

# What has Transparency to do with Husserlian Phenomenology?

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**Abstract:** This paper critically evaluates Amie Thomasson's (2003; 2005; 2006) view of the conscious mind and the interpretation of Husserl's phenomenological reduction that it adopts. In Thomasson's view, the phenomenological method is not an introspectionist method, but rather a "transparent" or "extrospectionist" method for acquiring epistemically privileged self-knowledge. I argue that Thomasson's reading of Husserl's phenomenological reduction is correct. But the view of consciousness that she pairs with it—a view of consciousness as "transparent" in the sense that first-order, world-oriented experience is in no way given to itself—is not compatible with it and that it is not the point of view he adopts. Rather, Thomasson's view is, from a Husserlian vantage point, self-undermining in the same way that any genuinely skeptical view is self-undermining. And this is one of the motives Husserl has for holding a non-transparent, same-order view of consciousness alongside his transparent method for self-knowledge acquisition.

## §1 Introduction

Given the methodological primacy of Husserl's principle of all principles,<sup>1</sup> which takes the evidentiary legitimacy of adequate intuition for knowledge to be originary, absolute, and foundational, it may seem that the only plausible reading of Husserl's view of self-knowledge would be an introspectionist reading. The introspectionist about self-knowledge takes *privileged* self-knowledge—i.e., knowledge of one's own mind which (i) does not rely on the same sort of evidence as our knowledge of the minds of others (immediate) and (ii) is not subject to the same sorts of error as our knowledge of other minds (authoritative)—to derive from an introspective capacity, which grants a special sort of access to our own mental states (grounding immediacy), and which only the subject of experience can utilize (grounding authority).<sup>2</sup> In a recent series of papers, Amie Thomasson (2003; 2005; 2006) argues that the introspectionist interpretation of Husserl's method for acquiring privileged self-knowledge is false; that the proper understanding of Husserl's methodology of the phenomenological reduction is "based in the idea that knowledge of one's own experiences is in some sense based on outer observation of the world, rather than a direct inner observation of one's own experiences" (Thomasson 2005, 116). In other words, Thomasson interprets the phenomenological reduction as a *transparent* method for the acquisition of knowledge of one's own conscious mental states, a method that answers questions about the nature of one's lived experience by

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1. (Husserl 2014, §24). As here, whenever I cite Husserl's work, I will refer to the section number; and when necessary I will also refer to the page number of the original publication after the section number.

2. Henceforth, when I say "self-knowledge," I will mean *privileged* self-knowledge as it is defined in this sentence.

answering questions about the world of which one is aware in having the experience.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it bypasses reliance on introspection as a method of gathering evidence for self-attributive judgments for a method that does not rely on introspection at all to justify introspective judgments.

In the following, I will argue that Thomasson's interpretation of Husserl's basic method by which a subject acquires knowledge of her own mind—i.e., as an interpretation of what Husserl calls the “reflective modification” of consciousness—is correct. But I will also argue that her (2006) attempt to pair Husserl's transparent method for reflective self-knowledge with a “transparent” or “adverbial” conception of phenomenal consciousness—a view on which phenomenal consciousness consists in nothing other than a distinctive way of being conscious of the world outside the current conscious experience—is destined to fail; and that Husserl himself anticipates the failure of any such view in his arguments against “skeptical” views of reflective self-knowledge in the *Ideas* (§79). So, if a transparent theory of self-knowledge is to be viable, it must be paired with a non-transparent conception of conscious experience in which first-order conscious experience of the world also involves some sort of awareness of the experience itself.

I will first (§2) review Thomasson's transparency interpretation of the phenomenological reduction. Then (§3) I will carefully examine Husserl's initial presentation of the reflective modification of consciousness in his *Ideas* in order to support the exegetical claim that Husserl does pair a non-transparent, same-order view of consciousness with his transparent methodology of self-knowledge acquisition in the reflective modification of consciousness. After that (§4) I will present the argument against Thomasson's attempt to pair a non-transparent view of consciousness with Husserl's transparent methodology of self-knowledge acquisition, an argument which claims that such a view succumbs to the problem that Husserl takes to be characteristic of all genuinely skeptical views: that it is ultimately self-undermining. Finally, (§5) I will sketch some of details of Husserl's same-order conception of phenomenal consciousness in order to illuminate the role that it plays as a condition of the possibility (or “transcendental condition”) of transparent reflection before giving some closing remarks (§6).

## §2 Thomasson's Interpretation of Husserl's Phenomenological Reduction

Thomasson takes Husserl's phenomenological reduction to be a method for acquiring intuitive

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3. Gareth Evans (1982) characterization of the transparency method of acquiring self-knowledge is the most often cited. But, as Richard Moran (2001) points out, Roy Edgley (1969) seems to have been the first to use this term in this application.

self-knowledge, not a method that itself presupposes intuitive self-knowledge or self-awareness as an evidential ground for self-knowledge. Thus, because it is a method that yields, but does not presuppose or rely on self-intuition, it is a transparent methodology.

