

# A New Perceptual Theory of Introspection

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## Introduction/Abstract

According to the perceptual theory of introspection, introspection is a kind of perception of our mental life. To evaluate the perceptual theory's plausibility, we obviously need to know what entitles a mental phenomenon to the qualification "perceptual." I start by arguing that this task is complicated by the fact that we really have *two* notions of the perceptual: a functional notion and a phenomenological notion. The heart of the chapter is an argument that even if we have no reason to think that introspection is a kind of perception in the functional sense, we do have strong reasons to think it is a kind of perception in the phenomenological sense. In the phenomenological sense, I argue, two features are central to a phenomenon's status as perceptual: its involving *direct awareness* of the perceived, and its taking a *distinctively perceptual attitude* toward it. The bulk of the chapter consists in (i) an argument from inference to the best explanation for the thesis that introspection involves direct awareness of the introspected, and (ii) a more direct argument that introspection involves an attitude almost identical to the attitude distinctive of sensory perception. The chapter then closes with responses to some of the standard objections to the perceptual theory.

## 1. The Double Life of Perception Talk

Perceptualism about introspection is the view that introspection is a kind of perception – perception, presumably, of one's own mental life. Just as through sight and hearing, say, we scan the physical reality around us, through introspection we scan the mental reality within us (cf. Armstrong 1968: 324). Historically, perceptualism has been quite a dominant view, especially among the British empiricists and the many philosophical schools they have influenced, from the Brentano school to logical positivism. Locke famously upheld perceptualism in section 2.1.4 of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

The other Fountain, from which Experience furnisheth the Understanding with *Ideas*, is the *Perception of the Operations of our own Minds* within us... And though it be not Sense, as having

nothing to do with external Objects; yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be call'd internal Sense. (Locke 1690: 74)

Interestingly, Locke and his followers did not think they needed to do much by way of *arguing* for perceptualism. It appears they took it to be somewhat self-evident.

Yet today perceptualism about introspection is often treated as one of those dead theories of merely historical interest, not unlike the sense-datum theory of perception or the soul theory of the self. What happened? Curiously, the attacks on perceptualism have come simultaneously from two opposite directions. Perceptualism has been attacked “from the right” as portraying the relationship between the introspecting and the introspected as more intimate than it really is; these critiques have led to more “cognitivist” views of introspection as involving essentially rational, conceptual, reflective capacities (see, e.g., Siewert 2012; and Stoljar, this volume). But perceptualism has also been attacked “from the left” as casting the relationship between the introspecting and the introspected as *less* intimate than it really is, leading to “constitutivist” and acquaintance-based theories of introspection (see, e.g., Gertler 2012, Giustina 2023; and Duncan, this volume).

My goal in this chapter is to develop a specific version of perceptualism and defend it against both kinds of criticism. The first order of business, however, is to get clear on what we’re doing when we call a mental phenomenon “perceptual.”

The difficulty in understanding what makes something perceptual is compounded, in my opinion, by the fact that we actually have two distinct conceptions of the perceptual. Consider David Chalmers’ thesis of the “double life of mental terms” (Chalmers 1996 Ch.1). According to this, mental terms in general tend to express two distinct concepts of the mental-state types they putatively refer to. There is a “psychological concept,” which characterizes the relevant mental state in terms of its functional profile, and a “phenomenological concept,” which characterizes it in terms of its subjective, phenomenal character.<sup>1</sup> On this view, we use the word “pain,” for instance, in two discernibly different ways, which express two different concepts. The “psychological concept” is, very roughly, the concept of a mental state caused by harmful stimulation and causative of aversive reaction. The “phenomenological concept” is the concept of a mental state that feels that unpleasant way.

Perhaps “double-life-ism” will not bear out, ultimately, as a thesis about the semantics of natural-language mental terms. Still, “methodological double-life-ism” is an exceedingly useful stance toward various issues in philosophy of mind, and more fundamentally toward the fact that some philosophers of mind tend to approach mental

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<sup>1</sup> It is a separate (and metaphysical) question what the ultimate relationship is between the two concepts’ putative referents: they may co-refer, they may refer to two different things, or one or both may fail to refer.

phenomena from a third-person perspective, keen first and foremost to integrate them into a mechanistic conception of mental life, while other philosophers of mind tend to approach mental phenomena from a first-person perspective, seeing their mandate as in the first instance one of “saving the phenomena” of inner life as they appear to us in as unprejudiced a way as possible. Both “camps,” such as they are, may agree to each flesh out one battery of mental concepts, and live to fight another day about the ultimate metaphysical relationship between the properties these pick out.

This kind of “double-life-ism” seems to apply to perception as well. We may hold that “perception” and its cognates express two systematically different concepts. There is a psychological concept of perception, characterizing perception through a distinctive functional profile, involving notably (i) responsiveness to distal stimuli through dedicated organs employing sensory transducers and (ii) a characteristic effect on belief formation and “central cognition” (see, e.g., Phillips 2019). And there is a phenomenological concept, which homes in on a specifically perceptual what-it’s-like distinct from that of imagination, recollection, and other forms of “sensory” experience (see, e.g., Kriegel 2019).

