

What is Inner Awareness?

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Abstract. According to some views of consciousness, when I experience the taste of mango, I also have an inner awareness of that mango-taste experience. What is this inner awareness? A common way to characterize a mental state is in terms of its content and attitude. This is what I propose to do in this paper. The characterization of inner awareness I will propose is intended to help address certain difficulties regarding the similarity and dissimilarity between inner awareness and sense perception, as well as concerning the observability of the self.

1. Introduction

There are three kinds of people in the world. There are those who believe that every conscious experience necessarily involves the subject's inner awareness of its occurrence. There are those who believe that although conscious experiences are typically accompanied by inner awareness of their occurrence, this is not a necessary or even universal feature of theirs. And there are those who believe that inner awareness of conscious states is a sort of philosophers' invention and is not a psychologically real phenomenon at all. This paper is not for people of the third category. I will assume without argument that inner awareness of our conscious experiences is a psychologically real phenomenon, whether or not it is necessarily built into each and every conscious experience. My goal in this paper is to offer a characterization of what this phenomenon *is* – what its *nature* is.

My approach will be to characterize inner awareness primarily through the dual concepts of *content* and *attitude* that have been so central to the characterization of mental phenomena in the philosophical psychology of the past century. First, however, we need to have the phenomenon itself more clearly before our mind, and to untangle certain conceptual and terminological issues associated with the expression “inner awareness.”

2. Fixing on Inner Awareness

The purpose of this opening section is to provide as theory-free a way to fix on the phenomenon of inner awareness as possible. The more we build theoretical commitments into our way of fixing the reference of “inner awareness,” the higher the risk that nothing will correspond to the theory and therefore that inner awareness could be dismissed as a philosopher’s phantom. If, in contrast, we could simply *ostend* something and say “Let us call *this* inner awareness,” the risk decreases substantially. I will aim for something like that.

Last night I went to a jazz concert. Each instrument took its turn in center stage: first the sax, then the double bass, then the piano, and finally, almost as a charitable afterthought, the drums. When it was the drums’ turns, the other instruments were silent, but during the sax and piano solos, for instance, everybody else played on with gusto. At those times I had a very rich and textured auditory awareness of a musical whole. This auditory awareness had a dynamic center/periphery structure, however. During the sax solo, my auditory awareness was focalized on the sax sounds; the piano, double bass, and drum sounds contributed to my overall auditory phenomenology, of course, but the awareness of them was less attentive, more “peripheral.” But when the piano solo started, this center/periphery structure changed: the focus on my attention shifted to the piano, such that my auditory awareness of the piano sounds became attentive and focal while the sax sounds receded into the attentional periphery.

Sometimes – oftentimes! – my entire auditory experience is tucked away in my perceptual awareness’ periphery. Right now, for example, in the center of my overall conscious experience is my visual awareness of the laptop in front of me, as well as thoughts about how to express my next point; the sounds of faraway cars, like the feel of the seat under me and the undefinable smell of my office, do contribute to the overall phenomenology of my experience, but they lurk in peripheral awareness. They are like supporting actors in the phenomenological drama (such as it is) of my current experience.

These remarks on a center/periphery structure in perceptual awareness apply also to *inner* awareness. In inner awareness you can be aware of some items focally and others peripherally, and your entire inner awareness can be part of the overall experiential periphery, or – more rarely – can come to the attentional fore.

Here’s a nice exercise to bring out a case of attentive, focal inner awareness (Petitmengin 2006). Find a friend, co-worker, roommate, or whatever, and ask them to

close their eyes and spell out the word “elephant” in their head. Then ask them to answer – without yet opening their eyes – the following series of questions:

- Did you spell it in sounds or in written letters? (A majority answer “written letters,” so I’ll assume this answer in the follow-up questions.)
- Is the first letter an upper-case or lower-case E?
- Are the *rest* of the letters upper-case or lower-case?
- What color are the letters?
- Are the edges of the letters marked off in color and/or shape, or do they look like the rest of the letter?
- What color is the background?
- How big are the letters – do they take up most of the “visual space” or is the background noticeably bigger than them?
- Did you spell out the entire word, down to the final T, or did you trail off toward the end?

