



Dretske's Naturalistic Representationalism and Privileged Accessibility Thesis

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Received: 26 November 2021 / Revised: 12 August 2022 / Accepted: 15 August 2022 /

Published online: 15 September 2022

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Abstract

The objective of the current paper is to provide a critical analysis of Dretske's defense of the naturalistic version of the privileged accessibility thesis. Dretske construed that the justificatory condition of privileged accessibility neither relies on the appeal to perspectival ontology of phenomenal subjectivity nor on the functionalistic notion of accessibility. He has reformulated introspection (which justifies the non-inferentiality of the knowledge of one's own mental facts in an internalist view) as a displaced perception for the defense of naturalistic privileged accessibility. Both internalist and externalist have been approved the plausibility of first-person authority argument through privileged accessibility; however, their disagreement lies on the justificatory condition of privileged accessibility. Internalist hold the view that the justificatory warrant for privileged accessibility is grounded on phenomenal subjectivity. In contrast to the internalist view, externalists uphold the view that the justificatory condition for privileged accessibility lies outside the domain of phenomenal subjectivity. As a proponent of naturalistic content externalism, Dretske defends the view that subject's privileged accessibility is not due to having access to the particular representational state (hence, they have the privilege of getting sensory representational information) and the awareness of mental fact rather the awareness of the whole representational mechanism. Having the knowledge of a particular representational state through privileged access is not the sufficient condition for the accuracy of knowledge about one's own mental facts. The justificatory warrant lies external to the subject. Even though Dretske's naturalistic representation is not plausible enough while dealing with the reduction of phenomenal qualities of experience, however, provides a new roadmap to compatibilists for the defense of privileged accessibility and has a major impact on transparency theorists.

Keywords Naturalistic Representationalism · Systemic Indicative Function · Phenomenal Realism · Phenomenal concepts · Anti-Representationalism ·

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1 Introduction

The current paper is divided into three sections. The first section begins with delineating Dretske's account of naturalistic representationalism and introspection. This particular section will address the questions like how a naturalistic representational function is distinct from the acquired function of representation? Is Dretske's reduction of introspection to displaced perception a threat to privileged accessibility, which is one of the foundations of first-person authority? In this section, we will focus on the debate on justificatory condition for privileged accessibility between natural reductive representationalism and phenomenal realism. Dretske raised objection against the view that defense of first-person authority argument consequently leads to subjectivism. In the following subsection, we are going to discuss his characterisation of phenomenal properties as representational properties of experience. The latter subsection delineates the supervenience of phenomenal qualitative properties on the object of external representational properties.

The second section will provide a critical analysis of the debate between internalist and externalist on privileged accessibility. In this section, we will focus on the debate about features of privileged accessibility and address the question that whether privileged accessibility invites the problem of solipsism. In the concluding section, I have shown the limitation of naturalistic representationalism for dealing with scepticism, solipsism and how the justificatory element of naturalistic representationalism is prone to fall in another trap of either circularity of reason or an infinite regress of justification. I have concluded that Dretske's attempt to objectifying the mental properties by proposing a naturalistic representational mechanism which stands for naturalisation of the properties of experience through reduction of introspection to inferential model of knowing, is at least succeed in addressing some of the anti-representationalist objection unlike reductive physicalist representationalism. Even though Dretske's major contribution- providing naturalistic justification for first-person authority has a major impact on weak transparency theorist and compatibilists on issue of naturalisation of mind and privileged accessibility, however, weaken the introspection method of knowing about experiential facts by reducing it to inference.

2 Naturalistic Representationalism and Introspection

Naturalistic representationalism is the view that the determination of the intentional-representation content of experience is solely dependent on mind independent objects. The ambient external environment of the subject plays a pivotal role in determination of intentional-representational content of their experience. Naturalisation of phenomenality of experience is the primary objective of reductive naturalistic representationalism. Burge (1993, 2003, 2010, 2013), Dretske (1995, 1996, 1999, 2012)

Kregel (2013), Lycan 2008, Morgan, (2018), Millikan (1984, 1989) Neander (2017) and Pautz (2013) are the proponent of naturalistic¹ representationalism.

In the first chapter of his book-*Naturalising the Mind*, Dretske has made the distinction between the natural-systemic indicative representational function and conceptually acquired indicative representational function (CAIRF) in order to explain the function of mental representation². He has shown that how human beings, as a complex representational organism, are capable of having unique representational states, which is distinct from other kinds of representational system³. The sense organ provides the sensory information through the natural-systemic indicative representational functions (NSIRF). The living organisms get this representational function through natural selection. This kind of representational function is inherited or phylogenetic in every living organism, which plays the role of providing the systemic indication about the sensory representational information. In contrast to NSIRF, CAIRF are ontogenetic, acquired through learning, and give rise to acquired representation. Furthermore, he categorized two kinds of mental representation, such as nonconceptual representation (i.e., experience), instantiated by NSIRF and conceptual representation (i.e., thought), which belongs to the domain of CAIRF. As a biological organism, human beings (unless there is no problem with the sensualistic system of the particular species of the organism, and along with that, it follows the equal contextual relation) have the same kind of systemic indicative function and their sensualistic representational system represents the same category of sensualistic information in a similar manner. However, only on the basis of sensory awareness, we do not ascribe a representational system to be fully conscious of the sensory information. The particular representational system needs to have the ability of phenomenal concept formation and conceptual representation.

¹ There are disagreements between the naturalistic representationalist on the issue of the reduction of representational function to biological function, contextual relation and causal representation, for instances, Millikan (1984, 1989) construed that the representational function can be reduced to biological function which is contrary to Tyler Burge's version of naturalistic representationalism. Burge (2010, p.301) has attempted to provide a distinct explanatory role of the representational function unlike Millikan.

² Dretske has made the distinction between natural-representational systemic states and conventional representational systemic states on the ground of their indicative function and nature of the indicative function- depends upon whether it is naturally acquired functions (biological functions) or conventionally assigned functions (i.e., through language, skills, programs). These two kinds of representational states also provide two distinct kinds of awareness- sensory awareness, which includes sensory information, biological functions, internal states of living organisms like sensation, belief, experiences, etc. and conceptual awareness like belief, language, numbers, abstract objects, etc. in the case of human beings. The sensory information became a part of conceptual awareness when the subject started thinking about them to express in language. Sprevak (2019) argued that cognition is nothing but information processing function.

