

# Acquaintance and Self-Knowledge

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# Contents

<b>Figures</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Declaration</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Copyright Statement</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b> .....	<b>23</b>
1. Introduction.....	23
2. The Foundations of Acquaintance.....	25
3. What Acquaintance is Not .....	28
3.1 Gertler’s Renewed Acquaintance Account .....	29
3.2 Giustina’s Integration Account.....	33
4. Acquaintance as Awareness .....	35
4.1 Epistemic Features of Awareness and Routes to Awareness .....	38
4.1.1 Epistemology of Awareness.....	39
4.2 The Acquaintance Argument .....	49
5. Conclusion .....	62
<b>Chapter 2</b> .....	<b>67</b>
1. Introduction.....	67
2. Transparency and Self-Knowledge: A Brief History.....	73
3. A Third Way: Rule Following.....	78
3.1 Two Views on V-Facts.....	82
4. The Rationality of Rule Following.....	87
5. Explaining Away Transparency.....	99
5.1 Blur and After-Images.....	100
6. Conclusion .....	106
<b>Chapter 3</b> .....	<b>109</b>
1. Introduction.....	109
2. Preliminary Remarks .....	111
3. Separatism .....	114
4. Representationalism .....	120
4.1 Content Representationalism .....	121
4.2 Mode Representationalism .....	122
5. Phenomenal Intentionality .....	130
6. Self-Ascriptions and Content Externalism .....	134

6.1 Traditional Content Externalism .....	137
6.2 Externalism and Perceptual Content .....	139
7. Conclusion .....	152
<b>Chapter 4.....</b>	<b>157</b>
1. Introduction.....	157
2. The Myth of the Given and its Commitments.....	160
3. The Myth of the Given and The Content of Experience.....	166
4. Conceptualism .....	168
4.1 Propositional Conceptualism .....	168
4.2 Assessing Propositional Conceptualism .....	171
4.3 Intuitionism .....	175
4.4 Assessing Intuitionism.....	177
5. Back to the Myth of the Given.....	193
6. Bridging the Gap.....	196
6.1 Initial Attempts.....	196
6.2 Weak Access Internalism: a Recognitional Capacities Account .....	198
7. Conclusion .....	204
<b>Chapter 5.....</b>	<b>207</b>
1. Introduction.....	207
2. Speckled Hens, Acquaintance, and Justification.....	209
3. Speckled Hens, Acquaintance, and Intentionalism.....	216
3.1 The Dilemma for Intentionalists .....	219
4. Conclusion .....	230
<b>Chapter 6.....</b>	<b>233</b>
1. Introduction.....	233
2. Preliminary Remarks: Introspection, Error, Acquaintance, Self-knowledge.....	234
3. Error and Acquaintance.....	238
3.1 Error 1: Variation in Introspective Reports About Visual Imagery.....	242
3.2 Error 2: Judgements about Visual Field Clarity.....	252
3.3 Error 3: Judgements about the Richness of Experience.....	260
4. Conclusion .....	264
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>273</b>

**Word Count:** 78, 253

# Figures

1. <b>Figure 1:</b> A Sussex Speckled Hen.....	212
2. <b>Figure 2:</b> Mental Rotation Task.....	250

# Abstract

Self-knowledge is the knowledge we have of our inner lives. In this thesis I develop and defend an account of a particular kind of self-knowledge: our first-person knowledge of our current conscious mental states. Such states include (but are not limited to) our own current perceptual experiences, pains, sensations, and imagery.

I argue that self-knowledge of these states is possible because we have a special kind of access to them. This access takes the form of a relation of awareness, between a subject and the phenomenal properties of their current conscious states, which has certain epistemic and metaphysical features. This relation of awareness I call ‘acquaintance’. It is because we are aware of our current conscious states in this way that we are able to form judgements about them. These judgements, when properly justified, amount to self-knowledge.

My account is made in three stages. Firstly, I give an argument for the features of the acquaintance relation. I argue that these features constitute an awareness of the phenomenal properties of our conscious states which is epistemically secure enough to form the basis of self-knowledge. Secondly, I argue that our current conscious mental states are individuated by their phenomenal properties. Hence, by being acquainted with a state’s phenomenal properties, we can be aware of both what kind of mental state it is (its state type), and what the state represents (its content). This gives us all the information we need to be able to form judgements in which we accurately self-ascribe these states. Finally, I explain how it is that these self-ascriptions are justified. I argue that the resulting account - the Acquaintance Account - explains our first-person knowledge of current conscious states.

# Declaration

I, Bethany Ansell, declare that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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# Introduction

Self-knowledge, to give it its most basic definition, is the knowledge we have about a particular subject matter: our inner lives. This subject matter is vast. A great many things can reasonably be said to be features of our inner lives. We can distinguish (following Ursula Renz (2017)) three main categories:

1. *Occurrent conscious mental states* - the experiences we are having *right now*. Perceptual states such as visual and auditory experiences, tactile sensations, pains, daydreams, inner speech, and inner imagery all fall into this category.
2. *Standing propositional attitudes* - the class of cognitive states; our beliefs, hopes, intentions, desires, values, and other types of attitude. These are not occurrent (though can be if we call them into mind).
3. *Dispositional properties* - our personal characteristics; behaviour patterns, character traits, abilities, and limitations.

Though they differ greatly, what links all of these things is their status as *mental features* of a subject. It is this shared status which has served as both a categoriser and a delineator, separating this group theoretically from knowledge of other forms. Hence the umbrella term ‘self-knowledge’.

But it is not just the subject matter of self-knowledge which singles it out from the other kinds of knowledge that epistemologists seek to explain. Self-knowledge is also unique in that it comes in two perspectival forms: the first person, and the third person. There is a difference between the knowledge of one’s inner life acquired *from one’s own perspective*, and the knowledge that one might come to have about an inner life that isn’t one’s own. Contrast this with other kinds of knowledge - empirical or mathematical, say - in which there is no dual perspectival dimension to be explained.

So self-knowledge is unique in both its subject matter and its perspectival dimension. But this does not mean that there is only one theory which explains knowledge of all mental features from the first-person perspective. The sheer variety of states that can be considered ‘mental’, their differing characteristics and metaphysical statuses, points us away from a one-size-fits-all theory towards a pluralist approach to self-knowledge (Coliva, 2016).<sup>1</sup> The term ‘self-knowledge’ is therefore slightly misleading, and should really be appended by the *type* of self-knowledge one is concerned with. In this thesis I will be concerned with self-knowledge of states in the first of the abovementioned categories, from the first-person perspective; that is, self-knowledge of our current conscious mental states.

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<sup>1</sup> The history of self-knowledge also points towards a pluralist approach, with debates usually centring around one of the three aforementioned categories at any one time. The ancient Greeks, for example, were concerned largely with self-knowledge of dispositional properties (Renz, 2017, pp.13-14). Towards the latter end of the 20<sup>th</sup> theorists were concerned with self-knowledge of standing attitudes, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there has been a shift in concern to self-knowledge of occurrent conscious states. With the notable exception of Transparency theories (more on these in Ch.2), there has been an observable tendency to discuss each category in isolation.

Our current conscious mental life is ubiquitous. We are almost always in the grip of some conscious experience or another; when I walk along the street I am visually aware of the world around me, I can hear noises - birds, cars, people. I can feel the warmth of the sunshine or the chill of the wind. At the same time I might have some song 'in my head', or be in the midst of a daydream. I might have a headache; I might be blinded by the sun and see spots of light in my visual field. All of these things are examples of current conscious experiences.

We need to take care here to make a distinction. This is a distinction between the *object of a certain experience* - what the experience is an experience *of* - and the *experience itself as an object*. It is our first person knowledge of the latter that I wish to explain in this thesis. I am not concerned with the trees, birds, buildings, sun, or wind. I am concerned with our *experiences* of trees, birds, buildings, sun, and wind. I want to investigate exactly what we can know about these experiences, and explain how it is that we can know them.

To see what it is that needs to be explained, we should take a closer look at an instance of self-knowledge. Take my current conscious visual experience: looking out of my window right now, I can see - amongst other things - a blue sky. I seem to *know* that I am having this experience. I am able to form the judgement that '*I am currently having a visual experience of a blue sky*'. It is judgements of this kind that constitute self-knowledge of our current conscious states.

Such judgements seem to have certain properties, and an explication of these properties will provide the first step to explaining this kind of knowledge. First of all, the judgements we make about our current conscious experiences seem to be *immediate*. We do not arrive at these judgements after a process of inference, or reason our way to them via other pieces of knowledge; on the contrary, if we have a certain current conscious experience, there is something about the very having of this experience that

allows us to make judgements about it from the off. This leads us to our second property; arguably, immediacy points to the fact that such judgements are formed as the result of a *privileged process*. That is, they are arrived at via a unique, first-personal method. My judgement that *I* am currently having a visual experience of a blue sky is not arrived at in the same way as my judgement that *you* are currently having a visual experience of a blue sky. I have a privileged way of knowing about my own experiences that I don't have when it comes to knowing about the experiences of others.

The third feature of such judgements is that they are potentially *fallible*; that is, the judgements I make about my own current conscious experiences can be *incorrect*. The extent to which one can be wrong about one's own experiences will be discussed further in Chapter 6. Finally, such judgements are *limited* to certain features of the subject matter; that is, there are some features of our current conscious experiences that we cannot have first-person knowledge of. More on this in Chapter 5.

First-person knowledge of current conscious experiences therefore has certain features that need explaining. It is *immediate*, *privileged*, potentially *fallible*, and has certain *limits*. This is the starting point for any theory of this kind of self-knowledge. If one can explain how we arrive at judgements about our current conscious states which are true, justified, and have the aforementioned features, then one can explain self-knowledge.

*Acquaintance theories* of self-knowledge offer one such explanation of how we form these judgements. According to acquaintance theorists, the relation we stand in to our current conscious mental states (a relation which has come to be known as 'acquaintance') affords us a special kind of access to these states.<sup>2</sup> It is this special kind of access which forms the basis of the acquaintance theorist's account of self-knowledge. According to

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<sup>2</sup> See Russell (1911; 1912), Fumerton (1995; 2019), Bonjour (2003), Gertler (2012), Giustina (2018; forthcoming).

acquaintance theorists, this access allows us to form immediate, first-person privileged judgements about our current conscious states, and hence allows us to have self-knowledge. In this thesis I will develop and defend an acquaintance account.

Why acquaintance? After all, there are rival theories. *Transparency* accounts, for example, point to our awareness of things in the world as the basis of our ability to form these judgements.<sup>3</sup> And *Inner Sense* accounts posit a mechanism of internal sensing, which, when activated, ‘reads’ our conscious states and reliably produces the requisite judgements.<sup>4</sup> What does an account based on acquaintance have over theories of these other two kinds?

Primarily, I believe that an acquaintance theory provides the *best explanation* of our self-knowledge of current conscious states. An acquaintance theory can explain how we are able to form true, justified judgements with the aforementioned features, and it provides a *better* explanation of how we are able to do this than any of its rival accounts.

There are other reasons to favour acquaintance too. For one, an acquaintance account is parsimonious. It makes use of well-established principles and uncontroversial features of mentality in order to explain self-knowledge. It does not posit any new self-knowledge ‘mechanisms’ whose utility must be weighed against an explanation of their existence. It is also relatively intuitive; the picture of self-knowledge painted by the acquaintance theorist aligns itself with the naïve, pre-philosophical notions we have on the topic. Acquaintance theorists take the access we *already have* to our current conscious states - our conscious awareness - and claim that is enough to form the basis of our ability to know these states. Primarily, this is because of two things: the nature of this access, and the nature of these mental states. Once the full nature of this access and

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<sup>3</sup> See Evans (1982), Dretske (1995), Byrne (2018), Millar (2019).

<sup>4</sup> See Armstrong (1993), Lycan (1996).

these states - their epistemic and metaphysical features - is explicated, we shall see that it alone is enough to explain self-knowledge. We don't need anything else. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to explicate these things.

With this in mind, I am now in a position to introduce the main argument of this thesis.

This I shall call the *Master Argument*:

### The Master Argument

- P1** We have self-knowledge of current conscious mental states.
- P2** Our self-knowledge of our current conscious mental states takes the form of true, justified judgements with certain special features.
- P3** An explanation of how we form these judgements is an explanation of self-knowledge.
- P4** The acquaintance theory can explain how we form these judgements.
- P5** No other theory can better explain how we form these judgements.
- P6** We should accept a theory if it is the best explanation for some phenomena.

- 
- C** Therefore, the acquaintance theory explains self-knowledge of current conscious mental states.

We can see from this that the premises in need of support are P4 and P5. That is, we require an argument that the acquaintance theory can explain how we are able to have true, justified, immediate, first-person privileged judgements about our mental states, and we require an argument that no rival theories are able to better explain these



judgements. Throughout this thesis, by way of establishing support for P4, I will also give arguments which constitute a rejection of rival theories, hence, establishing support for P5.

With my primary aim being to establish the truth of these two premises, there will, of course, be related issues which go undiscussed. For example, there are debates about exactly which kinds of mental state fall under the remit of ‘current conscious experience’, but I will not be discussing the question of acquaintance’s scope in this thesis.<sup>5</sup> Nor will I say much about how *reliable* or *skilled* we are at gaining knowledge of this kind.<sup>6</sup> I will take it that we *can* and *do* have at least some knowledge of this kind, and it is the possibility of this knowledge which I am concerned to explain.

The following chapter-by-chapter overview will explain how I will proceed.

### *Chapter 1*

In the first chapter, I will establish the basis of the acquaintance account by answering the question ‘*What is Acquaintance?*’. I will begin by pinpointing the phenomenon to be explained, and tracing the use of the term ‘acquaintance’ back to its origins in the work of Bertrand Russell. Most contemporary acquaintance theorists are content to borrow the notion explicated by Russell, and indeed I will argue that the Russellian account - whilst not complete - gives us a strong starting point from which to get a grasp on what acquaintance actually is.

To give it its most basic definition, acquaintance is the relation of awareness that a subject stands in to their own mental states. Following Russell, I shall argue that this

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<sup>5</sup> For example, I will not address whether ‘cognitive states’ such as thoughts and desires fall into this category (that is, whether there is such thing as ‘cognitive phenomenology’).

<sup>6</sup> See Schwitzgebel (2011) for more on this.

relation has certain metaphysical and epistemic properties. These properties afford us an access to our own mental states which is epistemically secure enough to form the basis of self-knowledge. However, Russell and other acquaintance theorists neglect to give any proper argument *for* acquaintance having these properties. Historically, this failing has meant that acquaintance theories have been branded ‘mysterious’, and acquaintance theorists have been charged with employing a brute, unexplainable relation which conveniently meets their theory’s needs. In this chapter I defend the notion of acquaintance against such charges by providing an argument for the properties of acquaintance. My argument follows the form of an inference to the best explanation from the *epistemic* properties of acquaintance to its *metaphysical properties*. With the metaphysical properties established, the acquaintance theorist needs only establish that the epistemic properties are also present. This task will be undertaken in further chapters of the thesis.

## *Chapter 2*

With the acquaintance relation defined, the basis of the account is established. We have an awareness of our current conscious mental states (acquaintance) which is epistemically secure enough to form the basis of our self-ascriptions. The next step is to explain how we move from awareness of these states to ascriptions of them. This is the task of the second and third chapters.

I will argue that we are acquainted with the *phenomenal properties* of our current conscious states. Hence, an account of self-ascription must explain how we move from our awareness of these phenomenal properties to a self-ascription of a mental state. A typical self-ascription - such as ‘*I am having a visual experience of a blue sky*’ - has two aspects: in it, we ascribe the mental state’s *content* (its representing a *blue sky*), and we

ascribe the mental state's *type* (its being a *visual* experience). Hence, for acquaintance to form the basis of self-ascriptions, information about a state's *type* and *content* must be available in the phenomenal character of that state.

In Chapter 2, I will establish that a mental state's *type* is given in the phenomenology of that state. My argument will take the form of a rejection of the only available alternative account: transparency. I will argue that transparency theorists cannot explain self-knowledge of state type, and therefore there must be a phenomenal character - with which we are acquainted - which corresponds to state type.

