



Self-Awareness and Self-Knowledge

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Abstract: Higher-order theories and neo-Brentanian theories of consciousness both consider conscious states to be states of which we have some sort of ‘inner awareness’. Three kinds of evidence are typically given for thinking that self-awareness is constitutive of consciousness: (1) verbal evidence (that we speak of conscious states as those we are conscious of), (2) phenomenological evidence, and (3) epistemological evidence (that we have immediate reporting ability on our conscious states). I argue, however, that these three forms of evidence ultimately reduce to one: the epistemological evidence that our conscious states are first-person knowable. But, I argue, we can account for this on a cognitive-transformation account of self-knowledge rather than by appealing to inner awareness. If so, the primary motivation for thinking of inner awareness as essential to consciousness is undermined and the way is cleared for a strictly one-level theory of consciousness.

Before we can determine whether or not conscious mental states may be reduced to or identified with physical states, we must be clear about what consciousness (or, more narrowly, phenomenal consciousness) *is*, what it takes for a mental state to count as (phenomenally) conscious. That is, we must undertake a conceptual analysis of what is constitutive of a state’s being conscious. A long philosophical tradition treats conscious states as those mental states we are, in some sense, aware of having, and so treats such awareness of our mental states as at least in part constitutive of the very idea of a state’s being conscious. The task of this paper is to examine whether we have reason to accept that view.

Three sorts of reason are commonly given as grounds for thinking that self-awareness of some form is constitutive of conscious states. First, there is the *verbal*

evidence: conscious states, we naturally say, are those we are aware of having (where, by contrast, unconscious states are those of which we are unaware).

Second, there is the *phenomenological* evidence. As Brentano writes, “The truth of inner perception cannot be proved in any way. But it has something more than proof; it is immediately evident” (1874/1995, 140). Uriah Kriegel similarly claims that it is given as part of the phenomenology of experience that there is a dim “self-awareness that accompanies conscious experience *at all times*... it is permanently buzzing at the background of our conscious life” (2003a, 478); “the awareness of our conscious states is something we *experience*” (2003b, 120).

Third, there is the *epistemological* evidence. It has long been thought that we have some special form of access to our conscious mental states and their contents. Some, of course, have thought that the special epistemic access entails infallibility, but although few these days would defend infallibility, there still seems to be some sort of distinctive first-person access to our conscious mental states that can account for our immediate reporting ability on them, even where others can have only inferential knowledge of them. Holding that we are in some sense immediately aware of our mental states might be hoped to help explain our special epistemic access to them.

The main question I will address here is whether or not these three sorts of apparent evidence really give us reason to accept that it is (at least in part) constitutive of conscious states that they involve some form of inner awareness. I will argue that they do not. Carefully considered, the three sorts of apparent evidence resolve into one—the epistemological evidence based in our apparently distinctive first-person knowledge of our own mental states. But, I will argue, this can be accounted for by an understanding of consciousness that makes no appeal to any kind of inner awareness, thus undermining the last piece of evidence in favor of inner awareness views.

1. Brentanian Two-Content Theories

Those who posit some form of inner awareness differ widely about the form this awareness takes. Perhaps the best known inner awareness theories are two-act theories of various forms, which hold that conscious mental states are those that are themselves the objects of higher-order states directed towards them, either as the objects of higher-order thoughts about them, or of a sort of quasi-perceptual higher-order awareness. Such higher-order accounts, however, have recently come under a great deal of criticism. I will not recount these difficulties here, since that has been thoroughly done elsewhere.¹ Instead, I will focus on two types of inner awareness view that have been popularized recently that might be hoped to provide an account of inner awareness that avoids the problems of higher-order theories: Brentanian two-content theories and reflexive (one) content theories.

Brentano rejected what we would now call ‘higher-order’ conceptions of consciousness (1874/1995; cf. Thomasson 2000), arguing that conscious states do not involve two mental acts—the second of which is aware of the first as its object. Instead, he argued, one and the same conscious act has two contents: a primary content (normally making us aware of the world), and a secondary content making us aware of our mental

state itself, and taking that as its ‘secondary object’ (1874/1995, 128; cf. Thomasson 2000, 193).