³ Phenomenal realists uphold the position that some living organisms, especially human beings, enjoy the privilege of having phenomenal reflective awareness about their phenomenal content (i.e., awareness of phenomenal property), which the fellow living organisms lack in their experience. Dretske's objective is to undermine the ontological independency of phenomenal consciousness and attempt to replace its role with the ability of having conceptual representational indicative function and representational property. Dretske tries to show the special status of the human species as the most evolved species due to the privilege of having conceptual representational indicative function by making the distinction of natural and acquired representational indicative function.

On the one hand, Dretske tried to avoid the mystifying project of phenomenal consciousness, which upholds the position that phenomenal consciousness cannot be explained in the naturalistic paradigm. On the other hand, he tried to confine his naturalism from falling in the trap of reductive physicalism⁴-which upholds the view that phenomenal/ representational states can be reduced to the brain states.

One of the common objections for reductive representationalist accounts of phenomenal consciousness is that the same representational properties of the phenomenal object can have different phenomenal properties; for instance, the representational properties of redness can have different phenomenal properties in different phenomenal states.⁵ The phenomenal states like the perception of redness, thinking about redness, and belief about redness though share the common representational properties; however, they differ in their phenomenal aspect of experience. Therefore, it is a direct threat to reductive representationalism, which holds that phenomenal-representational properties are somehow identical to intentional properties of experience. Because it is the demand of reductive representationalist principles that same representational states will always generate the particular phenomenal properties in order to have the relation of identity between phenomenal- representational properties. Even though it is a threat to other forms of reductive representationalism, however, Dretske's naturalistic representationalism has succeeded against some objections by providing a plausible account of naturalistic representation. He has defended his position by arguing that the same kind of sensory representational information (what phenomenal realists called information about the awareness of phenomenal properties) can be represented by different modes of representation.

2.1 Dretske's Naturalistic Representationalism and Naturalised Introspection

Introspection is the medium through which the subject non-inferentially knows their mental content⁶ of experience. It is the inner eye (*Internal scanners* in the language of Dretske) that observe the mental contents of the subject. Only the subject can have first-person authority over the experience because it is the subject itself only who can have privileged access to his content of experience (i.e., felt qualities) through introspection. Introspection provides the secure ground for the first-person authority argument. The way both X and Y are aware about their own mental states (i.e., sensation) is different from the way they know about each other's mental states (sensation). Because of the Introspective privilege of first-person accessibility, every biological

⁴ See, Hacoen (2022), Burgess (2022) for a comprehensive analysis of reductive representationalism.

⁵ I have discussed about the relation and nature of these properties in my previous article. See, Sahu (2019), (2020) & (2022) for detailed analysis.

⁶ On the one hand, Bukowski (2019), and Besedin et al., (2021) & Sahu (Forthcoming) advocate for introspection as non-inferential, infallible and reliable tool for self-knowledge. The Cartesian notion of introspection ensures the infallibility of self-knowledge which is completely distinct from other kind of knowledge. Introspection is the non-inferential way of knowing about one's own experience. Schwengerer (2021) advocates for extending the scope of introspection. On the other hand, Dretske (1995) rejected the foundationalists articulation of introspection as the source of non-inferential and infallible self-knowledge. See also, Tye (1995), Charles & Thompson (2021), Caporuscio (2021), Moran (2022) and Mathers (2020), for introspection as abductive inference.

organism has this privilege of accessing their subjective and phenomenal qualitative properties of experience.

Dretske's objective behind naturalising introspection is to establish that the *direction to fit* in case of introspection is not from the mind to world rather world to mind. Introspection is not the tool for tracing the intentional object by the accessing the mental content rather it's a tool for tracing the mental content from the intentional-representational object. Dretske argued for localising the introspective content of experience outside the mind. Dretske, like other representationalist, argued against the internalist justification for introspective privilege of first-person accessibility.⁷

He has rejected the view that introspection is the non-inferential way of knowing one's own mental states and reformulated the introspective model of knowing one's own mental states. The reason behind the need for reformulation of introspection for Dretske is the presumption about limitation of introspection in providing objective mechanisms for the knowledge of the mental fact. He has presumed that internalistic model of introspection makes the knowledge of mental fact objectively unexplainable and untraceable; however, his reformulation of introspection as the displaced perception⁸ will eradicate this problem. He illustrates that

“On a representational theory of mind, introspection becomes an instance of displaced perception-knowledge of internal (mental) facts via an awareness of external (physical) objects.” (Dretske, 1995, p.40).

He construed that it is possible to trace the phenomenal property with the representational properties. The knowledge of phenomenal properties of experience is not confined within the purview of first-person accessibility; rather, it is objectively accessible. He challenged the direct accessibility of the subject's mental fact.⁹ The Introspective representational contents are independent of corresponding objects. One can have non-existential representational content in introspective knowledge, because, introspection is displaced perception, which does not guarantee the correspondence of representational content with its representational object. The problem in the Introspective privilege of first-person accessibility claim, as Dretske argued, like other representationalist, is with the problem of paradigm through which the

⁷ His criticism is limited to the internalist version of privileged accessibility, which leads to subjective perspectival ontology; however, he has also defended one version of naturalistic privileged accessibility like Burge (1993), Heil (1988) for the defense of first-person authority argument. The justification of the internalist behind the first-person authority argument is misleading. Its justification lies outside the domain of the mental fact of the subject, according to Dretske. In the internalist account, the first-person authority argument comes under the domain of subjectivity of the subject, which is private, direct, non-inferential, self-sufficient, and immediate. Dretske has raised questions on the plausibility of the internalist account of justification for the first-person authority argument. His justification behind the plausibility of first-person authority argument is based on an appeal to an externalist account of justification, which lies external to the mind. Unlike the internalist perspective, the nature of justification is objective, indirect, inferential, and mediated by interconnective beliefs and representational fact. We will discuss about it briefly in the later section. See, Chaturvedi (2022), Mehta (2022) & Giustina (2022) for latest argument in favour of internalism.

⁸ Dretske (1995), in his book *Naturalising the Mind*, argued that introspection is not a subjective method of phenomenality for knowing the mental content of the experiencer, rather an objective method of intentionality for investigation about the representational facts.