### *Chapter 3*

In the Third Chapter I will continue the task of explaining self-ascriptions, this time turning my attention to self-ascription of *content*. The acquaintance theorist requires that information about a mental state's content can be acquired through awareness of its phenomenal character. This requires that there be some metaphysical relationship between phenomenology and content such that one constitutes the other or vice versa. This chapter will take the form of a review of the three main accounts of this relationship: separatism, representationalism, and phenomenal intentionality. I will assess each of these accounts against a set of criteria which will establish their ability to explain awareness of content, their compatibility with a phenomenology of state type, and finally their independent plausibility. From this, we will see that two varieties of the abovementioned theories are available to meet the needs of the acquaintance account: *mode intentionalism*, and weaker varieties of *phenomenal intentionality*. Moreover, I will show that there are reasons to think that varieties of these theories which *aren't* compatible with the needs of the acquaintance theory are not independently plausible. By appealing to either mode intentionalism or weak phenomenal intentionality, the acquaintance

theory can explain how awareness of phenomenal character gets us awareness of content, and hence explain how self-ascriptions are possible.

In the final section of this chapter I will consider an objection against the acquaintance theory from *content externalists*. I will argue that the acquaintance theory escapes the problems posed by content externalism because no viable externalist account can be motivated for the content of occurrent conscious states.

#### *Chapter 4*

With both the nature of acquaintance and our ability to self-ascribe conscious mental states explained, the acquaintance theorist must now explain how these ascriptions are *justified*. Chapter 4 will address the question of justification. The discussion in this chapter will centre around a well-known problem for the justification of perceptual and introspective judgements: the Myth of the Given. Roughly, the charge is that experience - conceived of as a brute, nonconceptual given - is not the sort of thing that can serve as evidence for our experiential judgements. The Myth of the Given presupposes two key claims; the claim that experience has *nonconceptual content*, and the claim that the justification of introspective judgements must be explained by an *access internalist* account. Thus, responses to the Myth of the Given can follow by rejecting either of these positions.

I will argue that solutions which reject the claim that experience has nonconceptual content cannot succeed. Either they make implausible claims about content, or they undermine access internalism. The key to avoiding the Myth of the Given - and to explaining how our introspective judgements are justified - therefore lies not in a rejection of nonconceptualism, but in a rejection of access internalism.

Access internalism, however, provides us with a much more intuitive explanation of justification than rival externalist accounts. Externalism should be avoided if possible. Given this, I will argue that we can distinguish between *strong* and *weak* varieties of access internalism. The Myth of the Given presupposes a strong variety, but a weak variety can be motivated by appeal to the subject's recognitional capacities. In the final section of this chapter I will propose such an account.

### *Chapter 5*

Chapters 1, 2, 3 & 4, with their explanation of acquaintance, self-ascriptions, and justification, thus constitute my acquaintance account of self-knowledge. In the final two chapters I will consider objections. The first of these will be the Problem of the Speckled Hen.

The Problem of the Speckled hen is a puzzle that arises from experiences of numerosity (standardly demonstrated by appeal to the number of speckles on a speckled hen). I will argue that experiences of this kind pose two issues for acquaintance accounts; the first of these is an issue for justification, and the second of these is a dilemma for the intentionalism that the acquaintance theorist relies upon to explain self-ascriptions. I will show that the acquaintance account I have developed has the means to overcome both of these issues. Firstly, the weak access internalist account based on recognitional capacities developed at the end of Chapter 4 avoids the problem that speckled hen experiences pose for justification. Secondly, the dilemma for intentionalism can be overcome as it is based on an incorrect account of the phenomenal character of speckled hen experiences. Once the correct account is given, the problem dissolves. Hence, speckled hens are not a problem for my acquaintance theory.

## *Chapter 6*

In the final Chapter, I will discuss the problem of *introspective error*. Introspective error occurs when we make first-person judgements about our current conscious states which turn out to be incorrect. The occurrence of introspective errors is not a problem for self-knowledge *per se* since self-knowledge is limited and potentially fallible. However, there are some types of introspective error which cause problems for acquaintance specifically. In particular, they threaten the truth of the epistemic claims made about the acquaintance relation in Chapter 1.

Following a review and analysis of the literature, I will identify the three types of introspective error which pose problems for acquaintance. For each of them, I will argue that their status as ‘errors’ is a mischaracterisation; that in fact, a correct description of the scenario in each case shows there to be no genuine error occurring, or at least no error that threatens the epistemic features of acquaintance. This will lead me to conclude that the acquaintance theory faces no unique problems from cases of introspective error.

## *Conclusion*

With the acquaintance account now fully developed, and objections responded to, I will revisit the Master Argument. I will show how the arguments throughout the thesis have established the truth of its premises 4 and 5, and hence the truth of its conclusion - the acquaintance theory. I will take stock of the significance of the arguments made throughout the thesis, which have consequences not just for the self-knowledge debate, but for wider issues in epistemology and the philosophy of mind.

## Chapter 1

# What is Acquaintance?

### 1. Introduction

In philosophy, the term ‘acquaintance’ has been used to mean several different things. A notion of ‘acquaintance’, in some meaning or another, has been invoked to play a number of roles. Aside from self-knowledge, acquaintance has been called upon in theories of reference, as the means by which we can have thoughts about objects (Evans, 1982; Russell, 1912; Pepp, 2019); in the epistemological project of foundationalism, as the means by which we can have foundationally justified knowledge (Bonjour, 1999; Fumerton, 1995; Feldman, 2004); and in theories of phenomenal concepts (Chalmers, 2003; Gertler, 2001). It has also been called upon as a potential answer to classic philosophical problems such as Jackson’s (1982) Mary in the Black and White Room argument.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mary gains knowledge by acquaintance of the colour red when she leaves the room, whereas before she had only knowledge by description.

It may not be immediately clear that the word ‘acquaintance’, in each of these examples, does not consistently refer to one single phenomenon. This is probably because, in each of these uses, we also hit upon a similarity in the use of the term which is key to understanding it. In each of the aforementioned debates, acquaintance plays a clear role; it is a way of relating the subject to things that they can know, in a way that has a bearing on their ability to know. Its role is epistemic: According to those who employ it in theories of reference, acquaintance relates us to objects and is thus the means by which we can have thoughts about these objects. For those who employ it in epistemic foundationalism, acquaintance relates us to mental states and contributes to the foundational justification of our beliefs about these states. For those who employ it in self-knowledge, acquaintance relates us to our experiences in a way which explains our knowledge of them.

For the purposes of this thesis I will be ignoring uses of the term ‘acquaintance’ that don’t apply to knowledge of our current mental states. Henceforth, unless otherwise stated, where I use the term ‘acquaintance’, I will mean the term as it is used in the debate on self-knowledge (and occasionally also the debate on epistemic foundationalism). I will not be talking of acquaintance as the means by which we are related to, say, physical objects in the world.

According to acquaintance theorists of self-knowledge, acquaintance gives us access to our mental states in a way that allows us to have knowledge of them. We are acquainted with our mental states, and this is why we can know them. For example, I am acquainted with my visual experience of, say, the flowers in front of me, and this is what allows me to know I’m having a visual experience as of some flowers. But what does it mean to be acquainted with a mental state? Is there really any such thing as



acquaintance? And if so, what are its features? These are the questions I will address in this chapter.

## 2. The Foundations of Acquaintance

A good place to begin when trying to get a grasp on acquaintance is with the work of Bertrand Russell. Russell was arguably the first person to make serious use of the notion of acquaintance. His writings on the topic are some of the most detailed and most informative, and many contemporary advocates of acquaintance are content to borrow his account for their own purposes without making too many amendments. As such, it will be useful to give a brief overview of the Russellian notion of acquaintance here - though I will be discussing Russell's account in much more detail later on in this chapter.

For Russell, acquaintance is a *relation*. It stands between a subject and certain types of object. For Russell, it is because the subject stands in *this relation to these objects* that they are able to know about and think about such objects.

What is it about this relation that, according to Russell, allows us to know and think about objects? First of all, it is because it is a relation of *awareness*. It is because we are *aware* of these objects that we are able to know and think about them. As Russell says:

We shall say that we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly *aware*, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths.

(Russell, 1912, p.24) [emphasis added]

But what is so special about this relation of awareness? After all, we are aware of many things, but not everything which we are aware of can we also be said to be acquainted with. For an answer to this, we can look again to the above quote: Russell claims that

the type of awareness we call acquaintance is *direct*. Here, ‘direct’ should be taken in a *metaphysical* sense, as meaning that we are related in a metaphysically direct way to the thing we are aware of. In other words, there is no other process or object which stands in between the subject and the thing they are acquainted with; the very object of our awareness is the thing we are related to.

According to Russell, this awareness also has an epistemic feature: *indubitability*. Russell argues that it is “not possible to doubt” the things with which we are acquainted (*ibid.*, p.26). Here, then, we have a rough characterisation of acquaintance, and one which has served as the basis for many contemporary theories which employ it. Acquaintance is a relation of awareness which is *metaphysically direct* and *indubitable*.

With this in mind, we can now begin to understand how acquaintance is used in theories of self-knowledge. However, to jump straight from the Russellian origins to contemporary acquaintance accounts is to ignore a key period in the history of acquaintance: its use in *epistemic foundationalism*. In order to better understand the rationale of acquaintance theories of self-knowledge, we must first look to see how they have risen out of theories of epistemic foundationalism.

In epistemology, the quest to provide an answer to Agrippa’s Trilemma - or the problem of justification - has traditionally thrown up two answers: foundationalism on the one hand, and coherentism on the other (Comestaña & Klein, 2019).<sup>2</sup>

Foundationalists argue that justificatory chains of belief will always have an end point - a foundation - involving a foundational belief. That is, a belief which relies on no other beliefs or knowledge in order for it to be justified. Purported examples of such

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Agrippa’s Trilemma’ is the problem that arises when we try to explain how our empirical beliefs are justified. If they are justified by appeal to other beliefs, then in order to explain how these *other* beliefs are justified we face either a regress or circularity. On the other hand, if no other beliefs are appealed to, then our empirical beliefs are without justification at all.

foundational beliefs are the beliefs we have about our current mental states, such as the belief that I am in pain right now, or a belief about my current visual experience.

Foundationalists argue that it is because we are *acquainted* with our current mental states that our foundational beliefs are justified.<sup>3</sup>

According to proponents of foundationalism, acquaintance can be characterised in the Russellian way explicated above; as a metaphysically direct, indubitable relation of awareness. This relation stands between the subject and their own mental states, and is the reason we can have foundationally justified beliefs about these states. First of all, we are aware of these states *directly*, meaning that, we needn't be aware of anything else in order to be aware of them. Secondly, we are aware of them *indubitably*, meaning the object of our awareness cannot be doubted. The foundationalist argues that, because our awareness has these properties, it can serve as the justification for beliefs based upon it. For beliefs about our current conscious mental states, no other beliefs or pieces of knowledge are required for justification. Acquaintance alone will suffice. Hence, acquaintance explains how we can have foundational beliefs.

We can now see the origins of the acquaintance theory of self-knowledge in the project of epistemic foundationalism. Unlike foundationalists, however, acquaintance theorists of self-knowledge bracket the question of whether acquaintance can be the basis of a foundation for *all* knowledge. Instead, they are focussed just on the question of whether acquaintance can be the basis of our *self*-knowledge - that is, our first-person knowledge of current conscious states.

Acquaintance is often appealed to, sometimes described, but rarely is it ever explained.

What I mean by this is that theorists are content to employ acquaintance, tell us what it might 'look like', but rarely do they ever give us any argument for its existence. In fact

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<sup>3</sup> See Bonjour (1999), Feldman (2004), Fumerton (1995; 2019).

many claim that it *can't* be explained - at least not in any way that would be satisfactory to a sceptic or critic of the notion. The majority of the detail in acquaintance accounts of self-knowledge is given to the issue of justification – explaining how beliefs based on acquaintance are justified. Arguments for acquaintance *itself* are often brushed over or missing entirely. In fact, since Russell's writings on acquaintance, little has said in any great detail about acquaintance itself.<sup>4</sup> The majority position amongst contemporary theorists is to claim that acquaintance is a primitive, or brute, unanalysable relation of awareness, usually between a subject and their mental states (Fumerton, 1995; Fales, 1996). Whilst it seems reasonable to say that not everything can be analysed, it is fair to say that so many theorists taking this position on acquaintance has led to it being regarded with suspicion. It is all too easy to plug a gap in one's theory with something of which we can only say of it that it is brute and unanalysable. As such, the purported mystery of the acquaintance relation does its advocates no favours. It is the purpose of this chapter, then, to demystify acquaintance, firstly with regards to its features, and secondly with regards to its existence.

### 3. What Acquaintance is Not

In order to get to the heart of what I think acquaintance *is*, it will be instructive to look at what I think acquaintance definitely *isn't*. From this, we will be able to make more sense of my claims about acquaintance later in the chapter. I will discuss two accounts which make use of the notion of acquaintance. Both, I argue, employ the notion incorrectly (and thus unsuccessfully) for the purposes of an account of self-knowledge.

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<sup>4</sup> Though a recent volume of essays edited by Knowles & Raleigh (2019), has helped to rectify this matter somewhat.

### 3.1 Gertler's Renewed Acquaintance Account

In her 2012 paper “Renewed Acquaintance”, Brie Gertler develops an acquaintance account of self-knowledge. In contrast to other contemporary accounts, Gertler says a good amount about what she takes acquaintance to actually be. This makes her account a good starting point for teasing out the exact nature of acquaintance.

To begin with, Gertler spells out what she takes acquaintance to mean. Her conception is largely Russellian. She agrees with the Russellian claim that acquaintance is a form of awareness that is metaphysically direct:

When I am acquainted with an object, my awareness of that object is epistemically direct: it is noninferential and does not epistemically depend on an awareness of anything else. My awareness is also *metaphysically direct*: *there is no object, fact, event, or process that mediates my access to the object.* (Gertler, 2012, p.95) [emphasis added]

Gertler is also clear that she takes acquaintance to be a type of relation. On the Russellian account, acquaintance is taken to be a type of relation too, but where Gertler and Russell differ is in what they take the *relata* of this relation to be. For Russell, acquaintance is a relation that holds between a *subject* and an object (in our case, this object is a mental state). For Gertler, acquaintance is a relation that holds between a *judgement* and the mental state which that judgement is about:

On Russell's view, acquaintance is a relation between subjects and things known ... but because the acquaintance approach takes knowledge of phenomenal states to be knowledge of truths rather than knowledge of things, on that approach *the salient direct relation obtains between a judgment*—such as the judgment I am experiencing pain—*and the mental event that is its truthmaker*, e.g., the pain experience itself. (ibid., p.96) [emphasis added]

For Gertler, the reason a direct relation must hold between a *judgement* and the mental state it is about is because of an (apparent) feature of self-knowledge itself: its epistemic strength. It is often thought that self-knowledge is epistemically more secure than other types of knowledge; that it is less open to doubt and error than other types of knowledge (Gertler, 2011, ch.3). To account for these purported features of self-knowledge, Gertler claims that the judgements we make about our mental states must be directly related to the mental states that make these judgements true (the thought being that any *indirect* relation opens up the possibility of doubt and error). Hence, according to Gertler, acquaintance is a relation between judgements and mental states which furnishes our introspective judgements with their unique epistemic security.

I see something amiss with this account of acquaintance. According to Gertler, acquaintance is a metaphysically direct relation of *awareness* that holds between a judgement and the mental state that judgement is about. But it seems that Gertler is positing awareness of something that doesn't have awareness: judgement. Judgements aren't aware of anything, *subjects* are. So on Gertler's account, either acquaintance is not a relation of awareness, or she is concerned with a *different* kind of relation to the one we are interested in in this chapter.

I believe we have reason to think that the mistake lies in the latter. Whilst it may be the case that a relation holds between judgements and the mental states they are about, to characterise this relation as awareness is clearly wrong. This relation between judgements and mental states perhaps has some bearing on the truth of the judgement, or the judgement's justification (as Gertler indeed argues it does), but what it does not explain is how we are aware of those mental states in the first place.