If this is right, then introspective perceptualism itself splits into two theses: “psychological perceptualism” is the view that introspective states have the same kind of functional role as perceptual states; “phenomenological perceptualism” is the view that introspective states have the same kind of phenomenal character as perceptual states. A lot rides here on the words “same kind of.” Clearly, introspective states don’t have the exact same functional role or phenomenal character as visual states, auditory states, and so on. But then nor do visual and auditory states have the same functional role/phenomenal character as each other. Their causes – colors vs. sounds – are different, they involve different transducers, and they generate different inputs into central cognition. Nonetheless, both visual and auditory states qualify as perceptual. Presumably, this is because the functional-role properties they differ in are accidental to their status as perception, as far as the psychological concept of perception is concerned, and it is instead some subset of the functional-role properties they *share* that is essential to this status. Likewise, what it’s like to see is very different from what it’s like to hear. Still, both are forms of perceptual experience. So there must also be some phenomenal commonality between seeing and hearing, however subtle, such that our phenomenological concept of perception designates *it* as more essential to the status of an experience as perceptual. The question for us is whether introspective states have the functional-role and/or phenomenal properties essential to perceptuality. The psychological perceptualist claims that, even though introspective states differ in their *total* functional profile from visual, auditory, and other perceptual states, they share that part of perceptual states’ functional role in virtue of which these qualify as perceptual states. The phenomenological perceptualist claims that even though the *maximally determinate* phenomenal character of introspective states is

different from that of visual experiences, auditory experiences, etc., it nonetheless shares precisely those phenomenal properties in virtue of which the latter are perceptual.

I am doubtful there is a good armchair case for psychological perceptualism. As anti-perceptualists often point out, there is no easily appreciable indication that introspection deploys a dedicated organ, complete with sensory transducers; without which it's hard to see what essential functional overlap could be envisaged with perception. Perhaps empirical developments would instruct us otherwise, but in any case they would have to be *empirical*; philosophical considerations do not, on their own, recommend psychological perceptualism – as far as I can see, that is. What I am going to argue in the remainder of this chapter, however, is that there *is* a good philosophical case for *phenomenological* perceptualism about introspection, in that the phenomenal properties essential to perceptual states' status as perceptual are by and large shared by at least some introspective states.

## 2. The Phenomenological Concept of Perception

What it is like to see a dog is very different from what it is like to hear a dog. What it is like to smell coffee is very different from what it is like to taste it. But if we are to have a phenomenological concept of perception, there must also be a shared phenomenal core to what it's like to see a dog, hear a dog, smell coffee, and taste coffee – some phenomenal feature(s) they all have in common.

One feature without which it is hard to see a mental phenomenon as perceptual is *direct awareness*. I can see (a) that there is a storm coming, and I see this at least in part by seeing (b) ominous, ever darker clouds heading here. On some views, I see (b) in part by seeing (c) certain colored patches growing and darkening. And on some views, I see (c) in part by seeing (d) internal proxy patches that exist only in my mind. On all these views, however, whenever I perceive *anything*, there is *something* that I perceive not in virtue of perceiving anything else – something that I perceive *directly*. It is in this sense that perception necessarily involves direct awareness of *something*.<sup>2</sup>

(It might be objected that “awareness” is factive, so in bad cases there is *nothing* we are perceptually aware of, directly or otherwise. However, we can cover the bad cases by restating the claim in terms of *seeming*-awareness: all perceptual experience involves direct *seeming*-awareness. Thus, the phenomenology of direct awareness that we find in

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<sup>2</sup> On standard sense-datum theories, I see (c) not quite in virtue of *seeing* (d), but in virtue of having *some kind* of awareness of (d). Still it is the case there that perceptual awareness of ordinary objects in our physical surroundings requires direct awareness of something.

successful perception is shared by envatted-brains' perceptual states. I will bracket this nuance going forward.)

It would seem, then, that any form of phenomenological perceptualism about introspection would have to be committed to direct introspective awareness. That is, it would have to posit a range of introspective states  $I_1, \dots, I_n$ , such that:

(*Direct Awareness*) For any subject S, if S is in  $I_i$ , then there is an  $x$ , such that (i) S is aware of  $x$  and (ii) there is no  $y$ , such that S is aware of  $x$  in virtue of being aware of  $y$ .

Sam may introspect that it's time to eat by introspecting that she is hungry, introspect that she is hungry by introspecting her hunger sensation, introspect her hunger sensation by introspecting its phenomenal character; or some other story may be correct about this slice of Sam's introspective life. But according to *Direct Awareness*, since Sam is introspecting, there is *something* that she is directly introspectively aware of.