⁹ The subject might have privileged accessibility, however, does not have direct accessibility and knowability, according to Dretske.

first-person authority of mental facts can be proved. He stated that there is no satisfactory response to the question that “*how come we have such knowledge and what gives us this first-person authority?*” (Dretske, 1995, p.40). Dretske advocated for externalism which holds that what constitutes the qualitative properties of experience are traceable in the external world. He has categorized the qualitative property of experience as unique kinds of representational content. The representational properties/contents are not in the head even though realized¹⁰ in the brain, for instances, as he illustrates

“The mind’s awareness of itself is an awareness of facts about itself, an awareness that internal experience, e, is P. it is not an awareness of the internal object e or the properties P out of which such facts are composed..... but the properties we are aware of in achieving this awareness exist nowhere. They are not in the head.” (Dretske, 1999, p.2).

Representational contents are external to the subject and causally affect the internal neurobiological structure and functions of the brain in order to generate experience. The experiential-representational contents (even identical with qualitative properties of experience) are external properties¹¹, and not the functional properties of the brain, hence the justification for representational content is also lies external to the subject. Representational properties causally affect the internal brain structure and functions because these are properties of the external world. The study of neurobiological activities of the brain is not going to tell anything about the qualitative content of experience, though it can provide information related to the vehicle of representation through which these qualitative-representational properties are represented. The agent needs to look towards the ambient environment for knowledge of the mental facts.

Dretske construed that introspective content is a kind of mental representation about the physical objects of the external world. The introspective representation of a representational fact cannot be localized in the mind, however, can be localized in the ambient environment of the subject. It became possible due to the displaced per-

¹⁰ The anti-individualist like Davidson (1984), Burge (1993), Heil (1988) hold the view that anti-individualism is compatible with first-person authority because, even though the mental facts like the content of thought, desire and sensation are realised within the brain, however, its content determination takes place outside the mind. Davidson and Burge argue that the external environment partially causes content determination of the above propositional attitudes, whereas Dretske argues for the complete determination of content through appropriate casual connection with the propositional attitudes. All of them argued that externalistic content determination is not a threat to privileged accessibility thesis. Their justification behind the compatibilist’s position between content externalism and first-person authority also differs. Somehow, they are trying to defend different forms of representationalism. Dretske had made a significant effort to defend one kind of mental representation and try to bypass some notable objections to mental representation, whereas Davidson and Burge put more effort for eradicating the limitation of linguistic representation.

¹¹ See Dretske (1999) *The Mind’s Awareness of Itself* in which he argues that localizing the mental fact with the brain is not a threat for externalism. In fact, compatible with the naturalisation project of the mind. Dretske made the separate distinction of awareness of the fact, object, and properties in this article and, through this distinction, able to counter the introspective ground of first-person authority of phenomenal consciousness.

ception¹² according to Dretske. It's a cognitive illusion which makes us to think that experiential representational facts can be localized in the brain, even though cannot be realized in the brain. The introspective facts are the representational fact of the mind- represents what the experience *of* (what the experience is about).

In the case of displaced perception, we know the representational fact about an object by not looking at the object rather associated facts or other objects. Introspective facts are not a direct representational fact of the object, rather representation of sensory representational fact. The knowledge of an object (P) is possible by not through the perception of the particular object (P) rather a different object (Q), which is the associated fact or object of P. for example, we often know the mental states of a person by observing their behaviour, facial expression, the way they react to the environmental stimuli. Here we do not access the mental states of a person directly in order to know what their mental state is; however, we are informed about their mental states by observing the associated facts like behaviour, facial expression, and responses to the environmental stimuli, past and current record of environmental interaction, etc. Introspective facts are the product of conceptual representation. The conceptual imposition on the sensory representational properties determines the value and meaning of the representational object. The conceptual representational facts are not belonging to the sensory representational object, rather about the mental facts.

In order to simplify that how qualitative properties of experience are associated with conceptual representational properties, Dretske¹³ has made the distinction between sensory representation and conceptual representation. The properties of sensory representations are identical with qualitative properties. In sensory representation, the sensory representational properties along with some determinate conditions and its representational contents are being represented through senses in an unorganized way. In contrast to sensory representation, conceptual representations represent the (sensory) representational information in an organized way and are capable of representing the mental properties. The sensory representation represents properties of the objects (sensory information) what the sense organ is supposed to provide the information systematically, whereas conceptual representation represents properties of mental content by shaping the sensory representational information.

Phenomenal qualities are *modes of sensory representation*¹⁴. Phenomenal knowledge is the knowledge of sensory representation- how the sense organ systemati-

¹² Displaced perception is the view that for the knowledge of the perceptual object, it is not necessary to have direct access to the particular object. One can know about the particular object, not through direct perception of the object rather something else. For example, my knowledge of “The increase of covid-19 cases in different countries”, “Biden has won the 2021 USA election” and “political violence in the USA in the early month of January 2021” through newspaper and television, is a case of displaced perception. Because I came to know about the representational fact not directly through my experience, rather an indirect medium- newspaper, television, and so on. Dretske also asserted that the perceptual displacement method is not completely infallible. It is subject to misrepresentation of representational fact. The degree of accuracy is dependent on the *cognitive skill* of the observer to identify the true interconnection of the doxastic information and associated fact with others. An observer has to be careful while analysing the information of the experiencer and the associated representational fact.

¹³ See Dretske (1995, ch.1, pp.17–30) for comprehensive discussion.

¹⁴ See, Ibid (Ch.3, pp.65–90).

cally represents the content of sensory experience. The subject is aware about the introspective representational process of representation if it has the privilege of self-consciousness (i.e., human beings) in introspection. Animals, non-leaving representational systems do not have this special kind of metarepresentational power; that is why they cannot be aware about how their sensory representational indicative functions perform their assigned/minimal-acquired function. Like human beings, they directly access the systemic sensory representational content; however, they cannot have the ability of concept formation and connecting one belief with others, which help the human agents to derive the inferential knowledge of unknown fact from directly accessible known facts. Human beings get this ability to have privileged access from the evolutionary process of natural selection.¹⁵

From the above discussion, it is clear that how a representational system represents its representational content can be known neither through the internalist view of introspection nor by tracking of representational processes (as tracking representationalism points out), even though representation and introspection are associated with the internal brain process. Therefore, How X represents Y through Z can also be investigated by the third-person observer. There are also inter-mediatory representational facts (conceptualize the sensory representational content, belief formation, etc.) between the subject and representational content in introspective knowledge, which plays a significant role in representation. The external observer can provide a clear picture about the representational content than the subject. The representational properties of mental fact (qualitative properties) can be objectively accessible if the conscious agents know how does the representational properties are being represented to the subject. External observers, though cannot have direct access to the sensory qualitative properties of the subject, however, can better know where to look for knowing how S (subject) represents Q (properties) of T (object) through U (representational process and other components of representation). The representational processes play a vital role in representation of its content. The representational system carries the information, however, dependent on the external observer and objective representational process in order to depict the correspondences of representational fact with its object for accuracy.