One might argue in response to this that judgement *is* required for awareness of our mental states; that the only way we are able to attend to our mental states is by judging

things of them. Thus, Gertler is correct to say that acquaintance is the relation of awareness between judgements and mental states. However, I do not think this response can work. We do indeed make judgments about our mental states - for example, I can judge that I am having a visual experience as of an orange notebook, or I can judge that I have a pain in my foot. But there is a strong case to be made that not all introspection requires judgement. That we do, first and foremost, have a non-judgemental form of awareness of our mental states. It seems I am able to introspect on my current conscious experiences without coming to any conclusions about them. I can probe and direct my attention, taking in my experiences and their features without forming judgements about these states or features. I can investigate the blurriness of my visual experience without judging that '*my visual experience is blurry*'. I can investigate the intensity of the pain in my foot without judging that '*there is a dull pain in my foot*'. Of course, this claim is based largely in what it phenomenally feels like for me; it feels to me as if I can introspect without judging anything of my experience, without characterising it in any way. One might respond that claims about the phenomenology of one's experience can easily be disputed. It might feel to *me* that I can introspect without judgement, but it might feel to *somebody else* as if they are always classifying their experiences when they introspect, always judging something of them. We cannot take one's introspective reports as fact.

However, there are other, non-phenomenological reasons as to why we should believe ourselves to have a non-judgemental introspective capacity. Giustina (2019) argues that a non-judgemental form of introspection is the only plausible explanation for our ability to acquire phenomenal concepts (concepts pertaining to the phenomenal features of our experiences). And Giustina and Kriegel (2017) argue that it is possible to introspect mental states for which we do not possess the concepts required to classify them in judgement (for example, I can introspect my taste experience when drinking kombucha

even if I have never heard of kombucha before, and even if nobody tells me that what I am drinking is kombucha). A further reason to believe that we can non-judgementally introspect is the widely accepted distinction in perception between *seeing* and *seeing that* - where *seeing that* involves making a judgement, and merely *seeing* does not (Dretske, 1969). If an analogy can be drawn between introspection and perception, then perhaps there is an analogous distinction to *seeing* / *seeing that* in introspection.<sup>5</sup> It seems, therefore, that there are multiple reasons to think that we have a non-judgemental form of awareness of our mental states.

Moreover, intuitively, it seems that this non-judgemental awareness is connected to our ability to make rational first-person judgements about our mental states. That is, it is *because* of this non-judgemental awareness that we are able to form judgements about our mental states. It is because I am aware of the pain in my foot that I am able to classify this experience and rationally judge '*I have a pain in my foot*'; it is because I am aware of visual blurriness that I am able to rationally judge '*my visual experience is blurry*'. It seems that self-knowledge of conscious mental states requires us to possess a non-judgemental awareness of them before we are even able to form judgements about them. Gertler's account explains the judgement stage, but it presupposes the awareness stage. Yet it is this first stage that needs explaining before we can go on to figure out the role of judgement in self-knowledge. So, whilst Gertler's account gives us an explanation of *something*, it is not the phenomenon we are looking to explain in this chapter. What we are looking to explain is a subject's non-judgemental awareness of their own mental states.

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<sup>5</sup> Though one has to be careful here. The theory which typically takes introspection to be analogous to perception is the Inner Sense theory (Armstrong, 1993; Lycan, 1996). By saying that introspection is analogous to perception with regards to the seeing/seeing that distinction, I am not endorsing the inner sense theory. I do not wish to endorse that theory here.



### 3.2 Giustina's Integration Account

Before I go on, I must deal with one more account which I take to misapply the label of acquaintance. This is Anna Giustina's 'integration account'. In her account of non-judgemental introspection (which she calls 'primitive introspection'), Giustina is concerned with explicating the metaphysical relationship between the mental state we are in when we are *performing* an act of introspection, and the mental state we are trying to introspect (Giustina, 2018, p.116). That there is any difference between these two states may seem surprising; surely when we are performing an act of introspection, the state we are in *just is* the state we are trying to introspect? Giustina argues that this is not so, and points to the phenomenon of *phenomenal modification* to show this (ibid., p.106; p.111).

Phenomenal modification is the change in your phenomenology that occurs when you undertake an act of introspection. It occurs due to the shift in attention we perform when we introspect. In our everyday, pre-reflective, conscious lives, we are generally paying attention not to our mental states, but to the objects in the world. However, when we introspect, we shift our attention from the things in the world to the features of mental states themselves. In other words, introspection is not the default mode for our attentive mechanisms.

When we shift our attention, we make certain things in our experience less salient, and certain things more salient. For example, my attention is now focussed on the words appearing on my computer screen as I type, but I can *shift* my attention (without moving my eyes, and whilst still focussing on the words) to the outer edges of my visual field. This makes the objects I am seeing in the periphery of my visual field - the bicycle, the bunch of flowers - appear to me with increased salience. At the same time, it makes the

words on the screen I am focussing on appear less salient. Moreover, doing this *changes* how my experience feels for me, it changes the phenomenology of my experience. So shifting my attention alters the phenomenology of my experience.

When we shift our attention from the things we are experiencing to experience *itself*, we can be said to be introspecting. This attentional shift will also come with an accompanying modification in the phenomenology of our current mental state. When we shift our attention from the world to our experiences, Giustina takes it that we are in an *introspective state*. An introspective state, then, is a mental state where the conscious attention of the subject is directed towards a mental state itself. In some sense, then, the original mental state - the one we wanted to introspect - makes up a *part* of this attentionally shifted introspected state. It is the exact metaphysical relationship between the original target mental state and the attentionally shifted introspective state that Giustina wants to explain.

Giustina argues that this relationship is a special kind of constitution called *integration*. The target mental state is *integrated* into the introspective state (where integration entails that the target state is a proper part of the introspective state) and inherits some but not all of the introspective state's properties.<sup>6</sup> Integration, Giustina argues, is what is meant by acquaintance (*ibid.*, p.131).

Whilst Giustina draws attention to some important features of introspection (the phenomenal modification and the attentional shift) which need explaining, I do not take the phenomenon she labels as acquaintance to be the thing I am trying to explain in this chapter. What happens to a mental state when it is introspected, the purported relationship between the introspective and introspected state, even the issue of whether or not there is any relationship to be explained - these are all important things to be

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<sup>6</sup> The exact details of this account are not important for my purposes.

worked out in an account of introspection. But what I am concerned with in this chapter is the means by which the *subject is aware of these mental states in the first place*, not the metaphysical relationship between their introspected and introspecting mental states. It is this awareness which I am calling 'acquaintance'.

From this discussion of what acquaintance is not, it is now, hopefully, clearer to see what I think acquaintance is - or at least what it is called upon to explain. What I hope to explain by appeal to acquaintance is the non-judgemental awareness we have of our own conscious mental states.

#### 4. Acquaintance as Awareness

There are very many things of which it can be said that I am, in some sense, aware. I am aware of the coldness in my feet. I am aware of the thoughts going through my mind. I am aware of the lamp on the table at the edge of my field of vision. I am aware of the children walking across the street, of the music in my headphones. I am aware of what other people think of me. These instances of awareness do not all consist in the same thing. They are reached by different mechanisms, they are 'of' very different objects, and plausibly, because of this, they will have very different features. For example, in the first two cases mentioned above, I exhibit an awareness of my own current mental states: the sensation in my foot, my current thoughts. In the third, fourth and fifth cases - the instances of my awareness of the lamp, the children, and the music - I am aware of things in the world via my perceptual mechanisms. In the final case, I am aware of another person's mental states, perhaps via inferences made from their behaviour, or through testimony. In each of these cases, we are aware of something. But what this awareness consists in is not the same in each case.

I say this to be clear that I want to distinguish, in several ways, the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states from the awareness we have of other things. As I have said, one difference between the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states and, for example, the awareness we have of the events happening in the news, or the awareness we have of another person's thoughts, is the way this awareness is arrived at in each case. I shall call this the difference in the *route to awareness*.

The route to awareness is not the only difference between the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states and the awareness we have of other things. A further difference lies in the epistemology of this awareness; in what epistemic features it has, and what epistemic roles it plays. I shall call this the difference in the *epistemology of awareness*.

Plausibly, the *route to awareness* has an impact on the *epistemology of awareness*. That is, the way in which you become aware of something has an effect on the epistemic features of the awareness you have, and the epistemic roles it can play. This is evident just by examining an obvious case like the following. Consider a tree that has fallen across the road. I become aware of this situation because I am out walking, and come across the tree fallen across the road. In this case, my *route to awareness* of this situation is perception. I see for myself that the tree has fallen across the road. It is possible, however, that I could become aware of this situation in a different way. Perhaps my flatmate tells me she had to cycle the long way home from work because there was a tree that had fallen in the road, or perhaps I hear it on the local radio traffic updates. In this case, my *route to awareness* is testimony, the testimony of my flatmate or of the radio presenter. Accordingly, the epistemic features of this awareness will be different, too. It may be that the knowledge that I have based on the awareness arrived at via testimony is more open to doubt than knowledge based on the awareness arrived at via

perception. And in the case of the awareness gained via perception, this seems *immediate*, too. It is not inferred, like the awareness gained via testimony is. This is a very crude overview, but one which hopefully shows the impact that different routes to awareness appear to have on the epistemic features of that awareness.

Returning to the case of awareness of our current conscious mental states, where we are unsure what this route to awareness might ‘look like’, we could investigate the epistemic features and work backwards. We could ask, ‘given that my awareness of my current conscious mental states has *these* epistemic features, what could the route to awareness look like to allow this?’. Of course, that our awareness of our current conscious mental states has some given set of epistemic features rather than another does not itself show that the *reason* it has these features is because of the route to awareness. To establish the connection between the two requires further argument. It is these two tasks that I will undertake in the next two sub-sections. In section 4.1 I will give an account of the epistemic features of the awareness we have of our conscious mental states. I will then give an account of the route to awareness that follows given these features. Taken together, the epistemic features and the route to awareness will constitute a complete account of the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states. This awareness I will call ‘acquaintance’. Indeed, in developing these accounts I will draw on the notion of acquaintance originally developed by Russell. In section 4.2, I will argue that the connection between the route to awareness and the epistemic features of awareness can be argued for via inference to the best explanation.

## 4.1 Epistemic Features of Awareness and Routes to Awareness

In this sub-section I will further investigate, and give an account of, two things. Firstly, the epistemic features of our awareness of our current conscious mental states.

Secondly, the route to awareness which is implied as a result of these.

My account of awareness of current conscious mental states (from here on in I will mainly just be using the term ‘awareness’ to mean ‘awareness of current conscious mental states’) will draw strongly on the notion of acquaintance originally developed by Russell. Hence, it will be necessary to head a little deeper into Russell’s account than was originally ventured in the earlier section of this chapter. I will begin by giving an overview of Russell’s claims on the epistemic features of this awareness. I will largely accept these claims, though will offer some amendments where I see there to be problems with the originals. I will then go on to discuss Russell’s claims about the metaphysical features of this awareness, which we can take as his account of the route to awareness. Again I will accept these claims, albeit with some minor clarifications. In section 4.2 I will present my argument for the explanatory connection between these metaphysical and epistemological features. The argument will take the form of an inference to the best explanation in which I argue that the best explanation for the given epistemic features of awareness are the given metaphysical features. For the purposes of this argument in this chapter, I shall be assuming the truth of the epistemic claims I am about to make. However, I will cover some preliminary reasons as to why they should be accepted, and will argue for them fully later in the thesis (in Chapters 2, 3, & 6).

### 4.1.1 Epistemology of Awareness

We are now in a position to investigate the epistemic features of the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states. As I have said above, I will be drawing on the Russellian account of such awareness, as I believe this to be closest to the notion of acquaintance we are trying to demystify and explain in this chapter. Perhaps the best place to start with Russell's epistemic account is by revisiting the following quote:

We shall say that we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths.

(Russell, 1912, p.25)

Before we go any further I should explain what I take Russell to mean by 'directly aware'. By talking of 'direct awareness' rather than mere 'awareness', Russell seems to be noting the possibility I highlighted in the previous section: that there are very many things of which we can be aware, and that our awareness of these things does not always come via the same route, or have the same features, in each case. 'Direct awareness' is thus Russell's term for a particular type of awareness; it is his term for the awareness he thinks we have of a special class of objects. The things belonging to this class of objects, according to Russell, are various. They include (in his terminology): "sense-data", "memory", "introspections", "the self", and "universals" (ibid., pp.26-27).<sup>7</sup> According to Russell, our awareness of all of these things has the same epistemic features, and the same metaphysical features. It is this category to which I take awareness of our current conscious mental states to belong.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Proops (2011, p.166) calls the class of objects of which we are directly aware 'Russellian Objects'.

<sup>8</sup> Whilst I take awareness of current conscious mental states to be in this category of things which Russell claims we are 'directly aware', I will remain neutral on whether our awareness of any of the other things Russell mentions truly falls into this category.

Back to the quote. When considering the epistemology of awareness that Russell wishes to highlight in this quote, we should start with the following phrase: “aware[ness], without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths” (ibid., p.25). I take this to mean that we require no prior knowledge of any other thing in order to be aware of the object we are aware of. Nor are we aware of it by inference from something else we are aware of (unlike, say our awareness of another person’s mental states, which is sometimes inferred from our awareness of their behaviour). The awareness we have, then, is *immediate*. As Russell says, the objects of this awareness are “things of which I am *immediately* conscious ... things *immediately* known to me” (ibid.) [emphasis added].<sup>9</sup> Here, then, we have the first epistemic feature of awareness:

**IMMEDIACY:** *this awareness is immediate in the sense that it is not inferred, and it requires no prior knowledge or awareness of anything else.*<sup>10</sup>

The second epistemic feature of this type of awareness, for Russell, is *indubitability*.

Russell argues that the things of which we are ‘directly aware’ cannot be doubted. For example, when discussing his current awareness of a table, he says:

We have seen that it is possible, without absurdity, to doubt whether there is a table at all, whereas it is not possible to doubt the sense-data (ibid., p.26).

There is a vagueness in the second use of the word ‘doubt’ here. When Russell says it is not possible to doubt the sense-data, it is not clear whether he means that it is not possible to doubt that the sense-data *exist*, or that it is not possible to doubt that the

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<sup>9</sup> Note that Russell makes a distinction between two senses of the term ‘knowledge’: knowledge of *truths* and knowledge of *things* (Russell, 1912, p.63). Knowledge of truths consists in propositional, conceptually articulated beliefs. Knowledge of things does not. It is a more basic, fundamental form of knowledge. It is this latter type of knowledge which Russell is referring to when he speaks of “things immediately known to me” in the above quote.

<sup>10</sup> Note: this sense of immediacy is not to be conflated with the sense of immediacy defined in the introduction to this thesis. The latter concerns a feature of *self-knowledge*, not awareness, and hence has a different meaning.



sense-data *are the way they appear to you*. Presumably to endorse the latter claim is also to endorse the former claim, but not vice versa. It could be the case that I can't doubt that something exists, but I could doubt that it is the way it appears to me. Whereas it couldn't be the case that I couldn't doubt that something is the way it appears to me, but I could doubt that it exists. There is a third combination too; presumably if you *can* doubt that something exists, you can also doubt that it is the way it appears to you (since it appears to you as existing, when it's possible that it might not be). For clarification, I believe that Russell's use of the word 'doubt' in the above quotation refers to an indubitability of existence. That is, when we are aware of some sense-data, we cannot doubt that these sense-data exist. He also makes similar claims about indubitability of existence elsewhere, saying, "If I am acquainted with a thing ... my acquaintance gives me the knowledge that it exists" (ibid., p.23).

However, I also believe that Russell endorses indubitability of appearance, too. That is, he believes that we cannot doubt that the things we are acquainted with are the way they appear to us. My argument for this rests on the claim Russell makes about the *perfection and completeness* of direct awareness.

