension) of the experience, usually spelt out in terms of the characteristic qualitative properties, or qualia, that conscious mental states have, and unconscious states do not. Accordingly, a mental state has phenomenal character in virtue of having a specific "qualitative feel [...] these qualitative feels are also knowns as phenomenal qualities, or qualia for short" (Chalmers 1996: 4). Thus, for example, what it is like for me to undergo a visual experience of a red apple is to be in a mental state that harbours a particular qualitative property: the quale of the red apple. In this view, the problem of state consciousness is the problem of understanding how and why conscious mental states have qualitative properties. Following Kriegel (2009: 53), we might call this thesis qualitativism about phenomenal character (OUA).

However, some philosophers have recently called QUA into question (e.g., Levine 2001; Kriegel 2009; Zahavi 2005). They do not reject qualitative character as a component of phenomenal character, but they claim that the latter is not sufficient to account for what makes a mental state conscious. Phenomenal character, they stress, has a more complex structure than it is typically recognised as having. For instance, consider my visual experience of the red apple again. According to these philosophers, if I merely identify the phenomenal character of such an experience with its qualitative character, I have forgotten to consider another essential aspect, namely that such a visual experience affects me in a special way, and no one else is affected by my experience in the same way. That experience, in other words, is given to me in a first-personal way—it is like something for me. Such an aspect is called the for-me-ness, or subjective character, of the experience. Thus, the what-it-is-likeness of conscious mental states—their phenomenal character—is, properly speaking, what-it-is-like-for-meness (Zahavi and Kriegel 2015: 36).

The phenomenon underlying the *for-me-ness* of experience requires specification, however. I will say something more about this in Sec. 4.2. For now, it is simply important to note that such a *givenness* of the experience to the subject is not intended to capture the mere *occurrence* in me of the experience—that is, the metaphysical fact that experience always comes with a subject who undergoes it. Rather, it is supposed to be a phenomenally manifest aspect of our mental life, something that contributes to the subject's phenomenology. As Zahavi and Kriegel recognise, "to say that an experience is for me is precisely to say some-

thing more than that it is in me. It is to state not only a metaphysical fact but also a phenomenological fact" (Zahavi and Kriegel 2015: 36).

To distinguish between qualitative and subjective character is not to say that they can occur apart from one another. The distinction, rather, is meant to be a conceptual one. It can be spelt out as a difference between levels of generality of SC: subjective character captures the most general feature of a conscious mental state, which remains invariant across the different experiences, namely that there is something it is like *for the subject who undergoes the mental state*; qualitative character, instead, captures the specific feature of a conscious mental state, the particular "something it is like", which changes across the experiences. In other words, subjective character establishes the existence conditions of an experience, whereas qualitative character establishes the identity conditions of an experience.

Since subjective character is what differentiates conscious mental states from non-conscious ones, its proponents regard it as "the central explanandum of the theory of consciousness" (Kriegel 2012: 444). What a theory of SC must explain in the first instance is the peculiar feature common to all phenomenally conscious states. In this view, therefore, the problem of SC is primarily the problem of understanding how and why conscious mental states are given to the subject who undergoes them. Let us call this view—the view that a mental state is phenomenally conscious in virtue of being given to the subject—subjectivism about phenomenal character (SUBJ). A more formal definition of the latter might be the following:

SUBJ For any mental state M of a subject S, such that S is in M, M instantiates the property of (state) consciousness in virtue of being phenomenally given to S.

Even though QUA remains the mainstream view in philosophy of mind, an ever-increasing number of philosophers advocate for SUBJ (cf. Kriegel 2009; Levine 2001; Strawson 2011; Williford 2015; Zahavi 2005, 2014; Zahavi and Kriegel 2015). Their belief in SUBJ is grounded mainly in phenomenological reasons. An account of the latter is a complex task that goes beyond the scope of this paper. But it is worth mentioning them to emphasise the pivotal role that the first-person reflection plays in discussing the structure of phenomenal character, something that makes SUBJ one of the most representative views of the growing prominence reserved to phenomenological observations within analytic philosophy of mind. Indeed, while it seems that no strong conceptual reasons exist to conclude that all experiences are characterised by *for-me-ness* (Farrell and McClelland, 2017), proponents of SUBJ, nevertheless, state that the latter is phenomenally manifest, and, therefore, it is hard to deny (cf. Kriegel 2011: 4; Zahavi 2014: 22).

