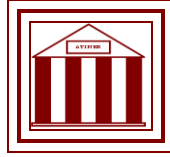


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**The Token Condition and
Consciousness without Self-
Consciousness**

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The Token Condition and Consciousness without Self-Consciousness

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Abstract

Rosenthal argues that it is not possible to think about a particular mental state token without thinking about the subject whose mental state it is. I refer to this as the token condition. Kriegel uses the token condition to support the claim that consciousness is not possible without self-consciousness. In this paper my purpose is to undermine the dependence of consciousness on self-consciousness based on the token condition. I discuss two reasons for the token condition. The first of these reasons consists in the what-it-is-likeness of experiences and the second consists in the strong conceptual relation between experiences and their subjects. I attempt to undermine this relation and suggest an account of the what-it-is-likeness of experiences without relying on the subject's point of view in order to undermine the token condition and thereby the dependence of consciousness on self-consciousness. I then suggest a particular version of higher-order theories of consciousness as a theory of consciousness that does not rely on self-consciousness. Finally I argue that even if the token condition is true, there is an asymmetry between the way I think about *my* mental states and the way I think about another person's mental states and given this asymmetry, the token condition cannot be used to support the view that consciousness is not possible without self-consciousness.

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Introduction

In considering how consciousness relates to self-consciousness, it is usually agreed that the former does not depend on the latter. Indeed it would be absurd to think that in having a perception of a tree, one also needs to be aware of oneself perceiving the tree. However, philosophers have also argued that the phenomenon of self-consciousness, when understood in a certain way, constitutes a necessary condition of consciousness.¹ This particular type of self-consciousness does not involve an attentive awareness of oneself and is usually characterized as a pre-reflective awareness of oneself as the subject of one's mental states.²

However what it is that one is aware of when one is aware of oneself is far from clear and yet rarely challenged possibly due to the strong influence of Descartes's *Cogito Ergo Sum*. At the same time though Cartesian Egos have long been the unwanted guests in our ontologies. And despite Descartes's influence, one does see in Hume's (1739-40/1978, p.252) famous words a significant dissatisfaction with the taken for granted experience of oneself; 'For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.'

Undoubtedly the existence of a self can neither be confirmed nor refuted by there being an experience of it or lack thereof. Nevertheless, the controversy over having such an experience, not to mention the controversy over both the nature of the experience granted we have it, and the nature of the self granted there is such a thing, does give us a good reason to see if we can explain the mental phenomenon of consciousness without possibly overcrowding our ontology. That is, without referring to a self and consequently to self-consciousness.

Henceforth I refer to the view that self-consciousness is required for consciousness, in the sense that the latter is not possible in the absence of the former, the *requirement thesis*. Elsewhere I discuss various reasons that motivate the requirement thesis and critically examine them in order to undermine the requirement thesis.³ In this paper I wish to look more closely at one of those reasons, viz. one of Kriegel's (2004, p.199) arguments for the requirement thesis based on Rosenthal's (1997, p.741) view that it is not possible to think about a particular mental-state token, as opposed to thinking simply about a type of mental state, without thinking about the subject whose mental state it is. Since conscious mental states are states *we* are aware of, then *our* awareness of them should include an awareness of the subject whose mental state it is, which is ourselves. Hence it is concluded that consciousness is not possible without self-consciousness.

¹This is most recently and thoroughly articulated and argued for by Kriegel (2003, 2004, 2009)

²Henceforth by self-consciousness I mean the pre-reflective awareness of oneself and not the reflective, focal, introspective self-consciousness unless noted otherwise.

³See Elkatip Hatipoglu (2013).