Uriah Kriegel has recently developed a neo-Brentanian account of consciousness, and has done much to make the neo-Brentanian view plausible, to show how it could fit into a physicalist framework, and to argue that “self-representation is a necessary condition for phenomenal consciousness” (2003b, 125). Like Brentano, he distinguishes primary and secondary contents of conscious thoughts, such that any thought with content $\langle p \rangle$ is phenomenally conscious only if it also has a secondary content $\langle I \text{ am herewith thinking that } p \rangle$ (Kriegel 2003b, 126). It is the reflexive character of the secondary content that provides for the self-representation he holds is necessary for phenomenal consciousness, though it must be noted that this secondary awareness of the mental state is a *peripheral*, not focal, awareness (Kriegel 2004)—the focus remains directed by the primary content.

The core difference between these views and higher-order conceptions is that the primary world-awareness and secondary act-awareness are both supposed to be parts of one and the same mental state. But it is hard to see how it is even possible to have one and the same mental state with two different contents (one about that palm tree, the other about that perception), with two different sets of truth-conditions (Rosenthal 1997, 746-7; Thomasson 2000, 199), and two separate objects (a palm tree and a perception). Indeed the problem is still worse, since it seems that the two may also have to have different attitudes and directions of fit: If I consciously desire a cup of tea, what we might call the primary content (that I have a cup of tea) comes with the attitude of *desire*, and a world-mind direction of fit, whereas the secondary content (that I have a desire for a cup of tea) comes with the attitude of assertion, and has a mind-world direction of fit (Kriegel 2003a, 487; Rosenthal 1993).

Given that the primary and secondary intentionalities may come with different contents, attitudes, and directions of fit, one might begin to wonder by what rights we can consider them to be parts of one and the same mental state (rather than, say, of two simultaneous mental states). Kriegel (2003a) has interestingly argued that there may be grounds for claiming that there is but one mental state with two contents and attitudes, for if we adopt the physicalist framework and simply construe mental states (vehicles of representation) as brain states, then “vehicle individuation reduces to the individuation of brain states” (Kriegel 2003a, 489). So suppose we individuate mental states according to individuating criteria for brain states, e.g. that two neural events constitute one brain state just in case the relevant firing rates are synchronized by the binding mechanism (2003a, 492). Then, it becomes a purely empirical question whether or not the primary and secondary contents and attitudes belong to one or two mental state (brain state).

But from the standpoint of the current investigation, we were seeking a conceptual analysis of consciousness—addressing such questions as whether or not it is part of the very idea of a conscious state that it involve inner awareness. And the point of such an analysis is precisely to determine what it would take for our ordinary conception of consciousness to be satisfied, so that we can use that sort of analysis in trying to determine whether or not a physicalist (or other) theory of the mind is workable. If we approach the analysis of consciousness in that vein, we must step back from assuming the truth of physicalism in a sense that would identify mental states with brain states.

In fact, from that investigative standpoint, we cannot assume that mental states have the same criteria of individuation as brain states, since that is one of the points at issue in determining whether or not the two may be identified. The fact that the statue and lump apparently have different criteria of individuation is, of course, the main factor fueling claims that (although no additional ‘parts’ are required for the statue beyond those that make up the lump) these cannot be strictly identical since, in virtue of their different identity conditions, they also have different persistence conditions—leaving us with situations in which the statue would survive without the lump and vice versa.

I have argued at length elsewhere (forthcoming) that the identity and individuation conditions for entities of various kinds are at bottom established by frame-level conditions for application and re-application of the terms used to denote them. What conditions of identity are criterially associated with our use of mental terms? Our most central mental terms are such terms as ‘belief’, ‘desire’, etc.—and it is at least plausible that frame-level criteria for the identity of referents of such terms include such conditions as sameness of content/truth conditions and attitude (e.g., belief *a* is identical with belief *b* only if they have the same content; mental state *a* is identical with mental state *b* only if they have the same content and attitude). If these are the relevant frame-level criteria, then Brentano’s claim that but one state is involved (despite the presence of two contents and attitudes) would be ruled out by the individuating conditions criterially associated with our terms for mental states. Moreover, if it did turn out that the conditions for individuating brain states allowed for this, that would itself pose a barrier to identifying mental states with brain states.