4. Against PSC: The Case From SUBJ

In the previous Sections, I considered two claims about the structure of consciousness: PSC and SUBJ. In this Section, I develop the case against PSC. It is, as I said, a restricted case. I do not want to claim that PSC cannot be a plausible

 $^{^{18}}$ See McClelland 2015 for a review of direct and indirect phenomenological reasons in favour of SUBJ.

model of the structure of consciousness in general. What I want to argue for, rather, is that the property of state consciousness cannot be explanatorily prior to creature consciousness—and hence, it cannot constitute the property responsible for the mystery of consciousness—if it is true that what makes a mental state phenomenally conscious is the mental state's being for the subject. Simply put, PSC cannot be true if SUBJ is true.

The argument for this can be thought of as proceeding in two stages. In the first stage, I provide the constraints that a theory must meet to establish the thesis resulting from the conjunction of PSC and SUBJ—which is Subj&PSC (4.1). In the second stage, I show that these conditions cannot be met due to the nature of the phenomenon that is taken to constitute the for-me-ness of the experience, revealing a circularity problem for Subj&PSC (4.2).

4.1 The First Stage: Setting the Constraints for Subj&PSC

In isolation, PSC and SUBJ are theses aiming to indicate, or point to, the property responsible for the mystery of consciousness. PSC, on the one hand, by accounting for CC in terms of SC, identifies the latter as what is to be explained; SUBJ, on the other hand, by claiming that a mental state is conscious only if it has the property of *for-me-ness*, identifies the source of the mystery of consciousness in such a mental state's being for the subject.

It is worth noting that the two theses do not necessarily entail one another. It is possible to endorse PSC without SUBJ. It is the case, for instance, of those philosophers who believe that the phenomenal character of the experience is constituted wholly by the qualitative character. Endorsing SUBJ without PSC is also possible. One can acknowledge that a mental state is conscious only if it is given to the subject while, at the same time, denying that the latter also explains what makes a creature phenomenally conscious.

Nevertheless, most proponents of SUBJ build PSC into their theories. Paradigmatic in this regard is self-representationalism, the most well-developed version of which is explicitly construed as a theory combining SUBJ with PSC (cf. Kriegel 2009). This practice is not so surprising. After all, as I stated previously, the idea that phenomenal consciousness is primarily a property of mental states is mainstream in the current philosophy of mind. Accordingly, viewing SUBJ as a better refinement of such a property by making a progressive reduction of the explanandum of consciousness is natural: the problem of what it is for a creature to be phenomenally conscious is ultimately reduced to the problem of what it is for a mental state to be given to the subject.

Even if SUBJ and PSC are often endorsed together, reflecting upon which constraints a theory must meet to successfully endorse the conjunction of the two theses, namely Subj&PSC, is helpful because it allows us to recognise better the problem one might encounter in endorsing Subj&PSC. Thus, let me make these constraints explicit.

Of course, a particularly pedestrian observation is that such a theory endorses both PSC and SUBJ. Hence, it must be a theory that claims both that creature consciousness is explainable in terms of state consciousness and that the latter is explainable in terms of the property of for-me-ness. However, these cannot be the only constraints for successfully endorsing Subj&PSC. Consider,

¹⁹ I will discuss the details of this theory in Section 5.2.

indeed, a theory that claims both PSC and SUBJ but that, in the end, provides an explanation of for-me-ness that refers to a kind of creature consciousness. Would such a theory successfully endorse Subj&PSC? The answer is negative. By definition, the for-me-ness of the experience is the property that makes a mental state phenomenally conscious, and an explanation of it in terms of creature consciousness would conflict with PSC, causing an explanatory circularity. Therefore, a theory that endorses Subj&PSC is also—and foremost—committed to claiming that no kind of creature consciousness enters into the account of forme-ness.

In light of these considerations, I believe stating that a successful theory of Subj&PSC is committed to meeting the following three constraints is plausible:

- (i) *The PSC constraint*: Creature consciousness must be explained in terms of state consciousness.
- (ii) *The SUBJ constraint*: State consciousness must be explained in terms of for-me-ness.
- (iii) *The non-circularity constraint*: The property of for-me-ness must not be explained in terms of creature consciousness.

The question we must ask ourselves, then, is whether a theory endorsing Subj&PSC is able to meet the abovementioned constraints. To answer this question, it is crucial to deepen what exactly defenders of SUBJ mean when they claim that a mental state is given to its subject.