In what follows, after briefly giving some historical background concerning the requirement thesis, I discuss two reasons for the view that it is impossible to think about a particular mental state token without thinking about the subject whose mental state it is. Henceforth I shall refer to this view as the *token condition*. The first of these reasons consists, in Nagel's (1974) famous words, in the what-it-is-likeness of experiences and the second consists in the strong conceptual relation between experiences and their subjects. I attempt to undermine this relation and I suggest an account of the what-it-is-likeness of experiences without relying on the subject's point of view in order to undermine the token condition and thereby the requirement thesis. I then suggest a particular version of higher-order theories of consciousness as a theory of consciousness that does not rely on self-consciousness. Finally I argue that even if the token condition is true, there is an asymmetry between the way I think about *my* mental states and the way I think about another person's mental states and given this asymmetry, the token condition cannot be used to support the requirement thesis.

Historical Background

It is possible to trace the idea of no consciousness without self-consciousness, although not in so many words, as far back as to Aristotle (*On the Soul* 3.2) and his view that it is impossible to perceive something and not be aware that one is perceiving it, to which Sorabji refers as Aristotle's 'most Cartesian remark.'¹ The idea can also be found in Locke (1694/1975) when he says 'thinking consists in being conscious that one thinks.' (p.115) Gallagher and Zahavi's (2008) survey of the phenomenological literature² reveal considerable consensus that consciousness calls for self-consciousness and this self-consciousness is described as 'an intrinsic feature of primary experience...it is not thematic or attentive or voluntarily brought about; rather it is tacit, and very importantly, thoroughly non-observational (that is, it is not a kind of introspective observation of myself) and non-objectifying (that is, it does not turn my experience into a perceived or observed object).' (p.46) In addition Zahavi (2006) himself argues that consciousness essentially involves self-consciousness.

There are similar remarks in the analytical tradition too. Goldman (1970, p.96) says that the process of thinking about something carries with it a non-reflective self-awareness. Flanagan (1992, p.194) speaks of a 'low-level self-consciousness involved in experiencing my experiences as *mine*.' And Kriegel (2003, 2004) argues that all forms of consciousness depend upon a peripheral

¹See Caston (2002) for a discussion of this. Caston cites Sorabji's remark on p. 759.

²Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, p.46) cite Husserl who says that consciousness always involves a self-appearance, Heidegger who says every consciousness is also self-consciousness, and Henry who claims that experience is always self-manifesting. They also cite Sartre who says 'This self-consciousness we ought to consider not as a new consciousness, but as the only mode of existence which is possible for a consciousness of something.' (p.47)

awareness of oneself as the subject of one's mental state. So there has been some growing consensus with regards to the requirement thesis.

Reasons for the Token Condition

As mentioned before, one of Kriegel's (2004, p.199) arguments for the requirement thesis is due to Rosenthal (1997, p.741) who says that it is not possible to think about a particular mental-state token without thinking about the subject whose mental state it is. The first question to consider then is why thinking about a particular mental state token implies thinking about its subject. One obvious response would be that in thinking about a particular mental state token, one also thinks about what it would be like for someone, viz. for its subject, to have it. In order to think about a particular mental state token of say the olfactory sensation of recently mowed grass, one needs to think of the olfactory sensation as somebody's sensation with its unique phenomenology since that's what makes it a particular mental state *token* and not a *type*. Hence the what-it-is-likeness of conscious states seems to be one of the reasons for the token condition.

Another reason for the token condition consists in the strong conceptual link between experiences and subjects of experiences. The concept of an experience entails the concept of something having the experience. In other words, where there is an experience, there is a subject of experience.¹ After Strawson (2003, p.280) I call this the subject thesis. Our understanding of beliefs, desires, memories, emotions, perceptions etc., ordinarily assumes something that believes, desires, remembers, feels, perceives etc. even if there seems to be no consensus regarding what the nature of this thing that desires and remembers is.² James (1890/1950) argues that the elementary psychic fact is not just this or that thought, but someone's thought, every thought being owned (p.226).³ Shoemaker (1986) argues that experiencing involves its subjects 'as intimately as a branch-bending involves a branch' (p.107). The notion of ownerless experiences seems very counterintuitive.