Russell's perfection and completeness claim concerns how much of the object of awareness is revealed to us in our being aware of it. According to Russell, when we are directly aware of an object, the *whole object* is revealed to us. There are no further aspects of it, or sides to it, of which we could also be aware but currently aren't. Ian Proops calls the perfection and completeness claim the Principle of Full Disclosure:

When a subject, S, is acquainted (in Russell's technical sense of that term) with an object x, S is acquainted with every part of x. (Proops, 2011, p.152)

We see Russell endorsing the Principle of Full Disclosure. Here, he is speaking of his awareness of the sense-data which make up the appearance of a table's colour. He says:

I know the colour perfectly and completely when I see it, and no further knowledge of it itself is even theoretically possible. (ibid., p.25)<sup>11</sup>

Contrast this with, say, your visual perceptual awareness of the table itself. The object of which I am aware - the table - is not completely revealed to me in my being visually aware of it. There is always more that I could know. Presuming I am stood above the tabletop, I am not aware of the underside of it. Perhaps from the angle I am looking from, one of the back legs is obscured, so I'm not aware of that either.<sup>12</sup> There is no way I could be visually aware of every aspect of the table itself. This would require viewing it from all angles at once. Therefore, the awareness we have of it is not, in Russell's sense, direct.

The objects of which we are directly aware have no undersides, no parts hidden from view. There are no bits of them missing from our awareness. It is because of this that our awareness of them is perfect and complete.

Hence, we arrive at indubitability of appearance: since there are no parts of the object of which we are not aware, we cannot sensibly judge that there are any aspects *missing* from the appearance of the object - aspects that the object has but the appearance of it doesn't. My visual experience of a red apple does not have any further 'sides' which go above and beyond the way it appears me. I cannot peek around the corner of my mental state to see what it appears like from the other side, whereas I can peek around the corner of the table to see what it appears like from the other side. My visual experience has no corner, no other side. The way it appears to me is the way it really, wholly is.

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<sup>11</sup> Again, the terms 'know' and 'knowledge' here are to be taken in the sense of knowledge of *things*. They refer to this basic, fundamental type of knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> At least not *visually*, the table might be 'anticipated' as having back leg, and an underside, but I am not aware of these in the same way that I am aware of its front-facing side (cf. Husserl, 1931, p.44). Certainly this doesn't amount to an awareness of the object that is 'perfect', or 'complete', if the mind has to do some of the filling in.

One might point to the possibility of making incorrect first-person judgements about our experiences as a potential objection here. For example, I may *characterise* the colour that my experience presents as ‘pink’, even though the experience presents the colour red. Is this not a case of the way an experience appears to me deviating from the way it is in reality? Russell would argue no.<sup>13</sup> For Russell, this is to conflate direct awareness with judgement. In judgement, error is possible, whereas in direct awareness it is not. In the following quotation, Russell explains the difference between the kind of knowledge gained via making judgements (knowledge of truths), and the kind of knowledge gained via direct awareness (knowledge of things):

Knowledge of truths raises a problem which does not arise in regard to knowledge of things, namely the problem of error ... this problem does not arise with regard to acquaintance. (ibid., p.63)

Similarly, he says elsewhere:

There is no positive state of mind which can be described as erroneous knowledge of things ... whatever we are acquainted with must be something; *we may draw wrong inferences from our acquaintance, but the acquaintance itself cannot be deceptive.* (ibid., p.69)  
[emphasis added]

So with regards to the appearance of objects of which we are directly aware, whilst we may make false judgements based on these appearances, the appearances themselves cannot make false claims. Hence, for Russell, direct awareness is indubitable with regards to appearance.

We are now in a position to state Russell’s second claim about the epistemology of (direct) awareness:

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<sup>13</sup> As would others. See Wishon (2016), Giustina and Kriegel (2017).

**INDUBITABILITY:** *it is impossible to doubt that the object of your awareness exists, and it is impossible to doubt that it is the way it appears to you.*

Along with IMMEDIACY, this claim constitutes Russell's account of the epistemology of (direct) awareness. For Russell, if we have awareness of an object which is immediate and indubitable then we have direct awareness of that object.

As I briefly mentioned above, there are various kinds of objects of which Russell thinks we are directly aware. These include (in his terminology) sense-data, memory, introspections, the self, and universals. Our awareness of all of these things, according to Russell, is immediate and indubitable. It is not my project in this chapter or this thesis to defend the claim of direct awareness with respect to any of these objects. As I have said, I will remain neutral on whether any of these things firstly exist, and secondly, can truly be objects of direct awareness. My concern in this thesis is only with our current conscious mental states. I will be arguing that the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states is indeed immediate and indubitable, and is thus, in Russell's sense, direct awareness.

To summarise, I have now given an overview of a Russellian account of the epistemology of the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states. On this view, the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states is *immediate* and *indubitable* in the above-defined senses. There are now two tasks which must be completed for the purposes of establishing the basis of the acquaintance account: We must show that the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states *really does* have these epistemic features. And we must show that the reason it has these epistemic features is because of the metaphysical features which constitute the 'route to awareness'. I do not propose to wholly tackle the first task in this chapter. Showing awareness of current conscious mental states to be immediate, indubitable, and perfect

and complete will be, in part, the aim of several of the other chapters in this thesis. Because of this, the ensuing arguments in the rest of this chapter will be dependent, for their success, on the success of arguments later in the thesis. In the remainder of this chapter I will be assuming that the immediacy and indubitability claims are true in order to develop my argument for acquaintance. The next step in developing that argument is to give an account of the route to awareness which corresponds with the epistemology of awareness just outlined.

#### 4.1.2 Route to Awareness: The Metaphysical Features

Now that I have given an account of the epistemic features of awareness, we can ask the following question: given that our awareness of our current conscious mental states is *immediate* and *indubitable*, what must the route to awareness ‘look like’ if it is to explain these features?

Again, we can turn to Russell for an account. Russell makes several claims about the route to awareness in order to explain his claims about the epistemology of awareness. For Russell, what we have been calling the ‘route to awareness’ is actually just the metaphysical features of the awareness in question. Hence, he believes that the metaphysical features of our awareness of current conscious mental states can explain its epistemic features.

What are these metaphysical features? And how do they relate to the epistemic features? For Russell, awareness has the epistemic features it has because we stand in a *direct cognitive relation* to the object of our awareness:

I shall say that I am acquainted with an object when I have a *direct cognitive relation* to that object, i.e., when I am directly aware of the object *itself*. (Russell, 1911, p.108) [emphasis added].

There are two things to note here. First is the notion of a ‘direct cognitive relation’, and second is that what we are aware of is the ‘object itself’. Let us begin with the first. It is clear from this that Russell thinks of direct awareness as a *relation* which the subject bears to an object. But that in itself doesn’t tell us much. There are many relations which a subject can bear to things: I can bear the relation of ‘being taller than’ to my mother, I can bear the relation of ‘sitting on’ to this chair, I can even - as I said at the beginning of section 4 - bear the relation of ‘being aware of’ to non-mental things. What is it about this particular *type* of ‘being aware of’ relation that plausibly confers immediacy and indubitability on my awareness? This is where Russell’s characterisation of the relation as *direct*, and *cognitive* come in.

Russell says:

When I speak of a *cognitive* relation here, I do not mean the sort of relation which constitutes judgement, but the sort which *constitutes presentation*. That is, to say that S has acquaintance with O is essentially the same thing as to say that O is *presented to* S. (ibid.) [emphasis added]<sup>14</sup>

Here, Russell is firstly ruling out the ordinary sense in which we would take something to be ‘cognitive’; as involving judgement. For Russell, the relation of ‘being aware of’ which we are concerned with here does not involve our making a judgement about an object.<sup>15</sup> Instead, what this relation amounts to is a *presentation* of this object. When I am

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<sup>14</sup> To put this in terms that we would more standardly use regarding relations today, we can say that the relation of acquaintance is the *converse* of the relation of presentation (Russell, 1911, p.108; Proops, 2014, p.782).

<sup>15</sup> Russell takes judgement to be a different kind of relation to direct awareness. The key difference has to do with the number of ‘constituents’ of the relation. Where direct awareness holds between two constituents (the subject and the object), judgement holds between at least three (between the subject and

immediately aware of an object, this object is presented to me; it is given to me. The object thus bears the relation of 'being presented' to the subject.

So this is what Russell means by 'cognitive' in his claim that awareness is a 'direct, cognitive relation'. What does he mean by 'direct'? When Russell uses the phrase 'direct, cognitive relation', it is a metaphysical sense of 'direct' to which he is referring.

The cognitive relation is metaphysically direct in the sense that there is no other thing to which we need to be related in order to be aware of our target object. A helpful way to illustrate this is to look at the theory of indirect realism in perception. Standardly, indirect realists argue that when we are perceiving the world, we are only *indirectly* aware of the things in the world. What we are *directly* aware of is a metaphysical intermediary - sense-data, or mental states (depending on your view on the metaphysics of experience). It is by virtue of our metaphysically direct awareness of these things that we can be aware of the physical world. Hence our awareness of the physical world is only indirect. Things with which we are *directly* aware, on the other hand, require no such metaphysical intermediary. To use a spatial analogy, there is nothing 'between' the subject and the thing they are directly aware of. In being aware of it, they are confronted with the *very thing itself* that they are aware of, not a representation of it, or some kind of image of it. Hence Russell's other remark that what we are aware of is 'the object itself' (Russell, 1911, p.108).

We are now in a position to state the features which make up the Russellian account of the metaphysics of the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states:

**RELATIONAL:** *we stand in a relation to the object of awareness.*

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the two or more objects that the judgement relates, and the actual relation that stands between the objects of judgement) (Russell, 1913, p.76).

**PRESENTATIONAL:** *this relation constitutes the presentation of the object of awareness to the subject.*

**METAPHYSICALLY DIRECT:** *in this presentation, we are confronted with the object of awareness itself. Nothing stands in-between the subject and the object; the subject need only be related to the object of awareness itself in order to be aware of this object.*

These three features constitute Russell's account of the metaphysics of awareness.

Taken together with the aforementioned epistemic features, we have an account of awareness of our current conscious mental states. The success of this account, however, is dependent on establishing that this awareness really does have these features. At the beginning of Section 4 I argued that one way to establish the metaphysical features of awareness is to first establish the epistemic features and work backwards - asking what the metaphysical features must be like in order to explain the given epistemic features. The Russellian metaphysical account above is an attempt to answer this question. In short, I am proposing that a metaphysically direct relation of presentation is the explanation for the indubitability and immediacy of the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states.

Russell himself hints at the explanatory connections between the metaphysics and epistemology of this awareness, but, as Matthew Duncan says, he is "hardly explicit" in making these arguments (Duncan, 2017, p.463). Hence, there is a need to develop an argument for these connections which is both explicit and compelling. In the next section I will do this by developing an argument that takes the form of an inference to the best explanation.



## 4.2 The Acquaintance Argument

The following argument moves from the claim that awareness of current conscious mental states has the aforementioned epistemic features, to the claim that it has the aforementioned metaphysical features, via an inference to the best explanation. In other words, a metaphysically direct relation of presentation is the best explanation for the immediacy and indubitability of awareness. Taken together, these epistemic and metaphysical features constitute the type of awareness which I shall call ‘acquaintance’. As I said at the end of Section 4.1.1, the success of this argument is contingent on arguments later in the thesis which will be given for the epistemic features in question. Whilst I have hopefully provided some preliminary reasons to believe that awareness of our current conscious mental states does indeed have these epistemic features, I do not claim to have fully established this yet. Thus, the first premise of the acquaintance argument is, for the time being, assumed to be true. The argument is as follows:

### The Acquaintance Argument

- P1** We have an awareness of our current conscious mental states which has the following epistemic features. It is:
- Immediate
  - Indubitable (with respect to existence *and* appearance)
- P2** The best explanation for the epistemic features in **(P1)** is that the awareness has the following metaphysical features. It is:
- Relational
  - Metaphysically direct
  - Presentational

**P3** Awareness which has these epistemic and metaphysical features is *acquaintance*.

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**C** Therefore, we are acquainted with our current conscious mental states.

This argument, if sound, establishes two things. Firstly, it establishes that our immediate and indubitable awareness of our current conscious mental states is due to our being in a metaphysically direct relation of presentation with those states. Secondly, it establishes that the type of awareness which has these features is acquaintance (though this second move is really just to give this type of awareness a name). Hence, we have a comprehensive answer to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: ‘What is Acquaintance?’.

Not counting arguments against P1 (to be dealt with in later chapters), there are at least three challenges to overcome to ensure the success of the above argument. The first is a threat to the explanatory move from P1 to P2 from the *naïve realist* theory of perception, the second is a partial denial of P2, the third is the threat of better explanations. In the following sub-sections I will respond to these objections.

### 4.2.1 The Naïve Realist’s Challenge

I do not wish to take a position on the truth of naïve realism in this thesis, but the doctrine, if true, threatens the inference to the best explanation argument as it stands above.

According to the naïve realist theory of perception, when we perceive, we are *directly aware* of objects in the world. The objects in the world, and their properties, are *a part* of

our experience. This is in contrast to the views of those who advocate for *representationalist* theories of perception (such as intentionalism) who claim that our experiences are just representations of these external objects.

Because naïve realists think of perceptual awareness as a form of direct awareness, they uphold that this awareness has the same metaphysical features as the introspective awareness defined in the Acquaintance Argument. That is, they hold that perceptual awareness is metaphysically direct, relational, and presentational:

The Naïve Realist thinks that some at least of our sensory episodes are *presentations* of an experience-independent reality. (Martin, 2004, p.38) [emphasis added]

The distinctive feature of naive realism lies in the claim that, when we see the world, the subject is *acquainted* with the elements of the *presentational* character - the mind-independent objects and their features-where 'acquaintance' names an *irreducible mental relation*. (Fish, 2009, p.14) [emphasis added]

[T]he subject of a veridical experience perceives things in her environment and some of their properties ... *this state of affairs constitutes the metaphysical structure* of veridical experience. (Logue, 2012, p.211) [emphasis added]

That naïve realists believe perceptual awareness to be relational, presentational, and metaphysically direct is not, on its own, the problem. The problem for the acquaintance theory is that these metaphysical features are posited to explain the *epistemic* features of *introspective* awareness when introspective awareness and perceptual awareness do not have the same epistemic features. Perceptual awareness, for instance, is not indubitable with regards to existence; it is possible to doubt the existence of an object we are perceiving. Nor is it indubitable with regards to appearance; the objects that I am perceptually aware of may appear differently to me than the way they actually are, so I can doubt the way that they appear, too. Hence, the epistemic features of perceptual

awareness differ from those of introspective awareness. And if we are positing metaphysical features to explain epistemic features, introspective awareness and perceptual awareness ought not to have the same metaphysical features either. But, if naïve realism is true, they do. Hence, naïve realism threatens the explanatory move made in the Acquaintance Argument from the epistemic features of awareness to the metaphysical features.

If we want to defend this explanatory move, we must show there to be some discernible difference between the metaphysical features of introspective awareness and the metaphysical features of perceptual awareness; one that explains the difference in their epistemic features without *altering* these epistemic features, and without straying too far from the original metaphysical account of each. To do this, we must investigate, in greater depth, the relationships between the epistemic and metaphysical features.

Forgetting for a moment the problem of naïve realism, let us return to the explanatory move made in the Acquaintance Argument. I have said that the metaphysical features of introspective awareness are the best explanation for its epistemic features, but this is a generalisation of several more specific instances of explanation. As we will see, certain epistemic features correspond to, and are explained by, certain metaphysical features and not others. So whilst I am still arguing that we are right to claim that the metaphysics of awareness explains the epistemology, I think we can be more precise than this. Getting clearer here will help us to respond to the naïve realist's objection.

As I have said, the epistemic feature lacked by perceptual awareness which is had by introspective awareness is indubitability. Perceptual awareness is dubitable with respect to both the existence and appearance of the object, whereas introspective awareness is indubitable in both of these respects. What we are looking for is further metaphysical differences which could explain these epistemic differences.

