

# 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 type is in terms of its characteristic content and attitude. This is what I propose to do in this paper. I argue (a) that conscious experiences constitute the characteristic content of inner awareness, and (b) that the characteristic attitude of inner awareness is that of representing-as-occurring-now-in-me this content.

## 1. Introduction

There are three kinds of people in the world. There are those who believe that every conscious experience involves the subject's inner awareness of its occurrence. There are those who believe that only *some* conscious experiences are accompanied by inner awareness of their occurrence. And there are those who believe that inner awareness of conscious states is a sort of philosopher's invention and *never* accompanies conscious experience. 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. But I will not assume the bolder claim that it is implicated in *every* conscious experience (though I believe it to be true). I will only assume that inner awareness of our conscious experiences is something that at least sometimes occurs in our mental life. My goal in this paper is to offer a characterization of what this phenomenon of inner awareness *is* – what its *nature* consists in.<sup>1</sup>

It is not easy to characterize inner awareness. Inner awareness is what we use to characterize *other* conscious phenomena. What is it like to feel irritable? What is it like to taste rainbow roll sushi? Answering these questions starts with inner awareness of feeling irritable and tasting rainbow roll sushi. This raises a methodological puzzle, however: how

can we characterize inner awareness itself? Can inner awareness be trained on itself, or are we doomed to access inner awareness indirectly?

I don't have a general solution to this puzzle. 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. I start by trying to bring the phenomenon itself more clearly into view (§2). After introducing the distinction between content and attitude in general (§3), I then argue for a specific view of the content (§4) and of the attitude (§5) characteristic of inner awareness.

## 2. Fixing on Inner Awareness

Last night I went to a jazz concert. Each instrument took its turn to do a little Solo: first the sax, then the double bass, then the piano, and finally, almost as a charitable afterthought, the drums. When it was the drums' turn, 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, with a dynamic center/periphery structure. 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 auditory awareness of them was less attentive, more "peripheral." Once the piano solo started, this center/periphery structure changed: 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 the periphery of my overall perceptual awareness. Right now, for instance, 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 the auditory awareness of them remains in the periphery of my overall awareness. They are like supporting actors in the phenomenological drama of my current experience.

This point about a center/periphery structure in perceptual awareness applies to *inner* awareness as well: inner awareness, too, can be either focal awareness or peripheral awareness. That's because in inner awareness, too, you can be aware of some items focally

and others peripherally. Suppose you happen to be anxious during a 3-minute period in which you are eating a mango. We can easily imagine a scenario where, attending to your internal experience, you are sometimes *focally* aware of the mango-taste quality and only *peripherally* aware of the feeling of anxiousness, while at other time you become focally aware of the anxiety, with the awareness of the mango-taste quality remaining peripheral.

In other cases, you may attend to neither of these things, because it is rather something in the external world that has captured your attention, but still be dimly aware of them. Imagine you are watching the news, focusing on what you're seeing and hearing on the screen, while anxiously eating your mango. A psychologically possible scenario involves you having *focal* awareness of the news accompanied by *peripheral* awareness of (a) the mango-taste quality and (b) the quality of the anxious feeling. In such a scenario, your inner awareness in its entirety is peripheral, and the only focal awareness is "outer."

Incidentally, philosophers who hold that *all* conscious experiences involve the subject's inner awareness of their occurrence hold this precisely because they think *peripheral* inner awareness can be counted on to be present during the large portions of our inner life in which our attention is directed outward (see, e.g., Kriegel 2009 Ch. 5). It is not lost on them that, pending extreme narcissism, most of the time human beings' attention is directed at the world around them rather than at themselves. Still, a subtle and peripheral inner awareness always lurks, according to these philosophers.

Note that, as used here, the terms 'focal' and 'peripheral' denote attributes of *awareness*, not of *objects* of awareness. Plausibly, there are corresponding attributes of the objects of awareness, but it would be judicious to use other terms to name them: we might for instance call *salient* what one is focally aware of and *subsidiary* what one is peripherally aware of. In these terms, we can say that in the scenario above it is sometimes the mango-taste quality which is salient, with the qualitative feel of anxiety remaining subsidiary, while at other times the feel of anxiety is salient and the mango-taste quality is subsidiary. All this means, of course, is that at some moments you are focally aware of the mango-taste quality and only peripherally aware of your feeling of anxiety but in other moments you're focally aware on the anxiety and peripherally of the taste quality. When inner awareness in its entirety is peripheral, as in the news-watching scenario, experience as a whole is subsidiary, and only external objects are salient.