4.2 The Second Stage: The Constraints Cannot Be Met

Proponents of SUBJ centre their discussion around the notion of the for-me-ness of experience. The idea, as we have seen in Section 3, is that conscious mental states are not merely states that take place in me, "they are also for me, precisely in the sense that there is something it is like for me to have those states" (Zahavi 2014: 34). However, at this point, a natural question is whether giving a more precise characterisation of the phenomenon under investigation is possible. To say that a mental state is conscious if and only if it is for me, or has the property of for-me-ness, does not say much: what does the phenomenally conscious state being for me consist in? Or, better, what phenomenon are philosophers pointing to when discussing the mental state's subjective significance?

The nature of the property at issue drives a first step in the answer of such a question. Unlike the qualitative character—which seems to pick out an intrinsic property of mental states—for-me-ness, as suggested by the term itself, appears to be a relational property: it is the mental state's property of being given to the subject. Such property, hence, pinpoints a relation between the subject and one of their mental states. Since, arguably, a relational property is grounded in the relation it picks out, it follows that the mental state's being for me seems essentially to involve the subject bearing a certain relation with her mental state.

What is the nature of such a relation? Interestingly, a common pattern exists that can be recognised in the literature. When abstracted from the details, all proponents of SUBJ agree in claiming that the relation at stake in the for-me-

ness of the experience is an epistemic relation in which the subject is somehow aware of their experience.²⁰ Here is how Kriegel expresses the idea:

If there is something that makes a conscious experience "for me," then by having the experience, I must be somehow aware of having it. For if I am wholly unaware of my experience, there is no sense in which it could be said to be "for me." (Kriegel 2005: 25).

More formally, defenders of SUBJ endorse the following principle:

(*) For any mental state M of a subject S, such that S is in M, M is phenomenally given to S (and hence, has the property of state consciousness) in virtue of S being aware of M in the right way.

(*) goes by different names in the literature, such as 'inner awareness principle' and 'self-awareness principle', and it comes in different versions. Depending on how the 'in the right way' clause is unpacked, various accounts of the phenomenon constituting for-me-ness result. Guillot (2017), for instance, describes three different ways of specifying the clause in question, which correspond to three different versions of (*): S is *just* aware of M; S is aware of M *and* themselves; S is aware of M *as their own*. Which of these accounts is the best characterisation of such a phenomenon is a matter of debate. In any case, we do not need to deal with this debate. For our purposes here, it is important that (*) describes the phenomenon that constitutes the for-me-ness of experience as the subject's being somehow aware of their experience.

A qualification about the sense of awareness at stake here is required. Indeed, the term 'awareness' admits at least two different senses: a non-phenomenal and a phenomenal one. According to the non-phenomenal sense, 'awareness' is, roughly, a synonym for 'knowledge'. As such, the awareness in question captures only an epistemic fact, without the need that this fact "enters" into the phenomenal field of the subject. Instead, the phenomenal sense links the notion of awareness with phenomenology. If, for instance, a person is aware of a red apple, that person *experiences* (is phenomenally conscious of) the red apple. Accordingly, 'awareness' is a synonym for 'experience.'

Although the non-phenomenal sense is quite common in discussions about consciousness,²¹ this is not how proponents of SUBJ usually intend the term, or so I would claim. We should not forget, indeed, that for-me-ness is supposed to be an aspect of the phenomenal character of the experience and that it is meant to be phenomenologically manifest. Arguably, this is possible only if the awareness in question is a kind of phenomenal awareness;²² that is, as effectively stated by Guillot, such "awareness is experiential, and registers as a certain way it feels to the subject" (Guillot 2017: 108, my italics).²³

²⁰ For contemporary philosophers who endorse some version of this general claim see, among others, Kriegel (2009, 2005), Levine (2001), Nida-Rümelin (2017), Williford (2015) and Zahavi (2005). The view can be also tracked back to Kant, Brentano, and classical phenomenologists.

²¹ High-order representational theories of consciousness, for example, appeal to this sense of awareness.

²² For an argument of this sort, see Kriegel 2009: Chpt. 4.

²³ From this, it should be clear that there is only a superficial similarity between (*) and the so-called Transitivity Principle endorsed by proponents of higher-order representa-

If what I have stated is correct, it follows that endorsing the view that forme-ness is the phenomenon to be explained involves endorsing the view that the latter is constituted by—or, more generally, is explained in terms of—the subject's transitive consciousness of their mental state.²⁴ In short, SUBJ entails (*) because what for-me-ness amounts to just is the subject's being phenomenally conscious of (experiencing) their mental state.