You can also run this on yourself, of course. I just wanted you to do it on a friend so that we could all imagine a situation in which the subject is answering these questions *at the very time they are having the experience* that the answers are describing (eyes closed etc.). For what it’s worth, the first time *I* did this, my answers were:

- I spelled the word out in written letters.
- The first letter was a capital E.
- The rest of the letters were small caps.
- The letters were a subtle pinkish-white.
- The edges were a slightly darker shade of pinkish-white, and had a 3D quality to them.
- The background was a very dark gray – almost black but not quite.
- My letters were quite tall, and took up about two-thirds of the “mental canvas.”
- I did not spell out the entire word, trailing off circa the H.

Whether these were the *correct* answers I don’t claim to know with certitude. They are the answers I gave in good faith, with high confidence in most cases (less so in others, notably the last one). I certainly did not have a feeling of infallibility as I was giving these answers; but nor did I have a feeling of saying something arbitrarily, just to satisfy the questioner say. On the contrary, I had a feeling of basing my question on direct awareness of the imagery I was describing. By “direct” here I don’t mean anything particularly fancy: I don’t mean, for instance, that the awareness was not mediated by a causal process. That is not something I had any feeling about. What I mean is simply that what I was aware of when answering the questions about the imagery letters was not something from which I made

inferences about what my imagery letters were like; rather, I was aware of the *imagined letters themselves*.

What kind of awareness was this? I call it *inner awareness*. It is certainly not perceptual or sensory awareness. When presented with the questions about my imagery letters, I did *not* engage in any sensory inspection of my external environment in search of the answers. Rather, I turned my attention inward and was *intro*-specting. For this reason, the label “inner awareness” seems fitting. Of course, one could prefer other labels. That’s okay.

The inner awareness involved in intro-specting my imagery letters is *attentive* and *focal*. It is similar in that respect to the auditory awareness I had of the piano during the piano solos in last night’s jazz concert. But inner awareness can also be peripheral and non-attentive, more akin to the auditory awareness I had of the double bass during the piano solos. When I was asked to spell “elephant” in my head, I was sitting down in a quiet room with my eyes closed. But imagine that instead I was asked to spell “elephant” in my head while running to the end of the hallway and back, and the hallway was full of alarm noises and bright flashes; and that when I was back in my seat, I was asked all those questions about the shapes and colors in the imagery experience I just had. I might be much less confident in my replies, partly because while spelling “elephant” in my head I will have been focusing my attention on running in that noisy and flashy hallway. I will have had *some* awareness of the imagery letters, but not the attentive kind of awareness I had when asked to spell elephant, eyes closed, in a comfy chair in a quiet room. As a result, we may surmise, the representation of the imagery letters in my inner awareness would be less rich and detailed – of lesser quality overall – and it would make a more limited mark on short-term memory. All this would be reflected in my lower confidence as I reply to the questions listed above. At the same time, it would presumably still not seem to me like my answers are entirely arbitrary. They would still seem to be based on recollection of my awareness of the imagery letters – a *peripheral inner* awareness.

Thus inner awareness can occur both as a form of focal awareness and as a form of peripheral awareness. The center/periphery structure can also be internal to inner awareness itself, just as it can be internal to auditory awareness. I can easily imagine that, as I was attentively introspecting my imagery experience, the better to answer the questions I was posed, I was also aware, if more dimly and non-attentively, of a certain feeling of nervousness or tension in me. This inner awareness of nervousness/tension would be peripheral inner awareness accompanying my focal inner awareness of my concurrent imagery.

This, then, is the phenomenon I propose to characterize: inner awareness of one’s own mental life, which, like other forms of awareness, is sometimes focal and sometimes