Thomasson argues that we can summarize Husserl's method of the phenomenological reduction—the basic methodological tool for the new science of pure phenomenology, a science of the essence of consciousness, presented in the *Ideas*—as the employment of two “conceptual transformations that license us to move, e.g., from claims about the world represented to claims about our ways of representing the world” (Thomasson 2006, 12). We might represent these “conceptual transformations” as something like inference rules that “license” (as Thomasson says) the transition from claims about the world (that one is conscious of in a mental event) to claims about these conscious mental events themselves and then, ultimately, to claims about their essential nature. As we shall see in the next section, Husserl prefers to speak of these as “modifications” that the conscious subject can make to her own conscious experience. But insofar as both terms—*inference* and *conscious modification*—refer to activities of the subject carried out in accordance with essential law, and insofar as it is the same essential law that validates the transitions in both cases, we can take these two otherwise importantly different kinds of activities to be equivalent in terms of their epistemic import for self-knowledge.

Before turning to Thomasson's presentation of the two conceptual transformations that make up Husserl's phenomenological reduction, I want to point out how they ground the *privileged* status of self-knowledge with prior reliance on introspection. First, as we shall see is the case with the first transformation, since only I, the conscious subject, can perform it, given that it is a transformation rule whose validity requires the presence of a conscious experience, and given the peculiar privacy of conscious experience to the subject, then it will always yield knowledge that only I (the conscious subject) am in a position to have. This grounds the *authority* of privileged self-knowledge. And since this method (when performed in the appropriate circumstances, i.e., in the circumstance of my having a conscious experience) always yields true results, this grounds the *immediacy* of privileged self-knowledge. Thus, in Husserl's method, we have an account of privileged self-knowledge without reliance on introspection as a special epistemic ground. Rather, all we need is conscious first-order experience and the (general purpose) cognitive capacities to execute the methods of the phenomenological reduction embodied in the conceptual transformations.

So, what are these conceptual transformations? The first Thomasson calls the “*reductive*” transformation. This is a transformation (or general inference schema) by which we can move

from our own first-order, world-oriented representation to a claim that “mentions” this representational state as being such-and-such. Consider, for example, the exemplification of this in the method of semantic ascent, where a subject can move from asserting

1. Bonnie is on the train

to asserting

2. Someone asserted that Bonnie is on the train.

When 1 is asserted, 2 is necessarily true. And one need not have any special introspective capacity to know fact expressed in 2 when it is inferred from 1. However, it is important to realize, it is not that the fact asserted in 1 implies or entails the fact asserted in 2—indeed, the assertion made in 1 might be false, Bonnie might not be on the train at all, and the intended inference would still reliably yield a truth in 2. This is so because it is that the assertion of the fact in 1 entails the fact asserted in 2 and that makes 2 a true proposition. In other words, the reductive transformation as applied to assertions is a logical consequence of “the rules of use of the concept *stated*” or the concept *assertion*: that, when one states or asserts that *P* one can, in every case, truthfully infer that someone is stating or asserting that *P* (Thomasson 2005, 129).

The shifts in the content of 1 that come out in the structure of 2 under the reductive transformation are two-fold: “The content (Bonnie is on the train) is transformed into a proposition (that Bonnie is on the train), and the force (stated) is extracted from the way in which the proposition is presented in the basic sentence (in this case assertion)” (Thomasson 2005, 129). And, insofar as these same shifts in structure can be carried out on other forms of mental representation (e.g., on perception—seeing that *P* —> it was seen that *P*; remembering that *P* —> there was a remembering that *P*; and so on), then the reductive transformation embodies a method for coming to know about the intentional content and intentional mode of every one of our first-order intentional experiences.

Thomasson argues that the reductive transformation is the basic conceptual structure at work in Husserl’s idea of “bracketing.” She argues for this, first, by pointing out that the German term *Einklammerung* is the word used to refer to what in English is called, “quotation marks.” And, of course, one key function of placing a sentence or term in quotes is to separate it from us as an item of use, while putting it forward simply as something that we are mentioning. Her second argument relies on the strong analogy between the two-part

transformation carried out by a reductive transformation—where the content (both mode and intentional representation) of the first-order representation is retained, but the “force” of the representation on me is removed or put out of play. Thus, when I bracket my conscious belief that P, I do not transform the belief into a doubt or mere presentation. Rather, the belief remains a belief, but the belief is put to a side and not utilized, but rather only mentioned.<sup>4</sup> And she also points out the striking analogy between her discussion of the method of reductive transformation and the kind of transformation of experience that Husserl describes under the heading of the *epoché*, such as when he says that