To repeat, philosophers who have held that *every* conscious experience implicates the subject's awareness of it have typically held that external objects are the salient objects of awareness most of the time, with inner experience remaining subsidiary. This is, again, because most of the time we are focally aware of external objects, and are only peripherally aware of our own experience of these objects.

This, then, is the phenomenon I have in mind – inner awareness of conscious experience, whether focal or peripheral. The purpose of this paper is to offer a philosophical characterization of this phenomenon. 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 one can; 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 – those 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. My aim here is to provide a *philosophical* characterization of inner awareness.

My approach is to characterize inner awareness in terms of its characteristic *content* and *attitude*. The reason I take this approach is that I take content-cum-attitude to be that in virtue of which a mental phenomenon is the mental phenomenon it is. My assumption here is that 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 view of mental-phenomenon individuation, instead taking it for granted.<sup>2</sup> I recognize that some views designate other features (e.g., functional role) as individuating of mental phenomena, and that on some views certain mental states don't even *have* content, as in some naïve-realist views of perception (e.g., Travis 2004). But I can't argue for everything here. So, I adopt the content-cum-attitude framework dogmatically, without argument. My goal is to *apply* this framework to the phenomenon of inner awareness.

### 3. Content and Attitude

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 on their own *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” attitude. More plausibly, then, 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 respect it resembles more the belief that  $q$ . “Content” is what we call the first respect, “attitude” what we call the second respect.

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.

On (a). 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* is how it represents it. However, 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 “what” and “how” relevant to capturing the content/attitude distinction.

On (b). 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 “what” and “how” we’re after, since on many (broadly Fregean) views the belief that the morning star is nice has a different *content* from the belief that the *evening* star is nice; whereas the content/attitude distinction is supposed to be neutral, in itself, on the choice between a Fregean vs. Millian approach to content.

To capture the content/attitude distinction, then, we need a different understanding of “what” and “how.” The right understanding, I suggest, is this. The proposition that the morning star is nice, individuated sensitively to both predication and 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 it differs from 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. It is this notion of “how” that manages to denote something that remains external to the *content* of a mental state. It remains external in the following sense: even though the belief that the morning star is nice frames the proposition that the morning star is nice *as true*, the content of the belief is the first-order proposition that the morning star is nice, *not* the second-order proposition that *it is true* that the morning star is nice. No, the content of the belief that the morning star is nice is simply the proposition that the morning star is nice; it is just that in its nature as

belief it *represents-as-true* this content. *Representing-as-true* is a specific way or *mode* of representing – the mode characteristic of belief. Here “as true” *modifies* “representing,” so that the expression “representing-as-true” indicates *how* belief represents what it does, but importantly, does so in a sense of “how” that does not specify an aspect of content, like predication or mode of presentation, but on the contrary remains external to content and concerns precisely how the content as a whole is represented. It is this sense of “how,” then, that captures the notion of attitude that contrasts with content.

I intend this construal of the attitude/content distinction to be entirely neutral on the ultimate accounts of the deep natures of attitude and content. Representing-as-true may ultimately amount to some kind of functional role, or to some primitive phenomenal property, or something else; what is represented-as-true may be something that stands in some broadly causal-historical or teleo-informational relation to the subject, or on the contrary may turn out to be some adverbial phenomenal property as on some phenomenal-intentionality views. All these *ultimate* accounts are consistent with drawing the content/attitude distinction in terms of the what and how of representation as understood here.

Content and attitude jointly fix the correctness conditions (or *fittingness* conditions) of every mental state. But they do so in complementary ways. The attitude fixes the *kind* of correctness conditions relevant to the evaluation of a mental state type; the content determines the specific condition that needs to be met. For example, the belief that Paris is the capital of France is correct, in the sense that the belief attitude is the right attitude to take toward the proposition <Paris is the capital of France>, just if the proposition that Paris is the capital of France is *true*. Here the *kind* of correctness conditions relevant to the evaluation of the mental state are *truth* conditions; and the specific condition that needs to be true is <Paris is the capital of France>. Crucially, it is because as-true is *how* the belief represents its content that the correctness conditions relevant to the evaluation of the belief are *truth* conditions. Thus the attitude characteristic of belief (namely, representing-*as-true*) selects the kind of correctness conditions relevant (namely, *truth* conditions). But which proposition needs to be true is determined by the belief’s *content*: it is because *what* is believed is that Paris is the capital of France that it is the truth of this proposition, rather than any other, that would makes the belief true (and hence correct).

