

# Possibility of Complex Phenomenal State in Consciousness: A Philosophical Debate

Bharat Malakar

**Abstract:** The nature of phenomenal conscious state is the core concept in consciousness studies. When we are talking about the nature, character and unity in consciousness, we are actually talking about the nature of phenomenal consciousness. Every phenomenal state is individuated in terms of their phenomenal character. In other words, it is characterized in terms of what it is like to instantiate them. There are two simultaneous opposite view of complex phenomenal state. Some philosophers like Hurley, Tye, etc provide a representational or intentionalist account of phenomenal state. On the other hand, Chalmers and Bayne provide a non-representationalist or non-intentional account of phenomenal state. The aim of this paper is to justify of both accounts and also intend to provide a satisfactory account of the complex phenomenal state.

**Keywords:** agentic experience, building block, individuation, Phenomenal Consciousness, self-undermining, Subsumption, tripartite conception.

**Introduction:** The nature of phenomenal conscious state is the core concept in consciousness studies. When we are talking about the character and unity of consciousness, we are actually talking about the nature of phenomenal conscious state. Every phenomenal state is individuated in terms of their phenomenal character. In other words, it is characterized in terms of what it is like to instantiate them. For example, it is something to hear a bird's melodious tune, to see a beautiful rose and to smell freshly brewed coffee. Again it is also something to think that  $2+3=5$ , intend to put the washing out and wonder when we receive some money or gift suddenly. This phenomenal state is one kind of state consciousness.

**Main Text:** According to state consciousness, some mental state as conscious in contrast with those mental states of which an individual is wholly unaware. The intentional conflation has an element of plausibility to it. We can see compared the conscious state of two dogs. One has a perceptual state whereas the other has a similar perceptual state with a representation of it. Surely the latter dog has a conscious state but the former dog does not. So state consciousness make less in the way of intellectual demands than consciousness of, and the first dog could be

conscious without being conscious of anything. State consciousness has a mental state. It is also called determinates or properties of creature consciousness.

There are two different views of complex phenomenal state – one is representational account of phenomenal consciousness, another is non-representational account of phenomenal consciousness.

Representational account claims that qualitative states are identical with certain representational states. For example, pain is a kind of perceptual or quasi-perceptual representation, though one that is in the service of an internal, introspective perceptual modality. Some philosopher, like B.J.Baars, attempts to explain the unity of consciousness within the contextual integrates of the representational content. According to Baars, the main idea of the unity thesis related to consciousness is that –"the unity of consciousness is the thesis that 'the flow of conscious experience ....is limited to a single internally consistent content at any given moment.'"<sup>1</sup> For instances, he consider the Nacker Cube <sup>2</sup> in which we can only be seen in one way at a time. Each conscious interpretation is internally consistent. We do not see a mix of the two conscious interpretations. For example, we do not see a corner in the front plane of a different depth than another corner in that plane, because it would violate the consistency constraint of a rigid, square cube. Though these phenomena are well-known in perception, but they are not limited. The same is true at the conceptual level. Many social psychologists have investigated cognitive consistency in value judgements and in person perception. In that case, internal consistency is maintained. We cannot think of two different ideas at the very same instant, though we can consider two contradictory ideas one after the other. It is because when we consider ambiguous words, most of them have at least two different abstract, conceptual interpretations.<sup>3</sup> We found a clear conception of representational structure of consciousness in Shoemaker's explanation of the said unity. He holds that the unity of consciousness is in part a matter of one's various beliefs forming, collectively leading to a unified conception of the world. According to Shoemaker,

“Unity of consciousness is in part a matter of one's various beliefs forming, collectively, a unified conception of the world. .... Perfect unity of consciousness, then, would consist of a unified representation of the world accompanied by a unified representation of that representation, the latter including not only information about what the former represents, but also information about the grounds on which the beliefs that make up the former are based, and about what the evidential relations between the parts of that representation are.”<sup>4</sup>

Another explanation of a representational approach to the unity of consciousness has been

preferred by David Rosenthal. According to him, so called unity of consciousness consists in the compelling sense. It says that all our conscious mental states belong to the single conscious subject. He also holds that, the term 'unity of consciousness' means to be aware about getting experience from some particular conscious state.