In relation to each thesis we are able, with complete freedom, to exercise this distinctive *epoché*, a certain withholding of judgment that is compatible with the unshaken and even unshakeable (because evident) conviction of truth. The thesis is “put out of action,” bracketed, it is transformed into the modification “bracketed thesis,” the judgment simply into the “bracketed judgment.” (Husserl 2014, §32, p. 55)

If this is correct, then the reductive transformation can be applied not only to assertions or to beliefs that one still holds at the time of the reduction, but to any intentional experience whatever as it is lived. For insofar as intentional experience is a particular mental occurrence that represents the world in a particular way, with a certain force (positing, neutralized, with doubt), then the transformations will produce a mode of awareness of this mental state that preserves its basic structure, it just distances it from the subject as her means of engaging with the world to an observance of her way of engaging with the world.

The first conceptual transformation, in Thomasson’s reading, is then paired with a second conceptual transformation, which Thomasson calls the “hypostatizing transformation,” to yield knowledge of the particular experience—suspended “in the brackets”—as an instance of a general type or essence of experience. Thomasson models this as an inference from a claim such as

2. Someone is asserting that Bonnie is on the train.

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4. To illustrate and elucidate this further, consider the difference between—to use an example from (Dancy 2000, 125)—having a belief self-consciously and having it merely as an object of reflective consideration. Suppose that I believe that there are pink rats in my shoes and, as a result, call the exterminator to get rid of them. This is to have a belief in a completely self-conscious way, i.e., in a way where my awareness of the belief is nothing over and above the way that I take the world to be. This is a mode of having a belief that is not “bracketed.” But now suppose that I have this same belief, but I call my therapist instead, to get rid of the belief. Here I have the belief in a bracketed mode, it is a feature of myself that I *mention*, but do not employ. And this is a difference easily and, it seems, adequately captured in the conceptual shifts Thomasson envisions occurring between 1 and 2.

to

3. There is an assertion that Bonnie is on the train.

Now, unlike the link between 1 and 2, the connection between 2 and 3 is a fairly trivial logical relation between the contents of 2 and 3, i.e., of what is asserted in each. Indeed, setting aside certain sophisticated worries about ontological commitment, 3 can seem nothing more than a paraphrase of 2.

Thomasson takes this inference to be a safe and sure way to bring out a distinctive ontological commitment to general types or essences that is characteristic of talk about ordinary objects and experience: that each of these are understood as entities whose conditions of existence are specified in a general, more or less determinate type. And, she argues, this is the way to understand Husserl's conception of *Eidos*. And here, of course, the kind of cognitive engagement that Husserl would invoke here to grasp this general type would involve the processes of free imaginative variation in the service of the discernment of eidetic structure. Now this whole ontological view, of course, can be criticized (and has been, especially amongst Husserl's critics). But since my critical evaluation of Thomasson's interpretation does not invoke any worries about this aspect of her reading, I will set aside such scruples for now and simply work under the assumption that Thomasson's reading of this step in the phenomenological reduction—the step that takes from an intuition of the particular experience to an intuition of essence—is correct.<sup>5</sup>

The important point here is that since this entire process for acquiring self-knowledge does not require any observations about our own mental states at the start or as an epistemic ground of the attributive judgment carried out in step 2, it is not a view that fits the introspectionist mold. Rather, it is view that is better characterized as extrospectionist or “transparent” in the sense that it answers questions about the nature of the mind only by consider how the world is experienced. So, it does not invoke introspection or inner-observation as a pre-condition of self-knowledge.

### §3 Husserl on the Pre-Givenness of Conscious Experience and Motivation

Thomasson (2006) departs from Husserl, however, in claiming that the execution of the

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5. For more on Thomasson's interpretation of Husserl's conception of *eidos* and the ontological commitments that it involves, see Thomasson (2017). For a critical evaluation of Thomasson's interpretation, see Tolley (2017).

transparent method of phenomenological reduction *can be and should be* joined with a transparent conception of conscious experience. On the non-transparent conception of consciousness, as Thomasson (2006, 9) puts it, “conscious states are states we are (in some sense) aware of.” Thomasson, instead, embraces an “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).” In other words, Thomasson foregoes analysis of the difference between conscious and unconscious experiences as a consisting in a further awareness of awareness present in the former, but lacking in the latter. Rather, it is simply an intrinsic part of the way in which the subject is aware of the world in the former (“phenomenally aware,” as it is often put in contemporary analytic philosophy) that is not present in the latter. And she argues that, insofar as Husserl’s transparent methodology for self-knowledge does not require any prior awareness of one’s own mental states, it is open to a neo-Husserlian phenomenologist to pair this with an adverbialist or transparent conception of consciousness as completely transparent, i.e., as consisting solely in an awareness of the world outside the mind.