To characterize a mental phenomenon in terms of content and attitude 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 right, i.e. 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 understood as concrete particulars but also properties, events, states of affairs, propositions, 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*. To identify the content characteristic of a mental state *type*, we need to delimit the *type* of entity 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.<sup>3</sup> But although a tree cannot be believed, it can be *seen*. That is, a tree is an eligible 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*, takes as content. In contrast, *auditory* experience represents *sounds*, and perhaps also sound *sources*, that is, things that *have* or *make* sounds (things *that sound*) – that is the category of entities that constitutes the characteristic content of auditory experience.<sup>4</sup> In this way, we can identify the content characteristic of a mental state type by specifying the type of entity that tokens of that mental-state type represent.

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 states represent their contents? Often it’s not easy to say. Under what guise did my auditory experiences of last night’s jazz concert represent what they did? What is the F such that my auditory experiences 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 also a certain kind of two-step argument that can be used to show this. It is worthwhile to go through this two-step argument, because it will later serve as a model when we try to pin down the attitude characteristic of inner awareness.

The first step in the two-step argument is to note that the here and the now are relevant to the correctness conditions of perceptual experiences. My auditory experiences last night represented various sound sequences. If those very sound sequences really took place when and where I was sitting, then mine were the correct auditory experiences to have. If, however, the room I was sitting in last night was empty and silent, then mine were not the correct auditory experiences to have. Crucially, it would not help if the very same sound sequences really did take place in the jazz club I was sitting in, not last night however, but a year ago. 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 – then, too, my auditory experiences would not be the right ones to have. Thus for my auditory experience to be correct, the sounds it represents must occur *when and where* I am having my experience; it is insufficient that the sounds occur *somewhere* and *somewhen*.<sup>5</sup> It is not even sufficient that the sounds occur here but not now or now but not here; they must occur both here and now.

This is the first step in the argument that perception's characteristic attitude is that of representing-as-here-and-now its content. In this step, it is shown that the here and now are crucial to the correctness of perceptual experiences. 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 the now smells, no way the here tastes. 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 on if you just listen close enough. To that extent, they cannot be part of *what* auditory perception represents. That is, they cannot be part of the *content* represented in auditory perception.

If the here and now are determinative of perceptual experiences' correctness, but are not part of the contents of these experiences, then they must be rather aspects of *how* that content is represented, that is to say, aspects of the *perceptual attitude*. That is the conclusion of the two-step argument. The general strategy here is to discover a mental state type's characteristic attitude by identifying something which, on the one hand, is relevant to its correctness conditions, but, on the other hand, we have reason to think cannot be part of its representational content (what it represents).

I mentioned at the outset that I adopt here – completely dogmatically – the style of philosophical characterization of mental phenomena through content and attitude. We are now in a position to see how this “paradigm” applies, for instance, to auditory perceptual experience: it is to be characterized as that mental phenomenon in which the subject represents-as-occurring-here-and-now sounds (and/or things that sound).<sup>6</sup> Arguably, this really does individuate auditory perceptual experience: no other mental phenomenon has sounds for its characteristic content and representing-as-occurring-here-and-now for its characteristic attitude; and 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 perceptual experience. But that is not our topic here. 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 us here 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 content. I think it's fairly straightforward that, in the sense in which sounds are the characteristic content of auditory awareness, *conscious experiences* are the characteristic content of inner awareness.

Clearly, we do not have inner awareness of external-world objects – such an awareness would not be “inner.” But nor can we 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 behave around them. Sometimes we infer that we have some unconscious state on the basis of inner awareness of a symptom or consequence or that state, as in Lawlor's (2009) case of a woman who comes to know that she wants another child on the basis of inner awareness of her consciously occurring thoughts and feelings as she folds her son's now-too-small clothes. Perhaps there are other bases on which we can 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.<sup>7</sup>

The sense of “conscious” relevant here is the *phenomenal* sense, not the “access” sense (in Block's 1995 terms). A state is phenomenally-conscious when there is something it is like for a subject to be in it; it is access-conscious when it is available to a range of downstream cognitive processes. Crucially, access consciousness is a *dispositional* property, whereas phenomenal consciousness is an occurrent, *categorical* property. Arguably, dispositional properties of mental states are no more introspectible than dispositional properties of external-world objects are perceptible. What we can perceive in the objects around us are their occurrent qualities; their *powers* are something we must rely on our *intellect* to establish – we cannot have direct perceptual awareness of unrealized powers. Likewise with mental states: we don't have direct inner awareness of their powers and potentialities, only of their occurrent phenomenal qualities. For this reason, if for no other, when we speak of conscious states being the characteristic content of inner awareness, it is *phenomenally* conscious states we must have in mind, not *access-conscious* states.

