

The Mind's Presence to Itself: In Search of Non-Intentional Awareness

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ABSTRACT: According to some philosophers, the mind enjoys a form of presence to itself. That is to say, in addition to being aware of whatever objects it is aware of, it is also (co-presently) aware of itself. This paper explores the proposal that we should think about this kind of experiential-presence in terms of a form of non-intentional awareness. Various candidates for the relevant form of awareness, as constituting supposed non-intentional experiential-presence, are considered and are shown to encounter significant problems. The fact that a plausible account of the non-intentional awareness which experience putatively has of itself cannot be framed with reference to such forms of awareness is grounds for scepticism concerning the cogency of non-intentional experiential presence.

Introduction

Standing at a train platform, Fred is waiting for his partner to arrive. However, the train is late. He looks at his watch, compares it to the arrival time on the notice board, and looks to see if there is an approaching train. Standing there, thoughts race through his head. While all of this is going on Fred is also aware of his immediate surroundings: the people stood at various distances from him; the background noise of activity on the platform; the faint smell of stale coffee and cigarettes. Fred also feels a weakness in his knees.

The above is a description of a rich conscious experience, combining perceptual, emotional, cognitive, and somatic-proprioceptive phenomenologies, which arguably all involve more or less explicit forms of conscious awareness of relevant objects in different modalities. Is there a sense in which Fred is also co-presently consciously aware of the experience itself as it unfolds? Put otherwise, is the mind somehow present to itself throughout this conscious episode (indeed throughout all conscious episodes)? If we answer in the affirmative, we might wonder whether conscious experiences' putative awareness of itself is analogous to the awareness Fred has of objects of focal awareness, such as the arrivals board; alternatively, we might think it akin to the awareness he has of

the background noise, or perhaps analogous to those racing thoughts which occur ‘in here’ rather than ‘out there’. Finally, we might think that it is like none of these, such that it is something of a fundamentally different kind.

Based on the above, we can pose the following questions: what kind of awareness (if any) might we have of our occurrent conscious experiences as they unfold, before (or without) reflecting or thinking about them. Is all conscious experience, prior to reflection, conscious of itself, and if so, how? So phrased, these questions make it clear that we are honing in on a putative phenomenon that needs distinguishing from the way we can become aware of our experiences when they are taken as objects in reflection (e.g., *thinking* about my conscious experiences). By and large, affirmative answers have appealed to forms of intentional awareness. For example, higher-order theories of consciousness appeal to a numerically distinct intentional state which takes first-order mental states as objects, thereby supposedly making them phenomenally conscious.¹ Likewise, self-representationalism appeals to a self-directed intentionality supposedly possessed by conscious experiences, such that in addition to targeting their intentional objects they also target themselves.²

This paper examines a different positive answer. It critically evaluates the proposal, found in classical phenomenology but also expressed by contemporary authors, that the best way of understanding the mind’s supposed (non-reflective) presence to itself is in terms of a form of *non-intentional* awareness.³ Here is how two advocates of this view articulate it:

¹ See Rosenthal 1997: 729–753; Carruthers 2000.

² See Brentano 1874: 127-8; Kriegel 2009.

³ Here are some authors who defend approximations of this claim; Zahavi 1999; 2014; 2018: 703–718; Gallagher and Zahavi 2012 Ch.3; Drummond 2006; Nida-Rümelin 2017: 55-82; Poellner 2003: 32-57. Similar sentiments are found in Shoemaker 1968; 563; Goldman 1970: 60; Flanagan 1992: 193-4. In classical phenomenology see Husserl 2008 [1906-7]: 249-50; 1973 [1921-8]: 151; Heidegger 1982 [1927]:159; Sartre 2004 [1937]: 10-13; 1998 [1943]: Introduction.

In pre-reflective or non-observational self-consciousness experience is given, not as an object, but precisely as subjective experience. On this view my intentional experience is lived through, but it does not appear to me in an objectified manner, it is neither seen nor heard nor thought about...pre-reflective self-consciousness is not a matter of taking an intentional or objectifying stance...(Gallagher and Zahavi and 2012: 60)

This view will be my target and my aim is to show that a range of possible interpretations of it are unsuccessful.

Let me now say why one might be drawn to posit 'pre-reflective self-consciousness' in the first place. One central motivation, appealed to by its defenders, turns on the following idea. When I am enjoying a conscious experience, or engaged in conscious activity, such as reading a novel, my focus is not typically on the nature of my experience, myself, or the relevant activity. Rather my focus is on the object. Nevertheless, say I am interrupted and asked what I am doing. In most cases, I can immediately and with little effort describe *what I am doing* or what my experience amounts to without the need for any kind of investigation. Here is how Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, drawing on a similar point from Jean-Paul Sartre, put it:

the self-consciousness on the basis of which I answer the question is not something acquired at just that moment, but a consciousness of myself which has been implicit in my experience all along...it is because I am pre-reflectively conscious of my experiences that I am usually able to respond immediately, i.e., without inference or observation, if someone asks me what I have been doing or thinking, or seeing, or feeling immediately prior to the question. (Gallagher and Zahavi 2012: 61)⁴

⁴ See also Sartre 1998 [1943]: 9-10.

