Being Conscious - An Odyssey Towards the Phenomenological Unity of Consciousness

Synopsis

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As a student of philosophy of mind, if you ask me about the hardest riddle, the straightforward answer would be “Consciousness”. Consciousness is more like a whodunnit. (There are many approaches to explain this mystery. People have used different kinds of metaphor) I use the “whodunnit” metaphor because I hope to find a solution to the riddle of consciousness. Similar to the murder mystery the explanation of who has done it, is not revealed until the end. In this kind of panorama, it takes the whole story to arrive at the killer because one must consider every clue and follow the right lead. Similarly, the riddle of consciousness can be decoded if one contemplates all the aspects of consciousness and attends to the right strategy. We need to distinguish between the "easy part" and the "hard part" of consciousness, as suggested by David Chalmers, to figure out the appropriate technique. Whether consciousness is a unitary concept is the main question I explore. First of all, let me state that when I address consciousness, I am speaking of conscious experiences. To identify the most efficient approach, one must ask about certain common characteristics of consciousness, which can define consciousness as "Consciousness." We explore Whether consciousness is a unitary concept. When I address consciousness, I am speaking of conscious mental states and I want to explain this philosophically. Pursuing it introduces me to two competing theses, one is phenomenal and the other is intentional mental states. In a certain way, I would like to carve my position from the philosophical literature, which transcends this dichotomy, yet at the same time, I do not want to take any reductive approach. I also desire to assert that consciousness has a phenomenology that is intrinsic to conscious experience and cannot be explained in any way (intentional/representational), which I refer to as *sui generis*. From this vantage point, all conscious mental states can be included under one roof and are not distinct categories of consciousness. The only thing separating them is how they are conscious; otherwise, they are all conscious states. One may assume that my research belongs to the discipline of "Phenomenology" because I have been using the term “phenomenology” for quite a long time. However, it is not. Simply put, it is the analytic philosophy of mind. I highlight the "for-me"

aspect of conscious states, which I term as phenomenology. Given the context here, I have often swapped the terms phenomenal and phenomenological throughout my thesis.

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The two most important aspects of consciousness need to be covered first in this discussion. It is widely believed that there are two separate categories of conscious mental states, that is intentional and phenomenal. This is due to the diversity of their contents. Intentionality can be defined broadly as aboutness, that is the mental state is about something. However, a phenomenal mental state is more about how something feels than necessarily being about anything. Being in that state encompasses a "something it is like" form of experience.

The classification of phenomenal states into qualitative and subjective categories is something else I have covered here. According to Uriah Kriegel, a phenomenally conscious mental state reveals two things: something that makes it a phenomenally conscious state “it is” and something that makes it a phenomenally conscious state “at all”. The subjective quality, or "for-me" aspect, is what allows a mental state to be phenomenal consciousness "at all," or the existence condition. On the other hand, the qualitative character gives phenomenality its identity conditions, or what "it is." Representational states may also possess qualitative character. Consequently, it could be claimed that the qualitative aspect unites an intentional state with a phenomenal state. A phenomenal state is unique because of its subjective nature.

The fundamental hypothesis of my work is that phenomenology makes a mental state conscious. What is a mental state composed of? Put differently, what can be the content (following the analytic tradition) of the experience? Needless to mention the representational/intentional dimension of consciousness has historically dominated the theory of mental content. Here, I have first discussed the orthodox theory of content. Unfortunately, this approach reduces content to a mere truth condition. A prerequisite that the world must

satisfy for that experience to be accurate. Undoubtedly, truth condition plays a significant role in cognitive or even emotional experiences. Let's agree that it is pertinent to sensory experience as well. But does it shed any light on the fundamental concepts underlying conscious experience ("for-me" ness)? I do not think that the content of a conscious experience can be adequately speculated based on correspondence with reality alone. Undoubtedly, we require more.