peripheral. I have tried to focus the reader's mind on the relevant phenomenon by conjuring a vivid example of the kind of phenomenon I have in mind, rather than by offering a definition that may or may not end up matching anything in our psychological reality. This way of fixing on inner awareness is not, and cannot, be entirely innocent of any theoretical commitments. For instance, if illusionism is true, then inner awareness is just a small part of the grand illusion. Still, many theoretical matters concerning the precise nature of inner awareness are successfully bracketed in this way of homing in on it. For my part, I hold, for instance, these two broadly empirical beliefs about inner awareness: (1) that in the mental lives of neurotypical humans, inner awareness is much more often peripheral than focal, and (2) that at-least-peripheral inner awareness of our ongoing stream of consciousness is a constant feature of our waking life. Indeed, I hold some beliefs in this area that may well go beyond the empirical, notably (3) that inner awareness is in fact a *necessary* feature of conscious experience (with a modality stronger than nomological) and (4) that inner awareness is even *constitutive* of each and every conscious experience – there is no conscious experience in absence of inner awareness (see Kriegel 2009 for detail). But none of these convictions have needed to be leveraged in order to fix on the phenomenon of inner awareness. Even if (1)–(4) are all false, there is still a kind of awareness we have when we inspect our own imagery to answer questions about it, and a similar but less attentive awareness of various other forms of conscious experience can and does occur as well. *That* is inner awareness.

3. Content and Attitude

The purpose of this paper is to offer a characterization the phenomenon just fixed on. What does it mean to “offer a characterization”? How does one “characterize” a phenomenon? One way to characterize a phenomenon is to list as many true propositions about it as possible; the more exhaustive the list, the more complete the characterization. A different way to characterize a phenomenon is to list a selective subset of true propositions about it, ideally that subset of propositions which capture that in virtue of which it is the phenomenon it is, distinguishing it from other, separate phenomena. We may call the former *empirical* characterization and the latter *philosophical* characterization; though other, more vanilla labels would do just as well. In these terms, my aim here is to provide a philosophical characterization of inner awareness.

My approach is to characterize inner awareness in terms of its content and attitude. The reason is that I think all mental phenomena feature content and attitude, and more importantly, different mental phenomena differ in the content and/or attitude they feature.

Thus content plus attitude suffice to *individuate* mental phenomena, and to that extent tell us what makes any mental phenomenon the mental phenomenon it is. I will not argue here for this general approach to the philosophical characterization of mental phenomena, instead taking it for granted.¹

It is possible to view content and attitude as two separate “elements” the coming together of which constitutes a mental phenomenon. But it is also possible, and perhaps more plausible, to think of content and attitude as two “dimensions” of a mental phenomenon, dimensions that we can abstract out *in thought* but which cannot really occur independently *in reality*. A *prima facie* reason to prefer this second view is that if content and attitude were separate elements, there would be no explanation for why they never seem to occur one without the other, as a “free-standing” content or a “free-standing” attitudes. On this second view, the fundamental distinction between content and attitude is just a distinction between two dimensions along which mental states may resemble or differ. Consider the belief that *p*. Does it resemble more a desire that *p* or a belief that *q*? Well, in one respect it resembles more the desire that *p* but in another it resembles more the belief that *q*. “Content” is what we call the first respect, “attitude” what we call the second.

What can be said more substantively about these two respects? At bottom, I want to say that the content-respect consists in *what* a mental state represents, whereas the attitude-respect consists in *how* that state represents what it does – but where the “how” is intended to pick out neither (a) a *property* attributed to an object nor (b) a *Fregean mode of presentation* under which an object is represented, but (c) something else. Consider the belief that the morning star is nice. What does this belief represent and how does it represent it? There is one way of using “what” and “how” such that the *morning star* is what the belief represents and *as nice* as how it represents it. But niceness shows up in the *content* of the belief that the morning star is nice (the belief that the morning star is nice has a different *content* from the belief that the morning star *is far*), so this can’t be the sense of “how” relevant to capturing the belief’s *attitude*. There is a second way of using “what” and “how” such that *Venus* is (at least part of) what the belief that the morning star is nice represents and *qua morning star* is how the belief represents Venus. But again, this can’t be the sense of “how” that captures the notion of attitude, since (on many views) the belief that the morning star is nice has a different *content* from the belief that the *evening star* is nice. To characterize attitude, then, we need a different understanding of “how.” The right understanding, I suggest, is this. The proposition that the morning star is nice, individuated sensitively to both predication and the mode of presentation, is *what* the belief that the morning star is nice represent. And *how* does the belief represent this proposition? *As true*. It is in this respect that the belief that the morning star is nice differs from, e.g., the *desire* that the morning star be nice. The desire represents the same proposition, but represents it