According to some philosophers, only the *contents* of conscious experiences show up in inner awareness; non-content properties, including attitude properties, do not. This is

one way, at least, of interpreting the idea of the “transparency of experience” (Harman 1990).<sup>8</sup> Opponents of transparency will claim that non-content properties of conscious experiences also show up in inner awareness (see Kriegel 2023). Neither side here contests the idea that only conscious experiences show up in inner awareness.<sup>9</sup>

When discussing the contents of auditory awareness, we allowed for the epistemic possibility that these are not (only) sounds, but (also) *things that make sounds*. 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*. This is of course a somewhat vexed question. Early in our 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*. So for Hume, the self is not something that shows up in the content of inner awareness. Now, Hume went on to conclude that we don’t have a legitimate (read: empiricistically reconstructable) concept of self; and this has agitated many a capable philosopher. But note that this legitimate-concept claim goes beyond the claim that the self doesn’t show up in inner awareness (and it depends on a very specific and very empiricist view of “legitimate concepts”). The question for us is only whether Hume is right that inner awareness does not disclose a self that underlies specific conscious experiences. The alternative view is that the self is perhaps a more difficult but not quite impossible thing to observe when entering most intimately into what one calls oneself (cf. Chisholm 1969).

I find it very difficult to evaluate this matter on the basis of my personal experience. I certainly cannot say *with confidence* that I enjoy inner awareness not only of conscious experiences but also of a mental being to whom they belong. Two other considerations move me further toward the Humean position here. The first is that a self who *underlies* conscious experiences but is distinct from them would be analogous to – or perhaps just a special case of – the substratum that allegedly underlies bundles of properties but is categorically distinct from them. There are live metaphysical debates about whether we should accept such a substratum in our ontology. But both sides seem to accept that substrata are not perceptually detectable. (Indeed, it is because he accepted the basic Humean point that substrate is not perceptible, and thus cannot be known a posteriori, that Kant posited substance among the *a priori* categories of the understanding.) Again, the ultimate intelligibility of substrata is not what concerns us here. The point is only that substrata are implausible objects of direct awareness. It is the qualities of things that can be directly observed, not the underlying we-know-not-what that may or may not be there to “support” these qualities. If this is right in the general case, it should be right also for the special case of the self or mental substance underlying specific qualities: it cannot be the object of direct awareness, and, a fortiori, of inner awareness.

The last reason I am moved toward the view that only conscious experiences constitute the characteristic content of inner awareness, and not selves, is that I think we can do justice to the place of the self in inner awareness through the aspect of *attitude*.

## 5. The Inner-Awareness Attitude

If inner awareness has a representational content, then there is a representational attitude, a mode of representation, under which that content is represented in it. Granted that conscious experiences provide the *contents* of inner awareness, what manner of attitude is taken toward conscious experiences in inner awareness? In the sense in which belief that  $p$  represents-as-true  $p$  and perception of  $x$  represents-as-occurring-here-and-now  $x$ , what is the  $F$  such that inner awareness represents-as- $F$  the conscious experiences it represents? In this section, I offer a hypothesis – a hypothesis of philosophical psychology, if you will – about the inner-awareness attitude. My hypothesis, succinctly put, is that inner awareness represents-as-occurring-now-in-me the conscious experiences it represents.

To establish this hypothesis, I propose to use the same method that was used in the two-step argument for the claim that the perceptual attitude is that of representing-as-occurring-here-and-now. In this two-step method, recall, it was first shown that occurring here and now is relevant to the correctness conditions of perceptual experiences, and then that the here and now are not part of *what is perceived*, not part of perceptual *content*. On the assumption that correctness conditions are fixed by content plus attitude, it followed that the here and now are aspects of *how* perceptual awareness represents, that is, aspects of the perceptual *attitude*.

For this method to be applicable to inner awareness it would have to be the case, of course, that inner awareness *has* correctness conditions. I think this is highly plausible. Suppose, for instance, that attending to my current state of mind, I have an introspective impression as of feeling frustrated, when in reality what I am feeling is *disappointed*. Then it is natural to describe my introspective impression as incorrect – it is not the right introspective impression for me to have in the circumstance.

It might be objected that inner awareness cannot be mistaken in this way: if an affective experience presents itself as frustration to inner awareness, then by that very fact it *is* an experience of frustration. Inner awareness is thus infallible: there is no appearance/reality gap for consciousness, because the way consciousness is *just is* the way consciousness appears to inner awareness.