The concept of non-propositional intentionality was promoted by Brentano, the father of intentionality. According to him, beliefs—the archetype of a propositional attitude—as well as all intentional attitudes are non-propositional. Every belief is existential. This point of view holds that existence only reveals a part of the intentional attitude, not the content itself. Everything we are aware of can be summed up as experience. Stated differently, an individual's experience is shaped by whatever they are given. Michelle Montague claims that developing the total content theory of experience is the most effective method for capturing the content of an encounter. One could say that everything that is given to someone experientially is also given to someone phenomenologically. The relation between phenomenological givenness and experiential givenness is of identity, not even mere similarity. There is something like being in that experiencing state, that is what makes the experience so distinctive and exclusive. It would seem to be illogical to have an experience without going through it. Although this might seem circular at an initial glance, a deeper look reveals how crucial it is. The idea of being aware of the conscious state emerges rationally from the fact that every experience comprises an element of consciousness of that experience itself, which leads to my second chapter.

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To begin with, everyone will agree that while we are having an experience, we are also conscious of having that experience. David Rosenthal expressed this intuition most straightforwardly by articulating the “transitivity principle”, that is, a mental state is conscious

only if one is in some way aware of it. I have tried to assemble several theories that approve or at least give assent to this principle. Two popular approaches have been widely discussed, one is the Higher-Order Theories of consciousness and the other is the First-Order Theories of consciousness. Then demonstrating the shortcomings of both theories, I gradually moved to the Same-Order approach.

The dominant idea behind the first-order approach is that any conscious state is a representation, and what it is like to be in a conscious state is formulated by the content of that representation. A first-order theory of consciousness attempts to explain and reduce conscious experience largely into world-directed or first-order intentional states. Tye and Dretske should be credited for familiarizing this theory on board. The main idea is that experiences and feelings are readily available for a direct impact on beliefs or desires and so on. In this panorama, feeling thirsty is nothing but an instantaneous cognitive effect, namely, initiated by the desire to drink water. The main objection against first-order approaches is that it does not include all conscious states. Some conscious states do not exhibit such aboutness, in a way they are not essentially directed at anything as such. One major loophole in Tye's first-order approach is that it looks as if in the poised criterion, everything appears extremely functional. The main reason behind the transition from the first-order to a higher-order approach is that Higher-order theories also deal with representations but they claim that the relevant representations denote mental properties. However, the prime reason for sanctioning higher-order versions is that it can reasonably distinguish conscious states from non-conscious ones. I am quite sympathetic towards the transitivity principle mostly because it can easily encompass what we generally mean by consciousness. Even if an amateur were questioned to define the distinguishing factor between conscious and unconscious mental states, s/he would simply respond that a mental state is conscious, when one is aware of it.

In higher-order theory, a mental state is conscious because a higher-order state is directed towards it. Hence, the states of higher order are meta-representations. Mental states are conscious in virtue of "being represented" rather than in virtue "of representing", according to Higher-Order Representationalism. Higher-order theories have many variations but here, by higher-order approaches, I have restricted myself only to Rosenthal's higher-order thought theory. A state is conscious only if one is aware of oneself being in that state. The higher-order theory explains that subjective awareness is due to one's having the thought that one is in that state. Rosenthal commented that both conscious and subconscious or subliminal perceptions encompass the same representation of the redness and the two perceptions have the same qualitative character. what distinguishes the conscious state from the unconscious state, is that the conscious state additionally involves subjective awareness aspect. To put it simply, a mental state is not conscious if it is present but the individual does not subjectively perceive being in that state. The higher-order theory is possibly the best explanation of phenomenal consciousness in terms of representationalism by accommodating the transitivity thesis, which can be interpreted in terms of it. It is comparable to saying that one can only have a phenomenal experience if one is conscious of oneself as being in a qualitative condition. The greatest criticism of the higher-order theory is that the transitivity concept is assumed rather than explained. Dretske for the inadequacy of explaining consciousness, Francescotti over causal connection, Byrne for similarity with first-order theory, and Montague depending upon conscious-content principle criticized the higher-order approach.

The meeting point between the higher-order and same-order approaches is that all conscious experiences are ones we are conscious of being in. In this view, awareness of an object and awareness of that very awareness cluster together and constitute a single mental state. In order the elaborate on it, I have followed Kriegel's vocabulary. To understand this dichotomy between these two theories, Kriegel demonstrated them in the following way-

HIGHER ORDER THEORY: For any mental state M of a subject S, M is conscious iff there is

a mental state M*, such that (i) S is in M*, (ii) M* is an appropriate representation of M, and (iii) there is no constitutive relation between M and M*.