Let us begin with indubitability of appearance. In the case of introspective awareness, I have already discussed the likely reasons behind indubitability of appearance. Recall the discussion of perfection and completeness: I argued that when we are introspectively aware of an object, we are aware of it perfectly and completely. That is, there is no part of the object which not revealed to us when we are aware of it. Hence, there is nothing missing from our awareness of the object. We cannot fathom there being another side to, or part of, our conscious mental states which we are not currently aware of.<sup>16</sup> And hence, we cannot doubt that its appearance differs from its reality. Contrast this with the perceptual awareness we have of objects in the world. We cannot be said to be perfectly and completely aware of these objects. There are always sides to them that we are not aware of, so our awareness of these objects will always be only partial. Hence, an object's appearance in one instance of perceptual awareness will not reflect this object's reality; we can always doubt its appearance.

This difference, I argue, amounts to a difference in the way the object is *presented*. In introspective awareness, the object is presented *perfectly and completely*; no part of the object is missing in its being presented to us. On the contrary, in perceptual awareness this presentation is imperfect and incomplete; there are parts of the object which are not presented to us. Hence, we must amend P2 to reflect this metaphysical difference.

But what of indubitability of existence? We can doubt the existence of the objects of our perceptual awareness (for example, it could be the case that we are hallucinating the object), but it doesn't seem that we can doubt the existence of the objects of our

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, if physicalism is true, then there *are* parts of our mental states which we are not aware of, for it is not the case that we are aware of the physical properties of our mental states (what brain states they are constituted by, etc.). But seeing as these are not properties we can be consciously aware of, they do not amount to any way the mental state can appear to you. With physical objects, on the other hand, their unseen parts *do* constitute a different way the object could appear to you. Therefore, physicalism doesn't threaten the truth of the indubitability of appearance claim.

introspective awareness. I can't doubt that my pain exists when I'm in pain, or that my visual experience exists when I'm having it. Here, I argue, we must again look to the nature of the objects of awareness to find the metaphysical difference which explains this epistemic difference. In introspective awareness, the object we are aware of and related to is a mental object: a conscious mental state. Conscious mental states are such that if we are aware of them, then they exist. It does not make sense to say that I can be aware of a current conscious mental state which doesn't exist. In other words, we cannot hallucinate our mental states. On the contrary, in perceptual awareness, the object we are aware of and related to is a physical object. Physical objects are such that if we are aware of them, then we can doubt that they exist. This is because there is always the possibility that the object we are aware of is actually being hallucinated and is not a physical object at all. Hence, I argue that the epistemic difference in indubitability of existence between introspective and perceptual awareness is due to an ontological difference in the object of awareness. Awareness of physical objects can be doubted with respect to those objects' existence, awareness of conscious mental objects cannot. We must further amend P2 to specify that the ontological differences between these relata are what explain this epistemic difference. We must say that the awareness we are concerned with is a relation *between a subject and their conscious mental states*.

Therefore, the problem that naïve realism poses for the explanatory move between P1 and P2 can be avoided. All we must do is amend P2: Firstly, to take account of the difference between perfect and imperfect presentation, and secondly to take account of the ontology of the relata. This amendment - P2\* - will now replace P2 in the Acquaintance Argument:

**P2\*** The best explanation for the epistemic features in **(P1)** is that the awareness has the following metaphysical features. It is:

- Relational *between a subject and their conscious mental states*
- Metaphysically direct
- *Perfectly* presentational

This amendment does not affect the rest of the argument. In fact, we can now see in greater detail the relationships between the metaphysical and epistemic features of introspective awareness, and make more sense of the proposed explanatory connections. Naïve realism is, therefore, not a problem for the Acquaintance Argument.

#### 4.2.2 ‘Built-in’ Awareness: A Challenge to P2\*

The second challenge to the Acquaintance Argument is the threat from non-relational accounts of awareness. As the name suggests, those who advocate non-relational accounts of awareness deny the claim that introspective awareness consists in a *relation* between the subject and the mental state. Instead, they argue that awareness is ‘built-in’ to the mental state itself, without being related to anything else.

Laurence Bonjour argues that we should think of our awareness of our current conscious mental states in this way. He says:

[E]xperience ... automatically involves a constitutive or “built-in”, non-apperceptive awareness of its own distinctive sort of content. (Bonjour, 1999, p.233)

And later:

I also believe that it is this sort of constitutive or “built-in” awareness of the content of a conscious state that Chisholm had in mind in speaking of states that are “self-presenting”. (ibid. p.236)

If this is so, we have a twofold challenge to P2\*. These challenges to P2\* consist firstly in the denial of the claim that introspective awareness is relational, and secondly in the denial of the claim that the metaphysical features listed in P2\* are the *best explanation* for the epistemic features in P1. Instead, introspective awareness is taken as *non-relational*, *self-presenting*, and *metaphysically direct*, and this is taken as the best explanation for the epistemic features in P1.

BonJour's view of awareness, then, can be taken as a competing explanation of acquaintance. Indeed, he writes as if it should be taken as such:

I am inclined to suspect that it is this sort of non-apperceptive, intrinsic awareness of the content of a conscious state that epistemologists such as those mentioned earlier had at least primarily in mind in their use of the notion of "immediate awareness" or "direct acquaintance." But if this is right, then discussions of direct acquaintance were often needlessly obscure, suggesting as they did some sort of mysteriously authoritative or infallible apprehension of an independent cognitive object, rather than an awareness that is simply constitutive of a conscious state itself. (ibid.)

So how should we characterise acquaintance? As a relational, presentational, metaphysically direct awareness? Or as non-relational, self-presentational, built-in awareness? I believe we have reason to accept the former characterisation. This is because BonJour's account rests on an equivocation between *awareness* and what makes something *available to awareness*. BonJour's account can explain the latter, but I do not think it can explain the former. Awareness, taken in the first sense, is always had *by* the subject, *of* something. It is not a property of the thing of which you are aware. For example, I have awareness *of* my mental states, but these mental states themselves do not have the property of awareness. Similarly, I have (perceptual) awareness *of* the tree in my front garden, but this tree itself does not have the property of (perceptual) awareness. If BonJour is right, and mental states have intrinsic awareness, then what do



they have this awareness of? Themselves? But then what of the subject? How does *the subject* have awareness of these mental states? It is this relationship that we are looking to explain.

On Bonjour's account, if we take awareness to mean 'awareness of', then we end up with a very muddled picture, where mental states are somehow aware and the subject is nowhere to be seen. It is this that makes me think that there is a confusion between 'awareness of' and 'availability to awareness'. Bonjour's account plausibly does a good job of explaining how it is that our mental states are available to awareness; they are intrinsically self-presenting. But it cannot explain what our awareness of these states consists in.<sup>17</sup> The relational account, however, can.

For clarification purposes, I will briefly discuss a similar type of account which I believe could be vulnerable to the same mix-up between awareness and availability to awareness. This is the self-representational theory of consciousness. The self-representational theory of consciousness is an account of how mental states are phenomenally conscious. Self-representationalists argue that mental states are conscious in virtue of representing themselves (Kriegel, 2009, p.16).

Though they do not bill their account as involving acquaintance, self-representationalists sometimes speak as if they are offering an account of awareness when what they are in fact giving is an account of what makes mental states available to awareness. For example, Uriah Kriegel characterises the awareness we have of our

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<sup>17</sup> I wonder if Bonjour's account is better taken as an account of what makes mental states *phenomenally conscious*. Mental states are available to awareness because they are phenomenally conscious and phenomenally conscious things are the sorts of things we can be aware of. What makes them phenomenally conscious, according to Bonjour, is something like a built-in ability to present themselves. 'Consciousness' and 'awareness' are often used interchangeably, but I think there is a tendency here to equivocate 'consciousness' in the same way that I argue 'awareness' is equivocated above. Consciousness can mean 'consciousness of', which can be used interchangeably with 'awareness of'. It means the same thing. But the word 'consciousness' can also be used to mean 'what makes something conscious'. This is more akin to the second meaning of awareness; 'what makes something available to awareness'. It seems to me that there has been a four-way entanglement of definitions.

conscious mental states as ‘inner awareness’, saying, “It is this inner awareness that ultimately makes the mental state phenomenally conscious at all” (ibid., pp.16-17). But this doesn’t seem to fit with the earlier claim that *self-representation* is what makes a mental state conscious. So which claim is correct? Another way of reading the above quote is as saying, “mental states are phenomenally conscious because we have awareness of them”. When read this way, the statement doesn’t seem to be doing any explanatory work on the self-representationalist’s account; it is essentially saying, “mental states are conscious because we are conscious of them”. But the fact that we are conscious of them doesn’t, according to the self-representationalist, explain why they are conscious. If anything, it is the other way around; the fact that they are conscious explains why we are conscious *of* them. And it is the fact that they *represent themselves* that explains why they are conscious. To put this into the ‘awareness’ terms I have been using throughout this chapter: self-representationalists argue that mental states represent themselves, and this is why these states are available to awareness. The fact that they are available to awareness explains why we are able to *be* aware of them, but it doesn’t explain what this awareness *itself* consists in. Hence, the self-representational theory should, like the ‘built-in’ awareness theory, *not* be seen as an account of awareness. It is, instead an account of availability to awareness.

As such, we must be wary when discussing accounts of purported ‘awareness’ as found in the literature, as there is a tendency to conflate ‘awareness’ with ‘availability to awareness’. More specifically, I argue that the ‘non-relational’ account of awareness is mistaken; it explains availability to awareness, but not awareness itself. Since we are looking to explain the latter, the Acquaintance Argument is not threatened by the non-relational account.

### 4.2.3 Better Explanations

Finally, we must consider the most obvious challenge to the Acquaintance Argument: the threat of better explanations. Recall that, in the Acquaintance Argument, we are looking to make a case for the metaphysical features of awareness by invoking them to explain the epistemic features of our awareness. These epistemic features are *indubitability* (with respect to the existence and appearance of the object) and *immediacy*. A *metaphysically direct, perfectly presentational relation* between the subject and their conscious mental states is posited as the best explanation of these epistemic features. But perhaps there is a better explanation, one which cannot rightly be considered as anything we would call ‘acquaintance’.

It is important to keep in mind here that we are looking for better explanations of *awareness*, not of self-knowledge in general. Some theories of self-knowledge deny that self-knowledge rests on a kind of awareness that the subject has of conscious mental states. On *Transparency* accounts of self-knowledge, for example, the self-ascription of mental states is made on the basis of an awareness of *physical objects* in the world, not an awareness of mental states themselves (Evans, 1982; Byrne, 2005, 2012, 2018). What this amounts to is not a ‘better explanation’ of our awareness of our own mental states, but a flat out rejection of the claims that a) that such awareness is necessary for self-knowledge, and b) such direct awareness of mental states is even possible. I do not propose to tackle such a challenge so late in this chapter, though I will deal with it later in the thesis (see Chapter 2). For now, I will limit discussion to a ‘better explanation’ which *does* make claim that there is a kind of awareness that the subject has of their conscious mental states. This explanation is the *Inner Sense* account. But first, a further word on the limits of the discussion in this section. I do not propose to give full treatment to the inner sense account in this section; I will limit my discussion to an

analysis of the claims that inner sense theorists make about awareness only, and give some preliminary reasons as to why we should not think of these claims as ‘better explanations’. This is because, whilst I will argue that the Acquaintance Argument gives us the best explanation of awareness, there could be *other* aspects of a full account of self-knowledge - an explanation of self-ascriptions, or justification, say - which are better explained by competing theories. Hence, on balance, we may have reason to favour the inner sense account over the acquaintance account of self-knowledge, even if its explanation of awareness isn’t as favourable. As such, the conclusion of my discussion in this section will not obviously constitute a *complete* objection to the inner sense account as an account of self-knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

Inner sense theories of self-knowledge are based on the idea that introspection is a process analogous to perception. In perception, perceptual awareness and perceptual knowledge are the outputs of the functioning of our sense organs. For example, visual perceptual awareness is the output of the functioning of our eyes and the visual systems in the brain, auditory perceptual awareness the output of the functioning of our ears and the auditory systems in the brain, and so on. Inner sense theorists claim that introspective awareness is arrived at in a similar way, hence the name *inner sense*.

For inner sense theorists, the analogous ‘sense organ’ for introspection is a mechanism within the brain which is directed at and scans our mental states. In scanning our mental states, this mechanism makes us aware of these states - just like the visual system makes us aware of the world by processing visual information. David Armstrong, for example, describes introspection as a “self-scanning process in the brain” (Armstrong, 1993, p.324). Similarly, William Lycan says, “consciousness is the functioning of internal *attention mechanisms* directed at lower-order psychological states and events ... attention

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<sup>18</sup> For this argument, see Chapter 4.

mechanisms are devices that have the *job* of relaying information about ongoing psychological events and processes” (Lycan, 1996, p.14) [emphasis in original].

What the inner sense view presents is an altogether very different view of the metaphysics of introspective awareness. On the inner sense view, instead of such awareness being characterised as a metaphysically direct, perfectly presentational relation between a subject and their mental states, it is characterised as the result of a causal process: the functioning of internal scanning mechanisms. It is no longer metaphysically direct (instead, a causal mechanism is the intermediary between you and the mental state), nor is it presentational (the mental state doesn’t present itself to you, it is searched for and ‘scanned’), nor is it a relation between only a subject and a mental state (again, the intermediary is a causal mechanism, so the *direct* relation between a subject and the mental state is broken).

Now that we have the metaphysical account of the inner sense view, we can ask the question which is asked of the Russellian-inspired view given in the Acquaintance Argument: can this metaphysical account explain the epistemic features of introspective awareness? That is, can a causal, attentional scanning mechanism explain the immediacy and indubitability of our awareness of our current conscious mental states.

Let us begin with epistemic immediacy. Recall our definition:

**IMMEDIACY:** *this awareness is immediate in the sense that it is not inferred and it requires no prior knowledge or awareness of anything else.*

On the inner sense view, introspective awareness *is* epistemically immediate. We do not arrive at this awareness by a process of inference, and it requires of us no prior knowledge or awareness of anything else. As Armstrong says:

In introspection we have direct, noninferential awareness of our own mental states.

(Armstrong, 1993, p.124)<sup>19</sup>

So the inner sense view can explain the epistemic immediacy of introspective awareness.

But what about indubitability? Recall our definition:

**INDUBITABILITY:** *it is impossible to doubt that the object of your awareness exists, and it is impossible to doubt that it is the way it appears to you.*

On the inner sense view, the indubitability of our introspective awareness is left without explanation. That is because the inner sense view, as defined above, leaves room for our introspective awareness to be doubted. The reason for this is that the inner sense view characterises the metaphysics of introspective awareness as a causal process performed by an introspective ‘mechanism’. There is always the possibility, however slim, that this causal process could malfunction, resulting in any three of the following scenarios: apparent awareness of a mental state which doesn’t actually exist, awareness of a mental state where that mental state appears differently to the way it actually is, or - as is the point of Shoemaker’s (1994) ‘self-blindness’ objection - no awareness at all of a mental state which is in fact present.<sup>20</sup> Hence, the inner sense view, as it stands, cannot explain the indubitability of our introspective awareness. With regards to the Acquaintance Argument, it is not, therefore, a ‘better explanation’.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been considering a question pertinent to P4 of the Master

Argument. This is the question ‘What is acquaintance?’. We have seen, from a brief

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<sup>19</sup> Note that the word ‘direct’ here refers to an *epistemic* sense of directness (i.e., immediacy), not a metaphysical sense.

<sup>20</sup> This latter scenario amounts to a sort of inverse of the first. In the first, the state doesn’t exist but we are apparently aware that it does. In the self-blindness scenario, the state exists, but we are not aware of it.

overview of the literature, that the term ‘acquaintance’ is used in philosophy to refer to a number of different phenomena. Yet what links all of these phenomena is the use of the term to refer to a way of *relating* us to things we can know, in a way that has a bearing on our *ability* to know. From here I focussed in on the notion of acquaintance used in the debate on self-knowledge, explaining acquaintance’s origins in epistemic foundationalism, and giving a brief overview of the original account advanced by Russell. We saw that the Russellian notion of acquaintance as an indubitable and metaphysically direct relation of awareness has formed the basis of the majority of acquaintance accounts in epistemic foundationalism and in self-knowledge.