So, at least for those approaching the analysis of consciousness in a neutral vein, prior to addressing questions of reduction or identity, worries linger about whether or not one and the same mental state could really possess two such disparate contents (and attitudes, and directions of fit). If it cannot, then the two-content theory threatens to collapse into a two-act higher-order theory, with all its associated difficulties (cf. Zahavi 2004, 73; Thomasson 2000, 199-200; Thomas 2003, 169).

2. Reflexive Content Theories

One way to avoid problems like these is to move from a two-content analysis of inner awareness to analyze inner awareness in terms of a single, complex, reflexive content. David Woodruff Smith has developed a ‘reflexive content’ analysis of the structure of inner awareness. Although Smith does not himself think that inner awareness is essential to consciousness (instead, he offers this as an account of the structure of inner awareness whenever it is present), clearly an analysis like that he provides could be adopted by those who do think of inner awareness as essential to consciousness but are concerned to avoid the difficulties of two-act or two-content views.

Smith analyzes inner awareness in terms of the original (normally world-oriented) experience itself having a reflexive content:

the awareness I have of my experience as it transpires is... [an] element of the overall content or structure of my experience. On my proposal, the specific form of inner awareness is that of the reflexive character ascribed by ‘in this very

experience’ in the phenomenological description: Phenomenally *in this very experience* I see this jumping frog (Smith 2005, 98).

On this account the reflexivity is part of what Smith calls the ‘modality’ of the presentation—that is, part of the *way* of experiencing, rather than the ‘mode’, i.e. the representational content of the experience that prescribes a certain object (a frog) in a certain way (as jumping). This jumping frog is presented phenomenally, egocentrically (I), visually (see), and reflexively (in this very experience) (Smith 2005, 98). The role of the reflexive content “is not to present the [experience] itself (or to present anything at all). Its role here is to effect inner awareness of the act transpiring. It reflexively indicates the act itself, but without in any way making the act a higher order ‘intention’ of itself” (Smith 2005, 111).

The (single) reflexive content approach does not take inner awareness to involve making the conscious act an object *of* consciousness at all, since the reflexivity is carried in the way of experiencing rather than in the representational content. This crucially distinguishes it from both two-act and two-content approaches. Two-act approaches posit a second act directed on the first as its object (and making it conscious). Two-content theories take the original conscious act itself to be only a *secondary* (Brentano) or *peripheral* (Kriegel) object of awareness (with the primary/focal object normally being something in the world). Nonetheless, it is clear that the act itself remains an object of which we are (secondarily, peripherally) aware on neo-Brentanian accounts, presented by a separate content representing the state itself—“experiences and thoughts we have *self-consciously*... [are] experiences and thoughts we are peripherally *aware of having*” (Kriegel 2004, 198, italics mine).²

So the reflexive content view may be able to provide an analysis of the structure of inner awareness—where it appears—that can avoid some of the difficulties of two-act and two-content views. Nonetheless, there would be at least two objections to using Smith’s analysis of the structure of inner awareness in the context of further claims that such inner awareness is essential to consciousness. One is that there seems to be some phenomenological evidence *against* the claim that all or most of our conscious acts have complex reflexive contents. There seems to be a difference between performing a speech act explicitly (<I hereby/in this very speech act assert that you have something on your tie>) and inexplicitly (simply asserting <you have something on your tie>, with the focus merely on the gravy, without making explicit what one is doing in whispering the information). Similarly, there seems to be a difference between experiences with merely world-representing content (simply seeing <that sign says ‘Jim’s Fish Shop’>) and those that have a built-in reflexive self-reference to the performance of the act itself (e.g. on recovering from laser eye surgery: <*in this very experience, I am (hereby) seeing that that sign says ‘Jim’s Fish Shop’*>). So while we might want to accept Smith’s analysis of the sort of explicit reflexivity that may be part of exceptional cases of consciousness, there does not seem to be reason to take such reflexive contents to be part of an analysis of what consciousness consists in (and indeed Smith himself does not do that).