There are two prominent non-transparent conceptions of consciousness with which Thomasson contrasts her own view. One is the higher-order awareness view, on which a mental state is conscious because a separate mental state of the same subject represents it. The other is the same-order awareness view, on which a mental state is conscious because it, in some way, involves an awareness of itself. Husserl is, as I will argue here, a same-order theorist.

In *Ideas*, Husserl talks of the process of acquiring self-knowledge of one’s own experience as a process of “reflection.”<sup>6</sup> And Husserl’s first use of the term “*Reflectiv*” in the *Ideas I* comes at §38, which is a further addition to a series of observations made in §37. In §37, Husserl illustrates how the total intentional object of a conscious intentional experience is not always to be identified with the object that the subject “apprehends,” i.e., the object that the subject attends to or focuses on in the experience. Husserl observes that while it is the case that “we cannot be turned toward a thing otherwise than in the manner of apprehending,” it would nevertheless be a mistake to think that “a consciousness’s intentional object [...] means the same as an apprehended object”—a mistake motivated by the fact that in simply thinking about or saying something about a thing, “we have made it an object in the sense of something apprehended” (Husserl 2014, §37, p. 67).<sup>7</sup>

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6. “[...] [T]he phenomenological method moves entirely in acts of reflection” (Husserl 2014, §77, p. 144). “Reflection is, as we may also put it, the name for consciousness’s method of knowing consciousness at all” (Husserl 2014, §78, p. 147).

7. This observation anticipates Charles Siewert’s (1998, 194–97) criticism of higher-order theories as falling prey to the “consciousness-of trap.”

For example, “In the act of evaluating [...] we are turned toward the value, in the act of joy we are turned toward what is enjoyable, in the act of love we are turned toward the beloved, in acting toward the action, without apprehending any of that” (Husserl 2014, §37, p. 67). When I saw the sunshine this morning (breaking through for a few hours in the gray winter months) and judged that it is lovely, I am not attending to/apprehending the value of “loveliness,” but rather I am attending to the sunshine—more precisely, attending to the sunshine *as being lovely*. To attend to/apprehend the sunshine’s property of loveliness would require turning my attention away from the sunshine and towards this property of the sunshine. And this requires transforming the intended but not apprehended value-property of loveliness into “an apprehended object in a unique ‘objectifying turn’”—that is, into a “‘having’ [of] the value “*as an object*” in the particular sense of an apprehended object, such as we must have it in order to apply predicates to it—and so, too, in all logical acts that refer to it” (Husserl 2014, §37, p. 67). In other words, it would subject the original experience of apprehending the sunshine to an essential modification—a transformation—that would yield the act of apprehending the *loveliness* (of the sunshine), and setting up the actualization of further conscious determinations of and judgments about this value-property.

At the beginning of the section following the one containing these observations, Husserl writes the following:

We may add further that, living in the *cogito* [i.e., a conscious intentional experience, which has the essential characteristic of apprehending something],<sup>8</sup> we do not consciously have the *cogitatio* itself as an intentional object. Yet at any time it can become that. The intrinsic possibility of a “reflective” shift of focus is an essential property of it, and naturally [this is] a shift of focus in the form of a new *cogitatio* that is directed at it in the manner of simply apprehending it. In other words, any *cogitatio* can become the object of a so-called “inner perception,” and then, as a further consequence, the object of a *reflective* evaluation, an approval or disapproval, and so forth. (Husserl 2014, §38, p. 68)

Given this context, we can see that Husserl is here doing two things. First, he is drawing a sharp distinction between the kind of awareness one has of properties of an object in a mode of consciousness wherein one *attends* to the object *as* having such-and-such properties (i.e., where the object is apprehended, but the properties are not apprehended but still given as a part of the total intentional object of the act). However, second, he is also marking a similarity to the givenness of unapprehended properties. Just as unapprehended but merely intended properties of apprehended objects can become apprehended by means of a “modification” of

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8. See (Husserl 2014, §35).

consciousness, so any *intentional act* can be subjected to a *reflective modification*, which transforms the act itself into an apprehended object of awareness. The key difference here, however, is that the first-order, world-oriented act does not take itself as an intentional object. So, reflection is a different kind of modification from the shift of attention that transforms unapprehended properties into apprehended properties, since it is a shift to an intentional object that was *not at all intended in the original act*. Furthermore, it is a modification that is applicable only to intentional acts (and not to objects of intentional acts).

