

gory as feeling pain. Indeed, as Kant pointed out a very long time ago, there is an enormous difference: pains inform the subjects about their own states, whereas the primary function of visual and auditory percepts is to provide information about "external" objects.

Access and what it is like

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Abstract: Block's cases of superblindsight, the pneumatic drill, and the Sperling experiments do not show that P-consciousness and A-consciousness can come apart. On certain tendentious but not implausible construals of the concepts of P- and A-consciousness, they refer to the same psychological phenomenon.

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When Block's superblindsighter reports spontaneously and reliably about objects in his blind field, his thought, or perhaps better, the nonvisual sensation, the "feeling" that there is an X, is both access-conscious and phenomenally conscious; but what of the underlying state of his perceptual system? Block claims that it would be A-conscious. But it is only in virtue of the underlying perceptual state's causing the thought that "there is an X" that this content is inferentially promiscuous and available for control of voluntary action and speech. The availability is directly in virtue of the thought, and only indirectly in virtue of the underlying state of the perceptual system. Based on Block's own Note 7, therefore, the underlying state of the perceptual system is not A-conscious. Block talks of the *content* being A-conscious, but this is a derivative notion; what matters is which *state* is A-conscious, and the underlying state of the perceptual system does not make itself available.

In the pneumatic drill example, your hearing the noise prior to noon is supposed to be a case of pure P-consciousness without A-consciousness; the sound must have been P-conscious at 11:50, because what you realize at noon is that someone has been noisily digging up the street *for some time*. One alternative explanation is that what you realize at noon is that it is deafeningly noisy and that there has been *no change* in the noise level for some time. So it is not obvious that there is P-consciousness of the noise prior to noon; there may have been habituation, as in the refrigerator example of Note 19, in which, despite habituation, you are aware of a change in the noise level. Yet another alternative explanation is that you had some P-consciousness of the noise but also diminished A-consciousness of the noise simply as a noise, without (prior to noon) conceiving of it as *unusual*, as the noise of a *pneumatic drill*, a noise that *makes it hard to concentrate*, or the noise of *your tax dollars at work*. The nature and degree of minimally conceptualized A-consciousness corresponds exactly to the nature and degree of minimally conceptualized P-consciousness.

In the Sperling (1960) experiments in iconic vision, Block suggests, you are P-conscious of all the letters jointly as specific letters, but not A-conscious of all jointly. This seems implausible as soon as we ask: When? After the icon fades you are no longer P-conscious of all the letters jointly. While the icon is briefly present you do have access to all the letters jointly; how else can you report the existence of three rows of letters, and how else can you select which to attend to? Access to all the letters jointly fades quickly, in step with fading P-consciousness.

Why is it so difficult even to imagine, coherently, P-consciousness without A-consciousness? Perhaps because although there

are two distinct concepts of consciousness, they refer to the same psychological phenomenon. With some tweaking of the concepts, this can be seen to be a live option. The identity is quasi-conceptual – not open to direct empirical test. But if the concepts are tweaked in empirically fruitful ways, then we should take them as identifying real psychological kinds. I propose the identity as necessary a posteriori.

One point to begin with is that a state is A-conscious if it is poised or promiscuously available for such inference or action or speech as the particular creature might be capable of. This is consistent with the creature actually having only the most rudimentary reasoning abilities, or its being as stupid or irrational or disoriented as a conscious creature can get, or its being physically incapable of appropriate action, or its being speechless. Access is not diminished merely in virtue of the creature's having less power to reason or act, though the question of why evolution might have put the access there is of course pertinent. Indeed, a state might be A-conscious to a hemisphere, or subpersonal system. The availability, the poisedness, is all; whether it is actually used by a particular creature (hemisphere, subpersonal system) in a manner conducive to survival is another matter. A-consciousness has a teleological function, no doubt, but it is not simply identical to such a function and need not invariably serve it.

A second point is that A-consciousness can be identical to P-consciousness only on a wide construal of P-consciousness. For any A-conscious thought token (e.g., that there are infinitely many twin primes, that God is eternal, that there was once an RNA world), there is something it is like to think it, even if there is no particular image or sensory quality or feeling tone intrinsic to the thought.

A third point is that P-consciousness is a relational notion. To say that a state is P-conscious is to say that it is P-conscious to some person or, perhaps, to some subpersonal system. But no state could be P-conscious to person or subsystem S without being poised or promiscuously available for such inference or voluntary action as S may be capable of. If one of our own subsystems has, separately, P-conscious states, those states will also be A-conscious to that system (recall that no threshold of actual reasoning power or rational control of action or speech is required). This is not to say that creature P-consciousness is the more basic notion; I agree with Block that state P-consciousness is basic. But I am suggesting, contrary to Block, that no state is P-conscious intrinsically, in and of itself. Any state is P-conscious only in virtue of its relations to a larger person or system.

Finally, we should distinguish a state's being P-conscious from its having any given particular sensory or phenomenal quality. What our thesis identifies with a state's being A-conscious is the fact of there being something that it is like to be in that state, not any of the more particular facts of form: what it is like to be in that state is [. . .]. The thesis does not entail that any particular sensory or phenomenal quality of a state can be identified with or explained in terms of access (or functional role broadly construed) but only that the more abstract or general feature of the state, its being P-conscious, can be identified with or explained in terms of access.

If these points are granted, and I think they are not implausible, then arguments of the following form become live options: (1) P-consciousness = A-consciousness; (2) The teleological functions of A-consciousness are F, G, H, and so on; therefore, (3) the teleological functions of P-consciousness are F, G, H, and so on. Certainly not all defenders of the target reasoning will warm to this reconstruction, but the friends of access may.