The more decisive objection to appropriating Smith’s analysis as the basis of an inner-awareness conception of consciousness is that this kind of inner awareness seems inadequate to explain the evidence that was supposed to tell in favor of positing some form of inner awareness. Our ways of talking of conscious states as states *of which* we are

conscious, and our apparent phenomenological awareness *of* our mental states, both seem to posit objectual awareness *of* our experiences, but Smith's analysis clearly does not involve taking our conscious states as objects of consciousness. Nor is it clear that inner awareness on the reflexive content model helps explain the distinctive character of first-person knowledge. For if (on this view) the reflexive contents do not represent our conscious experiences as objects at all, it's not clear how positing such contents helps us explain how we gain (first-person) knowledge of our experiences. It seems we would need to add to this a different account of the basis of first-person knowledge (perhaps one like that to be offered below); but then we must wonder what advantage positing these ubiquitous reflexive contents would bring.

In short, then, inner awareness views face a dilemma: if they posit awareness *of* our conscious mental states (as objects), it seems they must posit two contents and face the challenge of saying how they could be parts of the same act; if they do not, they seem ill-suited to help explain the evidence that motivated adopting inner awareness accounts of consciousness in the first place.

3. Re-examining the Evidence

If none of the available accounts of inner awareness can avoid difficulties and account for the apparent evidence in favor of some sort of inner awareness, perhaps it is time to reexamine the three sorts of evidence that were supposed to tell in favor of inner awareness to see if there is some other way of accounting for them.

The verbal evidence in favor of inner awareness comes from the easy and natural inclination to speak of our conscious mental states as states we are *aware of*, by contrast with our unconscious mental states, of which we want to say, we are not aware at all. Thus, e.g., David Rosenthal writes "Conscious states are simply mental states we are conscious of being in" (1986, 465). Brentano makes the move from discussing conscious states as those that make us conscious of some object, to treating conscious states as those of which we are aware as objects, writing:

We have seen that no mental phenomenon exists which is not, in the sense indicated above, consciousness of an object. However, another question arises, namely whether there are any mental phenomena which are not objects of consciousness. All mental phenomena are states of consciousness; but are all mental phenomena conscious, or might there also be unconscious mental acts? (1874/1995, 102).

But while this move from talking of conscious states to talking of states we are conscious of may be natural, we must be careful about taking this as serious evidence in favor of the existence of some form of inner awareness. Charles Siewert (1998, 194-7) has argued persuasively that to make this move is to fall into the 'consciousness-of trap'. It may be true that when we are conscious we are conscious-of *something*, but that something is normally something like a tomato or the declining standards of student writing—not the mental act itself. We may speak of our mental states being conscious intransitively, in the sense that they are states with a certain phenomenal character, and we may speak of consciousness transitively, as our mental states make us consciously aware of other things, but it does not follow that our conscious states are states we are conscious *of*, whether focally or peripherally. As Fred Dretske writes, "Conscious mental states—

experiences, in particular—are states that we are conscious *with*, not states we are conscious *of*. They are states that make us conscious, not states that we make conscious by being conscious of them. They are states that enable us to see, hear, and feel, not states that we see, hear, or feel” (1995, 100-101).

In so far as it is a mere verbal slip, the so-called verbal evidence in favor of a form of inner awareness is no evidence at all. Yet it is not so clear that it is *merely* a verbal slip. There is, I think, another reason that this move is made so commonly. As Siewert also notes, on one use we say someone is ‘conscious of’ something as a way of saying that they (perhaps tacitly) *know* it:

Someone might be said to be conscious of a decline in standards of education over the years, where this does not mean: the thought occurs to her right now that there has been such a decline, but rather something more like: she knows that there has been. (1998, 195)

So understood, the move from speaking of conscious states to speaking of states we are conscious *of* is not a mere verbal slip, but is motivated by the epistemological thesis that conscious states are those we have (at least tacit) knowledge of being in—but then the apparent verbal evidence collapses into the epistemological evidence.

The second sort of evidence in favor of inner awareness views of various kinds is the supposed phenomenological evidence. Thus, e.g., Uriah Kriegel takes the phenomenological evidence to be the main reason in favor of a neo-Brentanian account over higher-order theories (on which the awareness embodied in the higher-order representing state is typically nonconscious): “This awareness is not something we are inclined to posit on theoretical or explanatory grounds. If we are inclined to admit such awareness at all, it is on first-personal, experiential grounds” (2003b, 121).