Connected to this, the positing of a ‘pre-reflective consciousness of my experiences’ is supposed preferable as an explanation of this ability to accounts which involve the explicit ‘positing of experience’ identified *as an object* in pre-reflective experience, and so which would ground this ability in intentional awareness. The latter accounts are often thought to encounter problems, such as being cognitively demanding and profligate (I have to represent an *additional* object, namely the *experience itself*) and arguably do not reflect the phenomenology of paradigmatic pre-reflective experience.⁵

I now note important caveats concerning the discussion that follows. First, for the sake of simplicity, the discussion will *not* be concerned with whether the putative non-intentional awareness we have of our own experiences constitutes a kind of *self*-awareness – as awareness of *oneself*.⁶ Instead, the discussion concerns the more minimal claim that conscious experience essentially involves a non-intentional awareness of *itself*, as an impersonal ‘consciousness of consciousness’.⁷ Second, my interest will not be in questioning the universal scope of the non-intentional awareness we may have of our experiences, that is in examining putative cases of its absence, and so in virtue of which it would fall short of being an invariant structural feature of conscious experience.⁸ Such a project is secondary to determining whether we can make sense of the claim that experience is non-intentionally aware of itself.

Third, I paraphrase the awareness conscious experience putatively has of itself – non-intentional or otherwise – as *experiential-presence*. Consider the following:

⁵ Shoemaker 1968: 526-63; NB: Defenders of personalised forms of this supposed pre-reflective consciousness of experience also claim that our capacity for *de se* thought is grounded in this awareness, such that the awareness we putatively have of our own experiences constitutes a kind of *self*-awareness, which is then made ‘explicit’ in the ‘self-positing’ of *de se* thought. See Zahavi 1999; 2018: 703–718 for such a view (cf. Sartre 1937; Smith 2016: 141; Howell and Thompson 2017: 103-127).

⁶ See fn.5 for references.

⁷ See Kriegel 2009: 177 on the distinction.

⁸ For discussion see Gallagher and Zahavi 2012: 231-233; Zahavi 2014: Ch.3; Zahavi and Kriegel 2015: 43-44; Guillot 2017: 23–53.

1. [Conscious ‘of’ (Conscious of X)]

Contained in the round brackets is the intentional consciousness we enjoy of objects, where we can take objects in a broad sense, as covering physical particulars, persons, animals, events, and states of affairs involving those things. Contained in the square brackets is the purported (non-reflective) awareness consciousness has ‘of’ itself – its experiential-presence – where ‘of’ is in scare quotes to indicate that it is not necessarily intentional.⁹ To make this clearer consider the following:

2. [Conscious ‘of’ (Conscious intentional-of X)]

This formulation makes it explicit that the *of* in the round brackets is that of intentionality, leaving open the status of the ‘of’ characteristic of experiential-presence. Higher-order theories and self-representationalism model experiential-presence on ‘intentionality-of’. They offer something approximating to the following:

3. [Conscious intentional-of (Conscious intentional-of X)]

The alternative view, which is the critical focus of this paper, posits some form of *non-intentional* awareness as characterising experiential-presence:

4. [Conscious non-intentional-of (Conscious intentional-of X)]

⁹ NB: everything within the square brackets is one token experience. This would have to be amended to accommodate higher-order theories which posit a numerically distinct mental state, which also need not be conscious (see Rosenthal 1997: 729–753).

Let's refer to this view with the phrase *non-intentional experiential-presence*.

The question is whether any substance can be given to a form of awareness that constitutes supposed non-intentional experiential-presence; this paper surveys several candidates arguing that none prove satisfactory. The roadmap is as follows. Section 1 outlines two constraints on an account of the awareness constitutive of non-intentional experiential-presence. Section 2 then considers two candidates, namely awareness-with and background awareness. Section 3 considers acquaintance-awareness, and finally section 4 examines non-positional implicit-awareness.

1. Two Constraints: Non-Intentional and Phenomenal

Consider the following:

Non-intentional constraint on non-intentional experiential presence: any candidate type of awareness must not amount to a form of intentional awareness.

Intentional awareness comes in various forms. However, it is minimally a matter of *something being presented to or represented by experience*, as something which the relevant experience is 'about' or 'directed toward' (as an 'accusative' of consciousness). It is with such characterisations in mind that we might think of whatever a conscious experience is directed towards as its object. Another way of capturing this broad notion of intentional awareness is to say that it is a matter of something *appearing* *someway to* consciousness. These characterisations suffice for now. The putative awareness involved in non-intentional experiential-presence will need to meet the non-intentional constraint such that the above characterisations do not apply to it (or at least not without further clarification).

Next consider the following:

Phenomenal constraint on non-intentional experiential-presence: any candidate type of awareness must operate at the phenomenal level.

To unpack this, first consider that there are mental phenomena that we are willing to count as types of awareness, indeed types or instances of intentional awareness, that are non-phenomenal or do not operate at the phenomenal level. For example, it is plausible to describe blindsighters as having an awareness of objects in occluded or ‘absent’ parts of their visual field (and so enjoying a kind of intentional awareness) even though that awareness, whatever its precise character, does not operate at the phenomenal level.

Contrastingly, the phenomenal constraint reflects the idea, present in several authors who defend the idea of non-intentional experiential-presence, that the putative non-intentional awareness we have of our own experiences as they unfold is a phenomenal level feature, and so something which affects *what-it-is-like* to enjoy those experiences. However, these ideas need to be treated with care. First, note that a number of defenders of non-intentional experiential-presence take it to be a necessary concomitant of *any* conscious intentional awareness of an object.¹⁰ If that is the case then phenomenological investigation or study of experiences won’t be able to *isolate* this feature and its phenomenal contribution in the way we might seek to determine the contribution other phenomenal level features of experience, say by imagining otherwise phenomenally identical experiences from which the relevant feature is absent. As such, the sense in which non-intentional experiential-presence affects the phenomenal character of experience is, according to its central advocates, such that in its absence we cease to be enjoying conscious experiences at all.¹¹

¹⁰ This is the way the idea is framed in Sartre and classical phenomenology; see Husserl 2008 [1906-7]: 249-50; 1973 [1921-8]: 151; Heidegger 1982 [1927]:159; Sartre 2004 [1937]: 10-13; 1998 [1943].