SAME ORDER THEORY: For any mental state M of a subject S, M is conscious iff there is

a mental state M*, such that (i) S is in M*, (ii) M* is an appropriate representation of M, and (iii) there is a constitutive relation between M and M*.

He advocated the self-constituting kind of representation of awareness of awareness. Whatever else a conscious experience represents, it always represents itself, according to the Self-Representational Theory, also known as "Self-Representationalism." A conscious experience is conscious because it represents itself. According to this perspective, self-representation is limited to conscious states alone. For instance, when you deliberately gaze at nothing while sitting in the tub. Your awareness of the toes and your awareness of them are both true (albeit slightly less vividly) of your toes' visual experience. In light of the self-representationalist, this is due to your awareness that the encounter at the time symbolizes itself and your toes if the consciousness of a mental state is immediate awareness, it succeeds in making that mental state conscious, and if it is not immediate awareness, it fails to make that mental state conscious. An appropriate portrayal of mental state must make the subject aware of it not only, but also with the necessary immediacy. Higher-order theories appear to fall short of this criterion. The awareness of awareness relation must be understood as a special kind of representational relation. Arguably, the need for distinctness does not smear to awareness of awareness, though it is representational and consequently relational. The awareness of awareness allows it to partially determine the experience by being connected to the experience itself. Furthermore, as the phenomenological content of an experience and the comprehension of awareness relation

are inherently associated the experience itself contributes to the phenomenological content. In the next section, we will find out how this relational account of awareness of awareness doctrine validates the different kinds of phenomenology that I have mentioned in the first chapter.

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The philosophy of perception inhabits a special place among all the philosophical discourses. Epistemological inquisition regarding perceptual knowledge and psychological exploration concerning the mechanism of perception were predominant in the domain of philosophy. My aim in this chapter is neither epistemological nor psychological in that sense. Part of my investigation is about whether perception resembles or differs from other mental states and part of it discusses the phenomenal character of perception itself. The kind of sensory phenomenology we want to discuss can only be done within the broader understanding of perception as a distinctive mental state with its rich sensory phenomenology. Most philosophers agree that all perceptual experiences involve sensory phenomenology; whether exteroceptive or interoceptive. Many philosophers argue that cognitive phenomenology is inseparable from the sensory one and others are inclined to reduce it to the intentionality of perception typically. I have addressed different notions of perception to curve my position. My motivation for this thesis is neither object-centric nor subject-oriented, rather I am inclined to find the answer when one perceives some object or state of affairs how we perceive that as a particular thing or state of affairs (I have used object for both particular things or state of affairs afterward) along with phenomenological perceptual properties. Perception always involves experiencing something as a single, concrete object. That each of those separate objects is regarded as a distinct specific is almost universally acknowledged. Even people who otherwise tend to reject the idea of the existence of physical objects in the given context, in the final analysis, can hardly reject that we seem to perceive particular individual objects. This notion of perception is known as

phenomenology of particularity. It is a component of the experience's entire phenomenology and content. There is theoretical disagreement among philosophers when attempting to incorporate phenomenological particularity within the realm of phenomenological content. I will be speaking about the particularist approach and the generalist approach, which are two different alternatives for addressing phenomenological particularity. "Twin Earth" thought experiments encourage the premise that, regardless of how it seems that we perceive particular physical objects, the phenomenological content of perceptual experience is fundamentally and completely general rather than particular. It would be impossible for the experiences to have identical phenomenological content while having distinct objects of experience if a singular term were used to refer to the external object in specifying the phenomenological content of one of those experiences in the generalist view. Supporters of the generalist account frequently refer to the view, that there is a fundamental distinction between thinking about something in a particular space through a definite description and thinking about it because one is directly acquainted with him in perception. It must be accepted that the Great Wall of China cannot be directly located in space simply by thinking about it. According to one point of view, the phenomenology of particularity will be conveyed through the perception of shape since it could reveal a bounded object. Naturally, seeing shapes depends on the ability to perceive colour or the diffraction of colours. Following this, one might argue that shape perception is an acceptable justification for phenomenological particularity, as shape plausibly delineates the object's boundaries. Now, how can shape reveal an object's boundaries? Not every shape I perceive denotes the boundaries of an object. Because we have already recognized shape as belonging to an object, it just defines an object's border. That is, to experience a shape property such as identifying an object's boundary, we must initially have a particular object's experience. Since we are concerned with object shapes, the phenomenology of particularity is phenomenologically before shape experience, it is unable to adequately account for the phenomenological particularity.