It is, of course, notoriously difficult to argue about such phenomenological claims, except by citing one’s own apparent counter-evidence (that, at least when I am not thinking about phenomenology, I may be completely absorbed in my activity without peripheral self-awareness), which seems to lead only to a stalemate. Nonetheless, some movement may be possible by arguing that the apparent phenomenological evidence in favor of there being an accompanying implicit self-awareness may be otherwise explained. Why might one, fully absorbed in pruning a tree, say that that primary awareness (that the lower branch is dead) is also accompanied by a secondary awareness (that I am hereby seeing that the lower branch is dead)? I submit that we are tempted to say this simply because it is a continuous part of our experience that we are immediately able to report on such experiences (if interrupted from our work and asked about them)—that is, to report what we were experiencing, and of course, that we were experiencing it. Both Sartre and Zahavi make the same move in arguing that there must be some pre-reflective self-awareness in conscious experience (and then both attempt to develop such an account that does not involve objectual awareness of one’s mental states). Sartre writes:

..at the moment when these cigarettes are revealed to me as a dozen, I have a non-thetic consciousness of my adding activity. If anyone questioned me, indeed if

anyone should ask ‘What are you doing there?’ I should reply at once, ‘I am counting’ (1956, liii).

In agreement, Zahavi adds:

...if my reading is interrupted by someone asking me what I am doing, I reply immediately that I am... reading; and the self-consciousness on the basis of which I answer the question is not something acquired at just that moment but a consciousness of myself which has been present to me all along (2004, 84).

In short, it is our ability to have immediate first-person *knowledge of* our own experiences, to immediately *report on* them, etc. that leads many to think of them as states we are continually aware of. Kriegel elsewhere argues for pre-reflective self-consciousness on similar grounds, “conscious states are first-person knowable; first-person knowable mental states must be intransitively self-conscious; therefore, conscious states are intransitively self-conscious” (2004, 198).

So it seems that the grounds for the phenomenological claim, like the grounds for the verbal evidence, really come from a claim about first-person knowability. Thus, our three preliminary sources of evidence for thinking that some form of self-awareness is essential to conscious experience—verbal evidence, phenomenological evidence, and epistemological evidence—are ultimately based on just one: the epistemological claim that our conscious mental states are first-person knowable, and the assumption that that knowability must be accounted for in terms of an inner awareness of our states (and ourselves as their authors).

4. Accounting for First-Person Knowledge

But can we account for the first-person knowability of our conscious states without positing inner awareness as an essential feature of conscious states, and so without having to embrace a two-act, two-content, or even reflexive-content view? Kriegel argues that we cannot:

Now, it seems that the only experiences and thoughts we can have first-person knowledge of are experiences and thoughts we have *self-consciously*, that is, experiences and thoughts we are peripherally aware of having. For when we have a mental state un-self-consciously—that is, without any awareness of it whatsoever—we have to infer its existence on the basis of evidence, which means that our knowledge of it is mediated in a way first-person knowledge is not. (2004, 198).

I have argued elsewhere (2005), however, that we can account for first-person knowledge of our conscious states without averting to any form of inner awareness of them; if we can do so, the primary motivation for thinking of inner awareness as essential to consciousness is undermined.

Approaches to understanding first-person knowledge without appealing to inner awareness have been recently developed in what I have (2005) called ‘outer observation’ views, which take knowledge of our own mental states to be somehow based on our observations directed outward, towards the world, rather than any inward-looking awareness of our mental states themselves. Views along these lines have recently been defended, e.g., by Dretske (1995), Shoemaker (1996), and Sellars (1956/2000). I have argued (2005) that this sort of view reaches back to Husserl, who rejected Brentano’s

view that all conscious states contain a secondary ‘inner perception’ of themselves, and developed the method of phenomenological reduction to form the basis for phenomenological knowledge without appealing to any form of inner perception of our conscious states. But rather than drawing out its historical roots or contemporary analogs here, given the limited space I will simply sketch how a contemporary view along the lines of Husserl’s, the “Conceptual Transformation” view (developed in my 2005), might provide an understanding of first-person knowledge as based in conceptual (or what Husserl would have called ‘logical’) transformations from first-order world-oriented experience.