This is a controversial area into which we cannot go here. But even if inner awareness is infallible in the way described, it does not follow that inner awareness does not have correctness conditions. On the contrary, to say that inner awareness is infallible is, strictly speaking, to say that every state of inner awareness is correct; and for it to be correct it would have to have correctness conditions. Thus the “no appearance/reality gap” line in no way tends to show that inner awareness does not have correctness conditions. What it shows is only that, with inner awareness, we won’t be able to find *an example* of incorrect inner awareness with which to *illustrate* the idea of correctness conditions, since in inner awareness the correctness conditions are *always satisfied*. If, for instance, your inner awareness of feeling frustrated guarantees that your feeling *is* frustration, then the putative frustration/disappointment case described above is not a case of incorrect inner awareness after all. Still, it *is* a case of *correct* inner awareness. After all, the way things appear to your inner awareness is the way things really are. And so it is natural to say that inner awareness does have correctness conditions.

It is also possible to adopt a kind of naïve realist-view of inner awareness (Hellie 2007), whereby inner awareness consists in a non-representational relation to experience. In its pure form, naïve realism about perception involves the idea that perceptual states don’t have a content at all, and the analogous view here would be that inner awareness does not have a content at all. In such a framework, inner awareness would *not* have correctness conditions. But in such a framework there is anyway no hope for a philosophical characterization of inner awareness in terms content and attitude. Insofar as we’ve adopted a content-cum-attitude approach to the philosophical characterization of mental phenomena, then, we’ve closed the door on naïve realism about inner awareness. *Within* the content-cum-attitude approach, we are entitled to assume that inner awareness does have correctness conditions.

If (1) inner awareness has correctness conditions, (2) correctness conditions are fully determined by the combination of content and attitude, and (3) we know what the content of inner awareness is, then we should be able to work out the characteristic *attitude* of inner awareness. For any contributions to inner awareness’ correctness conditions that don’t come from its content must come from its attitude.

It is reasonably plausible, for instance, that at least one aspect of the inner-awareness attitude is representing-*as-occurring-now*. Here is how the two-step method would apply here. Suppose that, perhaps per impossibile, I have an introspective impression as of feeling irritable when in reality I am rather frustrated and anxious. If I have the introspective impression (i.e., a focal inner awareness) as of feeling irritable, but am not in fact feeling irritable right now, then this is not the correct introspective impression for me to have. The fact that a year ago, say, I *did* feel irritable – an irritable feeling qualitatively indistinguishable from the one I am currently having an introspective

impression as of feeling – would not help make my current introspective impression correct. (This is analogous to the way my auditory experience during the jazz concert is incorrect if these sounds are not occurring when I am “hearing” them, and the occurrence of qualitatively indistinguishable sounds there a year earlier does not help make my auditory experience correct.) Thus the now-ness of the conscious experiences one has inner awareness of is relevant to the correctness of that inner awareness. At the same time, the now-ness of conscious experiences is not introspectible any more than the now-ness of external-world events is visible or olfactible. Just as there is no taste or smell of now-ness, there is no phenomenal quality of now-ness that could serve as the object of inner awareness. Now-ness does not form part of *what* I am aware of in inner awareness any more than it does in outer awareness. Therefore, it must be a dimension of *how* I am aware of my conscious experience.

One potential point of resistance to this application of the two-step method concerns the idea that there is no phenomenal quality characteristic of an experiential now. The various authors who have delved into the notion of “time-consciousness,” or into William James’ “specious present,” may well have had in mind that although there is no sensible quality of an external-world present, there does exist an experiential present with a phenomenological reality. It may not be a *sensory* phenomenology of the sort visual experiences of red or bodily experiences of tickle exhibit, but a subtler, less “overwhelming” phenomenology of the sort we find in conscious thought or decision. Still, it is a phenomenologically real quality that inner awareness can glom onto and represent, but which lies in the first instance in the conscious experiences it is directed at.

This line of thought seems to me credible in a way a parallel line about perception of an external-world now is not. All the same, several considerations make me think that the now nonetheless belongs ultimately in the attitude rather than content of inner awareness. For starters, consider that something *can* show up in the content of a mental state even if it is in the first instance a characteristic of its attitude. I mentioned above that the belief that *p* has for content the first-order proposition  $\langle p \rangle$ , not the second-order proposition  $\langle p \text{ is true} \rangle$ , so that truth enters the state of belief in the first instance as a dimension of the belief attitude: to believe that *p* is to represent-as-true  $\langle p \rangle$ . Nonetheless, it is *possible* to have beliefs about truth, as when I believe that Fermat’s theorem is true without a clear memory of what Fermat’s theorem exactly says. In similar fashion, it might be possible for inner awareness to sometimes train its aim on an experiential now *in addition* to always representing-as-occurring-now whatever it represents.