¹¹ See Sartre 1943: 8, Gallagher and Zahavi 2012: 52, 57, 69; Zahavi 1999: 15; Zahavi 2005: Ch.1.

That being said, it is still legitimate to inquire after what *if not intentional* the relevant form of awareness constitutive of non-intentional experiential presence amounts to. Indeed, the question of what forms of awareness are present at the phenomenal level (as what belongs to conscious awareness and in what way) is the question which specifications of the relevant awareness constitutive of non-intentional experiential-presence are seeking to answer by claiming that the phenomenal level involves a form of conscious awareness that is different from (even if a necessary concomitant of) *intentional awareness of an object*. Importantly the phenomenal constraint, so understood, does not require that our own mental states should be somehow *presented to us* in conscious awareness in anything like the way that my visual experience, for example, presents the *redness of rose* to me – this would be to rule out non-intentional views from the outset and in which case it would be question begging to require such a constraint. Rather, it just delimits the level at which the relevant form of awareness is to be couched or pegged, and as such leaves open the possibility of different senses in which something could be said to be “presented in” conscious awareness.

To illustrate the importance of the phenomenal constraint, consider that without it appeal to the ‘of’ of specification (or type) – as distinct from that of intentionality – would be a legitimate non-intentional account of experiential-presence, but reflection shows this to be erroneous. Let me expand on this. Consider phrases such as ‘experience of seeing’, or ‘experience of touch’. When we typically use these phrases, we do not have in mind a higher or second-order intentional state directed at first-order experience, as an experience of a seeing-experience, or an experience of a touch-experience. Instead, we are concerned with a specification of the relevant *type, kind, or category*.

Applied to the case of non-intentional experiential-presence consider the following. Insofar as this ‘of’ directs our attention to a specification of the relevant type, then the relevant type-specification is that of being *conscious*, such that we have a conscious-type of conscious intentional experience expressible as follows:

5. [Conscious type-of (Conscious intentional-of X)]

One problem is that we have redundancy: That we are dealing with a ‘conscious-type’ as opposed to say an ‘unconscious-type’ is already explicit in the ‘*Conscious* intentional-of X’. Yet, even if we were convinced that the qualifier ‘Conscious type-of’ adds something in (5), it arguably does not add anything that it makes sense to pitch at the *phenomenal* level. Of course, we can be consciously aware *of* or *that* our experience is of a particular type, but in that case, we plausibly have an intentional (usually fact-based) awareness that our experience has certain properties that we use to identify it as falling under a particular category.¹² Yet, that one’s experience is of a particular type typically only becomes phenomenally manifest on the basis of being the accusative of an intentional act (e.g., thoughts or reflections *about* experiences). If this is correct, then when it comes to the ‘of’ of specification, the phenomenal constraint can only be met by violating the non-intentional constraint. So, the ‘of’ of specification is not a suitable candidate to capture the awareness constitutive of putative non-intentional experiential-presence, and by having the phenomenal constraint in play we can see why.

The method in what follows will be examining whether further candidates for the relevant type of awareness meet the constraints outlined in this section.

2. Awareness-with and Background Awareness

Say Fred is engrossed in the activity of bird watching. As Fred carefully visually attends to trees, looks to spot any movement, and listens for relevant sounds, there is something-it-is-like for Fred to be attending to these objects in the various ways that he is. Let’s say Fred has a sense-perceptual experience directed towards the *bird-watching environment* as a

¹² NB: awareness-that is intentional fact-awareness that *such as such is the case* (see Dretske 2000: 113-137; 158-17).

whole. Is it the case that he is also somehow aware-*with* the sense-perceptual experience, as follows?

6. [Conscious awareness-with (Conscious intentional-of bird-watching environment)]

One way of unpacking (6) would be to claim that our experiences are the kind of thing that we are non-intentionally *aware-with*, rather than intentionally *aware-of*. Consider the following analogy. Eyes are something one *sees-with*; indeed, one could not see anything without them (at least in the sense of the word ‘see’ tied to visual perception). Yet they are not something one sees-of, in the sense of intentionality, at least if one is not studying one’s eyes in a mirror – one’s eyes are not presented in one’s visual field. A neater formulation of this point is as follows: my eyes are something I am *visually aware with* rather than something I am *visually aware of*; they are the means by which or a condition in virtue of which I am able to see what I see, rather than something I am presented with in my experience.¹³

Using this analogy, we might say the following: Fred’s *sense-perceptual experience* of the bird-watching environment is something he is aware-with, and so is that in virtue of which he is intentionally aware of what he is intentionally aware of in the phenomenal way that he is. Lose the sense-perceptual experience and we lose the conscious awareness he has of the relevant objects and their properties. However, one’s sense-perceptual experience itself is not something that appears to him; it is not an additional intentional object of his experience.¹⁴ If this reasoning is sound, then ‘awareness-with’ looks like an ideal candidate for the kind of awareness constitutive of putative non-intentional experiential-presence. It satisfies the non-intentional constraint since awareness-with is not plausibly intentional

¹³ See Wittgenstein 2001 [1922]: 5.633.

¹⁴ Cf. self-representationalism (see fn.2 for references).

awareness, and it is also importantly tied to phenomenality (to his experience being like anything at all).