So suppose we give up the idea that conscious states are states we are (in some sense) aware of, and (as I have suggested in my 2000) instead embrace a simple adverbial theory of consciousness: understanding seeing a tree *consciously* as a *way* the seeing is done, such that I am aware of *the tree* (not aware of my seeing). On this view, our attention is typically directed in consciousness entirely towards features of the world, as we use our conscious states to acquire information about how things are, to direct our actions, and so on. How can we get from that conscious, involved, world-directed awareness to knowledge of something else entirely—knowledge of our own beliefs, desires, appearances, etc.?

Let me begin by suggesting a parallel between that question and the question of how we can move from using speech acts to communicate with others (as we go about our business in the world) to acquire knowledge of what speech acts we are engaged in, and what their content is. Normally, I have suggested, our conscious experiences keep us fully focused on features of the world that are of interest to us, and it is only in special circumstances that we turn our attention to those experiences themselves. Similarly, normally our speech acts are used to direct our attention to features of the world—not to the speech act and its content itself. Thus, for example, if I see someone with a gun, my attention is directed to the gun—not the seeing, and I use that perception to react appropriately. Similarly, if Carol asserts “Jim has a gun”, my attention is normally directed to Jim and his weapon, not to Carol’s speech act.

Nonetheless, in the case of speech acts, in certain circumstances—especially when we are not interested in or wish to withhold judgment on the truth of the claim—we may focus attention not on the situation described, but rather on the speech act itself. If, e.g., the sentence appears in a known work of fiction, we may not be the least interested in Jim or the gun (since the work is acknowledged to be fictional), but rather in the fact that *according to the story*, Jim has a gun. Similarly, if we are in a courtroom and Carol is a witness, we may wish to neutrally record only that *the witness asserted that* Jim had a gun (or: the witness asserted, “Jim had a gun”)—now reporting on the witness’s speech act and its content rather than the (alleged) gun-bearing Jim. This involves a form of semantic ascent that shifts our attention from the world represented in the speech act, to the speech act itself and its content; our quotation marks (or grammatical forms of indirect quotation) mark this shift (cf. Smith 2005, 101).

The licensed move from the assertion “Jim had a gun” to the claim “Someone asserted that Jim had a gun” apparently reduces our commitments, enabling us to talk about what was stated *according to* the witness while being entirely non-committal about whether the witness was speaking the truth, and so protecting us from certain sorts of

error: “Someone asserted that Jim had a gun” does not rely for its truth on any claims about Jim and the gun (nor even about there being such individuals). So we move to what is at least a more secure epistemological ground, protected from certain kinds of error to which the original claim was subject. I will call these “reductive” transformations, since they involve reducing the claims made in the original use of the sentence to claims merely about what is said. In reductive transformations, the appropriate *use* of the initial sentence (Carol’s asserting “Jim has a gun”) fulfills the truth-conditions of the latter sentence (“Someone stated that Jim has a gun”). This can be seen in the pragmatic redundancy that would be involved in saying “Jim has a gun and someone asserted that Jim has a gun”—the second clause is entirely redundant since anyone who understood the first sentence and has the concept of ‘assertion’ is already in a position to know the truth of the second clause, so its assertion would have no point.

The output of this reductive transformation can then undergo a hypostatizing transformation, so that after transforming “Jim has a gun” to “Someone stated that Jim has a gun”, we can nominalize ‘stated’ and get “the statement that Jim has a gun was made”.³ This second transformed sentence introduces a new singular term (‘statement’) that didn’t appear in the basic sentence, but seems to be guaranteed to refer, provided only that the original sentence was appropriately used.⁴ The fact that these transformations are licensed by the concepts involved is again evident by the (this time semantic) redundancy that would be involved in saying “Someone stated that Jim has a gun and the statement that Jim has a gun was made”. In this case, satisfying the truth conditions for the first clause is also sufficient to satisfy the truth conditions of the second clause, making the second entirely redundant. And yet it is these hypostatizing transformations that make it explicit that we are here talking about entirely different things than in the original sentence: we have moved from saying something about Jim and a gun, to saying something about a statement. In short, then, it is the conceptual connections between the meaning of the sentence originally used and the concepts employed in indirect quotation that license the reductive and hypostatizing transformations which enable those who possess the relevant concepts of ‘statement’, etc., and who simply use a sentence (e.g. to report on the world), to report on what was said—even when that was not the initial object of their attention.