Now, all of this might seem nothing more than grist for Thomasson's mill. For it seems to affirm that, whatever else may be required for reflective self-knowledge, prior awareness of one's own experience as a part of the complete intentional object of the experience to be reflectively apprehended is not one of the requirements. However, things become more complicated on this front when Husserl takes up the theme of reflection again, this time with a concern to further articulate the conditions of the possibility (or what I will also call the "transcendental conditions") of the reflective modification that results in immanent perception. Husserl writes,

Experience [Erlebnis] inherently has the kind of being such that a discerning perception can direct its focus in a completely immediate way at every actual experience that is alive as an originary present [Gegenwart]. That happens in the form of "reflection," which has the remarkable property that what is perceptually apprehended in it is characterized intrinsically as something that not only is and persists within the focus that perceives it, but *already was before* this focus turned toward it. "All experiences are conscious"—this statement means then, specifically with respect to intentional experiences, that they are not only consciousness of something and not only on hand as such [als das ... vorhanden] when they are themselves objects of a reflecting consciousness but that they are already there, unreflected, as a "background," and thus that they are intrinsically ready to be perceived, in a sense analogous, at least initially, to how things that we do not attend to [that is, things not apprehended] are there in our outer visual field. (Husserl 2014, §45, pp. 83–84)

In interpreting this passage, it is helpful to note that in the section immediately preceding the section from which this quote comes, Husserl argues that it is essential to the consciousness of material things (such as mid-sized dry goods) that they are only ever, at any given moment, given imperfectly and indeterminately, where this indeterminacy

necessarily means *determinability of a firmly prescribed style*. It points in advance [deutet vor] to possible manifolds of perception that, continuously passing over into one another, merge into the unity of a perception, a unity in which the continuously persisting thing shows new (or recurring old) "sides" again and again, in ever new series of profiles. (Husserl 2014, §44, p. 80)

In other words, it is a part of the transcendental conditions of apprehending consciousness of material things that “we are conscious of them in a certain way already, namely, as something that we have not paid attention to, and that means, in their case, insofar as they appear [erscheinen]” (Husserl 2014, §45, p. 84). What this observation sets out, in other words, is (1) a determination of the essence of what Husserl calls “appearance,” and (2) an essential correlation between the apprehension or attentive awareness of a material thing (which makes it a possible subject of cognitive determination and judgment) and its manifestation in appearance, i.e., its essentially imperfect manifestation in an infinite series of perceptions that altogether constitute a determination of a firmly prescribed style. For a material object to be an intentional object of perceptual consciousness is for it to have a determinable indeterminacy, for it to be caught up in manifolds of possible perceptions of the same object that yield further determination. This is part of what it is for perception to be perception of a transcendent, “external” thing, insofar as perception does not *create* but rather *discloses* objects. And it also (3) points out that a transcendental condition of the performance of the transformation that turns unapprehended objects into apprehended objects is the fact that objects are intended by appearances in the background of current lived experience. For it is the structure of appearance that *motivates* the shift in attention that makes an object an object of apprehension. As Husserl writes,

The background field, understood as the field of what can be observed in a straightforward way, encompasses, indeed, only a small part of my environment. The phrase “it is there” [in the background] means rather that *possible* and, to be sure, continuously and coherently *motivated* series of perceptions with ever new fields of things (as unnoticed backgrounds) lead from current perceptions, with the actually appearing background field, up to those very connections among perceptions, in which precisely the relevant thing would come to appear and be apprehended. (Husserl 2014, §45, p. 84)

Analogously, Husserl argues, the transcendental conditions of “immanent perception”—or the conditions of the possibility of apprehending awareness of experience itself—requires “unreflected experience [to] fulfill certain conditions of readiness [*Bedingungen der Bereitschaft*], although in a manner completely different [from material thing perception] and in keeping with its own essence” (Husserl 2014, §45, p. 84). Just as for perception of material things, these conditions of readiness for reflective apprehension must account for the sense that reflective experience is not a *productive* consciousness, but rather a *disclosive* consciousness, that is, a consciousness of something that was “already there” as “background.” And this requires that the experience be something the subject is aware of as “already there” before the reflection is

carried out on it, so that a reflective shift of attention to the experience can be motivated and carried out by the subject. However, the conditions of readiness for reflective apprehension (or “immanent perception”) of a lived experience are importantly different from the conditions of readiness for outer perceptual apprehension of a material thing insofar as an experience cannot “appear” incompletely and in modes of appearance. The experience is, rather, (if not different from) then at least given in the same way as the mode of appearance itself. It is a kind of background givenness that motivates reflection, but not by means of a structure of appearance.<sup>9</sup>

To summarize, then, the results of Husserl’s initial and preliminary characterization of the transcendental conditions of reflective self-knowledge in the *Ideas*:

1. Reflective consciousness is the result of a transformation carried out on intentional experience, which does not just transform an unapprehended intentional object of the experience into an apprehended object, but which transforms the experience itself into an apprehended object, even though the experience did not previously have itself as an intentional object.
2. It is a transcendental condition of reflective consciousness that the experience apprehended in reflection be already, in some manner, “there” to be apprehended, as something “given” but not intended in the experience itself; and this givenness motivates a reflective shift of attention. In other words, the experience that is a possible object of reflective apprehension must already involve some awareness of itself, prior to reflective apprehension of it.
3. But the background, unreflective givenness of an experience to itself, insofar as it is a possible object of reflection, is not an *appearance* of the experience and it is not a givenness of the experience as a part of the intentional content of the experience itself. Rather, it is a *sui generis* form of conscious givenness.