The problem, however, is that on closer inspection, awareness-with does not satisfy the phenomenal constraint. To see why let's examine the eye case again. It is true that one could not have a visual experience without one's eyes, but it is also true that they are not (at least not paradigmatically) manifest at the phenomenal level in visual experiences. Rather, they are a *non-phenomenal* necessary condition of visual experience. Applied to our example of bird-watching, insofar as we claim that our sense-perceptual experience is that which we are *aware-with* we need not commit to anything more than the fact that having the relevant sense-perceptual experience is a non-phenomenal necessary condition of my being consciously aware of whatever it is I am aware of (where the 'of' here is that of intentionality). Generalising, undergoing experiences is a necessary condition on having any phenomenal character, of enjoying *some* kind of awareness at the phenomenal level. However, this does not entail that experiences themselves are in any sense experienced. From 'nothing can be manifest at the phenomenal level without experiences' it does not follow that 'experiences themselves are in some sense manifest at the phenomenal level'.

The defender of this view might respond as follows. They might prefer to start by assuming that *experiences are things we are in some sense aware of* and then use awareness-with to explain how this could be the case. So, while there may be some things – like eyes – that one is aware with, but not in any sense aware *of*, experiences are not like this. In this sense awareness-with in the case of experiences would *not* be analogous to other instances of awareness-with relations. However, we should contest the assumed explanandum, that *experiences are things we are in some sense aware of* – why should we take this as a primitive? Further to this, if all we get for assuming that experiences are things we are in some sense aware of, by way of explanans, is an appeal to an instance of special relation that is *only instantiated* in the case of experiences, then arguably the account looks gerrymandered and explanatorily vacuous.

So, the defender of this view of non-intentional experiential-presence needs to do more than merely appealing to ‘awareness-with’; they need to tell us why *some* cases of awareness-with – namely those relevant to non-intentional experiential-presence – satisfy the phenomenal constraint, whereas other instances of the same awareness relation do not. Given these reflections, awareness-with looks to be a problematic candidate for the kind of awareness constitutive of supposed non-intentional experiential-presence.¹⁵

The next type of awareness to be considered goes under various names. Here are some of them: background-awareness; peripheral-awareness; marginal-awareness. What supports the psychological reality of these forms of awareness are the following considerations. The phenomenal character of our experience is not (at least not typically) exhausted by what happens to be in the foreground or centre of our ‘phenomenal field’ (the totality of what is manifest at the phenomenal level). Visual experience illustrates this. When enjoying a visual experience, there will be sense-perceptual objects which are the focal point, and so occupy the foreground of our visual field. It would be a mistake, however, to think that the phenomenal character of our visual experiences is exhausted by whatever we are explicitly visually attending to or ‘noticing’ in this sense. There is also a periphery or margin to our visual field, which contributes to *what-it-is-like* to be undergoing that experience, as part of a visual background (similar considerations apply across different experiential modalities and in multi-modal experiences).

Let’s apply this idea of background-awareness to non-intentional experiential-presence. Here is the formulation:

¹⁵ NB: awareness-with doesn’t offer any obvious explanation of what was seen in the introduction as a primary motivation for positing non-intentional experiential presence, namely our ability for immediate and non-inferential reflective ascription of certain conscious states to ourselves. On one way of developing this point, this is plausibly because awareness-with doesn’t satisfy the phenomenal constraint: if awareness-with is not plausibly a kind of awareness which operates at the phenomenal level then it could not supply phenomenal grounds for this ability.

7. [Background-awareness-of (Conscious intentional-of X)]

Fleshing this out with an example we can say the following: in having a visual experience of my laptop screen and keyboard, which occupies the foreground of my conscious experience (and so of which I have a foreground-awareness), I also have (likely along with other background features) a background-awareness of that visual experience itself. Now, enough has already been said above to support the claim that background-awareness satisfies the phenomenal constraint: background-awareness plausibly is (or at least can be) a kind of awareness which operates at the phenomenal level, such that background features contribute to the phenomenal character of experience.¹⁶ So, the critical question is whether background-awareness satisfies the non-intentional constraint.

Here is one line of reasoning suggesting it does. One might think that the intentional awareness constitutive of conscious experience necessarily targets *particular objects*, such that intentional awareness is co-extensive with focal awareness. As such, anything which is not the explicit theme of our awareness falls short of being object awareness. One might add that this view is supported by a certain reading of the familiar claim – encountered at the outset – that intentional experiences are ‘about’ their objects, or are ‘directed toward’ them, where we read the ‘about’ or ‘directed toward’ as necessarily picking out the particular object of focal awareness.

However, this reasoning is fallacious. Consider the case of absorbed writing. While focusing on the laptop screen and keyboard, as the focal point of one’s visual experience, the table and surrounding books all form part of the background, as ‘filling out’ the visual scene (as the ground in the figure-ground relation). They are, *ex hypothesi*, not the explicit focus, but they plausibly characterise what we might call the *intentional* background. They

¹⁶ NB: reportability is not a plausible condition of phenomenality. It might be that certain aspects of the background of our phenomenal field are sufficiently ‘marginal’ that we struggle to give precise specifications of them.

are part of how one is visually appeared to. As such, they contribute to the overall intentional content of the experience, that is the visual scene as it appears to me (this view is supported by the thought that my visual experience is also assessable for accuracy relative to those things which ‘fill out’ the visual scene, and so of which we have a background-awareness). Intentional awareness is, therefore, not plausibly co-extensive with focal awareness.

Generalising these considerations to (7) we end up with the following view. We have something like the overall phenomenal field (analogous to the overall visual field), as the totality of what is manifest at the phenomenal level in a token experience. Moreover, as in the visual case, within that ‘overall phenomenal field’ we can distinguish intentional awareness of what is at the centre vs the periphery. Experiential-presence, the putative awareness experience has of itself, is something that is at the periphery of, or forms part of the background of, our phenomenal field. As such, for any conscious experience of X, we also enjoy a background intentional awareness of the experience itself.¹⁷ This view, therefore, models the relevant awareness constitutive of experiential-presence after intentional awareness, albeit a less common-garden variety. As such, this view of background awareness is unsuitable for characterising the awareness constitutive of putative *non-intentional* experiential-presence.