Whilst this basic Russellian notion has great explanatory power - as is evident from its employment in both theories of self-knowledge and epistemic foundationalism - it is lacking in the sense that little argument has been provided for it. Russell leaves us with an account of acquaintance which is inadequate and mysterious. Acquaintance theorists have attempted to get around this objection by claiming that no such explanation *can* be given for acquaintance; that it is a ‘brute’ and ‘unanalysable’ explanation, but this has, for critics of acquaintance, been a reason to think such accounts unsatisfactory.

Acquaintance theorists need an argument in order to strengthen the overall plausibility of their account.

In the rest of the chapter I have developed such an argument; an inference to the best explanation which I have called the Acquaintance Argument. The process of developing this argument was as follows: first, I considered two accounts of what I believe acquaintance is *not*. These were the ‘Renewed Acquaintance’ account of Brie Gertler, and the ‘Integration Account’ of Anna Giustina. Both of these accounts, I argued, get the fundamental nature of acquaintance wrong. Gertler characterises acquaintance as a relation of justification, whilst Giustina characterises it as the relation between a state of

introspection and the introspected state. Whilst both of these are clearly phenomena to be explained by an account of self-knowledge, I do not take them to be what we should mean by acquaintance. Acquaintance is the *awareness* a subject has of their mental states. With this conclusion reached, we could focus in on awareness. I first considered the notion of awareness in general, noting that there are very many different *kinds* of awareness: perceptual awareness, introspective awareness, awareness of others' mental states, awareness of events, etc. In each of these different kinds of awareness, we are able to investigate two things: the epistemic features of the awareness, and the route to awareness. Plausibly the route to awareness (the explanation of the way in which you are aware *of* the thing) is what determines the epistemic features of awareness. Thus, if we want to explain the introspective awareness we have of our own mental states, we could consider its epistemic features and work backwards to determine and give an argument for the route to awareness.<sup>21</sup> In order to determine the epistemic features and potential route to awareness of our awareness of our current conscious mental states, I returned to Russell's original acquaintance account for a closer reading. The Russellian-inspired account characterises this awareness as having the epistemic features of *immediacy* and *indubitability*, and the route to awareness being a *metaphysically direct, presentational relation*. I then argued in the Acquaintance Argument that the best explanation for these epistemic features is the given metaphysical features. Taken together, these features constitute the awareness which I call 'acquaintance'.

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<sup>21</sup> Of course, one could do this the other way around - considering the route to awareness and working backwards to determine and give argument for the epistemic features. The reason I have not done it this way around is because I believe that the route to awareness (the metaphysical features of acquaintance) are more difficult to explain via independent argument than the epistemic features. The metaphysical features are the most 'mysterious' and 'unanalysable' of acquaintance's features, hence why I believe the best way to argue for them is in terms of the epistemic features, which themselves can be argued for independently.



I considered objections in the form of naïve realism, ‘built-in’ awareness accounts, and the threat of better explanations, but found that the Acquaintance Argument was able to overcome all of these with some minor clarifications. The resulting conclusion was the following: *acquaintance is the immediate, indubitable, metaphysically direct, perfectly presentational relation of awareness that stands between a subject and their mental states.* Hence, we have a complete answer to the question ‘What is acquaintance?’ and a partially complete argument for acquaintance. Regarding the latter, we now have an argument for the metaphysical features of acquaintance, but the epistemic features of acquaintance are assumed. The immediacy and indubitability of acquaintance remain to be argued for. In the next two chapters I will defend the immediacy claim when I consider how we move from acquaintance to self-ascription.

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## Chapter 2

# Acquaintance and Knowledge of State Type

### 1. Introduction

In the first chapter, I established what acquaintance is; it is the immediate, indubitable, metaphysically direct, perfectly presentational, relation of awareness we have to our current conscious mental states. From this starting point, we are in a position to fill in the rest of the details of the acquaintance account of self-knowledge.

The type of self-knowledge I am interested in explaining is the knowledge we have of our current conscious mental states. For example, my knowledge that I am currently having a visual experience of a tree, or my knowledge that I am currently having an auditory experience of the cars on the wet road, or that I currently have an ache in my back. All of these examples are propositional in form; they are beliefs that I come to hold which, when true and when properly justified, will amount to instances of self-knowledge. Hence, we can see the next two questions that any account of self-

knowledge will have to answer: firstly, how is it that we come to form these beliefs? And secondly, how is it that these beliefs are justified? In the next two chapters, I will answer the first of these questions. In the fourth chapter, I will address the question of justification.

Beliefs which amount to self-knowledge all have something in common; they are *self-ascriptions*. In forming the type of belief about our current conscious mental states that amounts to self-knowledge, we are *ascribing* that mental state to ourselves. To explain how it is that we come to have these beliefs, we must be able to explain how self-ascriptions are possible.

So, for the acquaintance theory to successfully explain self-knowledge, it must be able to explain how we are able to self-ascribe our mental states. As mentioned, the starting point we have is immediate, indubitable, metaphysically direct, perfectly presentational, and relational awareness of our mental states (the type of awareness I am calling *acquaintance*). How are we able to self-ascribe mental states based only on the acquaintance we have with them? To answer this we must look in more detail at exactly what is involved in a self-ascription. We will then be able to understand, in greater detail, the job that is required of acquaintance.

Take the example of the self-ascription I make when I am currently having a visual experience of a tree:

*‘I am having a visual experience of a tree’*

We can see that this ascription can actually be broken down into further separate components, knowledge of each of which needs explaining in order to explain self-knowledge as a whole:

1. 'Of a tree' - knowledge of *what* you are currently having an experience of (in this case, a tree). This is your knowledge of the *content* of your current conscious mental state.
2. 'A visual experience' - knowledge that the experience you are having is *visual* in type. This is your knowledge of the *state type* of your current conscious mental state.

So our self-ascriptions involve an awareness of the ascribed state's *content*, and an awareness of its *state type*. For the acquaintance theorist to be able to explain how self-ascriptions are possible, they must, therefore, be able to explain our awareness of both the content and type of our mental states.

On the acquaintance theory, the only tool we have so far for explaining self-ascriptions is the relation of acquaintance (as defined in Chapter 1). If what we are acquainted *with* gets us awareness of the content and state type of our mental states, then the acquaintance theorist can explain self-ascriptions. This is because we will then be able to make self-ascriptions based on this awareness alone. So far, I have said relatively little about what exactly it is that we are acquainted with, specifying only that we are acquainted with our 'current conscious mental states'. However, in order to see how acquaintance can explain self-ascriptions, we need to be more specific.

It follows from the proposed definition of acquaintance that the *objects of acquaintance* (the things with which we are acquainted), are things that we are *aware of* that are *perfectly presented* to us. Since we are not aware of *all* of the properties of mental states, this definition helps us to narrow down the exact features of mental states with which we *can* be acquainted. For example, if physicalism is true, then mental states have physical properties, and we are clearly not acquainted with these, as we're not aware of them (at least not in the immediate sense of awareness being discussed here). The kind of mental

properties we are aware of are *phenomenal properties*; the properties of mental states which make it the case that there is something it is like for you to be experiencing that state. Phenomenal properties are also (arguably) perfectly presented to you; there is nothing *missing* from the phenomenology of your experience that could possibly mean that it is imperfectly presented.<sup>1</sup> It is what it is, and you are aware of it exactly how it is. The question thus facing the acquaintance theory is the following:

*Can acquaintance with phenomenal properties alone get us awareness of a state's content and type?*

If the answer to this question is 'yes', then the acquaintance theorist has the means to explain all the components of a self-ascription. It is the task of the next two chapters to show that this is indeed the case; that we are acquainted with phenomenal features of mental states which indicate state type and state content. Once this is established, we will be able to explain how the acquaintance account allows for us to form the kind of beliefs which, when justified, amount to instances of self-knowledge.

In this chapter, I will be concerned with state type. I will argue that acquaintance with at least some of the phenomenal properties of our mental states gets us awareness of the *type* of mental state we are in. In the following chapter, I will argue that the same can be said for state content. I will tackle these two features in this particular order since some of the conclusions in this chapter regarding state type will have consequences for the discussion of content.

The acquaintance theorist needs it to be the case that information about the *type* of mental state we are in is given in the phenomenology of that state. For example a visual experience ought to have some phenomenal character which indicates that it is a *visual*

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 6 for a more detailed defence of this claim.

experience one is having - rather than, say, an auditory experience, or an imagery experience - and which allows one to recognise it as such.

One immediate issue is that an account of this kind conflicts with the widely held view that experiences are *transparent*. Transparency is a thesis about what exactly our experiences ‘reveal’ to us. According to transparency theorists, when we have an experience, we only seem to be aware of the *objects* of our experience and their properties. We do not seem to be aware of any features of the mental state itself.<sup>2</sup> Mental states themselves, according to transparency theorists, are transparent.<sup>3</sup>

The problem transparency poses for the acquaintance theorist is this: if we only seem to be aware of the objects of our experiences, and we do not seem to be aware of the experiences themselves, then how can we know that the experience we are having is an experience of a certain type? Consider a specific example: I am currently looking at a vase of flowers. According to transparency theorists, the only thing I am aware of in having this experience - the only information that is phenomenally available to me - is information about the vase of flowers and its properties. However, none of these properties tells me that I’m currently *seeing* the vase of flowers; they might tell me about the vase’s shape, and the flowers’ colours, but they don’t tell me any facts about my own experience. They don’t tell me that the vase is being *seen*. Hence, on a transparency account of experience, there will be no phenomenology which corresponds to state

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<sup>2</sup> See Harman (1990), Tye (2002), Martin (2003) for well-known versions of the transparency view.

<sup>3</sup> As Gow (2019) notes, there are actually two versions of the transparency thesis: the metaphysical thesis and the phenomenal thesis. According to the metaphysical thesis, we are *in fact* only aware of external objects and their properties. Naïve realists and externalist representationalists espouse the metaphysical transparency thesis. On the other hand, according to the phenomenal thesis, it *merely seems* to us as if we are only aware of external objects and their properties - we may *in fact* be aware of properties of experience itself, but it does not seem to us like we are. I will be concerned with the phenomenal thesis in this chapter, hence my talk of the ‘objects’ of experience. These need not be limited to actually existing objects; for example, I can have an imagery experience in which the object of my experience is the imagined object. This does not violate phenomenal transparency, because (according to transparency theorists) whilst it seems to me that I am aware of the imagined object, it does not seem to me that I am aware of any features of the imagery experience itself.

type, meaning the acquaintance theorist has nothing to appeal to in order to account for self-knowledge of state type.

However, this is a problem which causes difficulties in both directions. Transparency is a problem for self-knowledge, but self-knowledge is equally a problem for transparency. Anyone who wants to claim - as the acquaintance theorist does - that introspective access to features of our mental states explains self-knowledge will have to give up (and convincingly argue against) transparency. Conversely, anyone who wants to advocate a transparency account of experience faces the job of explaining how self-knowledge is possible without our having introspective access to any features of our own mental states.

For transparency theorists, the general strategy is to reconcile transparency and self-knowledge by advocating for an account of self-knowledge which rests on a kind of *inference*, rather than on immediate introspection. Since transparency theorists claim we have no awareness of any features of our own mental states, they argue that to get self-knowledge we have to *infer* things about these states from the things we *are* aware of - namely, the objects in the world.

For the acquaintance theorist, these inferentialist transparency accounts of self-knowledge, if successful, are bad news. Firstly, if true, inferentialist transparency accounts can explain self-knowledge without having to give up the intuitively plausible transparency thesis. Secondly, they are parsimonious, appealing only to our perceptual faculties and rational abilities to explain self-knowledge; no 'introspective mechanisms' or other relations requiring further explanation are posited.

In this chapter I will object to transparency views of self-knowledge on two grounds. Firstly, I will argue that the best available transparency account - Alex Byrne's rule following account - is unsuccessful. I will argue that Byrne's views on experiential



content, being solely motivated by transparency, cannot live up to the rational requirements of his account. Secondly, I will give an independent argument against transparency, to the effect that the phenomenology of state type required by the acquaintance theorist to explain self-ascriptions escapes existing attempts to explain away supposedly non-transparent features of experience. I will conclude from these two arguments that we have good reason to reject transparency accounts, and should instead accept a view on which self-knowledge of state type is explained by the fact that mental states are *not* phenomenally transparent - we are aware of (and, hence, acquainted with) phenomenal properties that correspond to state type.

Before I explain Byrne's account, it will be useful to give a brief overview of the history of the transparency and self-knowledge debate. This will allow us to get clearer on the general strategy of transparency accounts, and to see the difficulties from which Byrne's view arises.

## 2. Transparency and Self-Knowledge: A Brief History

As highlighted above, self-knowledge is as much a problem for transparency theorists as transparency is for self-knowledge. Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a good deal of literature concerning the attempts of transparency theorists to give an account of self-knowledge which is compatible with their views on experience.<sup>4</sup>

Transparency theorists argue that, because we don't seem to be aware of any features of our mental states themselves, we have no immediate access to them. The puzzle, then, as identified by many transparency theorists, lies in explaining how we can have

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<sup>4</sup> A notable exception to this crowd is Dretske, who in recent work has endorsed a sceptical view according to which self-knowledge isn't possible (Dretske, 2003a; 2003b). This, however, is due to a commitment to externalism about content, not transparency, so I will not discuss it at this point.

knowledge of these features. Consider the following musings from puzzled transparency theorists:

If I descry a hawk, I find the hawk but I do not find my seeing of the hawk. My seeing of the hawk seems to be a queerly transparent sort of process, transparent in that while a hawk is detected, nothing else is detected answering to the verb in 'see a hawk'. (Ryle, 1949, p.134)

How ... can I be aware of what my perceptual experiences are like - presumably a matter of knowing what qualities they have - if none of the properties I am aware of when I have these experiences are properties of the experience? (Dretske, 1999, p.103)

[T]he mere fact that there is a hawk on the fence post is hardly good evidence that it is seen, let alone that I am the one who sees it. Which is to say that an account of how I know that there is a hawk on the fence post by vision cannot easily be converted into an account of how I know I see a hawk. (Byrne, 2012, p.184)

In recognising the rose simply as a rose, I tell that it is a rose *from* its having the look of a rose, but I do not tell *from* anything that I *see* it. (Millar, 2019, p.112)

One answer to these puzzles lies in inference. If experience is transparent, we have to work backwards, inferring from the things we currently know about the world to the conclusion that we are currently experiencing those things.

Gareth Evans gives us one such model which, though not explicit in its use of inference, can be interpreted as implying as such:

[A] subject can gain knowledge of his internal informational states [perceptual experiences] in a very simple way: by re-using precisely those skills of conceptualisation he uses to make judgements about the world ... He goes through exactly the same procedure as he would go through if he were trying to make a judgement about how it

is at this place now ... now he may prefix this result with the operator 'It seems to me as though...'. (Evans, 1982, pp.227-228)

Evans is arguing here that we have rational grounds to make the epistemic move from a judgement about the world to a judgement about how the world *seems to us*. We have these rational grounds because the very way in which we make judgements about the world *is by experiencing it*.

The inference at work here is made explicit in Fred Dretske's 'displaced perception' model of introspection. Displaced perception, as defined by Dretske, is an indirect awareness of something which is gained via a direct perception of something else. In our everyday lives we regularly perform the kinds of inferences which adhere to the model of displaced perception. An obvious example of such an inference, one which Dretske highlights, is your coming to know that the fuel tank in your car is empty by looking at the fuel gauge on the dashboard and seeing that the pointer is at 'E' (Dretske, 1995, p.41). You gain knowledge of one fact (that your fuel tank is empty), via your perceptual knowledge of another (that your fuel gauge is pointing to 'E'). This knowledge of the second fact is inferred from your knowledge of the first fact plus a connecting belief about the relationship between the two phenomena. For instance:

**A1** The fuel gauge points to 'E'. [*perceptual knowledge*]<sup>5</sup>

**A2** If the fuel gauge points to 'E', then the fuel tank is empty. [*connecting belief*]

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**C** The fuel tank is empty. [*displaced perceptual knowledge*]

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<sup>5</sup> Note: the content in square brackets denotes the epistemic status of the premise. E.g., 'the fuel gauge points to 'E'' is a piece of perceptual knowledge.