The fact that SUBJ comes, as it were, bundled with (*)—call it SUBJ*, is problematic for those who want to endorse Subj&PSC. For SUBJ* seems to break the non-circularity constraint. Taking for granted that the property of being conscious of the experience is a property borne by subjects, 25 a kind of creature consciousness—which is, more precisely, transitive creature consciousness, is indeed required to explain the property of for-me-ness. However, if for-me-ness is explained in terms of creature consciousness, then a circularity occurs: a subject S is conscious in virtue of being in a conscious mental state M, but M itself is conscious in virtue of having for-me-ness—that is, in virtue of the subject being conscious of M.

One might contend that, in discussing consciousness, some circularity is unavoidable and that this does not get into embarrassment. Block, for instance, in his famous (1995), acknowledges that he cannot define phenomenal consciousness if not by using synonyms.²⁶ However, here the circularity is more problematic: if one takes for granted that being a conscious subject is nothing over and above having conscious mental states and takes the latter to be states the subject is conscious of, the result is a problematic explanatory circularity.

Notice, in addition, that appealing to the intransitive/transitive axis to contend the circularity will not help much—that is, complaining that we must distinguish between the subject's property of being phenomenally conscious, namely intransitive consciousness, and the subject's property of being phenomenally conscious of something, namely transitive consciousness. First of all, arguably, the fact that for-me-ness is explicated in terms of transitive creature consciousness presupposes intransitive creature consciousness. The provided explanation would still be plainly circular thus. To avoid circularity, one must maintain that transitive creature consciousness does not depend on intransitive creature consciousness, which is quite doubtful. According to Kriegel (2004), for instance, that the concept of consciousness-of presupposes the concept of consciousness (simpliciter) seems to be a conceptual truth. If it did not, we would have to admit that a person could be unconsciously conscious of something (ibid.: 184). Such a conceptual consideration is even more compelling when phenomenal consciousness is at stake. In fact, how could a subject experience something without being an experiencer in the first place?

In any case, even granting that transitive creature consciousness does not depend on intransitive creature consciousness, this does not resolve the circulari-

tionalism. For the former, unlike the latter, requires that the subject's awareness of their mental state is transitive phenomenal consciousness, that is, the subject's property of being phenomenally conscious of (experiencing) their mental state.

²⁴ Here I am assuming that the relation expressed by the locution 'is constituted by' can underwrite (at least some) non-causal explanations (for a discussion, see Audi 2012: 105-106). ²⁵ I cannot see, indeed, how to argue against this claim.

²⁶ Cf. Block 1995: 230.

ty I am considering here. PSC is the view according to which state consciousness is prior to creature consciousness, and this, of course, also requires that the property of transitive creature consciousness is explained in terms of state consciousness. However, as we have seen, SUBJ* claims otherwise. Therefore, even if the subject's property of being conscious of their mental states might not be sufficient to establish an unrestricted case for a circular explanation, it is so concerning PSC.

As far as I can see, such a circularity problem emerges because PSC and SUBJ state two conflicting views about the relationship between creature and state consciousness. According to PSC, creature consciousness obtains in virtue of state consciousness, but, according to SUBJ, state consciousness obtains in virtue of creature consciousness. This conflict, therefore, is what prevents Subj&PSC to meet the non-circularity constraint and it implies that, if SUBJ is true, then PSC must be false.²⁷

5. The State Self-Awareness (or the For-Itself-Ness) Challenge

At this point of the discussion, the fundamental motivation to call into question PSC should be clear: PSC is in tension with the view, phenomenologically driven, that a mental state is conscious in virtue of having for-me-ness. What I intend to do now is to defend and clarify the point further. I will do this by considering a family of positions that could be taken to represent a challenge to the abovementioned case. Such positions—sometimes unified under the label of the 'state self-awareness view' (Guillot 2017)—revolve around the core claim that the subject's special phenomenal awareness at stake in the for-me-ness of the experience is the result of a more primitive awareness that mental states bear with themselves. Depending on whether the relevant state awareness is interpreted either as a form of phenomenal awareness (typically spelt out in terms of acquaintance) or as a non-phenomenal (usually representational) one, the view gives rise to two distinct objections, which I will call respectively the 'state self-consciousness' objection and the 'state self-representation' objection.

One can also frame the abovementioned objections in terms of the property that the putative state self-awareness is supposed to constitute. The main tenet of the state self-awareness views, indeed, can also be captured by claiming that they maintain a conscious mental state to feature the property of *for-itself-ness*, that is, the property of being given to itself so to speak. Moreover, it is in virtue of this property that such a state has for-me-ness. Depending on whether such a for-itself-ness is further considered as a phenomenal property or not, the view gives rise to what we might call, respectively, the 'phenomenal for-itself-ness' objection and the 'non-phenomenal for-itself-ness' objection, which collimate with the 'state self-consciousness' and the 'state self-representation' objections.