Also when it is taken into consideration that mental states are states, one could argue that a state is a state of something – in this case the subject – and that it doesn't have an existence outside of the thing it is a state of. However, while this is true for all states including mental states, it does not immediately translate into the subject thesis. For instance a roll of thunder, insofar as it is a state of the weather, does not have an existence outside of the relevant medium of atmosphere. But we do not thereby posit a subject of the thunder, or we do not necessarily think of something that thunders.

¹I take experiences to be conscious mental states.

²Typically it is either brains or Cartesian egos. See Crane (2003) for a discussion of the problems with these suggestions and his theory of subjects as mental unities.

³The word 'thought' here extends to all types of mental states; beliefs, desires, pains, perceptions, etc.

However, one might argue that mental states are supposed to be different from states of the weather and that we do not think of mental states in the way we think about weather states. For instance, as Strawson (2003) argues, if there is pain, but nothing that suffers from it, the incentive to seek relief from the pain will be meaningless.¹ (p. 281) In short, it seems only natural to endorse the immediate inference from mental states to subjects of those mental states, and the inference is rarely second-guessed. Hence I take the subject thesis to be the second reason for the token condition.

Undermining the Token Condition

Despite the grip of the subject thesis, there are some who are skeptical about the inference from mental states to subjects of those mental states. For instance Carnap quotes Nietzsche who says ‘It is merely a formulation of our grammatical habits that there must always be something that thinks when there is thinking and that there must always be a doer when there is a deed’ (as cited in Bercic, 2004, p. 299). And as also pointed out in Lichtenberg’s (1959) objection to Descartes, it is not clear how one infers from mental states the idea of something that has those mental states. Consider again the case of a roll of thunder. When there is a thunder, there are various things happening that jointly give rise to the thunder. But one does not thereby conclude that there is *something* thundering. My purpose is to see if it is possible to adopt a similar way of thinking about mental states such that one is not forced into thinking that there is *something*, say, fearing when a number of things happening jointly gives rise to fear.

Such a subject-free way of thinking about mental states is suggested by Parfit (1984) in his reductionist account of personal identity where says ‘because we are not separately existing entities . . . we could fully describe our experiences, and the connections between them, without claiming that they are had by a subject of experiences’ (p.225). He refers to this as the impersonal description claim. Later though Parfit (1998) rejects the impersonal description claim as a result of Cassam’s (1992) objection that in order to describe the content of a self-ascriptive thought, one needs to appeal to the thing it is a thought of, viz. the subject. But Behrendt (2003), tracing the debate between Cassam (1989) and Parfit (1984, 1998) argues that Parfit’s (1998) rejection of the impersonal description claim is not as substantial as it may at first seem. One of the reasons why Behrendt takes Parfit’s rejection of the impersonal description claim to be insignificant has to do with Parfit’s suggestion (1998) that there

¹Perhaps it is part of a pain-state that it calls for a relief, in which case the need to ease a pain would not necessarily be dependent on there being something suffering from the pain, but on the state itself. On a related note, see Carruthers (2004) for an understanding of suffering without subjectivity.

could be imaginary intelligent beings who have no concept of themselves as the subjects of their experiences.¹

Parfit (1998, p.221) claims that these beings are no worse than us, humans, both scientifically and metaphysically, that they think like us, have experiences like us, only without a conception of themselves as the subjects of their experiences. According to Parfit (1998), these beings have the concepts of persisting objects, of a sequence of thoughts, a sequence of experiences and acts, and they are capable of thinking that a particular sequence of thoughts occurs in a persisting body (p.228). Instead of thinking about what is involved in 'seeing something' or 'feeling something', they think of what is involved in 'something being seen', or a 'seeing of something', and instead of giving names to people, they give names to particular sequences (p.228-29). Hence where we say 'Tenzing climbed Everest', they say 'in Tenzing there was a climbing of Everest' (p.229).