“under the guise of the good” rather than “under the guise of the true.” It represents it in a different way, where the way does not affect the individuation of content. Thus this notion of “how” manages to denote something that remains external to the content of a mental state. The content of the belief that the morning star is nice is the first-order proposition *that the morning star is nice*, not the second-order proposition that *the proposition that the morning star is nice is true* (nor the truth-operator-featuring first-order proposition that *it is true* that the morning star is nice). No, the content of the belief that the morning is star is nice is simply the proposition that the morning star is nice; it is just that it in its nature as belief to *represent-as-true* this content. *Representing-as-true* is the attitude characteristic of belief. Here the expression “representing-as-true” indicates *how* the belief represents what it does (*as true!*), in a sense of “how” that does not specify an aspect of content though, but on the contrary concerns precisely how the content itself is represented. In this case, the content *that the morning star is nice* is represented-as-true – that is *how* it is represented.

To characterize a mental phenomenon in terms of content and attitude, then, is to identify the content characteristic of the relevant phenomenon and the attitude characteristic of it. That is, it is to identify *what* kinds of things are represented by instances of the phenomenon and *how* these instances represent what they do (in the relevant, content-external sense of “how”).

When we identify the content of a mental state *token*, we point out the specific entity or entities this token represents. (Note well: I use “entity” to mean not only objects but also properties, events, states of affairs, and whatever else mental states may represent.) But when we speak of identifying the content characteristic of a mental phenomenon, we typically have in mind a mental state *type* rather than token. To identify the content characteristic of a mental state *type*, we need to delimit the *type* of entities that tokens of the state type represent. You can believe anything you want, as long as what you believe is a proposition. You cannot believe a cat or a tree. Individual objects of this sort are not eligible contents of belief (though they may be, for all we have said here, *constituents* of belief contents). But although a tree cannot be believed, it can be *seen*. In other words, a tree is among the things that can be the content of a *visual experience*. The reason appears to be that trees have color and shape, and the category of colored-and-shaped entities is what visual experience, as a mental state type, seems to take as its content. In contrast, *auditory* experience represents *sounds*, or perhaps things that *have* or *make* sounds (things *that sound*) – that is the category of entities that constitutes the characteristic content of auditory experience.

To identify the *attitude* characteristic of a mental state type, we point out the characteristic way, or manner, in which tokens of that type represent their contents. If beliefs represent their content “under the guise of the true,” and desires theirs “under the guise of the good,” how do other mental phenomena represent their contents? Often it’s not

easy to say. Under what guise does a visual experience of a cat climbing up a tree represent the cat's climb up the tree? What is the F such that my auditory experience of the jazz concert last night represented-as-F the relevant sounds (and/or instruments)? It's far from clear what we should say here.

My own view is that the attitude characteristic of such perceptual experiences is that of *representing-as-occurring-here-and-now*: perception represents its content under the guise of the hic et nunc (see Kriegel 2019b). I think it is intuitive that perception deals with the here and now, but there is more than intuition to support the idea. There is, more specifically, a two-step argument for this. The first step is that the here and the now are relevant to the correctness (or appropriateness, or fittingness) conditions of perceptual experiences. My auditory experiences last night represented various sound sequences (let's say). If those very sound sequences really took place in the jazz club I was sitting in, then mine were the correct auditory experiences to have. If the room I was sitting in last night was empty and silent, however, then I was hallucinating. But notice, now, that if the very same sound sequences really did take place in the jazz club I was sitting in, not last night though, but a year ago, then the verdict is still that my auditory experiences last night were hallucinatory or at any rate incorrect; and likewise, if the very same sound sequences did take place last night, not in the jazz club I was in however, but in some concert hall on the other side of the planet. Thus for my auditory experience to be correct, it is insufficient that the sounds it represents be real; they must also occur *when and where* I am hearing them. This is the first step in the argument that perception represents-as-here-and-now its content. The second step consists in noting that the here and now don't seem to be part of *what* perception represents. The reason is that here and now are not *sensible qualities*: there is no way to smell the here or taste the now. Even though for my current auditory experiences to be correct, the sounds I experience must occur here and now, there is no way here sounds, there is no timbre of now. The here and now are not audible entities you can pick up if you just listen close enough. To that extent, they cannot be part of *what* auditory perception represents, the *content* represented therein. They must be rather aspects of *how* that content is represented, that is to say, aspects of the *perceptual attitude*.