²⁷ More precisely, it is SUBJ* which is in tension with PSC. However, since I've argued for the entailment between SUBJ and (*), I consider SUBJ and SUBJ* to be equivalent. Here, and in the reminder of the paper, the choice between them is driven by reasons of clarity.

5.1 The 'State Self-Consciousness' (or the 'Phenomenal For-Itself-Ness') Objection

As I stated in 4.2, despite a variety of differences, most proponents of SUBJ share the view that the phenomenon that phenomenologically constitutes the mental state's for-me-ness is the subject's consciousness of their experience. On this construal, who is conscious—that is, who is the subject-relatum of the relation of consciousness—is the subject of the experience (or the self), while the experience features as the object-relatum (the conscious mental state). Some supporters of SUBJ, however, seem to advocate for a different view. According to the latter, the experiential awareness that constitutes the for-me-ness of the experience is not (or at least not just) the subject's consciousness of their experience but the experience's consciousness of itself. 28 In other words, what captures the for-me-ness of the experience at the phenomenological level—what 'grounds' its givenness to the subject—is the experience's 'reflexive capacity; its ability to disclose or reveal itself to itself' (Zahavi 2018: 4). In this reading, which leads back at least to Sartre and is sometimes called the non-egological account of selfconsciousness, the experience does not only feature as the object-relatum of the relation of consciousness but also as the subject-relatum.

Worth noticing is that the phenomenon in question—the experience's consciousness of itself—is supposed to be a phenomenally manifest phenomenon, namely something that an accurate phenomenological description reveals (cf. Williford 2015). Hence, the idea seems to be that what phenomenologically grounds the mental state's being for me is a certain phenomenal awareness the state has of itself and not the fact that its subject is conscious of it.

Based on this consideration, one might question that SUBJ, as such, entails that for-me-ness is explained in terms of creature consciousness because some views explain the conscious phenomenon constituting for-me-ness in terms of what might be called 'state self-consciousness' (Zahavi 2018: 4). However, if this is so, then the circularity afflicts only some versions of SUBJ, namely SUBJ*. As such, PSC is not in tension with SUBJ.

Even if the objection includes something true, I believe it is misplaced. It is true that, according to some philosophers, the experiential for-me-ness of the experience is properly speaking the experiential for-itself-ness of the experience. However, such views, if true, cannot be used either to develop a case against PSC, as I did, or to defend PSC from such a case because they make PSC a theoretically uninteresting thesis, or so I am going to contend.

To begin with, the claim that mental states are phenomenally aware of themselves is doubly problematic. First, we are taught to say that all conscious states of a subject contribute substantially to the subject's phenomenology—viz., what it is like to be that conscious subject. However, what type of contribution to the subject's phenomenal field is supposed to make a mental state which experiences itself? Do we have some direct phenomenological evidence that mental states are phenomenally aware of themselves? For my part, I have to say that I, qua subject of experience, do not find anything like this in my phenomenolo-

²⁸ It is not so clear whether these scholars intend such a state self-consciousness either as (i) the phenomenal awareness constituting the for-me-ness of experience or as (ii) what grounds the latter. In what follows, I will consider as (i) was the right interpretation but the bulk of what I will say can be easily applied to (ii).

gy. If mental states are literally conscious of themselves, this must be a persistently hidden experiential fact, which is *in me* rather than *for me*. This, in turn, makes unclear in what sense such awareness is *phenomenal*.

Second, the view at issue is at odds with the logical principle that the predicate 'consciousness of' cannot be ascribed to mental states.²⁹ Actually, this is a particular version of the more general principle that psychological predicates apply only to whole creatures (cf. Bennett and Hacker 2003: 72-73). If one accepts the principle, thus, the state self-consciousness view seems flawed by a categorical mistake: it is ascribing a property to mental states that can correctly be ascribed only to other entities, such as subjects.

One could interpret this way of talking metaphorically: we speak as if mental states are conscious of themselves, but we really mean that subjects are conscious of mental states, and we loosely refer to this fact as if conscious states have a 'reflexive content'. However, as I understand them, this is not what such philosophers mean when they claim that the experience manifests itself to itself; they want to say that a conscious mental state "is implicitly self-given, or, as Sartre puts it, it is for itself" (Zahavi 2005: 11), and that such a for-itself-ness is phenomenally manifest.