And here it is crucial that what is built into the very attitude characteristic of a mental state type characterizes every single token, whereas something that sometimes shows up in the content will be absent in certain tokens. Truth as a feature of belief content characterizes some token beliefs and not others, while the attitudinal feature of

representing-as-true is present in every token belief. Importantly, now, the now-ness of conscious experience is pertinent to the correctness of inner awareness always and everywhere. This suggests – by no means conclusively, but still meaningfully – that even if there is an experiential present we can become inner-aware of, it is also built into the very attitude of inner awareness that it represents-as-occurring-now the conscious experiences it represents.

There is reason to doubt, however, that there really is an experiential present awaiting representation by inner awareness. On the most plausible metaphysics of time we have, the so-called B theory, objective reality does not contain such things as past, present, and future, but only temporal relations such as earlier-than, later-than, and simultaneous-with (for background, see McTaggart 1908). There is no now inhering in a particular moment of objective time any more than there is a here inhering in a particular location in objective space. What there is are spatially perspectival representations relative to which a portion of space is designated as here and temporally perspectival representations relative to which a phase of time is designated as now. So the here and the now are really built into the structure of representation. They are not parts of representation-independent reality which representations may then seek to track. This, too, suggests, if only inconclusively, that now-ness must ultimately inhere in the inner-awareness attitude rather than content.

I conclude that, like perceptual awareness, inner awareness represents-as-occurring-now its contents. What about representing-as-here? Is that something that characterizes inner awareness as well? Here there is room for skepticism, since in general conscious experiences do not appear to inner awareness in a spatial form – even when what they are experiences *of* does. For instance, it feels like a category mistake to assert that my dream last night was in the shape of a pentagon. It could be a dream *of* a pentagon, but that would not make *it* pentagonal.

It might be suggested that, nonetheless, conscious experiences often have apparent spatial location, as when one feels a pain or a tickle *in the knee*. When one tastes a mango, the mango-ish quality one experiences is felt to occur *in one's tongue*, and when one rubs a piece of velvet with the tip of one's fingers, the velvety quality one experiences is felt to occur *in the tip of one's fingers*. In all these cases, it might be claimed, inner awareness presents the relevant experiences as occurring “here” in the sense of *in this body* – or something like that.

There are two problems with this line of thought, however. First, it is harder to see how it would apply to other experiences, for instance visual and auditory experiences. Looking at the oak tree across the street, the visible qualities of shape and color that I experience I experience as *in the tree* – the color feels “pasted on” the tree bark and the shape “inhabited” by the tree.

Secondly and more deeply, the line of thought seems to confuse the sensible qualities of worldly objects and events, on the one hand, and the subjective *experiencing* of these, on the other. Arguably, it is the former that are represented-as-here, not the latter; and represented-as-here by perceptual experience, not inner awareness. There is a difference between the tangible quality *of the velvet* and our tactile experiencing of it; between the degustible quality *of the mango* and our gustatory experiencing of it; between the proprioceptible quality of the tickle event in the physical knee and our proprioceptive experiencing of it. In all these cases, it is the sensory experiencing that is targeted by inner awareness, while the sensible quality is targeted by perceptual experience. And the impression of here-ness, such as it is, appears to attach to the sensible quality rather than the sensory experiencing, though this is obscured somewhat by the fact that, with contact senses like touch, taste, and proprioception, the spatial location of the object or event with the relevant sensible quality overlaps the spatial location of the organs of sensory experiencing. Unless and until the tongue and the mango come in contact, we don't have a subjective experience of the mango's degustible quality. And so the spatial point of contact becomes the temporal point at which the experiencing occurs, and the impression may arise that the relevant spatial region – the region in which the tongue and the mango are in touch – is the spatial location of the sensory experiencing itself. In reality, it is only the location of the sensible quality – or so I would argue.

When you see a tree across the street, the tree is represented in your visual experience as at a certain distance from you, in a certain orientation, with a certain size. That is, the tree is placed within a three-dimensional visual coordinate system, one whose origin point – the (0, 0, 0) point – feels as if it's somewhere an inch or two behind the top of the nose (or something like that). It is because this is where the origin point is that we call this "*egocentric space*." Might it be suggested that inner awareness "places" your visual experience – not the sensible qualities experienced, mind you, but the sensory *experiencing* of them – in this origin-point-of-egocentric-space, and that it's in this sense that inner awareness represents-as-here the experiencing? (Other sense modalities will have their own egocentric space, but inner awareness can "place" the experiencing in the origin point of each such egocentric space.)

