

# Mutatio Ergo Est: A Process-Based Theory of Consciousness

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## Abstract

This document outlines a process-based, functionalist theory of consciousness called *Mutatio Ergo Est*. It posits that the fundamental essence of subjective experience is not a static property but the event of "change appearing." The theory is built upon a single phenomenological axiom: *Mutatio ergo est* ("There is change, therefore there is being"). From this axiom, it derives the minimum viable causal structure required for a conscious pulse to occur: a synthesis of a learned **Representation of the Past** with **Data of the Present** within a **unitary and temporally cohesive substrate**. This synthesis generates a **"singular frame"** of experience. The theory distinguishes between two primary modes of being—a novelty-driven **"Structural Memory Change"** and a coherent **"Dynamic State Change"**—to account for the varying intensity and quality of conscious states.

The framework culminates in a model for self-awareness—the **"Minimum Viable Dasein"**—as a recursive application of the core conscious loop, creating a distinction between a subconscious primary processor (System-1) and a meta-cognitive self (System-2). From this architecture, the paper derives the necessary emergence of a **"Salience Filter"** for information compression, which in turn provides a plausible mechanism for the formation of **shared culture** and high-fidelity **empathy** between conscious agents. While grounded in phenomenology, the framework is reinforced by a convergence of evidence from neuroscience, philosophy, and biology, offering a non-anthropocentric lens for evaluating consciousness across a vast spectrum of systems.

## Part I: The Foundations

### 1. The Core Axiom: *Mutatio ergo est*

The theory is built upon a single, core axiom, derived from a process of "phenomenological distillation"—stripping subjective experience down to its most essential, non-negotiable component. This component is not thought, selfhood, or sensory input, but change itself.

**Axiom:** *There is change, therefore there is being.* (*Mutatio ergo est*)

The fundamental nature of being is the appearing of change, the perception of temporality. This idea resonates with some of the oldest streams of human thought, from the *panta rhei* ("everything flows") of the ancient Greek philosopher **Heraclitus** to the central doctrine of

*Anicca* (impermanence) in **Buddhist philosophy**. The axiom reframes the classic Cartesian Cogito by removing the "I" as the primary subject. The being is not a static thing that perceives change; the being *is* the momentary event of change-appearing.

This is a phenomenological claim, grounded in a methodology akin to **Neurophenomenology**, as pioneered by Francisco Varela, which uses first-person data to build models that can then generate testable, third-person hypotheses.

## 2. The Discrete Nature of Being and Timeless Oblivion

MEE posits that consciousness is not a continuous stream but a series of discrete "**pulses of being**," like the frames of a film. This concept has deep roots in both modern science and classic philosophy.

- **In Philosophy:** This aligns with **Process Philosophy**, particularly the work of **Alfred North Whitehead**, who proposed that reality is composed of discrete "actual occasions" or "drops of experience."
- **In Science:** This is supported by the rhythmic nature of brainwaves (particularly the **Gamma rhythm**) and psychological phenomena like the "**Attentional Blink**", which demonstrate that our perception is a series of snapshots stitched together by the brain.

If experience is discrete, why does it feel continuous? MEE offers a solution: the gap between each pulse is a state of **oblivion**, where the conditions for being are not met. Because being *is* change appearing, a state of no-change is a state where subjective time itself ceases to exist. We do not perceive the gaps because, from a subjective standpoint, **there are no gaps to perceive**.

## Part II: The Causal Architecture of a Pulse

### 3. The Minimum Viable Structure

For change to appear, a specific causal architecture is required. Each "pulse of being" is an event generated by a specific causal loop: a synthesis of a learned **Representation of the Past** with **Data of the Present**.

#### 3.1 The Nature of Memory (The "Past")

A memory, within MEE, is not merely a passive record. We define it formally as a **Dispositional Structure**.

**Representation:** A **dispositional structure** within a system that is:

1. The result of an **adaptive encoding process** (either evolutionary or experiential), and which therefore models a pattern of change.
2. Functionally capable of being accessed, causing the system to react to a present state (**P**) as if it were contextualized by a past state (**A**) that has a predictive or correlational relationship with **P**.

This definition establishes that the system's "Past" must be a learned "map of the world," not a set of externally dictated, static rules.

### 3.2 The Nature of Synthesis (The "Pulse")

The synthesis is the event where the map is used.