In §3, I will present an abductive argument for *Direct Awareness*. On some views, *Direct Awareness* is not just necessary but also sufficient for introspection qualifying as perceptual. On many views, however, perception is not the *only* mental phenomenon involving direct awareness. It has sometimes been claimed, for instance, that recollection (or "episodic memory") "puts us in contact" with the past in a way that thoughts and beliefs about the past ("semantic memory") don't (Byrne 2010: 21); or that intuition experiences make abstract objects feel as if they're "directly before the mind," again in a way that separates them from *thoughts about* abstract objects (Chudnoff 2011: 636). It is natural to interpret such claims – and similar ones about emotions and values, imagination and possibilities, etc. – as claiming direct awareness through non-perceptual modes of experience. If any of them is right, then while *Direct Awareness* is necessary for the truth of (phenomenological) perceptualism, it is not sufficient.

In response, we may note first of all that many of the accounts of recollection, intuition, emotion, and imagination that highlight direct awareness do bill themselves as "perceptual theories." More deeply, however, there is surely some phenomenal difference between perceptual experience on the one hand and recollection, intuition, emotion, and imagination on the other – some phenomenal feature that perceptual experiences exhibit but recollection, intuition, emotion, and imagination do not. So at the very least, we may identify as "perceptual" whatever has this phenomenal X-factor *in addition to* involving direct awareness.

What is this phenomenal X-factor? In several previous articles, I have argued for a certain answer that I will now only summarize. (For the fuller case, I refer the reader to Kriegel 2015, 2019, 2023). The main ideas are two. First, what phenomenally distinguishes

perception from these other phenomena is not the nature of perceptual *content*, but the distinctive *attitude* perceptual states bear to their contents. Second, the attitude distinctive of perception is one that frames the perceived object as *existing here and now*. It is intuitive, I think, that perception deals with the here and now. But there is also an *argument* that this captures its characteristic attitude. It will be instructive to reconstruct the argument in bare outlines, as it may serve as model when we come to discuss the *introspective* attitude.

The argument proceeds in two phases. In the first phase, it is shown that the here and now are relevant to the correctness of my perceptual experience of a strawberry (say); in the second, it is shown that it is not through the experience's content that they are.

*Phase 1.* My visual experience of the strawberry represents a certain object with a certain shape, color, texture, and so on. Suppose I am hallucinating this whole thing – there is in fact no strawberry anywhere near me. Whatever the correctness conditions of my perceptual experience, then, they must not be met in this case. Suppose, now, that the relevant shape, color, texture, etc. are in fact (com)present right now, not anywhere around here however, but on the other side of the planet. That would obviously not make my perceptual experience correct. Likewise, suppose that they *were* (com)present exactly where I seem to see them, but a year (or an hour) ago, not now. Again, that would not render my perceptual experience correct. Thus for my perceptual experience to be correct, it is necessary not only that the relevant shape, color, texture, and so on be compresent, *somewhere* and *somewhen*. They must be so *when and where* I am having my perceptual experience.<sup>3</sup>

*Phase 2.* Crucially, however, the here and now, unlike the strawberry shape, color, texture, and so on, don't seem to be part of *what* perception represents. For they do not seem to be *sensible qualities*. There is no way the now smells. (There is a way things smell now, but they will smell differently in a few hours, even though it will be "now" for me then too.) There is no way the here tastes or sounds. (Again: objects which are here may taste or sound a certain way, but when I move things may taste or sound differently, even though I will still be "here.") Exercising my perceptual organs extra hard doesn't help. Squinting really hard does not make here-ness more visible, it does not make now-ness come to the fore. They're simply not visible, audible, or otherwise perceptible. This distinguishes them from shape, color, texture, and so on. The latter can be *sensibly represented*; the former cannot.

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<sup>3</sup> There is the question, of course, of what counts as perception's "here" and "now" – how far from the region of space exactly occupied by the perceiver's body, say, is still "here," and how much thicker than the current instant is still "now," relative to perception. I have no good answers to offer, though see Kriegel 2019 for some relevant discussions.

*Conclusion.* If the here and now are not part of *what* perceptual experiences represent, hence not part of perceptual content, but nonetheless figure in perceptual experiences' correctness conditions, they must be dimensions of *how* what is represented is represented, in the sense that they're dimensions of the *perceptual attitude*. For arguably, the correctness conditions of mental states are fully determined by the combination of content and attitude (cf. Recanati 2007). Obviously, content is relevant to correctness conditions. But so is attitude: a belief that *p* and a desire that *p* have different correctness conditions, even though their content is the same. The belief is correct just if *p* is true, the desire just if *p* is good, in some suitably generic sense.<sup>4</sup> Crucially, now, we know of no element other than content and attitude that affects correctness conditions. So, if (1) the here and now are determinative of perception's correctness conditions, but (2) they do not show up in the content of perception, then given that (3) correctness conditions are fully determined by content plus attitude, it follows that (4) the here and now must be aspects of the perceptual *attitude*. I like to put this by saying that the perceptual experience of the strawberry does not quite represent the strawberry being here and now, but rather *represents-as-being-here-and-now* the strawberry (Kriegel 2019); this contrasts with the way recollection represents-as-existing-in-the-past the strawberry (Kriegel 2015) and imagination represents-as-possible the strawberry (Kriegel 2023).