On the other hand, some philosophers claim that 'phenomenal consciousness needs not any representational content. The feeling one has during orgasm, for example, has been offered as a candidate for a phenomenal content that is non-representational.'<sup>5</sup>Peacocke (1983) argues that, - "we must recognize differences in features of experience that do not correspond to represented differences. For example, when we see two birds, one closer than the other, they may look the same in size, (be represented by the experience as the same size), even though the nearer one occupies more of our visual field and is thus experienced differently."<sup>6</sup>

The closure account of the unity of phenomenal consciousness is brought in order to support the representationalist or intentionalist account of phenomenal consciousness. According to closure account, experiential states have not only phenomenal properties, they do not possess only 'what it is a likeness' or something alone but they also have representational contents. Even phenomenal properties of conscious state are related with their representational contents. So phenomenal unity can be explained in terms of the relation of representational contents of unified states. There might be something to be said about the relationship between the content of  $V_3$  on the one hand and  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  on the other hand, in virtue of which they are phenomenally unified with each-other.

On the basis of closure,  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  state will be treated as phenomenally unified if and only if that subject has  $V_3$  that has  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  conjunctly as content. So if  $V_1$  has  $\langle p \rangle$  content and  $V_2$  has  $\langle q \rangle$  content then  $V_3$  will have  $\langle p \ \& \ q \rangle$  content. Further if the concerned subject does not have an experience of  $\langle p \ \& \ q \rangle$  as content then  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  cannot be phenomenally unified with each-other. However, in closure account subject with a fully unified consciousness will have a single (total) phenomenal state. It is also called as subject's total phenomenal state. The conjunction of each phenomenal state is a content of that total phenomenal state. In this case elements of a single phenomenal field will be qualitatively unified with each-other in the sense that their contents are included into the content of subject's total state. But closure account is an account of what it is for consciousness to be unified but it does not entail any particular view about the degree to which consciousness is in fact unified.

Hurley and Tye – both philosophers think that the notion of the unity of phenomenal consciousness can be explained in terms of the closure of representational content. They do it in

two quite different forms. Hurley (1994) presents the notion of closure through the concept of “the agglomeration principle”...

When there is a state in *i* at *t* with content *p*  
And there is a state in *i* at *t* with content *q*,  
Then there is a state in *i* at *t* with content *p* and *q*.

This principle simply says that the issue about agglomerative unity arises, and something settles it. Call that something, whatever it is, ‘*i*’.<sup>7</sup>

Tye also presents the concept of closure in the following manner:... ‘Phenomenological unity is a matter of simultaneously experienced perceptual qualities entering into the same phenomenal content...A consequence of the above position is that phenomenal unity goes with the closure of perceptual experience under conjunction with respect to the unified properties. Thus, in the case mentioned [above] in which the loudness of a sound is phenomenally unified for person P with the brightness of a flash of light, the statements

P has an experience of a loud sound.

and

P has an experience of a bright flash,

Jointly entail,

P has an experience of a loud sound and a bright flash.<sup>8</sup>

Tim Bayne provides a non-intentional or non-representational account of complex phenomenal state. To explain phenomenal unity, he emphasizes on the notion of subsumption. We might say that two conscious states are phenomenally unified if and only if they are co-subsumed. In other words, two conscious states are phenomenally unified if and only if they are subsumed by another third state. For example: my headache experience and experience of sweet songs — both come to us as conjoint phenomenal character. According to “bottom –up” explanation of unity in consciousness, multiple parts of experience provides us a single consciousness unitedly. On the other hand, taking subsumption as a primitive, ‘top-down’ approach of the unity of consciousness, emphasizes on the notion of subsumes this multiplicity.

The term “Subsumption” indicates that any one experience subsumed another experience when the first experience treated as a part of the second experience. My whole experiential state is ‘whole’ in this sense which includes all of other experiential parts within itself. For

example, my all perceptual experiences, bodily sensations, auditory experiences come to me as a whole experience. Other whole phenomenal field is an experience which is constituted by his other experiences. It is also said that total phenomenal states is homeonurous. That means all the parts out of which the whole is composed, share their experiential nature.