Evans and McDowell hold that physical objects are in a way part of the contents of perceptions. The representational content of a veridical perception cannot occur in a perceptual experience in the absence of the relevant object because veridical perceptions are object-involving. Thus, it is impossible for hallucinations and very identical veridical perceptions (twin earths) to possess the same content. They have used the term "content" in an absolute externalist framework. The notion of the particularist account of phenomenological content refers to this concept of a representational (perhaps externalist) account of specific instances of phenomenological perceptual content. Martin makes a distinction between “phenomenal nature” and “phenomenal/qualitative character”. “Phenomenal/qualitative character” is supposed to capture resemblances and variances of content that can exist across diverse experiences regardless of their actual objects. The content of sensory experiences is context insensitive, that is discrete sensory occurrences that could have arisen at different times, or with the presentation of distinct objects, enjoy the same content. So, Martin’s notion of phenomenal/qualitative character is fundamentally coherent with the generalist's notion of content. But Martin also acknowledges, the phenomenological particularity of perceptual experiences. When he introduces the notion of the "phenomenal nature" of a perceptual experience, he also seeks to convey the idea that particulars are usually presented by experience. He seeks to convey that experience typically represents particulars. He states that comprehension of what an experience is like requires knowledge of this phenomenological aspect. According to Martin's jargon, the fact that perceptual experiences exhibit particular objects is a phenomenological fact and this fact is captured through an account of the phenomenal nature of an experience. for the phenomenological particularity fact once we have the object presented through correctness parameters. He eventually introduces physical objects themselves to justify phenomenological particularity. I think the fine-grained phenomenological particularity cannot be adequately defended by a simple correctness condition. There has to be something more than that. According to Montague, there is a

compelling reason not to turn to physical things when attempting to provide a sufficient explanation for phenomenological particularity. Like all phenomenological features, phenomenological particularity is a general feature of content. The general "phenomenological content" of almost all perceptual experiences includes something along the lines of this: that there is a presentation of a "this thing" or that a specific item is being represented or presented. Due to its ability to be shared by a wide range of perceptual experiences, the "this thing" feature is considered general. However, phenomenological particularity possesses an exclusivity that sets it apart from the general realm of phenomenology. Why does it vary depending on the person? One prevailing view is that cognitive phenomenology must be included in the phenomenology of perception to defend the particular perception. However, in the next chapter, I will consider the question more substantially by considering cognitive phenomenology in detail.

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What is conscious thinking? How does thinking feel like in practice? In what ways does it feel? Does it have a raw feel about it? Or does it possess some distinctively accepted cognitive colouring that sets it apart from all other forms of accepted phenomenology? Is it similar to feeling a sensation instinctively, or is it a different experience entirely? In recent years, the question regarding the phenomenal character of conscious thought, which is technically termed ‘cognitive phenomenology’ has emerged as a primordial issue within the domain of analytic philosophy of mind and also within recent discussions in phenomenology. The central questions that have been asked about the nature of cognitive phenomenology are the following:

(1) The Intentionality Question: What is the relationship between the phenomenology of cognition and the intentionality of cognition? Are the phenomenal properties of cognition identical with or distinct from intentional properties of cognition?

(2) The Reduction Question: What is the relationship between the phenomenology of cognition and the phenomenology of sensory perception? Are the phenomenal properties of cognition identical with or distinct from the phenomenal properties of sensory perception?

Consider, consciously thinking that there is a message in the WhatsApp application. It is a phenomenal state since there is something it is like for me when I think that there is a message on my phone. Also, according to some philosophers, there is a cognitive intentional state as well, because there is a way that I cognitively represent the world when I think that there is a message in my WhatsApp. Hence, conscious thought has both phenomenal and cognitive intentional parts. How could these be connected? According to one theory, cognitive intentionality is determined by phenomenal state and that is coined as cognitive-phenomenal intentionality. But why do you suspect that some phenomenal states have a connection to cognitive states? Generally speaking, there could be either of two attitudes in these aspects:

Grounding: Some phenomenal states put one in a cognitive intentional state.