So, how do proponents of the view in question address such phenomenological and conceptual concerns? That is, how do they attempt to make sense of the fact that mental states are (literally) conscious of themselves? Moreover, how can they argue that such a mental state's for-itself-ness constitutes the mental state's for-me-ness at the phenomenological level? As far as I can see, to answer these questions and support their central claim, defenders of such a view advocate for an identity between the subject of the experience and the very experience (cf. Sartre 1936; Williford 2015; Zahavi 2014). Possibly, one might consider this view as an even more strange position. However, when one wraps their head "around the idea that an episode of consciousness could be the phenomenological subject of consciousness" (Williford 2015: 12), one can straightforwardly understand both in what sense experiences can be conscious of themselves and why the latter is the conscious phenomenon that constitutes the experience's being for me: metaphysically speaking, the subject and the experience are not distinct entities.

Whether or not this "minimalist" view about the subject of the experience is true, what is of interest here is that the state self-consciousness view typically goes with such an approach. This has an important implication for the objection I am considering. Arguably, if the subject of the experience is identified with the experience, the notion of creature consciousness collapses into the notion of state consciousness. However, this trivialises PSC: if there is no distinction between a conscious subject and a conscious mental state, then it is trivially true that a subject instantiates consciousness in virtue of being in a mental state that instantiates consciousness. The state self-consciousness view, hence, removes any theoretical interest in PSC: we are no longer explicating one consciousness property (creature consciousness) in terms of a more fundamental consciousness property (state consciousness). Thus, the objection, far from rehabilitating Subj&PSC as a plausible position, has the unwelcome consequence of making

²⁹ For a defence of this principle see, among others, Howell and Thompson 2017, Janzen 2008, and Kriegel 2009.

PSC a philosophically uninteresting claim. This is also why I have avoided using such views of for-me-ness in the argument from subjectivism. Since my argument targets PSC, it would be question begging for me to develop a case that relies on views that make PSC the trivial claim mentioned above.

5.2 The 'State Self-Representation' (or the 'Non-Phenomenal For-Itself-Ness') Objection

Let us now consider the challenge raised by the non-phenomenal version of the 'state self-awareness' view. Unlike the phenomenal variant, such an approach does not deny that for-me-ness is phenomenologically constituted by the subject's consciousness of their experience, but, rather, it claims that the latter is constituted by a more primitive awareness that the experience has of itself, which, however, does not enter in the subject's phenomenology. In other words, the mental state's phenomenal property of for-me-ness ultimately obtains in virtue of a certain for-itself-ness, which is construed as a non-phenomenal property of the very mental state. Self-representationalism paradigmatically exemplifies such a view. Before explaining in what way it can challenge my argument, it is beneficial to outline self-representationalism in more detail. In what follows, I will focus on Kriegel's (2009) theory as the most exhaustively developed version of self-representationalism.

Self-representationalism (SR) is a reductive theory that accounts for phenomenal consciousness in non-phenomenal terms. SR's core claim is that a mental state is phenomenally conscious in virtue of suitably representing itself. The view can be thought of as being constituted by two parts: an account of the *explanandum*—that is, phenomenal consciousness—and an account of the *explanans*—what explain phenomenal consciousness.

As for the explanandum, SR is explicitly developed as a theory that endorses both PSC and SUBJ. As such, what SR wants to explain is the conscious phenomenon that constitutes the for-me-ness of the experience. Following the logical flow of Kriegel (2009) is sufficient to appreciate this fact. At the beginning of his inquiry, Kriegel acknowledges that phenomenal consciousness can be spelt out in two ways: in terms of phenomenal mental states and in terms of phenomenal conscious subjects. However, since 'creature consciousness conceptually depends on state consciousness' (Kriegel 2009: 29), he concludes that a theory of phenomenal consciousness needs to account just for the property that makes a mental state a phenomenally conscious state. As we know from the discussion of Section 2, Kriegel endorses also SUBJ, and, accordingly, he claims that state consciousness is constituted by the mental state's being for me. I have extensively presented SUBJ and the reasons for it, so I will not dwell on this point. I just want to stress that Kriegel also endorses (*). When he comes to offer a more precise characterisation of for-me-ness, Kriegel spells it out as a certain phenomenal awareness the subject has of their experience (cf. Kriegel 2009: 106-12). According to him, it is in virtue of my special awareness of the experience that the experience is "for me." In Kriegel's view, the awareness in question takes the form of peripheral inner awareness. In any event, what is important for our discussion here is that a certain transitive creature consciousness is essential for a mental state to exhibit for-me-ness. As Kriegel puts it:

It is this inner awareness that ultimately makes the mental state phenomenally conscious at all. For it is when the subject has this inner awareness of it that the state acquires subjective character, and subjective character is what makes a state phenomenally conscious at all (Kriegel 2009: 16-17, my italics).