Arguably, auditory perception can be characterized as the mental phenomenon in which the subject represents-as-here-and-now sounds, or things that sound. This would be a philosophical characterization of auditory perception, a characterization in terms of content and attitude. No other mental phenomenon has sounds for its characteristic content and representing-as-here-and-now for its characteristic attitude. Any token mental state that features this attitude toward that kind of content is perforce an auditory perceptual experience.

Perhaps this is ultimately not the right account of auditory perception. But that is not the topic of the paper. The account just presented serves to illustrate the style of

philosophical characterization of a mental phenomenon that I would like to pursue in characterizing inner awareness. The question that really concerns me is this: What are the content and the attitude characteristic of inner awareness?

4. The Content of Inner Awareness

The less interesting topic here is that of content. I think it's fairly straightforward that, if sounds are the content of auditory awareness, *conscious experiences* are the content of inner awareness. The imagery experience I had when I was asked to spell "elephant" in my head could be the content of my inner awareness because it was an experience.

I don't think we can have inner awareness of our *unconscious* mental states. The reason is that unconscious mental states are not the kind of thing we can be directly aware of at all. We rather *infer* their existence on the basis of awareness of other things. Sometimes we infer it on the basis of perceptual awareness of overt behavior, including our own, as when we realize we nurse a longstanding resentment toward a friend or family member on the basis of noticing the way we have been behaving toward them. Sometimes we infer that we have some unconscious state on the basis of inner awareness of a symptom or consequence or that state; Lawlor (2009) discusses a case where a woman comes to know that she wants to have another child on the basis of inner awareness of her thoughts and feelings as she folds her son's now-too-small clothes. Perhaps there are other bases on which one may infer the existence of unconscious mental states; but we have no direct awareness of these states themselves, and a fortiori no inner awareness of them. Only *conscious* states can be represented by inner awareness – where the relevant sense of "conscious" is the *phenomenal* sense, the sense in which there is something it is like for a subject to have the conscious experiences they have.

When discussing the contents of auditory awareness, we allowed for the epistemic possibility that these are not (only) sounds, but also *things that have or make sounds*. There is a live debate on this in the literature on auditory perception. O'Callaghan (2008), for instance, argues that auditory awareness represents also sound *sources*, among which are ordinary objects; while Batty (2011) argues that in auditory awareness only audible *properties* show up, never the individuals that *bear* those properties. In similar fashion, we can debate whether part of what shows up in the content of inner awareness is not just conscious experiences, but also things that *have* conscious experiences, that is, individual *minds*, or *selves*. In our early philosophical education, we all passed through Hume's claim that when he goes most intimately into what he calls himself, he only stumbles on one particular experience or another, and never catches his *self*. Wielding his strict empiricism,

Hume concluded (albeit uncharacteristically hesitantly) that we don't have a legitimate (read: empiricistically reconstructable) concept of self; and this agitated many a capable philosopher, who insisted there must be a legitimate concept of self, and that the self may be a more difficult but not impossible thing to observe when entering most intimately into what one calls oneself (see, e.g., Chisholm 1969). This is not the place to resolve this debate, though I will have more to say on it later on. For now, let me only record my feeling that although there is surely a legitimate concept of self, Hume was onto something in claiming that nothing like a self appears to show up in the content of inner awareness.

The only thing we can say *with confidence*, then, is that conscious experiences constitute the category of entities that inner awareness takes as content.

According to some philosophers, only the *contents* of conscious experiences show up in (the content of) inner awareness; nothing outside the content (including the attitude) does. This is one way, at least, of interpreting the idea of the "transparency of experience" (Harman 1990).² It is noteworthy, however, that those philosophers have tended to conclude that only the content of a conscious experience contributes to its phenomenal character, that is, to what makes it the conscious experience it is. On their view, the attitude employed by a conscious experience is "phenomenally silent." I reject this completely (Kriegel 2023), but I do note that this would preserve the alignment between what shows up in the content of inner awareness, on the one hand, and what constitutes a conscious experience, on the other. In this way, it only reinforces the idea that conscious experiences are what inner awareness is about.