I don't think this will work either. Granted that sensible objects and qualities are plotted within a virtual space with an origin point that feels to be somewhere inside the subject's body, it is a bold inference to the notion that the experiencing *occurs in* this origin point, and that furthermore inner awareness frames it as occurring there. More plausibly, the visual space as a whole belongs in that-which-is-experienced rather than to the experiencing, with the experiencing itself remaining location-less. Thus, the visual representation of sensible objects and qualities gives rise, in virtue of the visual representation of spatial relations among them, to a visually represented space. But this

space is part of the content rather than vehicle of vision. Visual experiencing remains “external” (or perhaps better: transcendent) to the visual space in its entirety. Likewise for perceptual experience in other modalities: the various egocentric spaces associated with each are part of the content rather than vehicle of sensory perception. If it is not plausible that the sensory experiencing itself is in fact located at the origin point of the egocentric space, it is even less plausible that inner awareness “says” that it is.

Furthermore, while perceptual experience involves essentially spatial awareness, this is not a characteristic of non-perceptual experience. Many philosophers believe that conscious thought and judgment have a *sui generis* cognitive phenomenology, that desire and preference have a *sui generis* conative phenomenology, and/or that indignation and other “higher” emotions have a *sui generis* affective phenomenology. But these phenomenologies do not seem to involve any coordinate system with origin points at which the cognitive, conative, or affective experiencing could occur.

To be sure, there are views of these conscious domains according to which they involve nothing beyond sensory phenomenology: for thought and judgment, an auditory phenomenology of silent speech; for desire and preference, a phenomenology of innervation (i.e., of a felt “current” running from one’s head to one’s musculature – see Wundt 1874); for emotions, a proprioceptive phenomenology of bodily changes in internal organs, often around the viscera. But unless *all* these “reductive” approaches succeed, reducing cognitive, conative, and affective phenomenology to varieties of sensory phenomenology, there would seem to be forms of experience that are altogether a-spatial.

I conclude that it is not plausible that inner awareness represents-as-here the conscious experiences it represents.

Still, there is perhaps something analogous to this that does characterize inner awareness, something we might call *representing-as-occurring-in-me*. The idea is that when I have an inner awareness of a feeling of irritability, say, or of a mango-taste experience, my inner awareness represents-as-occurring-in-me the irritable feeling or mango-taste experience. In this sense, the inner-awareness attitude does resemble somewhat the perceptual attitude, insofar as both encode information about “where” things are: it is part of the very nature of perceptual awareness to frame as occurring *here* the sensible objects and properties it presents, and it is part of the very nature of inner awareness to frame as occurring *in oneself* the conscious experiences it presents.

The argument for this – i.e., for the thesis that inner awareness represents-as-occurring-in-me its content – would follow the same two-step pattern as before. The first step is to point out that the in-me-ness of experiences is relevant to the correctness conditions of inner awareness. Thus, the occurrence of the right irritable feeling in *you* would not make *my* inner awareness as of feeling irritable correct. The fact that *you* are



having a mango-taste experience would not render correct *my* inner awareness as of having a mango-taste experience. Thus the “in me” information seems relevant to the correctness of inner awareness. The second step of the argument consists essentially in endorsing the Humean claim that the self is not part of *what* one is aware of in inner awareness – try as one might to capture the self in inner awareness, as opposed to some specific conscious experience, one never manages to become aware *of* the self. If the self never shows up as an *object* of inner awareness, as part of *what* one is inner-aware of, but the occurrence of experiences in oneself *is* part of inner awareness’ correctness conditions, it follows that the occurrence of the experience in oneself must be encoded into the very attitude of inner awareness. That is, inner awareness represents-as-occurring-in-oneseff its content – this is part of *how* inner awareness represents whatever it represents.

In addition, in-me-ness, like now-ness, is a *universal* feature of inner awareness, and this too suggests that it is built into its very attitude. Recall that part of our case for building now-ness into the attitude of inner awareness was that now-ness is relevant to the correctness conditions of every single token of inner awareness, similarly to the way truth of propositions is relevant to the correctness conditions of every token belief. The same point applies, it seems to me, to in-me-ness. The affective quality of irritability and the gustatory quality of mango-taste experience show up in inner awareness one moment and not others. But *all* conscious experiences one is inner-aware are framed as occurring in oneself. This *invariable* relevance to correctness conditions is indicative of being built into the very attitude of a type of mental state.