However, the defender of a non-intentional reading of background-awareness might reply that this is too quick. Why should we accept that all background awareness is intentional awareness? This claim may be plausible when dealing with the foreground/background distinction for the structure of visual experience and cross-modal cases. However, when applied to the overall phenomenal field – as the totality of what is manifest at the phenomenal level – why should we be committed to giving intentional

¹⁷ This view is close to Kriegel’s self-representationalism, which appeals to the ‘peripheral inner awareness [experience has] of itself’ (see Kriegel 2009 17). See also Dainton 2016: 113-143, who construes the ‘sense of self’ in experience along the line of background intentional contents ‘given as mine’.

readings of all putative cases of background awareness? Shouldn't we countenance that background awareness *can be* non-intentional?

The burden is, however, on the theorist wanting to explicate non-intentional awareness with reference to background-awareness to provide a credible alternative, explaining why the specific form of background awareness supposedly constitutive of experiential-presence is non-intentional. One possibility is to theorise the relevant background awareness as akin to the purported phenomenal contribution of non-intentional experiential accompaniments, akin to Reidian raw feels or pure sensations.¹⁸ Nonetheless, even if substance can be given to the notion of free-floating qualia, putatively in the background of the phenomenal field, it is questionable whether this is a suitable model for thinking of experiential-presence. One problem is that such free-floating non-intentional quales don't seem the kind of thing that could, in the appropriate way, be connected to our experiences, to constitute some kind of non-intentional awareness of them.

We can explain the worry by unpacking the proposed view. Perhaps its defender might say the following: 'whenever I have any conscious experience of X, I also have this special experience-presence feeling', as a putative 'inner glow'. However, what is it that type-identifies this particular non-intentional quale – this putative 'inner glow' – as being the supposed experiential-presence one, rather than some other one? Appeal to the fact that *some* putative non-intentional quale always co-occurs with any conscious experience I have (if it does) will not suffice. However, more fundamentally it is unclear how any such quale, whether we label it the experiential-presence one or not, can *in and of itself* constitute a kind of awareness (remember, the quale would need to itself constitute a non-intentional

¹⁸ Perhaps along the lines of mental latex, see Block 1996: 19-49. Mental latex are properties of experience which are putatively (a) not object properties, and (b) don't play any representational role. This interpretation of mental latex echoes Tyler Burge's suggestion that non-representational features of experience are 'noise in the medium of representation' (Burge 2003: 407).

awareness of conscious experience itself rather than be something we are intentionally aware of). Simply put: non-intentional *quales* (if there are such) do not seem like kinds or forms of awareness. In light of this, consider the following formulation:

8. [Background non-intentional inner-glow (Conscious intentional-of X)]

It is not clear where the relevant non-intentional *awareness* should be located. There is a putative non-intentional quale, namely some background inner-glow, but *awareness* in the sense required has dropped out of the picture. In sum, whatever the prospects for providing a non-intentional take on some instances of background awareness, it does not seem an appropriate candidate for capturing the awareness constitutive of supposed non-intentional experiential-presence.¹⁹

3. The Acquaintance Relation

The next view I consider appeals to *acquaintance*. First, let's define the acquaintance relation. The following has recently been offered as a non-controversial (minimal) characterisation:

...acquaintance is a conscious mental relation that a subject can, supposedly, bear to particular items or features that is, somehow, fundamentally different from thinking a true thought about the item/feature in question...Rather than deploying concepts to form a mental state that is (merely) about something, when we are acquainted with something we are, in some sense, supposed to consciously confront that very thing itself. (Raleigh 2020: 2)

With this minimal characterisation of acquaintance, we can offer the following formulation of experiential-presence:

¹⁹ See Zahavi and Kriegel 2015: 38; Zahavi 2014: 22 who rule out cashing out experiential-presence in terms of a free-floating quale.

9. [Acquaintance-awareness-of/with (Conscious intentional-of X)]

The idea would be that the awareness we enjoy of our own conscious experiences just in virtue of having them is a kind of acquaintance with them; we bear a ‘conscious mental relation’ to those experiences as they unfold, ‘consciously confronting’ them. The key question is whether experiential-presence, so construed, meets the phenomenal and non-intentional constraints. Insofar as we are granting that acquaintance is a *conscious* mental relation in which we *consciously* confront whatever it is that we stand in the acquaintance relation to, then the phenomenal constraint is met; acquaintance is plausibly a kind of awareness that operates at the phenomenal level.

Matters become more complicated when considering whether this view meets the non-intentional constraint. Here, however, is a set of considerations which suggest that it might. Say one thinks that intentionality is fundamentally *non-relational*, as expressed by the idea that we can enjoy intentional states about non-existent objects; for example, entertaining a thought which is ‘merely about’ the *fountain of youth*, or visualising the *lost city of Atlantis*. Intentional awareness as *mere aboutness* does not require that its object *actually exist* (hence the idea of ‘intentional inexistence’).²⁰ Contrastingly, drawing on the non-controversial characterisation above, acquaintance is *genuinely relational*, where talk of a relation necessitates the existence of both *relata*. So, if intentionality is non-relational, and acquaintance is relational, then arguably by construing the awareness conscious experience has of itself in terms of an acquaintance relation we can meet the non-intentional constraint.

²⁰ This notion of intentionality is found originally in Brentano (1874). It is a matter of controversy whether Classical Phenomenology (as inaugurated by Husserl) subscribes to this non-relational view (see Poellner 2007).