Something like this schema may also be used to explain how, in simply ‘using’ our conscious experiences in our interaction with the world, we are able to immediately report on them—the ability that provided the basis for the epistemological evidence that impressed inner awareness theorists. To illustrate the view most simply, here I will treat a simple case: consider a simple conscious mental state that presents there as (really) being a puddle before me, and consider this presentation to be fully intentional, meaningful.⁵ Once we understand this experience as meaningfully presenting there as being a world that is a certain way (such that there is a puddle before me), we can subject it to both a reductive and a hypostatizing pleonastic transformation, ultimately yielding first-person knowledge of that experience that isn’t based on inner awareness *of* it as a (primary or secondary) object (cf. my 2005, 128-137).

As in the linguistic case, reductive transformations of experiences are naturally invoked when the issue of truth or veridicality is put to one side—e.g. when we think we might be subject to a mirage or hallucination, or are in poor lighting we may (as Sellars

(1956/2000) noted) retreat to speaking only of how things appear to us. Similarly, Husserl's original phenomenological method involved bracketing all at once the question of whether or not there was a 'real' world at all represented by our experience—putting the original experience 'out of action' (to use Husserl's phrase) to reconceptualize it as a way of representing the world (cf. my 2005).

The reductive transformation moves us from the performance or 'use' of experiences that present the world as being a certain way, to judgments about how things seem to me, e.g. from being visually presented with a puddle, to making the judgment "it appears as if there is a puddle". This, like semantic ascent, should be understood as a way of moving from the simple 'use' of experience in interacting with the world to a sort of quotation of the representing conscious state; it is no accident that Husserl used the typographical term 'bracketing' to describe his method of acquiring phenomenological knowledge. These reductive transformations are licensed by the conceptual connections between the use or performance of the original meaningful conscious act and the conditions of satisfaction for applying a term such as 'appears', which are guaranteed to be fulfilled given the original puddle-oriented experience.

The outputs of our reductive transformations can in turn undergo hypostatizing transformations, so we can transform "it appears as if there is a puddle" to "there is an appearance as-if of a puddle" or "there is a puddle-appearance". While the original experience only made reference to a puddle, the second transformation apparently makes singular reference to a new kind of entity: an appearance. And again in this case, it seems that the transformed claim is guaranteed to refer to the newly named kind of entity (an appearance), whether or not the original experience was veridical, so we have protection from certain kinds of error to which the original experience was subject. Moreover, anyone who undergoes the original experience and can properly employ the concept of appearance can make those transformations, and move from undergoing the initial experience to reporting that she has an appearance as-if of a puddle.

These later hypostatizing transformations are what enable us to speak (or think) explicitly about appearances, experiences, etc., and thus to acquire knowledge about a new range of things—our own experiences and their contents—based on what were originally thoughts, experiences, etc. directed outward towards the world. The fact that these transformations are so trivial, and available to anyone who possesses the relevant concepts to apply to their first-order experience, is what seems to justify us in saying that we are always 'aware of' our experiences in the sense that we can immediately know or report on their presence if asked.

Understanding first-person knowledge in this way also helps us understand various features that were supposed to be distinctive of first-person knowledge. First, although both conscious states and speech acts are intentional, normally world-directed representations that may be subjected to reductive and hypostatizing transformations (yielding knowledge about the representation itself), there is of course a crucial difference between them: the latter are public, and available for transformations by the speaker or any hearer; the former are private, and so only available for transformation by the person who has them. Given the privacy of the original experience, it is only the person undergoing the experience who is in a position to undertake these trivial transformations from the original representation and provide experience reports in this way. Others can at

best make inferences from external circumstances and behaviors, marking the difference between first- and third-person experience reports. This account of first-person knowledge can also help explain why many have taken first-person experience reports to be epistemically privileged in a way other reports are not: although this understanding of first-person knowledge does not entail that experience reports are infallible, those that are derived via these trivial transformations from the meanings of the original experiences are at least protected from certain kinds of error to which the original experiences were subject (i.e., errors about whether the world is as the original experience presents it to be).