The explanans part of SR is fundamentally an attempt to reduce such a transitive creature consciousness in terms of a suitable mental state's self-representation. Roughly, this is how the strategy works. First, transitive creature consciousness is explained in terms of meta representation: a subject S is conscious of a mental state M in virtue of S's being in a mental state M* that represents M in the right way. Second, M (the represented state) and M* (the representing state) are taken to be numerically identical: S is conscious of M in virtue of M representing itself in the right way. Finally, 'the right way' clause is unpacked: to make S conscious of M, M's self-representation is qualified as essential, specifical, and non-derivative (cf. Kriegel 2009: 157-64).

Based on this account, we are now positioned to formulate a potential challenge to my argument. In fact, one might complain that I have, quite unduly, omitted to consider the whole argumentative strategy of most proponents of SUBJ, according to which the subject's phenomenal awareness constituting the for-me-ness of conscious states is further explained in terms of an intrinsic property of those states. More precisely, the objection could go as follows. The upshot of the argument is that PSC and SUBJ are incompatible because their combination—Subj&PSC—breaks the non-circularity constraint. But this alleged circularity rests upon misleading reasoning. If a circular explanation looms here it is not something that we can establish simply by considering the phenomenon that is supposed to constitute the for-me-ness of the experience purely at the phenomenological level.³⁰ To determine if Subj&PSC leads to a circularity a deeper look at the metaphysics of for-me-ness is required. Now, the objection could go, consider SR: it states that the subject's consciousness of their mental state is explained in terms of that state representing itself. The latter is thus what ultimately explains the for-me-ness of the experience. Moreover, since the property of representing itself is a property borne by a mental state, SR does not break the circularity constraint.

The objection deserves consideration but has less appeal than one might initially think. To begin with, though it is true that SR ultimately grounds the forme-ness of a mental state M in the self-representation of the latter, it is also true that it firstly grounds M's for-me-ness in the subject's consciousness of M. A kind of CC—viz., transitive creature consciousness—functions thus as an *intermediate explanans* of for-me-ness. At the very least, this step of SR's explanatory sequence is thereby threatened by the circularity discussed in the previous Section. The question, now, is whether the subsequent step in SR's explanatory sequence can dispel such a threat. The present objection seems to suggest a positive answer to this question.

However, is the explanation of the subject's consciousness of their mental state in terms of that state's self-representation (in terms of the state's for-itselfness) sufficient to avoid the problem of circularity between PSC and SUBJ*? Arguably not. It has to be stressed, indeed, that PSC is not the (general) thesis

³⁰ Which, we have seen, is transitive creature consciousness.

according to which creature consciousness is explained by a mental property of the subject's mental states but, rather, the more specific thesis that such a mental states' property is a consciousness property, that is, it is a kind of SC. The problem, though, is that the self-representation advocated by SR to ultimately explain for-me-ness is not a consciousness property, or so I contend.

It seems to me that the self-representational property P of a conscious mental state M of a subject S could be considered as a kind of SC only if P were either (i) a phenomenal property—so as to be a phenomenal representational awareness of itself, or, at most, (ii) a substantive theoretical way of explicating M's being (phenomenally) conscious. None of these conditions is met by P. As a reductive theory, SR explicitly denies (i).³¹ P is what in virtue of which S is conscious of M, but it is not a phenomenally manifest property of M; the fact that M represents itself does not enter into our phenomenology. Moreover, a phenomenal self-representation would arguably face the same problem of the state self-consciousness view. Unless a "minimalist" approach to the self is in play, the existence of such a phenomenon is questionable on both phenomenological and conceptual grounds.³² As for (ii), following SUBJ*, SR substantively explicates M's being (phenomenally) conscious in terms of its property of being the object of S's transitive consciousness. P is what grounds S's consciousness of M instead.