Dretske argues that self-knowledge is acquired by the same method; that we infer facts about our experience from facts about the world via a connecting belief.<sup>6</sup> The resulting inference would be something like the following:

**B1** There is a tree. [*perceptual knowledge*]

**B2** If there is a tree, I am having a visual experience of a tree. [*connecting belief*]

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**C** I am having a visual experience of a tree. [*self-knowledge*]

The problem with this argument, as it stands, is that it begs the question. If we already know that the instance of knowledge in B1 (and in the antecedent of the conditional clause of B2) is a piece of *perceptual* knowledge, then we already know we're having a visual experience. Hence, the conclusion is assumed in the premises. According to the transparency theorist, there should be nothing about the first piece of knowledge which tells me that it's *perceptual* knowledge, because I am not aware of any features of experience in the gaining of that knowledge. Hence, to avoid circularity, we must restate the argument without assuming perceptual knowledge in the premises:

**B1\*** There is a tree. [*empirical knowledge - source of knowledge not assumed*]

**B2\*** If there is a tree, I am having a visual experience of a tree. [*connecting belief*]

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<sup>6</sup> I should note, Dretske himself argues the displaced perception account of introspection is not *strictly* inferential. This is because the first premise needn't be true for the conclusion to be true (for example in cases of hallucination), and because the connecting belief is 'not defeasible' (whereas it is in cases of normal displaced perception). He says, "If this is inferential knowledge, it is a strange case of inference" (Dretske, 1995, p.61). But even if it's not *by definition* inferential, it's not immediate either; we still go through an *inference-like process* in order to acquire this knowledge. We move from knowledge about the world, via a connecting belief, to arrive at knowledge of our mental states.

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C I am having a visual experience of a tree. [*self-knowledge*]

This argument avoids circularity since it doesn't assume that the knowledge in B1\* and the antecedent of B2\* are instances of perceptual knowledge. In remaining neutral about the source of this knowledge, the conclusion is removed from the premises. However, it avoids circularity at the expense of its soundness, since B2\* will now sometimes be false. As Murat Aydede points out, it is very often false that knowledge of the presence of a tree means you are *seeing* that tree. You could instead know that a tree is present because you hear its leaves rustling in the wind, or because somebody tells you there is a tree over there. So to make the inference to C based on the conditional in B2\* is "epistemically irresponsible" (Aydede, 2003, p.57). Moreover, even if we *were* to make this inference, C would not count as an instance of knowledge even if B2\* did happen to be true. This is because since B2\* is routinely false, C would only be true by luck (ibid., p.58). Beliefs which are only true by luck cannot count as knowledge.

This objection - which Alex Byrne (2012, p.186) names the "evidential objection" - can be summarised thus: knowledge about the world is *not good evidence* that you are experiencing the world. We can see now that transparency theorists who want to invoke inference to explain self-knowledge face a dilemma: either they presuppose self-knowledge in their premises, or they make the inference from a belief which is sometimes false, hence facing the evidential objection. The possibility of self-knowledge on a transparency view of experience requires the transparency theorist to find a third way. This is what Byrne, in his rule following account, attempts to do.

### 3. A Third Way: Rule Following

In his rule following account, Byrne attempts to give a transparency-compatible account of self-knowledge which doesn't fall into the aforementioned dilemma. His account can be seen to take issue with the first horn of the dilemma; he seeks to avoid the circularity problem by arguing that we can have experience-dependent knowledge which *doesn't* presuppose knowledge of experience.

Byrne's inference from knowledge of the world to knowledge of experience takes the form of what he calls an "epistemic rule" (Byrne, 2012, p.189). According to Byrne, an epistemic rule is a conditional of the following form: *If conditions C obtain, believe that p.* The idea is that if the rule is a *good* rule - that is, if it is the type of rule that tends to produce true beliefs when followed - then we are justified in making the inference by following it. In the case of self-knowledge of state type, the rule would look like this:

*If conditions C obtain, believe that you are having an experience of type p.*

If the rule is a good rule, then in following it, your resulting belief - the belief that you are having an experience of type *p* - would count as knowledge. But what might *conditions C* be such that when they obtain we can follow this rule and have it lead us to knowledge?

Byrne is clear that to avoid the evidential objection, the subject needs to be able to find out *for themselves, by looking*, that some facts about their environment obtain. Mere knowledge of the fact that there is a tree is not, by itself, good evidence that you are seeing a tree, since you could have come by this knowledge in any number of ways. To get around this, Byrne argues that we have to ensure that our knowledge that there is a tree is acquired via visual experience. But how do we ensure this without giving up transparency? How can we ensure that our knowledge of the fact that there is a tree is

acquired by *visually experiencing* the tree without presupposing that we have an immediate awareness of this visual experience itself - precisely the kind of thing that transparency theorists deny we have.

The solution, according to Byrne, is to look in greater detail at what is involved in coming to have perceptual knowledge of an object. For example, we must ask: When I come to know that there is a tree via *visual* perception, what is involved in my acquiring this knowledge which distinguishes it from other ways in which I can acquire this knowledge? Byrne argues that the answer to this question is the following: Firstly, I come to know that there is a tree via *visual* perception by being aware of a portion of my environment, and recognising that the combination of sensible qualities presented to me (such as colour, shape, texture, perceived depth and orientation, movement etc.) constitute a tree. Secondly, - and here is the crucial claim - I would not be aware of any of these sensible qualities if I were not currently having a *visual* experience. I can *only* be aware of these kinds of sensible qualities if the experience I am currently having is visual. If my experience was auditory, I would be aware of a set of sensory qualities of a very different kind. If it was a tactile experience, I would be aware of yet another different set of qualities. Crucially, according to Byrne, none of these sets overlap; each contains only qualities which are specific to the sensory modality in which they are experienced. So if I come to know there is a tree by being aware of some set of sensible qualities which can only be known via vision, then I can infer from this awareness that I'm having a visual experience of a tree.

According to Byrne, to specify the set of sensory qualities of which I am currently aware is to specify the *content* of my experience. He calls the specification of the content of visual experiences *v-propositions*. True v-propositions (that is, v-propositions which specify the content of *veridical* visual experiences) he calls *v-facts* (Byrne, 2018, p.136).

The content of veridical experiences in other sensory modalities will not be specified by v-facts. The content of auditory experiences will be specified by a-facts, the content of tactile experiences will be specified by t-facts, and so on.

V-facts - by specifying only the sensible qualities we can be aware of through visual experience - “indicate their provenance” (ibid., p.139). That is, they indicate which sensory modality they originate from. So when we’re aware of a v-fact, we can infer from this fact - by following an epistemic rule - that we are having a visual experience. Byrne articulates this epistemic rule as follows:

**SEE:** *If [...x...]v and x is an F, believe that you see an F. (ibid.)*

Where “[...x...]v” is a v-fact specifying the visual array which constitutes the object ‘F’.

We can now see how Byrne’s account avoids the dilemma faced by previous transparency accounts of self-knowledge. To see this, consider the problematic premises from the original two arguments:

**B1**     There is a tree [*perceptual knowledge*]

The original issue with this premise was that it already presupposed that we knew that the knowledge we had about the world had been acquired through visual perception, hence, leading us into a circular inference. Byrne’s account avoids this problem by taking a step back from this instance of knowledge and instead explaining the way in which we have arrived at it. In essence, his first premise would be thus:

**B1\*\***    I am aware of some v-fact, and because of this awareness I know there is a tree.

Nowhere is it *presupposed* here that ‘I know there is a tree’ is perceptual knowledge, so Byrne’s account avoids circularity. Moreover, the second premise of Byrne’s argument



would also be true, hence, avoiding the objection that an inference is made from a sometimes false premise. Byrne's second premise would be:

**B2\*\*** If I know there is a tree because of awareness of some v-fact, then I can know I'm having a visual experience of a tree.

We can see that this premise is essentially a restatement of Byrne's epistemic rule. And it is true, since I will only be aware of v-facts if the experience I am currently having is *visual* in type.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, since v-facts specify features of things in the world, and not any features of experience itself, the account adheres to the transparency thesis. Nowhere does Byrne appeal to any awareness of features of experience itself to explain self-knowledge.

Byrne's account, if successful, is bad news for the acquaintance theorist. This is because it is able to explain how self-knowledge is possible *without* appealing to phenomenology of state type. According to Byrne, all we need to do is infer from our awareness of what is experienced that we are having an experience of a certain type. We can do this because the content of experience - according to Byrne - indicates its modal origin.

To assess the plausibility of Byrne's account, we must investigate, in further detail, his views on the metaphysics of experiential content.

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<sup>7</sup> Note: Byrne's rule is a conditional rather than a biconditional since he allows that it is possible, in principle, to gain knowledge of v-facts through other means. For example, someone could, if they had the time, write down the long list of sensory qualities they are aware of when they're seeing a tree and give this list to me. This list would be a specification of a visual array; hence, it would be a v-fact. If I were to make the inference in B2\*\* based on being aware of the v-fact only by reading this list, I would be wrong in concluding that I was currently visually experiencing the tree. However, since we almost never become aware of v-facts in this way, Byrne argues that we are justified in making the inference as it is explicated above (Byrne, 2018, p.139).

### 3.1 Two Views on V-Facts

For Byrne, the content of experience is specified by a v-fact, and a v-fact is a specification of the array of sensible qualities which we are aware of when visually experiencing. V-facts, according to Byrne, indicate their modal origin. But to claim this is to presuppose that a particular metaphysical view on the content of experience is true.

In this section, I will argue that Byrne does indeed presuppose a particular metaphysical view on experiential content. In what follows, I will detail this view (which I will call View A). I will then outline the competing, non-transparency view (which I will call View B). Byrne's account of self-knowledge requires View A to be true, but I will argue that he gives us no good reasons to accept it over View B. I will then proceed to defend View B by posing two difficulties for View A - difficulties which View B can easily overcome. I will conclude from this that firstly, we have good reason to accept View B (hence, Byrne's account of self-knowledge of state type does not succeed) and secondly, because of this, we have good reason to accept an account of self-knowledge of state type in which a mental state's type is known through acquaintance with the phenomenal properties that individuate it.

#### 3.1.1 View A

Byrne's account of content can be seen to adhere to a group of views on which content *itself* indicates its modal origin. I will call views of this type 'View A'. On View A, content itself indicates its modal origin because contents are not shared by experiences across different modalities. My visual experiences have certain types of content, and none of these very same content types can be had by, say, my auditory experiences, or my tactile or olfactory experiences, and vice versa. This view can be motivated by

considering pairs of experiences where the same property of an object is experienced through different modalities.

Take the example of my visual and tactile experiences of a cubical object. On the face of it, it might seem obvious to say that in both of these cases - in my seeing and my feeling of the cubical object - the content of my experiences is the same: 'that is a cube'. However, View A theorists such as Byrne deny this, instead arguing that the content itself *differs* in these cases because the modality in which the object is experienced affects the kinds of properties we can perceive. As Michael Tye argues in his View A-type account: "the properties presented in the two cases are very different" (Tye, 2002, p.143). A different array of sensory qualities is presented in the feeling of a cube than is presented in the seeing of a cube, and, because (according to Byrne) a specification of the sensory qualities with which we are presented *just is* the experience's content, when we specify these qualities, the content of the visual experience will not be the same as the content of the tactile experience. Crudely put, on View A, the content of my visual experience would be something like: <that is a cube<sup>V</sup>>, where 'cube<sup>V</sup>' is the sensible quality the cube is experienced as possessing when I have a *visual* experience of it. The content of my tactile experience, on the other hand, would be something like: <that is a cube<sup>T</sup>>, where 'cube<sup>T</sup>' is the sensible quality the cube is experienced as possessing when I have a tactile experience of it. Because content is not shared across modalities, when we recognise the presence of certain sensible qualities and the absence of others, we can use this information to infer both *that* we are having an experience, and to infer *what type* of experience it is. What is more, no appeal to awareness of anything non-transparent is made in this account of content or this account of self-knowledge.

### 3.1.2 View B

An alternative view of the metaphysics of content can be summarised by the account I will call View B. On this view, content itself *does not* indicate its modal origin. This is because the very same content can be had by experiences in different modalities. To put it simply, according to View B, when we *see* a cubical object and when we *feel* a cubical object, the content of these experiences is the same: <that is a cube>.

The content is kept the same, but still these two experiences - the feeling and the seeing of the cube - are phenomenally very different. Without being able to appeal to a difference in the content, View B theorists must point to some other feature of the experience to explain this phenomenal difference. Typically, this phenomenal difference is explained by appealing to some phenomenology which is associated with the sensory mode of the experience itself. For example, the difference between my seeing a cube and my feeling a cube is that the former has some kind of *visual* phenomenology, and the latter has some kind of *tactile* phenomenology, where this phenomenology pertains to an awareness of some features of the experience itself, not an awareness of any features of things experienced. On View B then, we are aware of both the object of experience *and* the experience itself. Given this, View B is not compatible with the transparency thesis.

We can separate views of this kind into two further camps depending on how one wants to explicate the exact metaphysical relationship between sensory mode and experiential content. In one camp we have those who argue that sensory mode is a *relation* to content:<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Mitchell (2020) calls this view 'Mode Intentionalism'.

To fix the nature of an intentional state, two things must be fixed: the intentional content and the *relation* in which the thinker stands to the content ... following Searle, I call this relation the intentional mode. (Crane, 2000, p.52) [emphasis added]

A mode is just the way in which one is *related* to an intentional content. (ibid., p.56) [emphasis added]

On this view, experiences are a hybrid of two components: a relation, and a content. The relation specifies the sensory modality you are currently experiencing *with*, while the content specifies *what* you are experiencing. Hence, a visual experience is one where I stand in a ‘visual’ relation to some content; an auditory experience one where I stand in an ‘auditory’ relation to some content, etc. When experiencing an object in different modalities, the content is the same across modalities – it is the relation in which one stands to this content which differs. It is this difference in relation to content that explains the phenomenal difference between seeing and feeling a cube.

In the other camp, the relationship between content and mode is conceived of as being more intertwined. Instead of mode being a *relation* to content, mode is characterised as a *way in which the content is presented*. For example a visual experience is one where some content is presented *visually* (i.e., <cube>, presented visually). A tactile experience is one where some content is presented in a tactile way (i.e., <cube>, presented tangibly). Like the relational view, the content itself can remain the same across experiences in different modalities. What differs in these two experiences is the way in which this content is presented.

This sort of view has been expressed in the literature in various ways. Ned Block seems to have such a view in mind when he characterises the notion of *mental paint* as a non-representational mental aspect of an experience which serves as a “vehicle for representation” (Block, 1996, p.27). Here, the experience’s sensory mode is construed as

a sort of foundation for the representation of the experience's content, without which there wouldn't be any way for content to be expressed. Similarly, Mitchell (2020, p.23) talks of "mode-infused content" (though we must make a clarification here - it is not the content *itself* that is altered by the mode, it is the way in which the content is presented).

Returning to the original dialectic, on both the presentational and relational versions of View B, Byrne's account of self-knowledge will be false. This is because Byrne's account requires us to have awareness of v-facts in order to follow the epistemic rule which leads us to self-knowledge. V-facts are specifications of an experience's content. However, if content can be the same across sensory modalities - as View B theorists argue it can be - then content itself does not indicate its modal origin. If content itself does not indicate its modal origin, then we cannot infer from our awareness of this content what type of experience we are currently enjoying. This is precisely because of the evidential objection: content which doesn't indicate its modal origin is not good evidence for forming beliefs about the state type of our current experience. Hence, Byrne requires View A to be true for his account of self-knowledge to work. If View B is true, his account succumbs to the evidential objection.