If all this is right, then the inner-awareness attitude shares with the perceptual attitude the feature of representing-as-occurring-now whatever content is represented, and features something analogous to the perceptual attitude’s representing-as-occurring-here in the form of representing-as-occurring-in-me. Taking these two features jointly, we may say that inner awareness represents-as-occurring-now-in-me its content. I have not argued that this *exhausts* the inner-awareness attitude; perhaps there are further dimensions involved here. Still, I am offering it as a hypothesis of philosophical psychology that this is the characteristic attitude of inner awareness: in the content-external sense of “how,” representing-as-occurring-now-in-me is *how* inner awareness represents the individual conscious experiences that it does.

## 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. Upshot: it is the nature of inner awareness to represent-as-occurring-now-in-me individual 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.

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 some conscious experience. Consider for instance recollection or “episodic memory.” On some views, what is being recalled, strictly speaking, is always a conscious experience. 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. 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). If a mental state miraculously transformed from representing-as-past a visual experience as of a panda bear to representing-as-now a qualitatively indistinguishable visual experience, it is hard to see how this would not be the miraculous transformation of a recollection into an inner awareness. Thus the representing-as-occurring-now-in-me of conscious experiences seems to capture of individuating nature of inner awareness. So, to the question “What is inner awareness?,” we should offer the answer: It is the representing-as-occurring-now-in-me of individual conscious experiences.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I happen to belong to a particularly radical sect of the group of people who think that inner awareness is involved in *every* experience, a sect that holds that this inner awareness is in fact necessary for, and even constitutive of, the conscious experience that involve it. As noted, though, this paper does not presuppose the convictions of this sect. The only thing it presupposes is that inner awareness *exists*.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> You can, of course, *believe a person* (as in "I believe you"), but that just means believing that what the person says is true – so what is believed is a proposition after all, namely, the proposition that what the person says is true (or perhaps: is said sincerely). We also speak of believing *in something* (as in "I believe in God"), but this too is standardly seen as a lackadaisical way of reporting a belief that an existential proposition is true (e.g., the proposition that God exists).

<sup>4</sup> There is a live debate on whether auditory experience represents only audible properties, as Batty (2011) claims, or also the objects that have those properties, as O'Callaghan (2008) claims. We need not take a stand on this here.

<sup>5</sup> It's an extra question how to delimit the spatial and temporal extensions of the "here" and "now" as they pertain to perceptual experience. We have to assume that the contingent facts about organ sensitivity effectively determine the extension of the "here"; and perhaps the relevant "now" is just as thick as the so-called specious present.

<sup>6</sup> Observe that in this picture, while content distinguishes between different *kinds* of perceptual experience, with auditory experience representing-as-here-and-now *sounds* (and/or things that sound), visual experience representing-as-here-and-now *colors and shapes* (and/or colorful and shapely things), and so on, all

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perceptual experiences, regardless of modality, share an attitude, namely, that of representing-as-here-and-now.

<sup>7</sup> On some views, including my own (Kriegel 2009 Ch.1), inner awareness of a conscious experience is what *makes* it a conscious experience. (When the subject has no inner awareness of a mental state, the state remains unconscious.) It might be claimed that this view makes circular, or uninformative, or otherwise defective the identification of conscious experiences as the content of inner awareness. I don't really see that: identifying the content of inner awareness is not the same thing as identifying the part of the world that is targeted by inner awareness; rather, it's identifying the relevant part of the world precisely as it appears *to* inner awareness. And what appears to inner awareness is conscious experiences. (Compare: on a view according to which visual perception targets refraction properties of surfaces, which then appear to visual experience as so-called Edenic colors, the correct answer to the question "What is the content of visual perception?" is not "refraction properties" but "Edenic colors.") There is of course a separate curiosity we might have, about the part of the world that's targeted by inner awareness, identified independently of being targeted by inner awareness. Here my answer would be something like "the kinds of mental state inner awareness of which would result in their being conscious experiences."

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it is noteworthy that proponents of transparency have tended to conclude that the contents of a conscious experiences *exhaust* phenomenal character. On this view, the attitude employed by a conscious experience is "phenomenally silent" (i.e., contributes nothing to what it is like for the subject to have her experience). I reject this completely (Kriegel 2023), but I do note that this would preserve the alignment between what makes a conscious experience the conscious experience it is, on the one hand, and what shows up in the content of inner awareness, on the other. It thus only reinforces the idea that conscious experiences are what inner awareness is about.

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