One might appeal to the notion of transitive state consciousness to make sense of the claim that P is a consciousness property of M. As the reader might recall, indeed, transitive state consciousness is the property that a mental state has when its subject is (phenomenally) conscious of something in virtue of being in it. And, on the face of it, P is precisely that kind of property. One, thus, might insist that PSC and SUBJ* do not lead to circularity because, although SR claims that intransitive state consciousness is explained in terms of transitive creature consciousness, the letter is ultimately explained in terms of transitive state consciousness. However, as already pointed out in Section 2.1, transitive state consciousness is a too weak notion to play the required role. Moreover, even granting, for the sake of discussion, that transitive state consciousness does refer to a substantive kind of consciousness, it is still unhelpful to block the circularity between PSC and SUBJ*. For, at least in Kriegel's SR, transitive state consciousness depends upon intransitive state consciousness (cf. Kriegel 2009: 30-31).

The essence of my reply, therefore, is that the final step of SR's explanatory sequence cannot dispel the circularity looming between PSC and SUBJ* because the relevant representational property advocated to explain the CC at stake in the for-me-ness of the experience cannot be taken as a kind of SC in any relevant sense.

6. Concluding Remarks

An underlying and generally overlooked assumption behind the attitude of considering the problem of consciousness primarily as a matter of what makes a mental state a phenomenally conscious state is that creature consciousness is derivative on state consciousness. I called this view the *priority of state consciousness* (*PSC*) thesis. This paper aimed to challenge the trust in the latter. To achieve this,

³¹ Recall, in fact, that one way to frame P is in terms of *non-phenomenal* for-itself-ness.

³² Another reason to not treat P as a phenomenally property of M is that this would arguably lead to an infinite regress of representational properties (cf. Kriegel 2018: 40-41).

I examined PSC in the light of *subjectivism about phenomenal character* (SUBJ). As I stated, in the literature, SUBJ is usually endorsed together with PSC. I argued, instead, that they are incompatible theses and, consequently, that PSC cannot be true if SUBJ is true. To arrive at this conclusion, I made two main claims. First, for PSC to successfully be combined with SUBJ—that is, for Subj&PSC to be true—necessarily, creature consciousness does not figure in the account of *forme-ness*. Indeed, since *for-me-ness* makes a mental state phenomenally conscious, its explanation in terms of creature consciousness would lead to an explanatory circularity. Second, SUBJ implies that state consciousness is explained in terms of a kind of creature consciousness—more precisely, in terms of the subject's consciousness of their experience—hence, when combined with PSC, it leads to circularity. Finally, I strengthened my argument by discussing (and dispelling) a couple of potential objections to it built upon the state self-awareness accounts of for-me-ness.

Of course, the persuasiveness of such an argument relies crucially on the truth of SUBJ. Although it has become an ever more popular position in philosophy of mind, it remains a controversial claim. In any case, notwithstanding this limitation, the discussion pursued so far helps us to draw what I take to be three important upshots for the contemporary philosophy of consciousness. First, the conflict between SUBJ and PSC raises a problem for those theories of consciousness that rely on both. As we have seen, this is the case of SR, which is explicitly developed as a theory that combines PSC and SUBJ. To preserve its internal coherence, thus, SR is forced to amend one of the two theses. I think the only option for SR is to amend PSC because depriving SR of SUBJ would remove its raison d'être. In fact, this is probably the move implicitly made by the advocates of the view somewhere in their argumentative strategies. What effects the denial of PSC has on SR's plausibility is something that deserves further analysis—an analysis that goes beyond the scope of the present paper. In any event, an upshot of such a move is that, despite SR's initial commitment to PSC, the consciousness property that SR really sets as its ultimate explanandum—that is, what effectively constitutes the mystery of phenomenal consciousness for SR—is not SC but, rather, a kind of CC: the transitive creature consciousness that constitutes the for-me-ness of the experience.

Secondly, the fact that for-me-ness—the phenomenon to be explained—is constituted by a subject's consciousness property suggests that the accounts of for-me-ness that construe the latter ultimately as an intrinsic property of mental states—or at least as a relation that the subject's mental states bear with themselves—might be inadequate.

Finally, and most importantly, if SUBJ is true and, consequently, PSC is false, most of the current debate on consciousness is grounded in a misleading conception of the phenomenon under investigation. This would call for a revision of our model of the structure of consciousness and, perhaps, of the mind, that is, a revision that takes the phenomenology of for-me-ness at face value: consciousness is fundamentally a property of subjects and only derivatively a property of the subject's mental states.³³

³³ Materials of this paper were presented in several conferences and seminars (The 10th European Congress of Analytic Philosophy, online; the 13th Conference of the Italian Society for Analytic Philosophy (SIFA), Novara; the "Doc'in Nicod" doctoral and post-

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