The representational source, representational system, representational-associated fact such as the past and current interaction with the environmental stimuli, representational concepts derived from previous experience, and the object of the external world (as a major component of introspective representation) signifies-what and how the representational state (P) represents or provides the information about the function of the representational system. In the case of introspection, the subject having direct accessibility to its representational states (P) knows about the properties of representational objects through its content of representational states. As we have discussed, Introspection is equivalent to displaced perception. It is an information process in which the subject gets the knowledge about the world, not the object of the world but the representational fact of its representation. In other words, the subject (i.e., Human beings) only have the privilege of metarepresentational power, which is the founda-

¹⁵ The internalist holds the view that it is an A-prior condition for human beings provided in terms of “Given”.

tion of the first-person authority argument, according to Dretske. Direct accessibility of representational content is the necessary condition of knowledge of experience; however, not the sufficient condition for knowledge of experience. “*Introspective knowledge is direct knowledge of facts about phenomenal appearances*” (Dretske, 1995, p.45), however, not about the phenomenal experience. Hence the worth asking question is how the sense organs of a representational system systematically represent the content of phenomenal appearances. Dretske rejects the relation of introspection of phenomenal experiential content with the direct correspondence of the phenomenal object. Introspection as the ground for ontological independency of qualitative properties of experience from sensory representational objects became falsified through displaced perception, hence do not epistemologically justify the knowledge claim of ontological independency of phenomenal consciousness. However, he has recognized that his naturalistic externalism is compatible with the first-person authority argument¹⁶. The rejection of ontological independence of phenomenal consciousness through naturalistic representational models of displaced perception does not threaten the first-person authority argument. As he illustrates that

Tyler Burge and John Heil argues that externalism about the mind..... Does not threaten first-person authority. The present chapter is my way of saying why I agree with them.” (Dretske, 1995, p.54)

Nonetheless, though I agree with them that an externalist theory of mental content is no bar to direct and authoritative self-knowledge of what that content is.” (Dretske, 1995, p.54)

We are very good-in fact absolute authorities-about what we think and experience, but not very good about the attitudinal aspect of these mental states.” (Dretske, 1995, p.55)

The analysis of the Dretskeian version of introspection shows that somehow Dretske agreed with the internalist on the point that the first-person authority argument is plausible enough for resolving the sceptical problem, even though he disagrees with internalist on the justification for first-person authority. As we have seen, for Dretske, in order to know A through B, it is equally important to know not only how A is related to (represent) B, but also the *knowledge of A and B* and tracking the appropriate causal connection between A and B. Therefore, it has to be acknowledged that Dretske’s intention behind the reduction of introspection¹⁷ into a displaced perception was to provide an objective representational mechanism, which could tackle the problem of solipsism and scepticism, even though how far he has succeeded in this approach is a debatable issue.

¹⁶ Introspection secures the ground for justification not because the subject is only aware about the representational information; however, as a representational system, knows how the information is being represented by him.

¹⁷ Dretske is not alone in the reductionistic project of introspection to inference. Tye (1995, p.136) has also defended the thesis that introspection as a method of inference. He argued that the introspective content only reveals the feature of the external object.

2.2 Naturalisation of Privileged Accessibility

Dretske, without rejecting the privileged accessibility of phenomenal properties, has delineated the naturalistic explanation of phenomenal qualitative experiential properties. Even though he accepts the privileged accessibility of phenomenal properties, however, rejects the phenomenal internalist account of ontological independency of phenomenal properties (the claim that fact about experiential properties are private, hence subjective and ontologically independent) from representational properties. He has considered that the privileged accessibility of experiential properties is not a threat to his representational account of experience. Because he construed that having privileged accessibility to *one's own thought* does not entail exclusive access to the particular thought.¹⁸ In fact, he advocates for a naturalistic privileged accessibility through displaced perception. The internalist defence of the privileged accessibility thesis solely depends upon the introspection method in which the subject knows about his private mental states through internal awareness. The naturalistic privileged accessibility thesis upholds the view that mental (representational) facts are not a private entity, even though the subject has privileged accessibility to their mental states. The external observer rather than the experiencer is in a better position for providing accurate information about the mental states of the experiencer. One has to trace the justificatory condition outside the internal brain states of the subject for knowing what is going on inside the mind of the subject, because its justification lies in the observation of non-mental experiential fact rather than internal facts (i.e., internal mental states of the subject).

Imagine a certain part of the world is not infected by Covid-19. They neither know “what is it like to have a Covid-19 pandemic experience” nor have direct access to the information about isolated eccentric life. They are totally unaware about the social normativity of life during a pandemic. However, somehow, they came to know about it that some part of the world is being infected by the Covid-19 virus. Their knowledge about what is it like to have experience of covid pandemic through all the possible ways of the objective mechanism will not fulfil the sufficient condition of accuracy.

In the covid infected world, people have the privilege to access the information about their mental states regarding pandemic, changes of the social normativity for pandemic and its effects. They have accessed the details and texture of the information about the pandemic experiences (i.e., the threat to be infected, social behaviour, isolated individuality, and so on). While experiencing all of those things, the subject is possible to be unaware about certain information even though their sense organism performs its assigned function correctly. According to Dretske, the unattended information can be traceable through the external observer by careful investigation in the naturalistic paradigm. It is also possible that even though the experiencer, despite

¹⁸ Internalist construed that the exclusive accessibility of content of experience plausibly establishes their version of first-person authority argument. Dretske (2012, pp. 52–62) has made the distinction between privileged accessibility and exclusive accessibility in order to counter the internalist. The subject having exclusive accessibility does not entail the infallibility about the content of experience. The internalist privileged accessibility thesis doesn't give space for the third person observer on detection and rectifications of the cognitive illusion, biasness or appearance of the subject about the content of experience.

having a conscious experience of certain facts, might not be attentive to those experiential facts. The unattended information might not be accessible through retrospection and reflection; however, it can be accessed through the displaced perception (i.e., the crime investigating officer's accessibility of information through correlation of facts and the later revelation of the unattended information by the witness while interrogation that s/he was not attended to the particular piece of information). Dretske has established this point through attentive blindness (change blindness) demonstration.