Necessitation: Some phenomenal states suffice for being in a cognitive intentional state

The problem with Grounding theory is that though it claims about a foundation of phenomenal state as the basic it hardly spreads any light over the nature of the phenomenal states that are supposed to ground cognitive intentional state. A tempting idea is that they just are cognitive intentional states. They are states that are both phenomenal and cognitively intentional. But Grounding has already precluded such an option. Because grounding relation is irreflexive as nothing grounds itself. To explain this ambiguity, Chudnoff introduced the notion of irreflexive relation and claimed that the grounding is irreflexive. So, what does it mean to say that grounding is irreflexive? Suppose some phenomenal state P grounds some cognitive intentional state C. By the irreflexivity of grounding, P is not identical to C. Therefore, we cannot just conclude that P is just C itself. Irreflexively principle excludes the idea that a phenomenal state

is identical to any of the cognitive intentional states it grounds. Irreflexively does not eliminate the possibility that a phenomenal state is identical to some other cognitive intentional state it does not ground. Also, one can challenge the workability of irreflexivity of grounding. necessitation does allow us to affirm with certainty that the phenomenal states that define cognitive intentional states are cognitive intentional states. Necessitation, as opposed to grounding necessitation, is reflexive as everything necessitates itself. Accordingly, let's say that some perceptual state P necessitates some cognitive intentional state C. could very possibly be that P is C. We would have a strong understanding of how P entails C if we knew who P and C were and their identity. As everything necessitates itself, P simply is C, hence P necessitates C. The major challenge, that arises with merging Necessitation with those phenomenal states and cognitive intentional states and claiming them identical is that it discards the idea of novelty. But the whole idea is wrong to postulate grounding and necessitation. According to Alberto Voltolini, using phenomenal intentionality poses serious challenges as well. I therefore took a different route and attempted to show that, regardless of intentionality, all conscious cognitive states have a *sui generis* type of phenomenology.

Uriah Kriegel introduces an argument that seems more compelling hypothesis than irreducibility, that is the Independence argument, which typically asserts that there are cognitive states that place the subject in phenomenal states that occur regardless of sensory phenomenology. Any justification that exhibits independence also proves Irreducibility, since independence in some sense entails irreducibility. Imagine there is Zoe, who is a partial zombie, which is devoid of any form of sensory, algedonic, and emotive phenomenology. For someone to fantasize about such a zombie, one first needs to envision three partial zombies each lacking one or more of the following phenomenologies, namely the sensory, alghedonic, or emotional. Kriegel calls us to imagine two fictitious scenarios where Zoe struggles to come to a sudden understanding of mathematical proof and an alternative scenario in which she is successful.

Any such realization refers to a contrast in her cognitive life. He contends that this disparity is phenomenal since it covers several phenomenal mental states. Assuming that those mental states lack sensory components, it follows that they exhibit cognitive phenomenology. Thus, he concludes that Zoe possesses a cognitive phenomenology though lacks a sensory one. Kriegel introduces a from cognitive-phenomenal primitivism, that asserts that cognition has a phenomenology of its own. However, according to some researchers, Though Zoe is a logical possibility it might not be a matter of metaphysical possibility. Therefore, Elisabetta Sacchi and Alberto Voltolini introduced another illustration of Zoe and that is the Vita argument. Vita's thoughts are hard to comprehend in the framework of sensory imagery, yet it has a kind of phenomenology. It shows that Zoe's instance asks for an explanation of the metaphysical potential, its expansion to Vita's situation certainly meets the solution of metaphysical possibility, further proving the existence of a type of cognitive phenomenology that is both irreducible to and distinct from sensory phenomenology.

In a way, Independence is a stronger claim than irreducibility. But I feel the supposition of irreducibility is a wiser and more specific explanation than independence and that is also sufficient to shed light on the purpose of the thesis, which is the individuality of cognitive phenomenology beyond the other. I do not think it is essential to interpret an autonomous thesis of any phenomenology and in this case the cognitive one, within my framework of the unitary notion of phenomenology. Instead, I aim to show that phenomenology is far more fundamental and undermines all conscious mental states, including conscious thought, emotion, and perception. The best way to truly comprehend the core of cognitive phenomenology is by attempting to cognize the phenomenology of cognition within the context of this structure of phenomenological unity. Hence, to shed light on every aspect of the framework I have talked about the phenomenology of emotion in the next chapter.