However, this is too quick. One problem is that acquaintance still looks to be an objectual-relation, as a way of being *directed at* something; indeed to ‘consciously confront that very thing itself’, is surely to stand in a relation, the supposed relation of acquaintance, to something *which is an actual object for consciousness*. As such, construing experiential presence in terms of an acquaintance we have with our own experiences still seems to involve our experiences being objects for us – albeit perhaps not ‘mere objects’ in the way the *fountain of youth* is a ‘mere object’ of my thought. And we might think, adopting a more minimal conception of intentionality that does not take a stand on supposed intentional inexistence – where intentional awareness is merely a matter of something *appearing* somehow *to* consciousness – that acquaintance is just a necessarily relational kind of object-intentionality.²¹ And if one of the central ideas of non-intentional experiential-presence is a denial that our experiences are *in any sense* presented to us as objects, then the non-intentional constraint cannot be met by appealing to acquaintance.

Now, the defender of this approach may bifurcate acquaintance into object-acquaintance and experience-acquaintance. Indeed, this looks to be the strategy of Zahavi. He claims, ‘we are not acquainted with our own subjective experiences in the same way that we are acquainted with objects’.²² The problem is explaining this difference in more detail. Zahavi suggests the following:

[I]t is necessary to avoid theories that describe self-awareness [experiential presence] as a kind of *relation*, since every relation - especially the subject-object relation - presupposes a *distinction* between two (or more) relata...basic self-awareness of an experience is not mediated by foreign elements such as concepts or classificatory criteria, nor by any internal difference or distance. It is an immediate and direct self-

²¹ See Smith 1989; 2020.

²² Zahavi 1999: 13

acquaintance, which is characterised by being completely and absolutely *irrelational* (and consequently best described as a purely immanent self-presence) (Zahavi 1999: 33)²³

This proposal meets the above worry since it denies there are two *relata* in play, one of which would be the ‘object’; indeed, it denies that the relevant form of ‘self-acquaintance’ is *relational* at all.

The problem is that we are now in contradiction with our original non-controversial definition of acquaintance. Arguably the most basic feature of acquaintance is that it is relational.²⁴ Insofar as we are now being offered a kind of experience-acquaintance that is *irrelational* it becomes confusing why the relevant form of awareness is a species of acquaintance. So, while we might bifurcate types of acquaintance, such that there might be relevant differences between acquaintance with existent worldly particulars and the (supposed) acquaintance we have with our own experiences, *relationality* is a basic shared feature of anything that counts as acquaintance. Insofar as we deny this, we lose our grip on what an account of the awareness constitutive of non-intentional experiential-presence in terms of acquaintance is supposed to positively amount to. We seem forced into appealing to a special type of non-relational acquaintance that undermines the motivation for appealing to acquaintance in the first place.

4. Non-positional implicit-awareness

The final candidate I consider for the awareness constitutive of supposed non-intentional experiential-presence is ‘non-positional’ *implicit-awareness*. Here is the formulation:

²³ See also Zahavi 2005: 15-22. For a different way of developing self-acquaintance, see Duncan 2015 and Wishon 2012. For a more complex account see Hellie 2007; 289–324 (cf. see Kriegel 2009: 106-113).

²⁴ Russell’s original formulations suggest this: ‘Acquaintance with objects essentially consists in a *relation* between the mind and something other than the mind...’ (Russell 1912: 42, my emphasis).

10. [Implicit-awareness of (Conscious intentional-of X)]

Let me unpack this with an example. When running for the bus Fred is intentionally aware of a range of relevant objects; for example, the bus beginning to pull off, the irksome people in his way, his heart-pounding, the jagged feel of the change in his pocket as he rustles around to find the right coins. Further to this, Fred is also concurrently *implicitly aware* of that whole experience just by having it.

Here is what Jean-Paul Sartre, one advocate of this view, says:

Everything in consciousness is thus clear and lucid: the object lies opposite it, in its characteristic opacity, but consciousness for its part, is purely and simply the consciousness of being conscious of this object: such is the law of its existence. We need to add that this consciousness of consciousness...is not *positional*, i.e., consciousness is not its own object. Its object is outside itself by nature... (Sartre 1937: 8)

Also, in a later work:

We now understand why the first consciousness of consciousness is not positional; it is because it is one with the consciousness of which it is consciousness. At one stroke it determines itself as consciousness of perception and as perception (Sartre 1943: xxx)

From these passages, let's make explicit two claims concerning the supposed non-positional implicit-awareness which conscious experience has of itself:

Non-distinct experience claim: Non-positional implicit-awareness is an awareness we have of our experiences *simply in virtue of having them*.

This claim distinguishes the view from theories in which there is some further, numerically distinct, mental state or experience which takes first-order experience as an object (i.e., higher-order theories).

Non-objectual claim: Non-positional awareness is not a matter of experience taking itself as an *object*.

This claim distinguishes the view in question from self-representationalist views. Such views adhere to the ‘non-distinct experience claim’ but construe experiential-presence in terms of a specific kind of self-directed intentionality.