These beings are also capable of making decisions, and are aware of their decisions, but they don't think of themselves as making those decisions. Parfit (1998) says that they conceive events like decision-making processes and the resulting acts as 'another kind of happening, distinctive only in the way in which these events are the product of practical reasoning, or, in simpler cases, of beliefs and desires' (p.229). As a result, a mountaineer would have thoughts like; 'Should *this* include a crossing of that ridge of ice? Yes it should. And, unless that crossing starts now, it will be too late. So let the ascent begin!' (Parfit, 1998, p.230)

The token condition thereby the requirement thesis would be undermined by Parfit's suggestion of the possibility of such beings since these beings would have experiences without a conception of themselves as the subject of those experiences. Kriegel (2004) is willing to accept that it *may* be possible to think about a particular mental state without thinking about the subject whose mental state it is, but he contends that it would be abnormal for humans to think in this way. Obviously humans do have a conception of themselves as the subjects of their conscious mental states, but it may be more accurate to say that they have *formed* a conception of themselves as the subjects of their conscious mental states.² But the requirement thesis says something much stronger, viz. that consciousness is not possible without self-consciousness. I cannot conceive any reason other than an extreme loyalty to our linguistic habits and a conceptual scheme arising from those habits why humans can't think in this subject-free way or why Parfit's beings would lead psychologically impoverished lives. Neither linguistic habits nor conceptual schemes and relations restricted in scope by linguistic habits should be the determining factor behind a metaphysical thesis such as the requirement thesis especially if there is a

¹This suggestion was intended as a reply to another objection that comes from McDowell (1997), who argues that reductionist accounts feed on our understanding of the persisting existence of persons and thereby are circular. For a detailed discussion of Parfit's reply, see Parfit (1998, p.227-238).

²Typically during the course of the development of the mind, we take the concept of oneself to come after consciousness. See Damasio (1999) for a discussion of this.

consciousness theory that does not depend on self-consciousness. In what follows, I suggest that there is.

According to some theories of consciousness, mental state x is conscious when there is another mental state y about it. Mental state y could be a thought or a perception¹ and is usually described as a higher-order state because it is about another mental state, viz., the target state. Whether the higher-order state is a thought or a perception is not relevant here. The important point is that it is in virtue of there being a mental state about another mental state that the latter state, viz., the target state is conscious. The question then is whether this account of consciousness involves self-consciousness.

According to one version of higher-order theories, viz. the higher-order thought (HOT) theory, the higher-order state is described as a thought to the effect that *I am in this (target) state*. (Rosenthal, 2005) Thus the content of the higher-order state involves self-consciousness. There are two remarks that can be made with regards to this.

Firstly, although the higher-order state involves self-consciousness, the higher-order state does not need to be conscious for the target state to be conscious.² However this does not immediately solve the problem. In favor of the requirement thesis, one might argue that when the target state is conscious, self-consciousness is nevertheless present in the accompanying higher-order state since it is contained in the content of the higher-order state, waiting as it were, to be phenomenologically activated when the higher-order state becomes conscious. Hence one might argue that consciousness is indeed not possible without self-consciousness since each conscious state is accompanied by self-consciousness – albeit possibly just potential – contained in the higher-order state. But it should be noted that with regards to arguments in favor of the requirement thesis there is a lot of appeal to a sense of *mineness* with regards to experiences and such *potential* self-consciousness in the higher-order state would be phenomenologically no different from there being no self-consciousness. Besides, whatever implications the consciousness of the higher-order state might have, since the higher-order state is numerically distinct from the target state, self-consciousness would be separated from the target conscious state, hence self-consciousness would not be taken to accompany all conscious states.

Still, it is worth considering if the content of the higher-order thought can be described in another way. For instance, there is no reason to think that the

¹See Rosenthal (2005) for the former and Lycan (1996) for the latter.