Dretske acknowledged this fact that there will always be a knowledge gap between the pandemic affected subject's accessibility of information regarding their own mental states, and pandemic-non affected observers even though they have privileged knowability, not because the subject has private phenomenal consciousness, but for the simple reason that the subject has undergone a particular representational state while experience, which none- of us, as an observer, have access to that representational state. He argued that "*The access one has to the qualities of one's experience is only through the concepts one has for having thoughts about experience.*" (1995, p.151). The phenomenal concepts¹⁹ of the pandemic affected subjects and pandemic non-affected observers about what it is like to have the experience of pandemic are different. The phenomenal concept formation about the experience of *what it is like to have the experience of pandemic* requires the specific representational information without which no knowledge about the phenomenal appearance of the particular object is possible. However, that does not mean the covid pandemic nonaffected observer can't form concept about the covid affected environment. Their concept formation about the covid affected environment may not be infallible, however, reliable enough for mental representation and fulfilling the epistemic knowability condition for representation of covid affected environment.

2.3 Perspectivism and Displaced Perception

Even though Dretske has advocated for a kind of naturalistic privilege accessibility, he was not convinced with the perspectivist's argument. In fact, he has criticized the perspectivists' thesis. His account of privileged accessibility does not render on subjectivism, which is just one step behind the trap of solipsism or scepticism of the other mind. The defence of naturalised privileged accessibility is grounded on the objective representational mechanism. One who understands the representational mechanism can understand the experiential fact, whether it is their own or others' experiential fact.

Dretske has made a conscious effort to draw our attention that the subject, by perceiving different parts of the same phenomenal field, can have different points of view even though they are the same type of representational systems having equal representational states.

¹⁹ Dretske (1996, p.156) argued that the phenomenal concept isn't required for accessibility of the object of experience. For instance, one does not need the concept green for perceiving green, however, one must have the concept green for the awareness of the quale of green. The phenomenal concept of green for the awareness about the quale of green. The phenomenal concept of greenness is required for self-knowledge of one's own qualitative experience of green.

As he pointed out, “*differences in experiential states are not the result of differences in point of view, but of differences in the way points are viewed*” (Dretske, 1995, p.80).

The objection from perspectivism to the representational identity thesis- (phenomenal properties are identical to representational property) is not a threat to Dretske’s position. As he argues that things may seem different from different perspectives due to different mechanisms associated with representational processes while looking at the same object. The same object can be perceived from different direction (near, far, from *inside out and outside in, above, below, and so on*), which leads to the experience of different phenomenal appearances of the same object; however, that does not establish the position of phenomenal subjectivist which claims that phenomenal experiential properties are subjective, hence, cannot be objectively determinable.

Even though the subjects have privileged access to their representational properties which cannot be accessible the same way by the subject of other living organism, not because they are private or subjective, but because of the different representational facts associated with the representational processes and representational mechanism while the particular subject is representing its phenomenal objects. Dretske argues that the phenomenal qualitative properties are objectively explainable through the analysis of the biological functions of an organism. As he illustrates “*A representational account of experience not only makes room for qualia, it provides an objective way of studying them.*” (Dretske, 1995, p. 73).

2.4 Phenomenal Properties as Representational Properties

Phenomenal states are the systemic representational states of the particular organism. Phenomenal properties of experience (sensory representation) are the case of how the phenomenal objects seem/appear to the subject. For instance, if a mango seems yellow and round to the subject, the yellowness and roundness are the phenomenal properties of the subject’s visual experience of the particular phenomenal object (mango). The quale or phenomenal properties of experience are about the phenomenal object. Hence, there is the correspondence between how things appear to the subject (phenomenal appearances), and actually it is (phenomenal objects). Moreover, only the veridicality of experience can establish the connection between phenomenal appearances (how things seem to the subject) with phenomenal reality (how things really are). A person other than the subject, if knows about the condition of veridicality of perception, knows about what the phenomenal properties are, what it is like to have the experience of the particular phenomenal object (i.e., mango). The phenomenal representational properties are the systemic-sensory representational properties of experience. In order to know how the phenomenal object seems to a particular living organism, one has to inquire about its representational process through which the subject of the particular living organism is representing the object. If two representational systems have the same systemic function of indicating, then their representational properties will fall on the same category of experiential properties.

There can be two representational systems having equal and indistinguishable discriminatory abilities and objective conditions of representations; however, they can have different experiences. As Dretske (1995 p.75) argues.

The key difference is not in what information their visual system provides (this might be the same), but in what information their visual systems have the function of providing.

Phenomenal properties of experience are functionally undefinable, however, physically traceable through the naturalistic theory of representation, according to Dretske. He argues for an objective explanation of phenomenal properties of experience without reducing to the functionalist mechanism of explaining the experiential properties.

2.5 Externalism and Supervenience

Dretske targets the internalist account of experience, which upholds the view that the subject has direct access to the indirectly perceived content (i.e., sense data) of himself. Generally, there are three components involved in experience: the mental states, experiential content of the experience (i.e., sense data), and the object of experience (i.e., external world). Internalist construed that there is a direct relation between the mental states and experiential content; however, the subject cannot directly access the external object. What is directly accessible for her/him is the representational properties of the external object, which is supplied by his senses. The experiential properties supervene on the internal properties (phenomenal content) of experience. Internalist do not undermine the causal necessity of an external environment. They accept that the external environment can causally affect the mental states; for instance, the experience of pain in my feet due to tickles is causally related to environmental stimuli; however, what is causally not associated is the phenomenal qualities of experience.

Unlike internalist, Dretske has associated the phenomenal qualities of experience with sensory representational qualities and argued for causal necessity between the external world in terms of the representational object with the brain states for generating phenomenal experience. He affirms that the genealogical data of experience and representational-causal conditions by the means of which the brain states generate phenomenal experience, plays the central role in content determination. Two subjects (A&B) might have indistinguishable in their brain states and behavioural states; even if in their phenomenal/representational states, however, the reason behind these states (i.e., external conditions, contextual relation, and natural selections, etc.) which is very much essential for the entire process of experience, hence the grounds of experience, can be different. Therefore, one has to look outside of the agent in order to know the content of the experience.