A final remark: the view that the content of inner awareness is given by conscious experience is neutral on the underlying metaphysics of conscious experiences. Are experiences events, property instances, episodes, something else? Any of these views is consistent, for all we have said here, with the idea that conscious experiences is what inner awareness is about.

5. The Inner-Awareness Attitude

If inner awareness has a representational content, then there is a representational attitude, or mode, or manner, under which that content is represented. But what *is* the way inner awareness represents its contents – what is the *inner-awareness attitude*?

It is a longstanding concern in philosophy of mind and epistemology to consider the extent to which inner awareness may be analogous to perceptual awareness. The first

impression, I think, is that there is some significant kinship between the two, but also important dissimilarities. The characterization of the perceptual attitude as representing-as-here-and-now may allow us to make sense of this impression. Intuitively, inner awareness represents-as-now but does not represent-as-here its content. There is no *spatial* dimension to the way inner awareness represents what it does, in the sense that inner awareness does not seem to present what it does as *located in space*, let alone as located in a place shared by oneself as the subject. Thus, when I inspect my “elephant” letter imagery, I am not under the impression that these letters share a common space with me, are here in the room with me in the way the chair I am sitting on is. But it does feel like the imagery is *concurrent* with my awareness of it – that they share a location *in time*, if you will. Inner awareness does not present just any old conscious experiences, but *current* ones.

This, I think, is the first impression. But we can also establish that inner awareness represents-as-now more theoretically, using essentially the same method we did to establish that perceptual awareness represents-as-here-and-now. The method we used was a two-step argument in which (1) the first step showed that the here and now are relevant to the correctness conditions of perceptual experiences and (2) the second step showed that the here and now are not part of *what is perceived*, that is, are not part of perceptual *content*. On the assumption that correctness conditions are fixed by content and attitude, it follows that (3) the here and now are aspects of *how* perceptual awareness represents what it does, that is, aspects of the perceptual *attitude*. We may now apply this style of reasoning to inner awareness.

The application is complicated, though, by the fact that it is less obvious that inner awareness can be incorrect in the way perception can. There is clearly such a thing as misperception, but it has traditionally been a matter of some debate whether there is such a thing as inner mis-awareness, or inner *merely-seeming-awareness*. This is a difficult topic we cannot delve into here. My own view is that while some forms of inner awareness cannot be incorrect, others can be (Horgan and Kriegel 2007, Giustina and Kriegel 2017).³ On my view, it is possible for me to have an introspective impression of feeling irritable when in fact I am rather frustrated and anxious. If I am not in fact feeling irritable right now, but have the introspective impression that I am (a focal inner seeming-awareness as of feeling irritable), then this is not the correct introspective impression for me to have. Importantly, now, the fact that I did have a qualitatively indistinguishable irritable feeling a year ago does not help my introspective impression to be correct (just as the fact that there was a qualitatively indistinguishable sound sequences at the jazz club a year ago did not help my auditory experience to be correct). At the same time, the now-ness of my irritable feeling is not introspectible any more than it is audible. It does not appear to introspection the way the quality of irritability does. It does not form part of *what* I am aware of.

Therefore, it is a dimension of *how* I am aware of my conscious experience. My inner awareness represents-as-occurring-now an irritable feeling.

Insofar as inner awareness represents-as-now but does not represent-as-here, whereas perceptual awareness both represents-as-now and represents-as-here, we can see the sense in which inner awareness can be said to be “quasi-perceptual.” Speaking loosely, if perceptuality is characterized by representing-here-and-now, and inner awareness does half of that, then inner awareness is half perceptual.

It is worth adding, though, that inner awareness also presents us with conscious experience *itself*, rather than with something from which we can make *inferences about* our conscious experience, in the same way perceptual awareness presents us with our sensible environment *itself*, rather than with something from which we can make inferences about it. In this way, inner awareness resembles perceptual awareness in putting us *in contact* with things. Husserl might say that in auditory perception we are presented with sounds *in persona*; we could say, similarly, that in inner awareness we are presented with conscious experience *in persona*.