If all this is right, then for *introspection* to be perceptual, it would have to exhibit the kind of attitudinal character that perceptual experience does:

*(Here and Now)* For any introspective state  $I_i$  and item  $x$  that  $I_i$  represents,  $I_i$  represents-as-existing-here-and-now  $x$ .

In §4 I will argue that something very close to this is true – close enough, I will opine, to earn introspection the qualification “perceptual.”

### 3. Direct Introspective Awareness

In this section I present an argument from inference to the best explanation for *Direct Awareness*. The explanandum leveraged in the argument is this:

*(Planandum)* There is a list of six specific types of evidence, such that for any neurotypical human subject  $S$ , it is impossible for anybody other than  $S$ , but possible for

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<sup>4</sup> I am assuming here the “guise of the good” view of desire (see Orsi 2023 for a recent overview), though just for the sake of exposition. If you prefer some other view of the desire attitude, you may end up with a different view of the correctness conditions of desire. Still, that attitude would remain relevant to desires' correctness conditions.

S, to form justified beliefs about S's conscious states without relying on any of these six types of evidence.

The explanation designated best by the argument is this:

(*Planans*) The reason it is possible for S to form justified beliefs about S's conscious states without relying on any of the relevant types of evidence, but impossible for anybody else to do so, is that S has direct introspective awareness of S's conscious states, but nobody else does.

It follows from *Planans* that every neurotypical human subject has direct introspective awareness of their own conscious mental life. (Other things follow too, but they do not concern us here.) It does *not* follow from this, of course, that atypical human subjects or non-human subjects *don't* have direct introspective awareness of their own conscious states; I just don't want to worry about those cases here.

My explanandum is adapted from Siewert forthcoming Ch.1, and can be nicely illustrated through an exercise from Petitmengin 2006. Petitmengin asked her subjects to spell "elephant" in their head and then asked them a series of questions, such as "Did you spell it in sounds or in written letters?," "Were the letters upper- or lower-case?," and "What color(s) were they?" When she ran this on me, I gave my own answers in good faith, e.g. that I had spelled the letters in pinkish-white small caps. These answers expressed beliefs, and while there is no reason to think that these beliefs were infallible, there is also no reason to think that none of them were epistemically justified.

Interestingly, *your* belief that I spelled the word in written letters is justified as well, as it relies on my honest testimony. However, there is this important epistemic difference between your and my justified beliefs about my imagery: there are *six types of evidence*, to be listed shortly, such that for *you* to form your justified belief that my imagery letters were pinkish-white, say, it is necessary that you possess at least one of the six; whereas I can form a justified belief here without possessing *any* of these six kinds of evidence.<sup>5</sup> The six types of evidence are:

- (a) *Verbal behavior*. I *tell* you that I had an imagery experience as of pinkish-white letters.
- (b) *Nonverbal behavior*. I engage in some behavior indicative of having formed pinkish-white letter imagery, e.g. sitting around and scribbling "Elephant" in pink crayon.

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<sup>5</sup> This is an adaptation in that Siewert lists only four kinds of evidence, and I have added two – namely, (c) and (e) below. But the basic idea of drawing this absolutely minimal epistemic disanalogy between first- and third-person justification is Siewert's.



- (c) *Bodily changes*. Certain observable changes in my body (blushing, goosebumps, skin conductance, etc.) indicate this somehow (this is easier to envisage with other kinds of experience, notably emotional).<sup>6</sup>
- (d) *Brain scans*. If my brain was being scanned when I was answering the questions, and you later obtained the scans, you could use these scans to form a justified belief that I had an imagery experience as of pinkish-white letters.
- (e) *Environmental clues*. If you look around the room where I am doing the exercise and see a poster with the word “Elephant” written in pinkish-white, you might on that basis conjecture that my imagery experience was of pinkish-white letters.
- (f) *Testimony*. Someone else (my mother, my doctor) informs you that *they* obtained one of (a)–(e) above.

If you possess none of (a)–(f), you *cannot* form a justified belief that I had an imagery experience of pinkish-white letters. Without any of (a)–(f), all you can do is guess, really. In contrast, I *can* form a justified belief that I had an imagery experience of pinkish-white letters even without any of (a)–(f). Even if I say nothing about my mental imagery, engage in no relevant behavior whatsoever, have undergone no publicly observable bodily changes, have no scans of my brain available to me, am in the presence of nothing remotely pinkish, and have obtained no third-party testimony about any of this, I can still be justified in believing that I had an imagery experience of pinkish-white letters.