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If incorporating conscious thought expands the limits of phenomenology, then achieving unanimous agreement on the definition of emotion is perhaps the most difficult endeavour for phenomenology in general. At the outset, there is a consensus across philosophers that emotion is essentially phenomenological, reflecting both the subjective and qualitative aspects, but the particular type of phenomenology that distinguishes emotion is an area of dispute. In my opinion, emotion always has a distinctive *sui generis* kind of phenomenology, along with any other kind of phenomenology that philosophers usually claim, which is evaluative phenomenology. People usually have a great propensity to assimilate emotion with belief-desire accounts, somatic feeling theories, judgementalism, and strong perception theories. Many philosophical studies of emotion attempt to reduce it to a more familiar state. One criticism can be raised that such theories fail to grasp the distinctness of phenomenology (what-it-is-likeness) of emotional experience.

I have followed Brentano's notion of emotion to validate this exclusivity of emotion. Brentano takes an evaluative stance on emotion. This is evident because he recognizes "emotion" (Gemüt) as a suitable term for the group of mental states for which he provides the evaluative explanation. However, I have contrasted various perspectives and in turn, attempted to curve my position depending on which I find most similar to what I want to convey by the phenomenology of emotion.

First, I discussed Martha Nussbaum's cognitivist approach to emotion. According to her, emotions should be considered a specific type of cognitive state that helps us comprehend values and reason in the environment around us since they are value judgments. Our value judgments and the associated feelings are a type of belief that may or may not be true. It simply says that evaluative phenomenology is adequate to give objects and situations value properties. I am not at all sympathetic to this cognitivist approach because I believe that I can always feel

emotional without any adjoining judgment whatsoever. The next approach I discussed is about emotional awareness in evaluative judgment because often it is said that feeling emotions makes one evaluatively aware of the world. The thesis I focused on here is evaluative sentimentalism, which holds that holds that evaluative judgments are based primarily on emotions. Some Sentimentalists assert that evaluative judgment either conveys or encompasses emotions. Therefore, having an evaluative judgment is almost similar to having an emotion or sentiment towards what is being judged. Here I have used recent research regarding alexithymia and detecting emotions. Studies indicate that people with high alexithymia have more trouble telling the difference between fear, anger, disgust, and sadness. These feelings underpin awareness of offense, danger, foulness, and loss, following Evaluative Sentimentalism. Therefore, the purpose of our research is to determine how alexithymia affects a subject's ability to discriminate between these specific assessments. Although I generally embrace this viewpoint, it seems like something is lacking in this discussion of emotion. It doesn't feel particularly emotional for some reason. One essential element is missing when providing a judgmental account of emotion, and that is the felt component.

The only view of emotion I feel sympathetic and closest to what I typically want to assert is Bennett Helm’s notion of felt evaluation. In Helm's view, emotions, desires, and certain sensations all reflect a unique form of intrinsically enticing evaluation, which also includes even bodily pleasure and pain. Felt evaluation talks about four concepts, namely formal object, target, import, and focus. This framework allows for an evaluation to include not only the subject and the object but also the subject's perspective on the object and the subject's background, which is a crucial component of the evaluation.

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One might ask about the need for such unification. I must admit that the motivation behind trying to develop such a phenomenological design, drives into the pragmatic, epistemological,

and even ontological domains, going beyond simple phenomenological requirements. Certain conscious experiences might be hard to separate into the domains of cognition, sensation, perception, or emotion. It is sometimes the sensation, often cognitive phenomenology, and at times evaluative phenomenology that occupies the forefront of those conscious experiences. How can we embrace states like these if we do not move forward with a holistic understanding of phenomenology? Consider the shame and guilt for example.

Why are scientists attempting to develop a unified, all-encompassing theory of consciousness? Is my experience's phenomenology in any way coloured by the "me" in the "for-me" ness? Attempts to understand the "me" of "for-me" ness are part of the quest to understand consciousness as a unity that affirms all the subtle similarities and differences of each conscious mental state while concentrating on the "for-me" ness aspect. I believe that the idea of "being" as the subject of the phenomenologically given experience suggests the phenomenology of the agency or "what it is like" to experience oneself as an agent in a very intricate way. My framework could be a stepping stone to comprehend the phenomenology of the self or agentive phenomenology and also it would open an avenue for further research.

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