2.6 Privileged Accessibility and Knowability

There is an explanatory gap between privileged accessibility and knowability²⁰, which should be acknowledged by both internalist and externalists while dealing

²⁰ Russell (1910) has a similar kind of view- he made the distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. He has suggested that for knowledge of something, one need not have direct acquaintance. One can have knowledge about the particular experiential object through knowledge by description.

with mental facts and its representation. It is one of the primary reasons behind the failure of linguistic representation and mental representation for the reduction of the inner qualitative mental fact into the physical mechanism (which is technically impossible) I have also delineated the reason behind failure of representationalism in another paper. See , Sahu (2021, pp. 145- 147). However, that does not mean that objective knowledge about mental facts is impossible. We can have objective knowledge of a mental fact by acknowledging its ontological-independency; and without reducing it to an objective mechanism.

Privilege Accessibility is not the necessary condition for knowability. One can know lots of things without having direct privileged access to the particular things. One can have privileged knowability without having privileged accessibility, not vice-a-versa. My knowledge about “Recent political Capitol, Washington riots in the USA” is not derived from direct privileged accessibility. Because I came to know about the particular representational fact not through the direct access of the political violence rather from something else (i.e., by reading the newspaper, watching the news on television). Here I do not have privileged accessibility of the particular representational information; however, I do fulfill the condition of privileged knowability (even though I do not have direct access to “what it is like to be the victim of a political violence”). For Dretske, it is a kind of displaced perception, as we have already discussed earlier.

Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* argues that because human beings have the privilege of sharing the same *form of life* as a human species (due to the common medium of communication for information interaction), can objectively know about the mental fact of others even though they do not have privilege access to the mental states of the subject.

3 Internalist and Externalist Debate on Privileged Accessibility

The debate between externalists and internalist on privileged accessibility for securing the foundation of first-person authority relies on the justificatory conditions and content determination. The disagreement between externalist²¹ and internalist on the justification for first-person authority leads them to different directions for justificatory warrants. Internalist uphold the view that privileged accessibility can be grounded on self-justificatory warrants. However, externalists argue for non-mental justificatory warrants, which can be found in the external world (outside the domain of subjectivity). Dretske agrees with the internalist that the first-person authority argument can be grounded through introspection²².

²¹ Here the term externalism accommodates only limited externalist theory, which proposes reductive externalist theories are compatible with first-person authority. See for such kind reductive externalism -Heil (1988), Burge (1993), and Davidson (1987). There is another set of the externalist theory which puts their money on reliabilism rather than accesibilism for justification of first-person authority argument.

²² Dretske’s agreement with internalist that introspection can provide a secure foundation for first-person authority does not mean that they also agree on the point of justification for introspection.

3.1 Internalist Characterisation of Privileged Accessibility

The feature of privileged accessibility as the vital element of self-knowledge, plays the significant role in content determination. The feature of privileged accessibility not only acknowledges the self-justifying truth, but also provides a secure ground for knowledge acquisition. Those features of privileged accessibility are as follows:

3.1.1 Immediacy of Experience

The way a subject knows their mental content is not the same way they know about the mental content of others. In case of the subject's awareness about his mental content, they know their mental content directly; there is no mediatory process involved in the experiencer's content of experience and the experience itself. However, the knowledge about the mental fact about others has been mediated by inter-mediatory processes of knowledge ascription (observation of speech, action, behaviour, justification, and so on). The subject has direct access to his mental content. it is one of the biggest components of self-knowledge in order to combat against scepticism and making the self-knowledge infallible²³ and incorrigible.

3.1.2 Non-Inferentiality of Experience and Incorrigibility

Privileged accessibility provides the foundation for the non-inferentiality of experience. The subject knows non-inferentially about their mental facts through self-knowledge. The mental facts are directly accessible by the subject. Hence the knowledge of direct accessibility of mental fact is not derived from inference because there is no need for looking at the external world for the justification about the knowledge of the mental fact. The direct awareness of mental content is self-sufficient for knowledge of one's own mental fact.

The proposition about inner private experiential contents are incorrigible propositions. For example- even if an objective analysis (neurological analysis of experience through tracing brain activity) of the mental fact about the subject failed to identify the correlation with the brain function with experiential content of the subject and conclude that there is no experiential content, definitely he is committing a mistake about the experience. If the certainty of knowledge about mental fact can be doubted, then every established scientific truth also can be doubted. The problem of scepticism is not that a sceptic is unable to get a satisfactory justification rather the suspension of the judgement about self-reliability. Descartes was well aware about the problem; that's why he invoked a unique kind of sceptical method for combating scepticism and established that there are reliable sources for knowledge by forcing the sceptic through the sceptical method to rely on self-reliability.

²³ *Df.* A proposition (X) is infallible *iff* there is no rational justification for either proving Y (which contradicts X) or disproving X, and X fulfil the necessary and sufficient condition in which all the logical possibility of disproving X as well as proving $\sim X$ is ruled out.

3.1.3 Subjective Certainty

The subjective certainty is the necessary condition for knowledge about experience. One cannot claim that he knows X without being certain about the knowledge of X. Justified-true beliefs are the primary and sufficient condition for any kind of knowledge claim (even though not for knowledge) about the external world. Privileged Accessibility bypasses this tri-condition because there is no knowledge gap between the knowledge about the accessibility of objects of experience and the experience itself. In addition to that, one cannot claim that I am experiencing X but not certain about the accessibility of X. The indubitability claim and the appeal to the pragmatic contradiction in case of privileged accessibility of mental content ensure at least the subjective certainty to the subject.

3.1.4 Distinctive Authority

The subject enjoys the distinctive authority over the knowledge about his own mental states. One can be wrong about the mental facts about others; however, one cannot be wrong about their own experiences. There are different methods of knowing used while accessing the mental fact from the first-person perspective and third-person perspective. The subject who is having a particular experience has the privilege of accessing the detailed information in a first-person perspective, because he knows what *it is like to have that particular experience*, which is not possible in a third-person perspective. The irreducibility of phenomenal character of experience into the objective mechanism or third person perspective limits the observer from having knowledge of what it is like to have a particular experience. Only the privileged accessibility can accommodate the *distinctive authority* as a special feature of experience to the subject, which an external observer will always be deprived of while conducting their objective investigation.