Upshot: from the fact that I have a justified belief about my imagery experience it does not follow that I possess one among (a)–(f), but from the fact *you* have such a belief it does follow. This difference calls for explanation. What explains the fact that I can, whereas you cannot, form a justified belief about my imagery experience without any of (a)–(f)?

Clearly, if I can form such a belief despite lacking any of (a)–(f), then there must be an additional – seventh – way to obtain information about my imagery experience, and that seventh way is available to me. (Also, since you *cannot* form a justified belief without any of (a)–(f), we can conclude that this seventh route is not available to you.) What might this seventh route to justified belief about conscious experience be?

The answer seems fairly straightforward: in addition to the six listed sources of evidence about my imagery experience, I also enjoy direct awareness of the experience itself. You have a justified belief that I had an imagery experience of pinkish-white letters in virtue of being aware of my verbal behavior, which is *indicative* of – is a *reliable symptom* of – my having an imagery experience as of pinkish-white letters. My situation is different. Whatever awareness I have of *indicators* and *symptoms* of this imagery experience, I also have, *on top of that*, awareness of the experience itself. It is not as if I am aware only of

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<sup>6</sup> I am assuming here that bodily changes of this sort don’t count as behavior: blushing is something that *happens* to me, for instance, not something that I *do*.

something the presence of which *indicates*, or *suggests*, the occurrence of pinkish-white letter imagery. No, it is the pinkish-white letter imagery itself of which I am aware. That is, I am aware of my imagery experience without there being anything else such that it is in virtue of being aware of that thing that I am aware of my imagery experience. I am *directly* aware of the imagery experience.<sup>7</sup>

This direct awareness is *introspective*. When asked what color I spelled “elephant” in, and having decided to answer honestly, I don’t start inspecting the room around me in search of the answer. Rather, I turn my attention inward and start *intro*-specting. And what I find upon doing so is not something from which I can make *inferences* about what my imagery experience is like; rather, it is the imagery experience itself that I attend to. This is direct introspective awareness.

So, the natural explanation for *Planandum* is clearly *Planans*. What alternative explanations might there be? It’s hard to think of any serious candidates, but let us consider one alternative proponents of the so-called transparency of experience (Harman 1990) might float. Fred Dretske once argued (Dretske 1995 Ch.2) for a “displaced perception” model of introspection. Crushing many subtleties, the core idea, and the one directly relevant to us here, is that when I introspect my current perceptual experience of the laptop before me, I am aware of my laptop experience in virtue of being aware *of the laptop*. Compare: I am aware of how much gas is left in the tank by being aware of the gauge on my dashboard (Dretske 1995: 41). What I am directly aware of is the state of the gauge; the state of the gas tank is something I have indirect awareness of – this is the phenomenon Dretske calls “displaced perception.” In exactly the same way, argues Dretske, I am directly aware of the laptop before me, and my perceptual experience of the laptop is something I am indirectly aware of. Applying this model, then, one might propose the following alternative explanation of *Planandum*: when I set out to answer the question about the color in which I spelled “elephant” in my head, what I am directly aware of are the pinkish-white letters, and it is only in virtue of being aware of the letters that I am aware of the experience *of the letters*.

The immediate problem with this, however, is that whereas there is a way to be aware of my laptop without being aware of my laptop experience, there is no way to be aware of the letters otherwise than by being aware of my letter experience. For the laptop exists independently of the laptop experience, whereas the letters have no existence

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<sup>7</sup> I can’t stress enough that accepting the existence of direct introspective awareness involves not the slightest commitment to infallibility, indubitability, and the like epistemic wonders. For all I have said, it is possible that when I had an introspective seeming-awareness of mentally spelling “elephant” in pinkish letters, the reality was that the imagery letters were bluish. Even in these cases, however, we have direct *seeming*-awareness (i.e., seeming-awareness of *x* where there is no *y*, such that we have seeming-awareness of *x* in virtue of having seeming-awareness of *y*); and since presumably there are also good cases of introspective seeming-awareness, we almost certainly sometimes enjoy direct introspective awareness.

separately from the letter experience. The letters are not sitting there waiting to be attended to by someone, who happens to be me. They “exist” merely as intentional objects of the letter experience – as the representational content of an imagery experience. To attend to the letters is strictly speaking just to attend to the representational content of the imagery experience. And that is a property *of the experience* – a representational property of it, but a property of it nonetheless.

I conclude that *Planans* is really a far superior explanation of *Planandum* than this displaced-perception alternative.

I actually think there is a wider lesson here regarding displaced-perception and similar transparency-style models of introspection. There is a tendency in the relevant literature to conflate the claim, which we may call *modest transparency*, that when we introspect our experiences we find that we can only attend to their representational contents, and the claim, which we may call *radical transparency*, that when we introspect our experiences we can only attend to external objects and properties. The two claims are different, and when we consider cases where representational contents and external objects come apart, as in bad-case perceptual experiences and imaginative experiences, we see immediately that it is only modest transparency which is plausible.