Going back to Thomasson: while it is clear that Thomasson’s interpretation of Husserl’s method of phenomenological reflection is consistent with his general characterization of reflection (in particular, noting the coincidence between point 1 and Thomasson’s characterization of the reductive transformation), her commitment to a transparency conception of consciousness is not consistent with Husserl’s understanding of the transcendental conditions—the conditions of the possibility—of reflective consciousness itself.

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9. For more on Husserl’s concept of motivation and its importance for his systematic philosophy, see Walsh (2017).

For the conditions of preparedness for this kind of consciousness, to Husserl's mind, clearly requires that the experience be already, in some way, given to itself in the experience itself, even if not as an intentional object that appears in the experience. In other words, if consciousness is to be reflectively apprehended, it must involve some sort of pre-reflective, non-objectivating awareness of itself.

#### §4 Why Prefer Husserl's View?

What reason is there to prefer Husserl's pre-reflective same-order awareness view of consciousness over Thomasson's? Thomasson (2006) offers some arguments against same-order views that she believes raise problems for same-order theories that her own adverbial theory does not face. So, all other things being equal, the adverbial theory is to be preferred. However, alongside the fact that Thomasson's arguments are not convincing (as I shall argue in §5 below), all other things are not equal between the adverbial and the same-order view that Husserl advances. For the adverbial theory faces a skeptical problem—a problem of undermining the conditions of the truth of the theory that Thomasson advances in the very conditions of the possibility of her theory—which is outlined in an argument Husserl gives against “skeptical” views of reflective consciousness in the *Ideas* (Husserl 2014, §79).

For Husserl, the common characteristic of all skeptical views in philosophy is that they are self-undermining.

Every genuine skepticism, of whatever kind and orientation, shows itself by way of the intrinsic absurdity of implicitly presupposing, in its argumentation, as conditions of the possibility of its validity, just what, in its theses, it denies. (Husserl 2014, §79, p. 155)<sup>10</sup>

The skepticism about self-knowledge that Husserl addresses in *Ideas* is a skepticism about the power of reflective self-awareness, voiced in a critical review Theodore Lipps's views by Henry J. Watt, to yield knowledge of experience as it is *prior to being an object of reflection* (Husserl 2014, §79). Watt argues that reflection cannot yield self-knowledge because, since first-order experience is not already a knowing of itself, the only way in which it *could* become a self-knowing is by means of an essential modification. Thus, the object it would come to know would not be of its pre-reflective self, but only of itself *as an object of reflection* (Husserl 2014, §79, pp. 152–153). Now, Thomasson is not, like Watt, denying that reflection can yield knowledge of pre-reflective experience as it is prior to reflection; rather, this is, in her view, guaranteed by

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10. See also (Husserl 1970, Prolegomena, §32). This is a line of argument that he probably picked up from Kant, who used it to limit the scope of Pyrrhonian skepticism. See Forster (2010, chap 12) for discussion of this idea in Kant.

the reductive transformation rule. The skepticism in Thomasson's view arises from her positive claim about the structure of pre-reflective experience: that it lacks any sort of awareness of itself. The problem with this is that it undermines its own knowability by denying a condition of its own possibility, the condition of having a rational motive for making a reflective judgment in the circumstance of having a conscious experience.

Let me spell this out: (1) In denying the pre-reflective givenness of a lived experience to the subject of the experience, Thomasson undermines the very possibility of executing the reductive transformation. And (2) since her thesis about the nature of conscious experience—that it involves *only* awareness of the world, not an awareness of the experience itself at all—is a thesis that can be confirmed only by recourse to evidence about experience as it is lived (i.e., not reflected, but just lived through), then it denies any possibility for Thomasson's thesis to be confirmed as true. Therefore, (3) if Thomasson's thesis is true, there is no way that one could honestly and knowingly assert it to be true. For the condition of the possibility of such an act is undermined by the truth of the claim to be asserted. Therefore, it is true, it is not something we can know to be true.

Let's take up and clarify each of these claims in turn.