Although inner awareness does not represent-as-*here* its content, I suspect there is something analogous in the “mode of inner awareness.” This is that inner awareness represents-as-occurring-*in-me* whatever it represents, for instance an irritable feeling. Clearly, the present occurrence of the right irritable feeling in *you* would not make *my* (seeming) inner awareness of feeling irritable correct. So the “in me” information seems to be relevant to the correctness conditions of inner awareness. The only question is whether it does so by being part of the *content* of inner awareness or by being an aspect of its *attitude*. Because I suspect that Hume is right that the self does not appear to inner awareness in the way the quality of irritability does, I also suspect that the “in me” information is built into the very attitude of inner awareness and affects the correctness conditions of inner awareness in that way. If this is right, then inner awareness represent-as-occurring-in-me its content. This representing-as-in-me is in some ways the “inner” analogue, or counterpart, of perception’s representing-as-here. Both carry information, in some intuitive sense, about *where* what is represented is, or takes place.

I note in passing that, if all this is right, then the skeptical inferences Hume made on the basis of his failure to find his self when attending to his stream of consciousness seem to have been based on a mistaken expectation that the self should show up as part of what is introspected, when in fact it is built into the very attitude of introspecting. Perhaps Hume was guilty of what Barwise and Perry (1983) called the “fallacy of misplaced information,” whereby “informational commitments” built into attitudes are wrongly taken to be carried by contents; or perhaps he simply failed to realize that there is more to inner awareness than its content, such that the self may be implicated in our most intimate cognitive

relationship to our inner life otherwise than by being part of *what* we are inner aware of, and rather as an aspect of *how* we are inner aware of our inner life: namely, *as-our-own*.

It *may* turn out, of course, that the self does show up in the content of introspection, perhaps even in the form of a mental substance modifications of which *constitute* conscious experiences. This is what Brentano, for instance, held (Brentano 1982: 63-4). If *that's* right, then the self is part of *what* we are inner-aware of after all, and in some sense is the *only* thing we are inner-aware of. I don't mean to settle these issues here; I am merely recording my inclination to think that it is actually through the *attitude* of inner awareness that the self shows up in our mental life. Either way, though, the self would be implicated in the overall representational character of inner awareness.

To summarize, the hypothesis I am putting forward here – a hypothesis of philosophical psychology, if you will – is that the attitude characteristic of inner awareness is that of *representing-as-occurring-now-in-me*. In the content-external sense of “how,” as-occurring-now-in-me is how inner awareness represents whatever it represents. It is a consequence of this view, and an attractive one to my mind, that it casts the analogy between inner awareness and perceptual awareness as quite tight: like perceptual awareness, inner awareness represents-as-now, and although inner awareness does not represent-as-here, it does something similar in representing-as-in-me. Moreover, both put the subject in contact with certain items (conscious experiences in the case of inner awareness, sensible objects or qualities in the case of perception) as opposed to symptoms or consequences of those items. When I answered questions about my imagery letters, I did not make conjectures about them based on encounter with some other things, but was attending of the imagery letters themselves and simply reporting what I was aware of upon thus attending.

The close analogy between inner awareness and perception brings with it a close analogy between *introspection* and *observation*. I think of observation as attentive, inspective perception. Walking my dog around the block, I may first see a subtropical flower without paying any notice to it, and then stop in my tracks and start attending to it more closely and inspecting the various lovelinesses. That is when I “graduate” from *perceiving* the flower to *observing* it. Introspection is the analogue in the case of inner awareness: it is simply focal, attentive inner awareness. To answer the questions about my imagery, I introspected it, attending to and inspecting the “shapes” and “colors” of the imagery letters. Thus insofar as inner awareness is quasi-perceptual, introspection is quasi-observational.

I have mentioned in passing that, on my view, inner awareness is constitutive of conscious experience, in that each and every conscious experience has built into it as a constituent an inner awareness of its own occurrence (this is part of my “reflexive” or “self-

representational” view of consciousness – see Kriegel 2009). There are, on my view, two dimensions to the phenomenal character of conscious experience that we can distinguish at least *in thought*, even if they do not come apart *in reality*. When I look at the sky, there is a bluish way it is like for me to have my visual experience of the sky, and the experience’s phenomenal character consists in this “bluish way it is like for me.” But we can distinguish between, on the one hand, (a) the *bluish* aspect of this bluish way it is like for me, which I call *qualitative* character, and which varies across conscious experience types, and (b) the *for-me* aspect of the bluish way it is like for me, which I call *subjective* character, and which remains invariant across all conscious experiences. What does this subjective character, or for-me-ness, of experience consist in? I would like to propose that it consists precisely in the fact that every conscious experience is represented-as-occurring-*in-me* by an inner awareness built into that very experience. Thus the proposed account of inner awareness also illuminates the nature of for-me-ness.