Bayne thinks that unity of consciousness can be explained with the help of mereological language. Lockwood says that experiences are co-conscious 'when they are parts of a complex experience'.<sup>9</sup> Siewart maintains phenomenal unity 'normally relates the constituent experiences of a single "visual" field of one another, as well as those making up a single temporal "stream" of thought and imagery.'<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Shoemaker says that 'conscious states are co-conscious when they are parts of a unified state of consciousness'.<sup>11</sup> Bayne concludes that though the mereological approach is most important to explain the unity of consciousness, yet it feces some objection.

Mychel Tye opines that the only experiences human beings are entire streams of consciousness where a stream of consciousness is a middle period between an unconscious state and the next consciousness. Tye labels it as "one experience". So, if Mychel Tye's explanation is true then the mereological account would be untenable. He clearly says that no two experiences are phenomenally unified with each-other. He gives both positive and negative argument in support of his views. Negative argument is related to the subsumptive approach to phenomenal unity. On the other hand, positive argument is related to identifying experience through entire stream of consciousness.

Bayne contends that Tye's concept of experience is revisionary. He points out that Tye fails to provide a truthful analysis of the pre-theoretical notion of experience when the ordinary thought faces no difficulty in espousing the idea that a stream of consciousness contains multiple experiences, both simultaneously and also through time.

Mychel Tye, in support of his one-experience view, tries to explain the concept of unity with the help of parallelism between experiences on the one hand and clouds and statues on the other.<sup>12</sup> Briefly, clouds contain undetached collections of water molecules as proper parts. But such collections are not called clouds. Similarly, statues of clay may contain undetached collection of chunks as proper parts. But such chunks don't constitute statues in their own right. Like it, experience may have more experiential stages. But these experiential stages are not experiences themselves.

Bayne opposed Tye's view. He opines that though collection of water molecules or collections of chunks are not uniquely cloud or statue of clay, yet we cannot claim this necessarily. Further

he mentions the main problem of Tye's is that how we identify the arbitrary components of a stream of consciousness as experience in their own right?

Bayne maintains that there is no certainty whether we should regard every arbitrary component of a stream of consciousness as an experience or not. But he considers a state of consciousness that can be enjoyed 'all at once'. Nonetheless, although it is not possible to say that every part of a stream of experience is an experience in its own right, it seems to him that many parts of a stream of experience may be experiences in their own right. For example, the pain in my left hand, my olfactory experience of the chicken Tandury, and my auditory experience of the singing bird on the tree—all these conscious states may be regarded as an experience in their own right. Bayne argues that there is no plausible reason for using the word experiences stages as Tye's uses, to explain the entire stream of consciousness. However, Bayne goes on to claim that the typical stream of consciousness does not constitute an experience in its own right. Bayne complains that Tye's one-experience account remains silent about token experiences and does not provide any suitable account of the individuation of experiences. Bayne thinks that different approaches to the individuation of experiences are possible depending on different contexts. Bayne considers his conception of experience as strong enough to explain the individuation of experience and also to answer some important questions raised by the unity of consciousness.

According to the tripartite conception of experience, experiences are to be uniquely characterized in three ways. These are subjects of experience, times and phenomenal properties. In other words, token experiences must differ from each-other in terms of whose experiences they are, when they happened and in what type of phenomenal properties they involve in those experience. Bayne also thinks that though it is possible to introduce tripartite analysis by phenomenal property, it is also possible to do so in terms of phenomenal event because events are understandable in terms of the instantiation of properties.<sup>13</sup>

Bayne mentions that there is a "natural fit" between the tripartite conception of experience and the mereological conception of phenomenal unity. This is so because we can identify more or less complex experiences within the stream of consciousness. Let us take an example of the experience of tasting a Strawberry. This experience of tasting will involve distinct phenomenal properties such as tanginess, sweetness, strawberryiness etc. We can consider this phenomenal property as involving distinct experience that constitutes a more complex experience. Such complex experiences may be modality specific or they may include contents drawn from multiple modalities. In fact what it is like to be myself at this point of time – my overall phenomenal field – 'is a complex phenomenal event containing within its my other experiential states at this point of time. Bayne points out that, according to this conception of experience, a period of consciousness

between one state of unconsciousness and the next typically described as a stream of consciousness, is not to be taken as phenomenal event since there is no single phenomenal property corresponding to this stream of consciousness. It is like to enjoy a typical stream of consciousness but this “what it is likeness” is distributed across a different conscious state. It lacks the kind of unity that the phenomenal field possesses.