With the Sartrean view of experiential-presence clarified, we should ask does non-positional implicit-awareness meet the phenomenal constraint, such that non-positional implicit-awareness must operate at the phenomenal level. At least according to Sartre it does, since it purportedly makes all the phenomenal difference. Here is how he puts it:

This [non-positional implicit awareness of experience itself] is a *necessary condition*, for if my consciousness were not consciousness of being consciousness of the table, it would then be consciousness of that table without consciousness of being so. In other words, it would be a consciousness ignorant of itself, an unconscious – which is absurd. (Sartre 1943: 8, *my emphasis*)

So, the relevant non-positional implicit-awareness that experience has of itself is claimed to be a necessary condition on any phenomenality – in its absence, phenomenal consciousness (or phenomenal character) disappears.²⁵

²⁵ NB: we are assuming that by consciousness Sartre means something like *phenomenal consciousness*. There may be reasons to doubt this. For instance, Sartre at times uses the term ‘consciousness’ to characterise all

Note, there are important considerations which might lead one to question Sartre's reasoning here (so interpreted) and its connection to the phenomenal constraint.²⁶ Arguably just because there would not be any phenomenal consciousness without non-positional self-consciousness it does not therefore *necessarily* follow that non-positional self-consciousness *operates at the phenomenal level* or is to be 'pitched' at the phenomenal level. After all, there seem to be a range of claims for which it is true to say *without X* there would be no phenomenal consciousness but from which it does not follow that X is something which operates at the phenomenal level. For example, arguably without the proper functioning of certain neurological structures in the brain there would be no phenomenal consciousness, but it does not therefore follow that those neuronal structures are something which *operates at the phenomenal level*. However, for the sake of argument let's grant that this putative non-positional implicit-awareness meets the phenomenal constraint, as Sartre seems to assume it does, even if we might question his precise reasoning for why it does.²⁷

What more can we say about non-positional implicit-awareness concerning the non-intentional constraint? Note, one might think that the view obviously meets the constraint

intentional phenomena and takes consciousness to apply to 'belief, which is not usually taken to be an occurrent phenomenal state (in contrast to *conscious judgement*). However, arguably Sartre diverges from the contemporary consensus on this issue, that is, he does seem to at points think of belief as phenomenally conscious (see Sartre 1994: 98-100). However, note even if this were not true and we were to take Sartre as using 'consciousness' in a more liberal way (i.e., as something akin to Block's notion of access consciousness) then it could still be true that, for him, in the absence of non-positional self-consciousness 'phenomenal character disappears'. It would just be that other things (i.e., consciousness that is *not* phenomenal) would disappear also. Also, see Gallagher and Zahavi 2012: 52, 57, 69; Zahavi 1999: 15; and Zahavi 2005: Ch.1, as accounts which explicitly link 'pre-reflective self-consciousness' and phenomenal consciousness', and do so drawing on Sartre and the Classical Phenomenologists.

²⁶ See Siewert 1998: 358, fn.3 and fn.7 for a different strand of criticism. I thank a referee for pressing me to clarify this issue.

²⁷ Alternatively, one might interpret non-positional implicit-awareness as not operating at the phenomenal level (so not meeting the phenomenal constraint). We might then seek to explain the 'minds presence to itself' in terms of the capacity one has to take one's experiences as objects, which would be non-phenomenally implicit in conscious experience (see Schear 2009: 95-105).

given the ‘non-objectual claim’. Nevertheless, this is just a negative claim: to evaluate this idea of experience ‘not taking itself as an object’ we need to introduce further requirements.

Here is the first:

Attitude-content requirement: For any awareness to count as an instance of intentional awareness *of something* we need to be able to distinguish between the intentional ‘attitude’ and the intentional ‘content’ (with respect to it).

As is often noted, intentional states admit of a distinction between their attitude and content. For propositional attitudes like ‘S believes that P’, we can distinguish between the attitude, in this case believing, and the representational content, ‘P’. One reason this distinction is important is that if we can describe, and so individuate, content separately from attitude, then the same content can be entertained by different intentional attitudes. For example, as we can say ‘S believes that P’, we can also say ‘S desires that P’, or ‘S wishes that P’, where the (propositional) content remains the same across the different intentional attitudes. Further, consider a standard visual experience, which takes a physical particular as its object, and so has presentational content. Arguably, the presentational content of that visual experience can be taken up by different experiential attitudes or modes, such as ‘imagining P’.

Applied to the non-positional implicit-awareness constitutive of supposed non-intentional experiential-presence one might claim that we cannot make the attitude-content distinction. Consider the following example. Fred is enjoying a visual experience as of a red and rectangular table which purportedly is constituted by a non-positional implicit-awareness of itself. The only intentional attitude (or ‘act’) in the structure of the experience is that of *visual perception*. There is no further ‘attitude’ which takes up as a *content* that very perceptual act, or anything else for that matter. So, if Fred’s visual experience is constituted by a non-positional implicit-awareness of itself, then as per the attitude-

content requirement, it cannot be a form of intentional awareness. Indeed, this is one way of interpreting Sartre's talk of 'positing' since we might think 'positing' is another term for an intentional attitude or 'act' which takes up a content. Insofar as there is no 'positing' of the experience itself, but there is nonetheless a supposed implicit-awareness of it, then implicit-awareness meets the non-intentional constraint.

How convincing is this? One might undermine the view by rejecting the attitude-content requirement. After all, why can't we have forms of intentional awareness for which it makes no sense to distinguish between some 'attitude' and 'content' components? One might argue that it makes sense to frame the propositional attitudes in this way, but when it comes to intentional experiences, say sense-perceptual experiences, the distinction is questionable. After all, vision, touch, and taste, for example, are not *attitudes*, but rather are determinate types of experience. However, this is an artificially narrow reading of the attitude-content requirement. While it may be true that sense-perceptual experiences, for example, are not 'attitudes' – or at least not in the sense that the propositional attitudes are – they are nonetheless *experiential modes*, and so there is the broader *mode-content* distinction which is applicable to experiences. After all, vision is one mode, with taste and audition being different modes, and these different modes can present various contents. So, the attitude-content requirement, as applicable to a broader range of intentional experiences seems in reasonable shape.²⁸

Taking a different line, a critic might suggest that we can in fact make an attitude-content distinction for experiential-presence. One reading of the formulation, '[Implicit-awareness of (Conscious intentional-of X)]' would locate the relevant content as contained in the round brackets, as <conscious intentional-of X> and the act-type as that of 'implicit-awareness'. Naturally, this points in the direction of a kind of self-representationalism, whereby all experiences are self-directed. This view violates the non-

²⁸ See Searle 1983: ch.1; Crane 2009: 474-93.

intentional constraint and the non-objectual claim of the view under consideration, but it does not seem ruled out just based on talk of consciousness ‘at one stroke’ determining itself as consciousness of perception and as perception’.²⁹ Put otherwise, there is not anything in such talk opposed to the attitude-content distinction or a variety of self-representationalism.