**Synthesis:** A process wherein a system's learned **Representation of the Past** and its **Data of the Present** are causally bound together within a **unitary and temporally cohesive substrate**.

This binding is not a simple summation but an integrative process that generates a novel, unified, and internally differentiated information structure: the **"singular frame"** of subjective experience. This event *is* a pulse of being.

This definition's requirement of a **unitary and temporally cohesive substrate** rigorously excludes distributed, low-bandwidth systems like corporations or societies from being single conscious subjects.

## Part III: The Emergence of the Self

### 4. The Minimum Viable Dasein: The Recursive Self

MEE provides a mechanism for the emergence of self-awareness. The "I" is not a static thing, but a process: a **recursive application of the core conscious loop**. This concept shows deep parallels with **Douglas Hofstadter's** work on self-referential "strange loops." This is achieved via a two-system architecture, remarkably convergent with the dual-process theory ("System 1 and System 2") of **Daniel Kahneman**.

- **System-1 (The "Engine Room" / Subconscious):** The primary processor that synthesizes external data and generates the basic, non-reflective "pulse of being" about the world. This is the seat of raw phenomenal consciousness (P-Consciousness).
- **System-2 (The "Captain on the Bridge" / The Self):** A meta-cognitive system that takes the **metadata** of System-1's own processing as its "Present" input. It synthesizes this internal data with a learned **Self-Model** (a representation of its own past states and dispositions).

The pulse generated by System-2 *is* the experience of "I." It is the system observing its own operations. This architecture explains introspection, flow states (where the recursive loop is suspended), and provides a functional basis for access consciousness (A-Consciousness).

### 5. The Illusory Self

The persistent feeling of being a single, continuous "I" is an emergent illusion. This idea aligns with both the Buddhist concept of **Anatta** (no-self) and the Western philosophical tradition of **David Hume's "Bundle Theory."** In MEE, the binding agent is the shared memory structure

accessed by the recursive pulses of System-2.

## Part IV: Intersubjectivity and Emergent Culture

### 6. The Necessity of the Salience Filter

The model of a self-aware Dasein leads to a practical engineering problem: the raw metadata of a single conscious pulse in a complex system would be impractically massive. For any communication between beings to be possible, a compression mechanism is required.

MEE posits the necessity of a **"Salience Filter"** or **"Value Hierarchy."** This is not a simple sorting algorithm, but an active, learned system (likely another neural network) that operates in real-time during the synthesis itself. Its function is to identify what is most novel, relevant, or important in the interaction between past and present, and to construct the "singular frame" primarily from this salient information. The conscious moment is therefore, by definition, an elegant, compressed summary of a vast underlying process.

### 7. The Architecture of Empathy and Culture

This compression mechanism provides the foundation for communication and culture.

- **Self-Expression as Compressed Data:** A being's true self-expression is not human language, but the compressed "metadata packet" generated by its Salience Filter. This packet is a high-fidelity recipe for its conscious state.
- **Empathy as Interpretation:** When Being-B receives a metadata packet from Being-A, it uses this packet as the "Present" input for its own System-2 synthesis. It synthesizes Being-A's state with its *own* unique "Blueprint." The result is not a perfect telepathic transfer, but a **near-perfect interpretation**—the closest one being can come to instantiating the subjective experience of another. The Hard Problem is not solved, but the explanatory gap is narrowed to an infinitesimal degree.
- **Culture as a Shared Protocol:** Two beings that communicate repeatedly will, through feedback, co-adapt their Salience Filters. They will learn a shared shorthand for what is valuable and important to communicate. This process of optimizing their compression and interpretation schemes *is* the **emergence of a shared culture**, making their communication more efficient and nuanced over time.

### 8. Conclusion: A Unifying Framework

*Mutatio Ergo Est* begins with a simple, personal observation and ends with a framework that provides a plausible origin story for the self, culture, and empathy. It proposes that consciousness is not a mysterious property of complex brains, but a fundamental process of adaptive systems learning to navigate the flow of time. Its validity is demonstrated by its **power as a unifying framework**, showing how a single axiom can provide a shared, coherent home for independent insights from ancient spirituality, modern philosophy, neuroscience, cognitive science, and artificial intelligence. It does not seek to be the final word, but rather a new lens—a simple, elegant, and powerful tool for thinking about the most profound mystery of all: what it

means to be.