My point is that it is not only the introspection of imagery that gives us direct awareness of experience. The story is exactly the same for the introspection of perceptual experiences (as well as recollection, emotion, etc.). The case of imagery introspection is simply specially *instructive* in stifling a certain temptation (namely, the just-mentioned conflation) that the case of introspection of perceptual experience may encourage.

This concludes my abductive argument for *Direct Awareness*. I now turn to argue for something in the close vicinity of *Here and Now*.

#### **4. The Mode of Introspection**

What is the mode of introspection? In terms of the hyphenated expressions introduced in §2, what is the F such that states of direct introspective awareness represent-as-F whatever they represent? And how are we to go about finding out?

One approach is to pursue the two-phase method presented in §2. Since the correctness conditions of introspective states, too, are fully determined by the combination of content and attitude, if we could identify elements relevant to these correctness conditions that cannot plausibly be attributed to the contents of introspection, we could reasonably conclude that these elements are built into the very attitude of introspecting. Consider how this would apply to just representing-as-occurring-now.

*Phase 1.* Suppose that, as in one of Eric Schwitzgebel's cases, I am under the introspective impression that I am perfectly happy to be doing the dishes, when in reality I am quite resentful of being stuck with the dishes again (Schwitzgebel 2008: 252). In this case, the correctness conditions of my introspective impression are not met: it is an incorrect introspective impression that I have. Clearly, now, it would not help make my introspective impression correct if a month ago I did the dishes and really was happy doing them. Thus the now-ness of the conscious experiences represented by introspective states is relevant to introspective states' correctness. It figures in their overall correctness conditions.

*Phase 2.* Arguably, however, the now-ness of an introspected experience is no more introspectible than the now-ness of a perceived object is visible, audible, or otherwise sensible. Just as there is no taste or smell of now-ness, there is no introspectible mental quality of now-ness. We cannot introspect the qualitative character of the now the way we introspect the qualitative character of tasting mango or feeling irritable. The experiential present does not distinguish itself as a self-standing phenomenal quality in this way.

*Conclusion.* If both Phases are right, then the awareness of introspected states' now-ness must be a dimension of *how* we are aware of our conscious states in introspection, rather than of *what* we are aware of – a dimension of introspective attitude rather than introspective content.

This argument is somewhat less convincing than its counterpart concerning the perceptual attitude, for the following reason.<sup>8</sup> Whereas it is odd to insist that the now-ness of worldly events is perceptually sensible, plenty of philosophers have belabored notions such as “time-consciousness” and the “specious present,” which suggest an experiential now which is phenomenologically manifest after all.

A second consideration, however, convinces me of the attitudinal take here. Note that different phenomenal qualities figure in the contents of different introspective states: introspecting the experience of imagining a panda is different from introspecting the experience of tasting coffee, because the introspected experiences have different phenomenal qualities. Accordingly, the correctness conditions of the two introspective states are different. In general, the correctness conditions of introspective state types vary concomitantly with the different phenomenal qualities figuring in their representational contents. But the now-ness of introspected states is an *invariant* aspect of introspective states' correctness conditions. And this too suggests that now-ness enters introspective states' correctness conditions via their attitude rather than content. Compare: the belief that *p* has different correctness conditions from the belief that *q*, because  $p \neq q$ ; but all beliefs' correctness conditions require the *truth* (rather than goodness, say) of the

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<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Anna Giustina for pressing me on this point.

proposition believed, and this is symptomatic of the fact that representing-as-true is built into the very attitude of believing. Likewise, I claim, representing-as-occurring-now is built into the very attitude of introspecting, and for that reason characterizes the correctness conditions of *all* introspective states.

I conclude that, like perceptual awareness, introspective awareness represents-as-occurring-now its contents. When it comes to representing-as-*here*, however, there is room for skepticism, given that conscious experiences do not in general appear to introspection as spatially located – even when what they are experiences *of* does. Right now I am looking at the globe on my office desk. Just as my current visual experience does not introspectively appear to me to be spherical, even though it is an experience *of* a spherical object, nor does it introspectively appear to me to be *in* my office, even though it is an experience *as of* an object that is in my office. It is sometimes said that in pain experiences, the pain appears to be located, say, in one’s knee. However, it is important to distinguish pain as an experience from pain as the bodily event *presented by* that experience. The pain event does appear to be located in the knee. But first of all, that is a proprioceptive rather than an *introspective* appearance. And more importantly, the *experiencing* of the pain event does *not* appear to be located in the knee. Even if we end up thinking that experiences *have* locations, say because we conceive of them as identical to neural states, these locations don’t seem to be *introspectively manifest* – not any more than the putative neural characteristics of experiences (so conceived) are introspectively manifest. If experiences do not introspectively appear to be located, then a fortiori they do not introspectively appear to be located *here*.

