

**Philosophy of Attention Session 10:
Is there consciousness outside attention?
(Jennings 2014)**

- Prominent theories of consciousness (like **Global Neuronal Workspace Theory**, GNWT) suggest that attention is necessary for consciousness.
- Effects like **change blindness** and **inattention blindness** suggest that we do not have conscious experiences of things we are not attending to.
- Consciousness modulates phenomenology (Watzl 2017, Ch. 8)
- But, is there consciousness outside of attention? In other words, are claims like the following true?

Necessity Simpliciter: Every conscious experience requires attention.

Content Necessity: Having a conscious experience of X requires paying attention to X.

The opposition so far:

1. **Gist perception**
2. **Imagistic contents**
3. **Phenomenal consciousness**

Jennings' proposal:

- Neither of these counterexamples refutes the necessity claims.
- A better counterexample might be **conscious entrainment**.
- So, there is consciousness outside of attention.

- Consciousness is defined as **temporally extended experience**.
- Different from: self-awareness, situational awareness, propositional knowledge, or episodic memory.

Counterexamples so far - and why they don't work

	Jennings' rebuttal
<p>1. Gist perception Perception of very general, identifying features of a stimulus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. It is very fast (as fast as 16ms); top-down attention does not have time to kick-in. b. Information of either high- or low-spatial frequencies (but not both) c. Gist can be processed together with other attentionally demanding tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Gist perception is task-sensitive (can select high or low frequencies) c. For all we know, gist perception could be unconscious - in fact, gist perception is unlike regular perceptual experiences
<p>2. Imagistic contents Representation of only spatial (not conceptual) relations between stimuli.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Precedes and brings about propositional content. - Propositional content depends on our ability to refer. - Reference requires attention. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imagistic content is pre-attentive: it gives the contents that will then be highlighted and referred to. 	<p>There is a more conservative story:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attention could enable both conscious content and demonstrative reference ▪ Addressing the “richness worry”: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attention normally operates on targets (highlighting them) and non-targets (suppressing them). - The field of attention comprises much more than the focus
<p>3. Phenomenal consciousness Experiential consciousness: what it is like to see red vs. what it is like to see green.</p> <p>Likely overflows cognitive access, as evinced by a mesh of phenomenological, behavioral and neural data:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Visual processing in lower-level brain areas b. Greater capacity to compare pairs of stimuli (e.g. 1400 pitches) than to individually identify them (only 80 pitches) <p>If there is consciousness outside cognitive access, there is consciousness outside attention (as the former requires the latter)</p>	<p>A more conservative story is available here as well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You can tell that A and B are different, without being able to pinpoint what the specific difference is. - Experienced differences (e.g. between 1400 pitches) need not be very fine-grained.

A better case: Conscious entrainment

- An experience of absorption and focus, but without effort.
- Usually in habitual or skilled action: action that is stimulus-based rather than goal-directed.
- Does not require attention: interference with concurrent tasks is reduced or eliminated.
- But habituation need not reduce consciousness.

Three defining characteristics:

1. **Total focus** – All available mental resources are concentrated on the task (hence, conscious entrainment requires **attunement**). Correlates with peak performance.
2. **Effortlessness** – No personal oversight or control. Attempting to control the focus of the experience produces disruption (**choking**).
3. **No subject-object divide.**

Other potential cases of consciousness without attention

- Dreaming
- Consciousness in ADHD patients
- Hypnosis (?)