1. According to Thomasson, the complete field of awareness of a conscious subject is the world outside the mind. It is focused completely on the world, and it does not involve any awareness of itself in any form. Now, according to the reductive transformation, I have epistemic license to infer the claim

S: I  $\varphi$  that P (where  $\varphi$  stands in for some particular *mode* of awareness—perception, positing thought, doubt)

on any occasion where I have an experience with this content (with this mode of presentation  $\varphi$  and this content P). But if all that I am aware of in my experience is the world beyond this experience—i.e., aware of whatever it is in the world that P is about—then there is no indication to me in having a conscious experience that I am in a position to apply the reductive transformation to it. In other words, I am in no way motivated to apply the reductive transformation to my current conscious experience, and it seems as if there is no way that I could be so motivated.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, even if we grant the validity of the transformation rule for

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11. As Victor Caston (2006, 3) puts this point, voicing this claim against Thomasson's view, "what good

acquiring self-knowledge, it will be of no use to a conscious subject in the process of acquiring self-knowledge. For the subject will never be able to know that she is in a position to apply the transformation. Therefore, the truth of Thomasson's adverbial theory of consciousness undermines the possibility for one to perform the reductive transformation.

2. Thomasson's adverbial conception of consciousness requires confirmation on the basis of evidence about the nature of first-order, unreflective lived experience. But if reflective knowledge of first-order lived experience is not possible (as per her thesis, as made clear in 1.), then Thomasson's adverbial conception of consciousness cannot be known, insofar as knowledge requires evidential grounding.

3. To know a claim to be true, one must have evidential grounding for one's knowledge. Furthermore, to honestly assert a claim as something that one knows, one must know that one at least believes that one has evidential grounding for what is asserted.<sup>12</sup> But insofar as the truth of Thomasson's thesis denies the availability of evidential ground for self-attributive judgment (as per 1), then it also denies the possibility of a subject honestly asserting the truth of Thomasson's thesis.

Therefore, not only is Thomasson's thesis about consciousness self-undermining in terms of removing the possibility of its being known by a subject (by removing the availability of the relevant evidential ground), it is also self-undermining in terms of removing the possibility of its being honestly asserted at all. In short, not only is it unknowable, it is also absurd.

## §5 The Pre-Reflective Givenness of Consciousness

But the self-undermining and absurd consequence of Thomasson's adverbial theory of consciousness in conjunction with Husserl's phenomenological reduction (or reductive transformation) makes the articulation of the structure of self-consciousness in lived,

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does all this do me, if I don't already have some awareness of the fact that they do obtain? Otherwise, wouldn't the conceptual connections here equally license third-person judgements about our mental experiences, just as they plainly do in the case of speech acts? How, in short, do these connections speak to either the immediacy or privileged access that first-person knowledge appears to have? It is not clear how the connections involved here give us any distinct kind of leverage. [...] Adding the requirement that such states must be conscious won't help on the current account: for Thomasson, conscious states are states in which we are aware of the world, and not those in which we have some internal awareness of the state itself. The question still remains: what puts us in a distinctive position with regard to our own mental states, if we do not also have an awareness that we are having them? How will it help us, in particular, to discern features of that experience, such as its modality—whether, for example, we are seeing the shape of an object rather than feeling it?"

12. For defense of this claim, see Marcus and Schwenkler (forthcoming, §2).

unreflected experience all the more pressing for the viability of Husserl's view. Therefore, in this section, I will review Thomasson's reason for preferring the adverbial view over the same-order view in order to show how they are not convincing as objections to Husserl's view. Furthermore, I will show how Husserl's view can address the objections to same-order views arising from the Heidelberg school. Addressing these two objections from the perspective of Husserl's view will in turn help elucidate how the pre-givenness of consciousness overcomes the objection levied against Thomasson's view.

Thomasson argues that same-order views face an insurmountable dilemma building on the question of how conscious experiences represent themselves. If experiences do represent themselves as objects, then the state must have a two-dimensional representational content. But then this raises a problem of how to individuate a mental state that has two representational contents. Since mental states are individuated by their contents, then it seems impossible to have a single mental state that has two representational contents. Indeed, it seems safer just to go back to a higher-order view. However, if the same-order theorist does not posit two dimensions of representational content, then "they seem ill-suited to help explain the evidence that motivated adopting inner awareness accounts of consciousness in the first place" (Thomasson 2006, 6). Therefore, there seems no reason not to adopt the adverbial transparency view instead.

But this argument is not convincing against Husserl, since he can easily get around the first horn of the dilemma.<sup>13</sup> This is because he denies that conscious experiences are individuated by their representational contents, and this is a commitment that has characterized his view from early in his career. In the *Logical Investigations*, for instance, Husserl makes sense of the possibility for one conscious experience (what he there calls an "act") to having multiple intentional contents by taking intentional contents as universal types (or, in contemporary metaphysical jargon, "properties") and the having of an intentional content by an act as the instantiation of this type in the act. Therefore, insofar as it is not impossible for one thing to exemplify multiple properties at once, it is also not impossible for the same act to have two different intentional contents at the same time.<sup>14</sup>

However, even though Husserl has the theoretical tools to make sense of an experiential positing of itself as a part of its total intentional object, as we have seen in §3, he does not opt for this. And, it seems, he does this for reasons of phenomenological adequacy. While he

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13. Caston (2006, 4) makes this same observation, except he does not, as I do here, also argue that Husserl has the resources to resist Thomasson's objection in this way as well.