Nonetheless, it seems to me there is something analogous to representing-as-occurring-here that characterizes introspective states, what we might call representing-as-occurring-*in-me*. When I introspect my pinkish-letters imagery experience, for instance, my introspection represents-as-occurring-in-me the imagery experience. To establish this, let us use again our two-phase method.

*Phase 1.* The in-me-ness of a conscious state seems relevant to the correctness conditions of the introspective representation of that state. After all, the occurrence of a qualitatively indistinguishable pinkish-letter imagery experience in *you* would not in the least help my introspective state be correct. The fact that you are having this imagery experience would not render correct *my* introspective impression as of a pinkish-letter imagery experience. Thus the “in me” information is relevant to the correctness of introspective awareness.

*Phase 2.* Hume famously claimed, in §1.4.6.3 of the *Treatise*, that the self is not part of what one is aware of in introspection. Try as we might to introspectively capture our self, as opposed to some specific conscious experience undergone by it, we never really manage

to become aware *of* the self. And concentrating harder does not make the self step out into full introspective view. There is of course considerable debate over the Humean claim, but let us accept it for now (we will take a more critical look shortly).

*Conclusion.* Suppose, then, that Hume is right that the self never shows up in the *content* of introspection – is never part of *what* we are aware of. Yet, as we have seen in Phase 1, the occurrence of introspected states in oneself is part of introspective states' correctness conditions. It seems to follow that the occurrence of introspected states in oneself is built into the very attitude of introspecting. In other words, introspecting represents-as-occurring-in-onself.

This argument requires, of course, that we accept the Humean claim about the self, which is highly controversial. But there are two plausibility considerations I want to raise in its favor. First, many of Hume's critics on this point were motivated in large part by a strong conviction that the self *must* play a central role in introspective self-knowledge. However, our conception of introspection as by its very nature framing its targets as occurring in oneself seems to speak to this concern. We are not here expelling the self from our philosophical psychology, but merely finding a different place for it as a perspectival modification of introspective awareness. Secondly, it is also noteworthy that, like with now-ness in perceptual and introspective awareness, in-me-ness is an *invariant* feature of introspective states' correctness conditions. As before, this invariance suggests that the in-me-ness information is encoded in the very attitude of introspecting, rather than miraculously showing up in each and every content introspected.

I conclude that the introspective attitude (1) *shares* with the perceptual attitude the feature of representing-as-occurring-now its contents, and (2) *resembles* the perceptual attitude in representing-as-occurring-in-me its content, analogously to the way the perceptual attitude represents-as-occurring-here its content. Taking these two features jointly, we may say that introspective states represent-as-occurring-now-in-me their contents, and that this is exceedingly close to the perceptual attitude; much closer, for instance, than the representing-as-past characteristic of recollection and the representing-as-possible (or whatever) of imagination. Adding to this the fact that like perception, introspection affords us direct awareness of its objects, it seems to me that introspection has done enough, so to speak, to earn the qualification "perceptual" when perceptuality is understood along the lines of our phenomenological conception of perception. Because there is still the attitudinal difference between perception's representing-as-occurring-here and introspection's representing-as-occurring-in-me, some might insist that the result is really only a "quasi-perceptual" theory of introspection. That's cool with me; what's important after all is not what we *call* the theory, but what the theory shows if correct. What it shows, I submit, is that the introspective and perceptual attitudes resemble each

other *strikingly more than either resembles any other of our psychological attitude*. This, I suspect, is what traditionally motivated perceptualism about introspection.

## 5. Objections and Replies

Perhaps the most damaging objection to perceptualism about introspection has been that while a state of perceptual awareness and the item therewith perceived are distinct existences, between states of introspective awareness and their objects there is a measure of ontological dependence: introspective states bear a *constitutive* connection to their objects, where perceptual states bear only a causal, contingent connection. This is sometimes claimed to be “the fundamental difference between perception and introspection” (Shoemaker 1994: 289).

The few modern defenders of perceptualism have insisted on a merely causal connection between introspective states and their objects (see notably Armstrong 1968: 329). But I’m not with them on this. I agree that the connection between introspective awareness and its object, but not between perceptual awareness and its object, is constitutive (see Kriegel 2009 Ch.5). However, I would argue that it is not *essential* to perception, under either the psychological or the phenomenological conception, that it bears a non-constitutive, merely causal relation to perceived objects. If this were essential to perception, then the leading theory of perception on the British Isles would be *eliminativism* (“there is no such thing as perception”). For naïve realism, which enjoys considerable popularity among philosophers of perception and is virtual orthodoxy on the British Isles, asserts a constitutive connection between perceptual experience and its object. The fact that naïve realism is *not* a form of perception eliminativism, and that people who reject it do not claim it is an *analytic truth* which naïve realism denies, shows that nobody really takes a non-constitutive relation to perceived objects to be *essential* to perception. Accordingly, however plausible it is that perception and introspection differ in the way Shoemaker claims – and I think it’s *very* plausible – that fact does not undermine perceptualism. For it is merely a difference in accidental properties (accidental, that is, to the status of *being perceptual*). What’s (phenomenologically) essential to perception, if I am not mistaken, is only that it provides the subject with direct awareness of the perceived item, which it represents-as-occurring-here-and-now. Whether the “metaphysical mechanics” enabling these features are causal or constitutive is accidental as far as the phenomenological concept of perception is concerned.