²The suggestion that the higher-order state does not need to be conscious for the target state to be conscious comes from Rosenthal as a reply to an objection to his higher-order thought theory. The objection is that if the higher-order state in turn needs to be conscious so that the target state is conscious, that would mean there is yet another higher-order state, viz. a third-order state about the second-order state so that the second-order state is conscious. And this can go on infinitely. That the higher-order state is not necessarily conscious would also explain why self-awareness is usually missing from the phenomenology of ordinary, non-reflective experiences but present in experiences of a reflective and introspective kind since it is likely that in the latter case relevant higher-order states are also conscious.

higher-order state could not be an indexical kind of thought with the content *that state* rather than *I am in that state*. As such it would be possible to re-describe the higher-order state in a more Humean or Parfit's reductionist way. The purpose of the indexical type of higher-order state may be to assign the target state to a group of other psychologically continuous states – or if one favors bodily continuity theories of identity, to a group of bodily states that fall on the same spatio-temporal path – including the higher-order state itself. Hence, self-conscious friendly content of the higher-order state which is *I'm in so and so state* may be replaced by the following self-consciousness free content of the higher-order state: *this target state goes with this body and this series of psychophysical states*. And when the higher-order state is conscious, one may inferentially form the conception of oneself as the subject of a group of psychologically continuous states, but that is far from the kind of self-consciousness denoted by the requirement thesis.¹

Nevertheless, there may be other reasons for thinking that subjects are indispensable. The first reason for the token condition, viz., the *what-it-is-likeness* is an essential part of experiences. Without the subject's viewpoint as a part of the concept of an experience, thermometers can be said to *experience* heat and become hot or trees can be said to *experience* the presence of water or lack thereof and become thirsty. But we typically do not take trees to be thirsty and the thermometer to be hot. There is no what-it-is-likeness for the tree or for the thermometer.

The concept of an experience essentially includes what-it-is-likeness. And what-it-is-likeness involves a subject for which it is going to be like whatever it is like. So to undermine the token condition, and thereby the requirement thesis, one must give an account of the what-it-is-likeness without referring to the subject. I believe that one does not have to look far to see how this might be possible because it is something that is already suggested – but most of the time overlooked – by our very own concept of experiences.

Typically we attribute experiences to beings with a sufficient level of biological complexity, e.g. to those that have well-developed nervous systems.² That is, we don't think machines have experiences, but persons do. We don't think unicellular organisms have experiences, but dogs and cats might. We don't think flowers and trees have experiences but dolphins and chimpanzees probably do. This suggests that there might be a way to understand the what-it-is-likeness in virtue of an increasing level of biological complexity; i.e. in terms of interactions between simpler mental states, which give rise to experiences, and then in virtue of experiences themselves. If there is such a possibility, maybe we can understand the what-it-is-likeness of experiences without the subject that it-is-like-for. In other words, although the unique phenomenology of an experience is typically anchored in the subject's

¹This is also compatible with the fact that a conception of oneself comes much later in the development of mental lives, definitely after consciousness. See again Damasio (1999) for a discussion of this.

²See Damasio (1999) for a comprehensive account of what level of complexity gives rise to subjectivity as experienced by an organism.

viewpoint, there might be another way to make sense of the unique phenomenology of an experience that does not necessarily call for the subject.

Consider a belief that it will rain at time t_n . Consider further that this belief arises as a result of an observation of the sky at time t_{n-1} . A belief that it will rain at t_n is associated with the perception of the sky at time t_{n-1} along with many other psychophysical states. Among these are past sky-observations, some of which were followed by confirmations, i.e., observations that it did rain, and by disconfirmations, observations that it did not rain which eventually lead to the belief that it will rain at t_n only when the sky-observation is in a particular way at t_{n-1} based on previous experiences.

Likewise consider a present concern about a dentist visit that will take place in the future. It is a consequence of prior dentist visits, stories about dentist visits, a particular tolerance of pain, which has the threshold it has as a consequence of prior pains, knowledge of the particular procedure that is to be applied during the dentist visit or lack thereof that there is a concern in the first place and has the particular phenomenal character that it has.