6. Conclusion

Putting together the results of the above discussion, we get a two-part philosophical characterization of inner awareness: (i) the *content* characteristic of inner awareness is given by conscious experiences, while (ii) the *attitude* characteristic of inner awareness is that of representing-as-occurring-now-in-me. That is, it is the nature of inner awareness to represent-as-occurring-now-in-me conscious experiences. Conscious experience is *what* states of inner awareness characteristically represent, and as-occurring-now-in-me is *how* these states represent these experiences (in the relevant sense of “how”).

This characterization suffices, I claim, to capture what makes inner awareness the mental phenomenon it is: all instances of inner awareness represent-as-occurring-now-in-me some conscious experience(s), and no instances of any other mental phenomenon represent-as-occurring-now-in-me conscious experiences. On some views of recollection (or “episodic memory”), what is being recalled strictly speaking is always a conscious experience. For instance, when I recall going to the zoo last summer and seeing a panda, *what* I am recalling – the *content* of the recollection – is my *visual experience* of the panda bear. The truth about recollection may be somewhat more complicated (see Fernández 2006), but even if recollection did just represent conscious experiences, it would not represent-as-occurring-*now* these experiences; on the contrary, it is in the nature of recollection to represent-as-*past* its contents (see Kriegel 2015). Thus no mental phenomenon that represents what inner awareness does represents it quite under the same guise as inner awareness does.

The proposed characterization throws new light on two traditional issues in the philosophy of mind and epistemology of self-knowledge. First, it explains the sense in which inner awareness resembles perceptual awareness in essential respects, while still being importantly different. The main similarity is that both represent-as-occurring-now their contents, and both put us in contact with certain items. The main dissimilarity is that inner awareness does not represent-as-*here* its content, though plausibly it involves a counterpart in the form of representing-as-*in-me* its content. Secondly, it explains the sense that Hume was onto something in his observations concerning the introspective elusiveness of the self, while at the same time overreaching in the philosophical conclusions he subsequently drew. Hume is right, I have suggested, that the self does not show up in the *content* of inner awareness (focal or peripheral), but wrong to conclude that the self does not play a role in the overall representational character of inner awareness; on the contrary, the self is implicated in the *manner* in which inner awareness represents what it does – it is a central aspect of the *inner-awareness attitude*. As a bonus, I also claimed that the subjective character or for-me-ness of conscious experience *consists in* the way each and every experience is represented-as-occurring-in-me by an inner awareness built into that very experience.

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¹ For what it’s worth, in Kriegel 2019a I tried to apply this approach to what is commonly considered the mental phenomenon least likely to feature content and attitude: mood.

² But then again there are so many different ways to interpret the idea of transparency – see Bordini 2023 for a recent and perforce only partial overview.

³ There are, in particular, three forms of inner awareness “doomed” to correctness. First, the peripheral inner awareness that is constitutive of our conscious experience cannot be incorrect, because the phenomenal character of experience is *constituted*, on my view, by the way the experience appears to this inner awareness (Kriegel 2009 Ch.4). Second, there is a *pre-doxastic* form of focal inner awareness, what Anna Giustina (2021) calls *primitive introspection*, that is also immune from error or incorrectness. And third, there is also a minimal form of *doxastic* focal inner awareness, what Terry Horgan and I called *SPPB phenomenal beliefs* (where SPPB stands for “singular, present, phenomenal in mode of presentation, and bracketed” – see Horgan and Kriegel 2007 for details), that we argue is infallible. (It’s an open question in mind, though, whether this third phenomenon should be brought under the umbrella of the concept inner awareness, or is better conceived as a kind of belief or judgment *based* on inner awareness.) This leaves many forms of inner awareness that may be either correct or incorrect.