A different objection to perceptualism is that perceptual justification depends on the subpersonal processes that “spit out” perceptual experiences, and into which we have no first-person insight; whereas self-knowledge is based on personal-level, reason-giving rational processes in which the subject exercises cognitive agency (cf. Peacocke 1999: 224).

This too is something I agree with. But we have to be clear on the *scope* of perceptualism. It does not claim that self-knowledge is *exhausted* by direct introspective encounter with our inner life – that nothing happens cognitively after that, so to speak. It only insists that, whatever rich personal-level rational processes are involved in introspective self-knowledge, their typical starting point is in perception-like direct encounter with mental life. Just as empirical knowledge of the external world starts from perceptual encounter with one’s surroundings, but is not exhausted by this first encounter, so self-knowledge goes far beyond the first encounter with inner life we enjoy in introspective direct awareness, using personal-level rational processes to build on that encounter and form a much richer picture of our mental reality (cf. Lawlor 2009).

A third important objection to perceptualism is due to Charles Siewert (2012). Imagine you spend a nice sunny afternoon in the countryside, looking up close at a beautiful poppy, when suddenly a dark cloud moves in and casts its shadow on the whole field. The poppy changes its appearance – it now appears darker. Interestingly, however, the poppy does not appear to have changed: you are not under the illusion that the poppy itself has darkened, and not only because your intellect is “correcting” a perceptual illusion of a darkening poppy. On the contrary, the poppy *perceptually* appears unchanged, though its appearance has certainly changed. In short, there is a perceptual appearance here of an object persisting unchanged through the change in its appearance. Siewert (2012: 143) argues that this marks a crucial difference between perceiving and introspecting. For in introspection, we never find in our introspective awareness an item whose introspective appearance changes without it introspectively appearing to change, let alone an item whose introspective appearance changes while it appears unchanged.

*Reply.*<sup>9</sup> It is true that the phenomenon Siewert isolates is a striking feature of visual perception. However, it seems to be a peculiarity of vision rather than an essential feature of perception as such. It is not easy, for instance, to think of a poppy-style phenomenon in *olfactory* perception. We can, of course, imagine that you are enjoying smelling the poppy when suddenly a foul odor wafts through. But this is not a case where the poppy’s olfactory appearance changes while the poppy olfactorily appears unchanged. Instead, the poppy ceased to appear olfactorily to you. Even in a case where the poppy itself suddenly starts to emit a foul odor, what we have is *at most* a change in the poppy’s olfactory appearance without the poppy appearing olfactorily to change; but there is no *olfactory appearance of unchanged-ness* here (even if there is a *visual* appearance of unchanged object accompanying the various olfactory appearances). It seems to be a peculiarity of our visual awareness that it delivers to us an *appearance of objecthood*, a feature which makes possible a persistence in this appearance of objecthood through change in apparent characteristics. Perhaps other perceptual modalities are also object-disclosing in the way

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<sup>9</sup> I owe this reply to Anna Giustina.



vision is, delivering an appearance of persistent objecthood. But not all are, as the case of olfactory perception shows; and even if they were, it would not follow that this is an *essential* feature of perception, such that if olfactory experience on day stopped doing it, say, it would cease to be a form of perception. So being object-disclosing in this way is not part of what makes a perceptual experience perceptual. It is not essential to any perceptual experience's status as perceptual.

## Conclusion

This concludes my defense of a currently highly unpopular but historically prominent doctrine in philosophy of mind: the perceptual theory of introspection. Much of the current dislike of the doctrine I chalk off to the double life of mental terms, and the fact that there really is no immediately compelling case for *psychological* perceptualism about introspection. Whether *phenomenological* perceptualism is plausible depends crucially on what we take to be essential to perception as phenomenologically conceived. Here I have argued that direct awareness and representing-as-occurring-here-and-now capture the phenomenologically essential character of perception; other features, such as bearing a non-constitutive relation to the object or exhibiting perceptual constancy, can be striking without quite being essential. In the bulk of the paper, I presented first an abductive argument for the thesis that we enjoy direct introspective awareness of some of our mental states, then an argument that introspection represents-as-occurring-now-in-me its objects. If all this is right, then in the phenomenological sense of the term, introspection is a form of perception – perception of our inner life.

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