This way of thinking about the unique phenomenology of experiences requires denial of the Humean type of atomism about experiences according to which 'distinct perceptions are distinct existences' and they are 'separable from each other, and may be separately consider'd, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing to support their existence' (Hume, 1739-40/1978, p. 252). I assume that experiences presuppose relations to other experiences. What-it-is-likeness can then be said to consist not in the subject's viewpoint but in the fact that each experience is associated with a unique relational matrix of other experiences. In other words, an experience is the experience it is and has the unique phenomenology it has as a consequence of the particular relational matrix of experiences it is a part of.

It would be interesting to study what types of interactions are at work in the relational matrix. However, I do not attempt to articulate the specifics of the relational matrix here. Perhaps the interactions are of a causal nature or maybe they are deterministic or maybe probabilistic. It may be suggested that the uniqueness consists in the particular spatio-temporal path of a person's life. These are interesting questions but impossible to undertake within the scope of this paper.

As mentioned before, Kriegel (2004) argues that our awareness of our conscious states is an awareness of ourselves as the subjects of those mental states because it is impossible to think about a particular mental state token without thinking about the subject whose mental state it is (p.199). Given the discussion above I suggest that it is impossible to think about a particular mental state token in isolation because I deny an atomistic view of experiences and not because I cannot think about a mental state without a subject. As such, subjects may be dispensable with regards to explaining the what-it-is-likeness feature of experiences.

Asymmetry in the Token Condition

Still, some may not be convinced by the reasons given above for the dispensability of subjects and endorse the token condition. However, even if the token condition is granted, and one agrees that one cannot think about a mental state token in abstraction from its subject, it is possible that this restriction applies only to the way we think about others' and not about our own mental states. Consequently I suggest that there is an asymmetry between the way I think about *my* mental states and the way I think about another person's mental states. I contend that given this asymmetry, the token condition cannot be used to support the requirement thesis.

As mentioned before, thinking about a particular mental state token implies thinking about what it would be like for someone to have it. In order to think about a particular mental state token of say the olfactory sensation of recently mowed grass, one needs to think of the olfactory sensation as somebody's sensation. But when I think about a particular mental state of *mine*, its unique phenomenology is immediately given to me. I don't need to further think about the subject whose mental state it is in order to understand that it has a unique phenomenology since in having the mental state, its unique phenomenology is already given. So perhaps the special access a subject has to *her* mental states consists precisely in the fact that she does not need to further think of them as belonging to her.

Given the asymmetry described above, I contend that the way we think about *a* particular mental state token does not necessarily provide the right insight into the way we think about *our* mental state tokens. This is most likely a consequence of the gap between the immediate and non-inferential knowledge one has concerning her own (conscious) mental states as opposed to the inferential knowledge another has concerning those conscious mental states.

One might be curious about the nature of the gap involved. For my friend to know about the olfactory sensation that I'm having, she either needs to be told by me or she needs to observe me take in deep breaths with a pleasant look on my face and also realize that the grass has been recently mowed etc. I, on the other hand know it immediately. As mentioned by Kriegel (2004, p.198) too, there are no intermediate steps between my having the olfactory sensation and my knowing that I'm having such a sensation. This constitutes essentially an epistemological gap between my knowledge of my conscious mental states and someone else's knowledge of them. This gap in turn gives rise to an asymmetry within the token condition and therefore I contend that the token condition cannot be used to support the requirement thesis.

Conclusion

My purpose in this paper was to see if there is a way to undermine the requirement thesis, viz. the thesis that consciousness is not possible without self-consciousness. I specifically focused on one of Kriegel's arguments to

support the requirement thesis viz. the one based on Rosenthal's view that it is not possible to think about a particular mental state token without thinking about its subject, which I called as the token condition. I suggested three reasons to reject the token condition; the first consisted in the weakening of the conceptual relation between experiences and their subjects; the second consisted in the possibility for a particular version of higher-order theories of consciousness that does not rely on self-consciousness and the third consisted in the possibility of giving an account for the what-it-is-likeness of experiences without relying on the subject's point of view. In the end I argued that even if the token condition was endorsed, it could not be used to support the requirement thesis.

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