If the attitude-content requirement is not an appropriate way of determining whether the relevant non-positional implicit-awareness is genuinely non-intentional, then perhaps the following requirement will fare better:

Aspectual requirement: For any awareness to count as an intentional awareness of something it must be the case that the awareness we have of that something (re)presents it as being *somehow or someway*.

A common idea in theory of intentionality is that paradigmatic intentional experiences do not merely (re)present their objects *per se*, as bare particulars, but (re)present them as being ‘thus and so’. For example, a visual experience presents the rose *as red*, or the grass *as green*, and so presents its objects under more or less specific determinations (as having certain properties and not others). Reflected in the above requirement then, for any awareness to be intentional it must be an awareness of, or relation to, an ‘aspectual content’ (i.e., to an object under a particular aspect). Intentional awareness, as such, must ‘have something to say’ about ‘the way its object is’.³⁰

Arguably non-positional implicit-awareness does not meet this requirement, and so, if we accept it, is not a form of intentional awareness. Consider, for example, Sartre’s claim that consciousness does not ‘pass judgement on the consciousness reflected upon’.³¹ If we

²⁹ Sartre 1943: xxx.

³⁰ See Searle 1983: ch.1; Crane 2009: 474-93.

³¹ Sartre 1943: xxix

take this ‘passing judgement’ as signalling aspectual content, as an awareness of an object being *thus and so*, then a central dimension of non-positional implicit-awareness is its supposed non-aspectuality. When applied to experiential-presence, the idea would be that insofar as conscious experience is constituted by a non-positional implicit-awareness of itself, it presents the relevant conscious experience *as it is*.³²

However, how much sense can be made of non-aspectual ‘presentation’ or ‘awareness’? One issue is that the above formulation is arguably still aspectual. How else can we make sense of the idea of ‘something being presented as it is’ apart from its being presented as being *someway*, namely the way it is. Additionally, if the idea is that the ‘seems/is’ distinction does not apply to the non-positional implicit awareness experience has of itself then we may grant that as plausible: perhaps my implicit-awareness of my experience cannot fail to present that experience as being any other way than it is experienced as being (as it in fact is). However, this seems an epistemic point rather than anything which guarantees that the relevant awareness is non-aspectual (and so is non-intentional given this requirement).

Alternatively, perhaps the analogy with ‘bare particulars’ is the right one to draw on. Non-positional implicit-awareness of experience would be genuinely non-aspectual because the way it presents experience is as a *bare particular*, that is as having no properties at all. In this sense, it would not present it ‘as it is’ but would present it *simpliciter*, and *as per* the aspectual requirement, this would not amount to intentional awareness.

There are, however, several problems with this view. First, it seems we have slipped back into a more minimal intentional characterisation of the relevant awareness, such that we might talk of awareness of bare-particulars as having purely-objectual intentional contents, that is contents specified singularly in terms of their objects under no modes of presentation or aspects. Why, so the critic might ask, and *pace* the aspectual requirement,

³² See Smith 2016: 139.

does this not count as a form of intentional awareness? Of course, we might choose to stipulate that intentional awareness is necessarily aspectual, but that seems arbitrary in this context. Purely-objectual awareness satisfies what is arguably a more fundamental condition of intentional awareness than aspectuality; namely, that it is minimally about something, or takes an object, and so has something like a content (albeit in this case a non-aspectual or singular one). Second, some might balk at the suggestion that we can make sense of ‘purely-objectual’ experiential constituents. The idea that our experiences themselves, rather than what they are of, present as ‘bare particulars’ seems even odder than the similarly contentious claim that intentional experience *per se* can be directed towards bare particulars.

In light of these considerations, the view that the awareness constitutive of supposed non-intentional experiential-presence can be made sense of along the lines of non-positional implicit awareness is caught in a dilemma concerning the non-intentional constraint. Either it satisfies that constraint, but the relevant form of non-intentional awareness is mysterious (as reflected in the above discussion), or the air of mystery is removed by bringing the proposal closer to background intentional *awareness of*, and so the view becomes harder to distinguish from varieties of self-representationalism.

Conclusion

Let me summarise what has been achieved in this paper. We have critically surveyed a wide range of candidates for the form of awareness supposedly constitutive of non-intentional experiential-presence. All of the interpretations have been seen to encounter significant problems. Note, however, there is no claim to exhaustiveness: I am *not* claiming to have considered *all possible* interpretations of this idea. There may yet be different accounts which escape the criticisms levelled here. Nonetheless, the candidates considered (e.g., awareness-with, background awareness, acquaintance, and implicit awareness) cover a significant range of possible types of awareness, and indeed forms of awareness that have

been central to philosophical discussions of consciousness, intentionality and phenomenology. As such, the fact that a plausible account of the non-intentional awareness which experience putatively has of itself cannot be framed with reference to such forms of awareness is grounds for scepticism concerning the cogency of non-intentional experiential presence.

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