3.1.5 Epistemic Objectivity

One of the striking features of privileged accessibility is the epistemic objectivity—the view that one can know about the private-subjective mental states of a person which is ontologically subjective through epistemic objectivity²⁴. It can be interpreted that epistemic objectivity as a response to the question that how privileged accessibility thesis address the problem of other minds? The privileged accessibility thesis proved that the subject can have direct accessibility (hence, established subjective certainty about the knowledge about their mental states) to their mental content. However, in order to solve the problem of self-certainty about a subject's own mental fact, there is the threat for internalistic privileged accessibilists to fall in the trap of solipsism and scepticism about the world. If one cannot access the mental facts of other, then how can someone know that even other human beings have mental states at all?

²⁴ See, Searle (2015) for the distinction of subjectivity and objectivity in ontological and epistemological sense. Searle responds to the problem of solipsism and scepticism of the world by introducing epistemic objectivity.

Generally, there are two kinds of responses to the question. John Searle, one of the most influential philosophers of the 21st century, tries to avoid the problem by making the distinction between privileged accessibility and knowability. The mental facts such as bodily sensation, emotion and thought are though come under the category of privileged accessibility by the subject because they are ontologically subjective, however, that does not mean one cannot know about these mental states of others. The privileged accessibility condition of experience does not rule out the objective knowability condition. The mental facts are epistemically objective, according to Searle. He has shown that the ontological subjectivity of experience is compatible with epistemic objectivity. Hence, one can have knowledge about the mental facts of others (epistemic objectivity) without having direct accessibility of a mental fact which is ontologically subjective. Conee (1994), one of the proponents of privileged accessibility thesis, argues that knowability without accessibility conditions for knowledge of the mental fact is not possible, not because it is subjective, however, for the simple reason that there is no acquaintance with the mental fact of others. One can have phenomenal knowledge (knowledge about the mental facts of others) through description without having direct acquaintance with the mental facts of others.

Davidson (1984) has argued that the first-person authority argument through privileged accessibility does not undermine epistemic objectivity.²⁵ At the same time, he also argues that the first-person authority thesis does not make the subject completely *authoritarian* during intersubjective interaction while the subject tries to share their mental content through an objective medium of communication with others. as he remarks

“The speaker can be wrong about what his own word means. This is one of the reasons first-person authority is not completely authoritarian. Nevertheless, the possibility of error does not eliminate the asymmetry. The asymmetry rests on the fact that the interpreter must, while the speaker does not, rely on what, if it were made explicit, would be a difficult inference in interpreting the speaker.” (Davidson, 1984, p.110).

Both internalist and externalist positions are compatible with the idea of privileged accessibility of phenomenal qualities of experience- *privileged awareness of one's own experience*. (Dretske, 1995, p.40) However, they only differ in the justification for privileged accessibility. As he illustrates.

“It is not the denial that we know we have thoughts and feelings. It is the denial that we have a way of knowing this not available to others, a kind of awareness of or access to our thoughts and feelings that gives us a special authority about the fact that we have them. You know you have thoughts and feelings, yes, but you know that your spouse, children, friends, and colleagues have them too. And they know you have them. So, knowledge is not the issue. It is the source of this knowledge.” Dretske (2012, p. 49).

²⁵ The subject has privileged access to their mental states and has the first-person authority over their mental content; however, the subject's utterances are neither completely infallible nor incorrigible while he/she is engaged in the practice of the language.

3.2 Externalistic Characterization of Privileged Accessibility

The naturalistic privileged accessibility thesis holds the view that privileged and direct accessibility of some mental content does not guarantee the truth claim for privileged knowability of all mental states (i.e., unaware thought and perception). It is possible that the subject might be wrong about some states (i.e., some dispositional mental states); for instances, some of the unconscious thoughts are outside the domain of privileged direct knowability of the subject²⁶; however, in order to know the accuracy of those thoughts, the inquiry of an external observer is essential who can provide the correct explanation about those thoughts. Even though a subject can have the privilege of direct accessibility to those thoughts, their knowledge will come under the category of indirect knowability rather than privileged direct knowability. The experiencer who is having those unaware mental states either needs an observer or any other objective mechanism for accurate determination of the content of those mental states. Dretske, as the pioneers of content-naturalistic externalism, argues for this kind of view by reducing the introspective content determination into displaced perception.

Dretske has made the distinction between privileged access and exclusive access. The denial of exclusive access to the mental content of the subject does not mean the denial of privileged access. The privileged access to one's own content of experience is *a mode of awareness* which provides only the *unwitting authority*. The subject needs other ways of knowing in addition with the introspective method for witting authority over her/his content of experience. He construed that fallibilism is compatible with the authority of self-knowledge. Dretske, as a sympathizer of reliabilism, construe that the reliabilists account of privileged accessibility does not accept that only infallible knowledge will necessarily entail the authority of self-knowledge about phenomenal knowledge.

Dretske is not alone in the project of providing naturalistic ground for first-person authority; Burge (1993) and Heil (1988) have also defended the same kind of view. Both Wittgenstein and Burge (1993) argue for a unique kind of content externalism—the view that the determination of mental content (such as beliefs, thought, desire, etc.) is dependent on the epistemic warrant called entitlement (i.e., usage of language of *the linguistic community*). The mental content is individuated by social normativity and the practice of languages. By criticizing the narrow content view (which upholds the position that some content of mental states is not determined by external factors and independent of external conditions while the determination of the content), Dretske had attempted to establish a radical version of wide content externalism.

Burge like other representationalist, agree on the point that the knowledge of privileged accessibility (self-knowledge) is not infallible, indubitable and incorrigible. He has characterized that the self-knowledge is *reflective, performative, or self-verifying* rather than *infallible, incorrigible, and indubitable* as per the internalist characterization of self-knowledge. As he argues that.

“Self-knowledge that involves a performative element includes a broader range of cases than those that are logically self-verifying. The thought I am hereby enter-

²⁶ See Bennett (2022) for the debate on unconscious thought and perception.

taining the thought that writing requires concentration is logically self-verifying” (Burge, 2003, p.417).