Bayne next considers the possible objection that the tripartite account is counter intuitive and, hence, there is a friction between this account and common sense in that it is at odds with the ordinary ways of counting experiences or that how our experience is individuated. Consider the experience of blue by a person. According to tripartite account, a person will have an experience corresponding to the event of instantiating this phenomenal property. However, one can see many object and regions of space as of blue colour and on this basis that person can claim that she is having multiple experiences of blue at a single point of time. Yet, the tripartite account seems to entail that she is having a single experience, contrary to the pre-theoretical claim that she is actually having multiple experiences of blue.

In replies to this objection Tim Bayne argues that the tripartite account of experiences should be understood as restricted to maximally specific or fine-grained phenomenal property.<sup>14</sup>The phenomenal property of blue is a determinable that has as determinates the phenomenal property of blue occurring in a certain location of space. Arguable, this phenomenal property has no determinates. According to Bayne this property is maximally specific or fine-grained phenomenal property. Thus, there is an intuitive sense in which one cannot have multiple instances of such fine-grained phenomenal property. Hence, the above restriction for states is the present objection.

Another objection against tripartite account concerns the ‘common sensible’ aspect. It has been pointed out that properties can be detected via more than one modality. Consider a fundamental common sensible: motion. Someone is watching an ant crawl across her skin. She is aware of the ant’s movement in two ways –via vision and via touch. In this case the tripartite account entails that there is only single experience of the property of motion with the concerned person gets two kinds of experiences. There is only one phenomenal property – this is motion’s representation.

In one possible reply to this objection, it can be said that the visual experiences of motions involve one phenomenal property and the tactile experiences of motion involve another phenomenal property. When different sense experiences represent the same property then they do it in different ways, that is to say the phenomenal properties get finer grained than the worldly properties that they represent. It certainly takes away the sting of the objection against the tripartite account.

However, Bayne thinks that the best possible strategy for answering this objection is to

“biting the bullet.”<sup>15</sup> He claims that, in the situation outlined, one would have a single experience of ant’s motion. Bayne claims that there is an identity between what it is like to see an ant moving at such-and such speed and what it is like to feel its movement ‘such-and-such’ speed. That is to say, the two cases represent the self-same property like as movement at such and such speed. Thus the experience of the anti-movement is viewed as ‘amodal’ so far as it is viewed as ‘amodal’ so far as it is viewed as in and itself.

However, there is a difference between seeing the ant’s movement and feeling its movement. Now, if these two senses represent the ant’s single movement similarly then so in the context of other modality specific representations. For example, visual representation of ant’s motion will take place in the context of the visual representation of colour. On the other hand, tactile representation of ant’s motion will happen in the context of the representation of a person’s own body. In this way we can account for the possibility of saying whether the experience of ants motion is visual or tactile, or both. So the alleged friction between tripartite account of experience and our traditional ways of counting experiences are not real but only apparent.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, we can say that the approach of the tripartite account to the individuation of experience is better than the vehicular approach, which appeals to the physical functional basis of experience that segments the stream of consciousness into parts. But, explaining this approach, according to Bayne, the tripartite account is more suitable for accounting the individuation of experience is content of the unity of consciousness. So we should discuss our thought of experience in tripartite terms. That means an experience is to be understood in terms of the instantiation of a phenomenal property by a subject at a time. These instantiations are as phenomenal event. Phenomenal unity can be understood in terms of mereological relations between phenomenal events easily. So the discussion about the possibility of the closure account of complex phenomenal state is more debatable. Hence, keeping aside all these debates, we can say that complex phenomenal state is one of the key features of unity of phenomenal consciousness. It is not only explaining by the closure account, but also explains by the mereological account. Both are acceptable to explain the concept conceptually.



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