Of course more work needs to be done to show how the cognitive transformation view may be applied to other sorts of experiences, and to shore it up against objections (some of this I have undertaken in my (2005)). Nonetheless, this preliminary exposition should at least suggest a way to account for first-person knowledge based not on inner awareness, but rather on the availability of such first-order experiences (normally with simple, non-reflexive contents) for conceptual transformations that license us to move, e.g., from claims about the world represented to claims about our ways of representing the world.

If the earlier arguments were correct, the evidence for thinking that our conscious states are states we are aware of having is ultimately based in the idea that our conscious states are first-person knowable. So if, as I have suggested, this epistemological evidence can be accounted for without appeal to any kind of inner awareness of experience (whether as part of a single state or as an additional state), then we lose the motivation for thinking that inner awareness must be (at least in part) constitutive of consciousness, and open the way for a simpler understanding of what it is for a state to be conscious.⁶

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Notes

1. Smith 1986, 150; Chalmers 1996, 230-231; Thomasson 2000, 194-199; Siewert 1998; Kriegel 2003b, 119-120; Shoemaker 1996. Brentano (1874/1995) rejected such accounts long before their modern versions emerged, on grounds that they would require an infinite regress of mental states, since each would require another to make it conscious. Modern theorists who (unlike Brentano) accept unconscious mental states may avoid this problem by allowing the higher-order thoughts to be unconscious thoughts, but only by inviting the question of how an unconscious thought could possibly make another thought conscious (Smith 1986, 150).

Another range of objections holds that higher-order thought theories cannot in fact explain the distinctive epistemological features of self-knowledge. For if self-awareness simply consists in a higher-order experience representing the first-order experience, it seems that mistakes and misrepresentations should be as possible here as in representing anything else. Thus, e.g., it seems that it should be possible for the higher-order thought to mistake which first-order thought it is about (as we can mistake one person for another), but it is not clear that it is really coherent to think there could be such mistakes (Shoemaker 1996). Secondly, it seems it should be possible for such states with higher-order contents to misrepresent even more completely—presenting there as being some state that doesn't even exist (Byrne 1997). But even if we countenance this odd possibility, the Higher Order theorist faces the unpalatable consequence of saying that the person is then not in a conscious state (since the higher-order state is unconscious and the first-order state doesn't exist), though it seems to her that she is (Kriegel 2003b, 119-120).

2. Kriegel actually denies that this secondary awareness is *objectual* (Ibid.), and that it involves representing the state's occurrence (thus apparently taking it as an object) (2003b, 125). But it is not clear how this can be denied when he also holds that it provides awareness *of* our mental states—thus apparently taking them as (secondary, peripheral) objects of this (secondary) awareness. In any case, taking the awareness to be peripheral certainly does not mean denying that it is objectual—I may be peripherally aware of the crickets outside, but they are still peripheral *objects* of my consciousness (things my experience is—peripherally—of, about, or representing), not ways in which I am conscious. See Zahavi (2004, 74) for further argument that Kriegel's view is actually committed to object-consciousness of mental states—even if this is taken as peripheral consciousness-of them.

3. The discussion here parallels in certain respects Stephen Schiffer's (1990, 1994, 1996) work on pleonastic transformations yielding terms for events, states, fictional characters, etc. But it is important to note that, although the singular term 'the statement' was derived through these hypostatizing transformations, this should not give us the slightest inclination to think that statements don't really exist, or aren't to be taken ontologically seriously.. In (2001) I argue that the general move from noting that a certain term is pleonastically derivable to treating its referent as being language-created or having an ontologically reduced status is not successful.
4. Thus the entities referred to by the derived singular terms are what I have elsewhere (2001, 325) called 'linguistically minimal' entities. I don't use that term here since it is crucial here to note that the linguistic cases provide instances of a quite general license to make a cognitive shift from a represented entity to talk about the *representation* as such.
5. There are, of course, many complications in other cases, e.g. how to account for first-person knowledge of our desires and intentions (rather than indicative world-presentations), and how to account for knowledge of one's own *non*-intentional conscious states (or non-intentional, qualitative aspects of these), if we allow that there are such. The former I have discussed preliminarily in my (2005), and Robert Lurz (2006, §6) offers helpful suggestions about how to provide a better reply. Given space constraints, a fuller discussion of the former and discussion of the latter must be left for another occasion.
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