14. For further discussion of this view of meaning and the important implications of the possibility of one act having many contents for Husserl's theory of knowledge and mind, see Kidd (forthcoming).

recognizes that it is possible to attribute to an act a robustly rich total intentional object, which involves both an aspect of the content that is attended to/apprehended and a potentially large number of aspects that are not, but are merely intended, he does not admit the experience itself to be a part of the overall intentional object of the act. Indeed, he doesn't even admit it as a part of the background that *appears* to the subject as objects in the periphery of my visual field appear without being apprehended. And this is so because this just *not* how the current lived experience itself is given to the subject of the experience. Rather, the experience "is there," in the sense that a coherently motivated shifting of one's attention, a motivated reflective transformation is always available to the subject of conscious experience. But this does not happen *through the content* of a coherently motivated series of appearances, as it does for material things in the background of consciousness.

So, how does it happen? In what way is one's own conscious experience given to one, such that it motivates a reflective turning toward the experience? Husserl answers this question largely in negative characterizations, by contrast with the background appearances of material things and their motivating function, in the *Ideas*. And I do not have space to go into a positive characterization of it here that would be clear enough to avoid dangerous ambiguity. But, just by way of a general indication, it is clear that the pre-givenness of consciousness to itself in experience, which functions as an ever present motive for the reflective modification (i.e., for what Thomasson calls the reductive transformation), is a fixed structure of the basic self-temporalizing, originally flowing-off of conscious experience. That it is essential to my living present awareness, prior to any reflective self-regard, that it is a manifestation to the subject of experience, albeit not as a background appearance. As Zahavi puts it, "The absolute flow of simply is the pre-reflective self-manifestation of our experiences" (Zahavi 1998, 155). In other words, it is built into the very structure of our experience—be it of the transcendent world of material things or an awareness that is just a "blind" flowing off of consciousness (say, such as one might have in those moments right before falling asleep)—that it is self-giving and offering the opportunity to reflect, an ever-present call for reflection.

With this, it might sound like what Husserl has done is built a kind of self-manifestation into the way that consciousness brings transcendent things to the subject's awareness. In other words, it may seem as if Husserl is building a reflexive structure into the adverbial aspect of the description of consciousness. But, again, further clarification of this mode of givenness is best reserved for another place.<sup>15</sup>

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15. Dan Zahavi (1998; 2003; 2005, chap. 3–4) has, in my opinion, written the most clear and accessible characterization of this aspect of Husserl's view (of Husserl's positive characterization of pre-reflective self-consciousness) and its function as a transcendental condition on the reflective modification of

## §6 Conclusion: Transparency and Self-Consciousness

If the foregoing is correct, then Husserl's view of consciousness and self-knowledge combines two things that are often thought to be incompatible or, at least, not worth combining: a transparency method for the acquisition of self-knowledge (in the reflective modification of consciousness outlined in Thomasson's reductive transformation) with a non-transparent, same-order awareness conception of conscious experience. This kind of combination would be inconsistent or not worth pursuing if the self-awareness constitutive of conscious experience is posited as an evidential ground for reflective self-knowledge. For this is the very thing that the transparency method of reflective self-knowledge is supposed to do without. But, as we have seen, Husserl's view avoids this potential inconsistency by positing the pre-reflective self-awareness of consciousness not as an evidentiary ground for self-knowledge—i.e., as a reason that justifies the content of the self-attributive judgment—but as a motivation for the act of carrying out a transformation (the reductive transformation) on the conscious experience—a process which constitutes its own evidentiary ground in the form of an immediate awareness of the current lived experience. Furthermore, if the skeptical argument against any view of consciousness that does not have the resources to account for the motivation of a reflective act given above is correct, then it turns out that any transparency method of self-knowledge would need a model of consciousness that posits pre-reflective self-awareness. Otherwise, it would succumb to the self-undermining problems of skepticism. So, Husserl's conception of consciousness as involving pre-reflective self-awareness would be a general requirement for any transparency approach to self-knowledge, making it a view not only of historical interest, but of great systematic interest as well.<sup>16</sup>

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consciousness. However, Zahavi's interpretation of Husserl's view of pre-reflective self-awareness as a fixed structure of the essential temporal flow of experience is still a subject of controversy. See, e.g., the discussion in DeRoo (2011).

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