“I agree that self-conscious self-knowledge is present in many ordinary first-level thoughts about the world. But I think that there is a reflexive element in more such self-knowledge than most people realize..... I agree that agency is at the heart of our understanding of first-person authority” (Burge 2003, p.419)

Some authoritative self-knowledge are reflexive, performative, or self-verifying” (Burge, 2003, p. 425)

.Burge’s defence of privileged accessibility, unlike Dretske, is not grounded on justification. He has defended the privileged accessibility through *authoritative self-knowledge*, the view that the subject has an epistemic warrant to the knowledge of his mental facts. The nature of the epistemic warrant²⁷ in case of *authoritative self-knowledge* is fundamentally *non-inferential*, however, is not infallible in all cases. For example, the mental states such as thought, sensation are the cases of *pure cogito*, hence, enjoy the status of infallibility, whether as perception and belief are the cases of *impure cogito* (fallible) according to Burge.

4 Conclusion

Dretske has taken a divergent approach for dealing with the problem of other minds and scepticism about the experience. His major contribution- Providing justification for first-person authority through naturalistic externalism has a major impact on the emergence of transparency thesis. He has established that for transparency of experience, one need not have to look inside the mind, rather, external to the mind. The justification for the first-person authority argument is not constrained within the purview of internalist justification. Its justification lies outside the domain of phenomenal subjectivity. The transparency of experience can also be justified without an appeal to phenomenal subjectivity. Dretske’s justification through epistemic representative naturalism for privileged accessibility provides a new perspective for compatibilists²⁸ to the defence of first-person authority argument. However, Dretske’s naturalistic representationalism is not plausible enough while dealing with phenomenal properties and representational properties²⁹. It’s the common ambiguity, committed

²⁷ Burge (1993) has categorized the epistemic warrant into two groups 1-Justification and 2- Entitlement (interlocution and authoritative self-knowledge). Justification required reason for being an epistemic warrant, however, entitlement as an epistemic warrant is independent of rationality. He argues that the authoritative self-knowledge is compatible with his anti-individualism-the view that mental states supervene on “non individualistic conditions”.

²⁸ The compatibilist argued that externalistic representationalism is compatible with the first-person authority argument. Byrne (2011) & Dewalque (2022) states that transparency arguments can be applied for the defence of first-person authority.

²⁹ Hegarty (2021) construed that any attempt to naturalize the mental properties of experience will have to face the naturalization dilemma in the first place. A natural representationalist is bound to accept or reject Brentano’s thesis of intentionality, which is consequently does not serve the objective of naturalist.

by almost all the representationalist, that explaining the representational content of a mental state includes the explanation of the phenomenal qualitative character of the particular experience. The reduction of the ontological independency of phenomenal properties to representational properties makes his theory redundant. The phenomenal qualitative properties are not relational properties as argued by Dretske and other reductive representationalist, rather an independent property. There is no doubt that Dretske's model of introspection implies the possibility of defending *first person authority* claim through naturalistic justification, however, his displaced perception model of introspection goes against the common sensical view of the world. Because relying on the inference for knowledge about subject's own mental fact will be an appeal to pragmatic contradiction. The subject's awareness of own mental fact is non-inferential, immediate and direct³⁰.

There are two prongs of attack against Dretske's model of naturalistic representationalism in relation to the accuracy of introspective knowledge.

Firstly; If one has to fulfil the necessary conditions of displaced perception for knowledge about their own mental states like (a) ability to conceptually represent the sensory representational information with the appropriate causal connection between what kind of information the systemic-indicative representational function provides to us and information about other associated representational mechanisms (i.e., past record and current environmental interaction to environmental stimuli, correlation of representational information with perceptual-representational concepts); (b) ability to interconnect beliefs through cognitive skill; (c) the causal relation between sensory representational information with experiential concept gained from previous experience; then the attributional function of propositional attitude, became a complex phenomenon. Dretske has acknowledged that these necessary conditions of displaced perception will not guarantee the infallibility of knowledge of representation because there is always the possibility of misrepresentation. Therefore, even if someone interprets Dretske's naturalistic justification for the accuracy of introspective knowledge as a response to scepticism will provide a temporary relief rather than cure the disease.

Secondly, Dretske's displaced perception model of introspection is itself inconsistent with its own principle³¹. If we follow Dretske's principle, the possibility of having non-inferential knowledge becomes impossible.³² Inferential knowledge can only ensure the accuracy of knowledge to some extent; however, it cannot provide infallible and indubitable certainty of knowledge. Dretske's naturalistic repre-

³⁰ Hick, Moore, Edgell & Broad (1909) argued that acquaintance is a direct relation between the subject and object of experience. Moore had also proclaimed that acquaintance-as the immediate and direct relation between the subject and object of experience, is an *undisputable fact*. See, Duncan (2021) & Sahu (MS) for the genealogical origin and evolution of acquaintance as *direct awareness* of the content of experience.

³¹ At least Dretske must be certain that his displaced perception of introspection model is plausible enough for providing the accurate knowledge of the mental fact; if so, his displaced perception principle itself must come under the category of inferential knowledge, which can only provide minimal accuracy but not certain knowledge. The fallibility of the displaced perception principle proves its unreliability. Pereira (2020) has criticised Dretske for his sceptical attitude towards the reliability of introspection.

³² Dretske himself affirmed that his theory of introspective belief formation is grounded on inference.

sentationalism, while dealing with the knowledge of direct privileged accessibility through introspection of the mental fact, weakens the introspective method by reducing to inference³³. The self-certainty of knowledge about the phenomenal experience becomes fallible, dubitable, and untransparent, which invites not only the sceptical attack on the possibility of acquiring epistemic certainty about mental facts but the possibility of certainty of knowledge itself. Dretske's objective representational mechanism is unable to provide a secure foundation for knowledge. Therefore, bound to fall in the trap of either infinite regress or circularity of justification.

Phenomenal realism, as a rivalry theory of naturalistic representationalism, at least establishes the certainty of phenomenal knowledge by providing non-inferential justification for self-knowledge. Phenomenal realism acknowledges the internalistic privileged accessibility. It has a more elegant approach towards the knowledge of phenomenal certainty than naturalistic representationalism. One of the common assumptions behind the misconception of the internalistic privileged accessibility theory is that the internalistic privileged accessibility theory does not leave room for epistemic knowability and objective investigation about the mental facts. In other words, mental facts are objectively unknowable is the fundamental principle of internalist privileged accessibility as superimposed by critics. A well-articulated theory of phenomenal realism is the better option for the plausible response to solipsism and scepticism.

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³³ One of the primary reasons for self-certainty of knowledge about the phenomenal experience is that the non-inferentiality of introspection provides the secure ground against sceptical attack. Descartes' *Cogito* argument somehow managed to succeed against scepticism due to the same reason.

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