Despite the problems that View B causes for his account, in his work, Byrne gives us no reasons (independent of the transparency thesis) to reject it in favour of View A. In the next sections I will argue that View A lacks motivation by posing two issues for it which View B can easily overcome. The first issue pertains to Byrne's account of self-knowledge specifically, the second problem has to do with transparency accounts of experience more generally. I will argue that when considered together, these issues give us good reason to reject View A in favour of a non-transparent account of the

metaphysics of content which is compatible with the requirements of the acquaintance theorist.

#### 4. The Rationality of Rule Following

The first problem I wish to pose for View A is that, if it is true, it seems to make it irrational to follow Byrne's epistemic rules for self-knowledge. To see this we must revisit Byrne's epistemic rule for acquiring knowledge about one's visual experiences. Byrne's rule is as follows:

**SEE:** *If [...x...]v and x is an F, believe that you see an F.* (Byrne, 2018, p.139)

The idea is that when we are in possession of some v-fact, since this type of fact only specifies the content of *visual* experiences, we can rationally follow SEE to know that we are having a visual experience. However, a problem occurs when we consider the more general category of perceptual facts, of which v-facts are just one member. For Byrne, the content of *all* perceptual experiences can be specified by these modality-specific facts; 'a-facts' specify the content of auditory experiences, 'o-facts' specify the content of olfactory experiences, 't-facts' specify the content of tactile experiences, and so on. Let us call the general category to which *all* of these facts belong 'p-facts' (where 'p' just stands for a sensory modality of any kind). For each type of p-fact, there is a corresponding rule which one follows to gain self-knowledge. For example, the rule to follow to acquire knowledge of one's auditory experience would be:

**HEAR:** *If [...x...]a and x is an F, believe that you hear an F.*

Where '[...x...]'a' is an a-fact.

My question is this: given your possession of some p-fact, what is it about this fact that allows you to know which epistemic rule to follow? I know that if I am in possession of a v-fact then I am to follow SEE. But how do I know that the fact I am in possession of is a v-fact? In other words, how do I know that my p-fact is a v-fact, rather than an a-fact or an o-fact, so that I know I'm to follow SEE, rather than HEAR or SMELL? Presumably, without this extra piece of knowledge, it is not rational for me to follow one particular epistemic rule over any of the others.

One obvious answer is that we know some p-fact is a v-fact because there is something, recognisable by us, that all and only v-facts have in common. Hence, if we are aware of some p-fact, and we know that p-fact possesses some quality that is had by all and only v-facts, then we can know that the p-fact we're aware of is a v-fact. This raises the further question: what is the recognisable quality that is had by all and only v-facts?

One obvious response would be to appeal to something like 'phenomenal visualness'; all and only v-facts have a visual phenomenal quality. However, we cannot explicate such a notion in a way that is compatible with transparency. For v-facts to possess phenomenal visualness, this 'visualness' would have to be perceived as a property of the objects in the world that we are experiencing. But this is implausible. The objects that we are experiencing don't seem to us to have the property of 'visualness'. If visualness is a property of anything, it is a property of experiences. Trees and tables and flowers and birds aren't visual, experiences are. So any appeal to 'phenomenal visualness' as the recognisable quality which all and only v-facts have in common will be incompatible with the transparency thesis.

The type of quality which all and only v-facts have in common must be a property which we perceive *objects* as having. A potential, transparency-friendly candidate for such a property is *colour*. Colour is a proper sensible, and proper sensibles are sensory



qualities which are unique to a particular sensory modality. We only *see* colour; we do not hear it or smell it or taste it. Moreover, *all* visual experiences present their objects as having some colour or another. The sensory quality of colour is seemingly present in all and only visual experiences, so is a plausible candidate for the recognisable quality which all v-facts have in common.

So before we are able to rationally follow SEE, we must be able to recognise the presence of the sensory quality of *colour*. Only then will we know that the p-fact we are presented with is a v-fact. Similarly, for the other sensory modalities, different proper sensibles will play the same role. *Sound* is the proper sensible for auditory experience, so if we recognise the presence of sound, we can rationally follow HEAR. For olfactory experience we would have to recognise the presence of *smell*, etc. The presence of proper sensibles allows us to know what type of p-fact we are presented with, and therefore makes it rational for us to follow one epistemic rule over any others.

However, I believe that the appeal to proper sensibles does not succeed. The strategy falls into difficulty when we try to distinguish perceptual modalities from their imagination counterparts. For example, when we try to distinguish between v-facts and visual *imagery*-facts (which Byrne calls "*v<sup>-</sup>-facts*" (Byrne, 2018, p.189)).

The problem is that perceptual experiences seem to *share* proper sensibles with their imagination counterparts. Because of this, we have no way of distinguishing between vision-facts and visual imagery-facts. If the only way we are able to know that a v-fact is a v-fact is because we recognise in it the presence of the proper sensible of colour, and

this proper sensible is *shared* by  $v^-$ -facts, then we cannot, on Byrne's transparency rule following account, have any way of distinguishing between v-facts and  $v^-$ -facts.<sup>9</sup>

Byrne's views on the content of visual imagery experiences are such that they seem to support this conclusion. He says of visual imagery content:

[T]he content of visualizing is the *same kind* as the content of vision—albeit degraded and transformed in various ways. (Byrne, 2018, p.188) [emphasis added]

There are two things to note here. The first is Byrne's claim that the content of visualising is the *same kind* as the content of vision. I take this to mean that the same sensory qualities are present in visual imagery that are present visual perception (so colour, texture, depth, motion etc., which can all be recognised in visual perception, can also be recognised in visual imagery). Byrne says as much:

So to the visual world we may add its ethereal counterpart, the *visualized* world, the totality of *visualized facts*, or  $v^-$ -facts. (ibid., p.188-9) [emphasis in original]

I also take "same kind" to mean that there are no sensory qualities available to visual perception that are not available to visual imagery. If this is the case, then there are no sensory qualities the presence of which would allow us to tell the two types of experience apart. But since we can, most of the time, tell these types of experience apart, the claim that visual perception and visual imagery have the same kind of content is a troubling conclusion for the transparency theorist.

Perhaps Byrne's claim that the content of visual imagery experiences is "degraded and transformed" when compared to the content of visual perceptual experiences is

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<sup>9</sup> The presuppositions in this argument are in line with Byrne's thinking on self-knowledge of imaginary states. Byrne argues that we follow a rule to acquire this knowledge, and that the antecedent of this rule contains a  $v^-$ -fact (Byrne, 2018, p.195).

supposed to solve this problem. If I am aware of some content which is visual in kind, and I know this content is *not* degraded and transformed, then I know I am in possession of a v-fact rather than a  $v^-$ -fact. But what does it mean for some content to be degraded and transformed? Byrne gives us the following definitions:

*[D]egradation* is logical weakening, and *transforming* corresponds to substituting distinct logical equivalents. (ibid., p.188) [emphasis in original]

By 'logical weakening' Byrne means something like a *less detailed* version of the original content. We can consider the following metaphor: if the content of visual experience is like a book, the content of visual imagery is the book's synopsis; it contains the main points but is lacking in many of the details. By "substituting logical equivalents" Byrne is referring to the replacement of determinate contents with more general ones (such as the general colour content 'red' replacing 'scarlet' in an instance of visual imagery).

Phenomenally, it does seem to us that these differences can be felt. Take my current visual experience of the tree outside my window. There is so much detail in this experience; it is informationally very rich, containing details about the various shades of green of the leaves, the trees movement in the wind, the background of the surrounding clouds and houses and walls and all their details too. By contrast, if I am asked to form a visual image of the tree, (at least for me, anyway) many of these details will be lost.

However, on the other hand, there are cases where such degradation and transformation of content *doesn't* seem to occur. Consider, for example, dreams and daydreams. These passive instances of visual imagery can be enormously realistic, to the point where it can take us some time to realise that the conscious experience we just had was only a dream. On the flip-side, there are certainly instances of visual *perceptual* experience which seem to us to be degraded. Consider the following two contrasting visual perceptual experiences: in the first, you are in a well-lit room looking at a red

cubical object. The content of this experience - the sensory qualities you are presented with - are highly determinate and very detailed. You can make out the exact shade of red, the preciseness of the boundaries of the object, its varying depths. Consider now an experience of the very same object in a poorly-lit room (perhaps the lights are turned off, it is dark outside and there is only minimal illumination coming from a window). In this experience, the content is arguably degraded and transformed; perhaps the object is presented as red, but you can't make out the exact shade, or perhaps you can't tell how far away its edges are from you, or even whether it is 2D or 3D. One could also quite easily imagine a pair of glasses which would, when worn, create a similar degraded effect. Finally, there are examples such as the well-known Perky Experiment. In this experiment, subjects are placed in front of a white screen and asked to form a visual image of an object. At the same time, an actual image of the object is projected onto the screen in front of them. Subjects confuse the actual image for their visualised image, claiming that they are aware of a visualised image, when in fact they are aware of a real image. All of these examples seem to support the conclusion that it is not any quality of the *content* that we consider when distinguishing our visual experiences from visual imagery.<sup>10</sup>

Crossover cases such as these suggest that, in practice, we *don't* look for whether the content of some experience is degraded and transformed in order to tell whether it is a perceptual or imagery experience. Perhaps sometimes we *can* tell our visual imagery apart from our visual experiences by looking for degradations and transformations in the content, but the abovementioned cases suggest that this is not the primary method by which we do so. Hence, the transparency theorist must look for other options in order to explain how we are able to tell the two apart.

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<sup>10</sup> See Perky (1910).

Potentially, the transparency theorist could appeal to something like the experienced object's *phenomenal presence* to explain our ability to tell the difference between v-facts and  $v^-$ -facts. When we have a visual experience, the objects we experience are presented to us as existing *in the actual world, right now*. Conversely, when we merely visualise an object, that object is *not* presented to us as existing in the actual world. It is presented as existing in the imagined world (Dorsch, 2010, p.177). If these variations in phenomenal presence can be attributed to an experience's content, then we can be sure that they are the result of variations in the sensory qualities of the experienced objects that are presented to us in experience. Presence needs to be represented in the content in order for the transparency thesis to be maintained.

However, it doesn't seem that modal presence is as simple to accommodate in an experience's content as other, more obvious sensory qualities are. This is because of a contradiction which occurs in a special case of visual imagery. If we simply admit 'presence in the actual/imagined world' into the content of an experience (along with, say, an object's colour, texture, depth etc. - all the other obvious sensory qualities), we end up with contradicting content in the case of experiences where we *visually imagine* ourselves as having a *visual perceptual experience*.

To illustrate, consider the following example. I can visually imagine myself as having a visual perception of some object; I can form a visual image of my visual perception of my red bike when I am not in fact visually perceiving my red bike. My bike is leant against the wall in my hallway, and I can imagine what it would be like, visually, for me to stand in front of it and look at it. In this case of 'imagined visual perception', what is the content of my experience with respect to the object's presence in the actual/imagined world? It seems like there are two options:

1. <That is a *present in imagined world* <*present in actual world, red bike*>>

In this first case, there are two contents at play, with one nested within the other. The nested content is the content of the visual experience you're imagining yourself as having, whereas the sentence as a whole is the content of the imagined visual experience. This way of spelling out the content, however, seems to contradict the transparency thesis. To be able to nest the content of some experience within the content of another experience seems to presuppose that we are aware that what is being nested is an *experience itself*, and not just some extra content which is part of the original experience. In other words, we need to have some awareness of the fact that the nested content is the content of *a separate experience*. But we can only do this if we have awareness of features of experience itself, rather than just the objects of experience, otherwise there would be no way of discerning the content of the imagined perception from the original imaginary state. We need to be aware of the experience itself, rather than just the object of this experience, in order to be able to nest its content accurately within the content of the original experience.

However, according to the transparency thesis, we have no such awareness of experience itself, hence, there can't be any nesting of contents. Given this, the transparency theorist must go with the second content option:

2. <That is a *present in the imagined world, present in the actual world, red bike*>

But this is problematic, too. Without the nesting of the visual experience's content within the content of the visual imagery, we have a case of an experience with contradictory content. The bike can't be given as both present in the imagined world *and* present in the actual world at the same time. If it is given as present in the imagined world, it is not given as present in the actual world (and vice versa).

So we cannot admit an object's phenomenal presence into the content of experience without either contradicting the transparency thesis, or ending up with contradictory content.

Jonathan Mitchell suggests an alternative way to build phenomenal presence into an experience's content which seems to avoid this problem. Mitchell argues that we should think of phenomenal presence as "[A]spectual qualifications of property senses [(sensory qualities)] in experience (as *senses of senses* if you will)." (Mitchell, 2020, p.28). On this view, then, a visual imagery experience and a visual perceptual experience could present the same array of sensory qualities, what differs between the two is that in the former, these sensory qualities are presented under the aspect of *presentness in the imagined world*, and in the latter, these sensory qualities are presented under the aspect of *presentness in the actual world*.

The problem with this, however, is that it doesn't build presentness *into* the content at all. For presentness is now conceived of in the same way that some View B theorists conceive of sensory mode: as a way in which the content is *presented*. To be aware of presentness is not to be aware solely of the object of experience and its sensed properties; it is to be aware of some feature of experience itself. Hence, if we accommodate presentness in the way Mitchell proposes, we admit that there are phenomenally salient features of experience which are *not* given as features of the objects of experience. Transparency is, again, undermined.

So attempts to explain how we can know the difference between v-facts and  $\bar{v}$ -facts by appealing to the phenomenal presentness of experienced objects, and without undermining the transparency thesis, are unsuccessful. The straight-up admission of presentness into content leads to the problem of contradictory contents, whereas building it in as a way in which content is presented undermines transparency.

Thus, the transparency theorist's attempts to make epistemic rule following rational, whilst at the same time being compatible with their view on the metaphysics of content, seem to fail. Appeal to proper sensibles as a way of recognising v-facts over other p-facts seems promising, but quickly runs into trouble when we consider how we are then able to tell v-facts apart from their imagination counterparts.<sup>11</sup> Neither appeal to degradation and transformation of content, nor appeal to phenomenal presentness gives us the necessary differences in content required by the transparency theorist for us to tell these facts apart. Without this ability, to follow any one epistemic rule over another would be irrational. And any coincidentally true beliefs gained in such an irrational manner cannot be considered knowledge. Therefore, it seems that Byrne's view on the metaphysics of content, motivated solely by transparency, cannot conform to the rational requirements of his rule-following account.

Before we move on, it will be instructive to consider what View B theorists can say in response to the problems discussed above. If we put aside the fact that View B theorists needn't subscribe to an epistemic rule following account of self-knowledge in the first place (since they deny transparency, they are not committed to an account where self-knowledge must be inferred from knowledge about the world), we can see that View B theorists can easily respond to the problem of distinguishing the various types of p-facts.

Consider first the problem faced by Byrne; the problem of explaining what recognisable quality all v-facts have in common that distinguishes them from other p-facts. View B theorists need not appeal to proper sensibles to explain this because they can allow that, when we have an experience, we are aware of more than just the sensible qualities of objects. According to View B theorists, the phenomenal character of an experience is

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<sup>11</sup> I take it that the same problem arises for all p-facts and their imagination counterparts.



determined by both the content itself *and* the way in which that content is presented (or, for relational View B theorists, the way in which we are related to that content). Here, then, we are allowing that the subject is aware of *features of the experience itself*. It is this awareness that View B theorists can appeal to when explaining what it is that all v-facts have in common. All and only v-facts are presented in a distinctly *visual* way, and it is our awareness of this presentation of the content that explains our ability to distinguish information received visually from information received in other perceptual modalities.

When it comes to explaining the difference between visual perception and visual imagery, View B theorists can say the same thing. In visual perception, content is presented *visually*. In visual imagery, content is presented (for want of a better word) *visual-imaginarily*. Both will have similar visual-like phenomenologies (which explains their phenomenal similarities), but the former is presented as a perceptual experience and has perceptual phenomenology whereas the latter is presented as an imagery experience and has imagery phenomenology.

What of the case of imagined vision discussed earlier which caused so much trouble for the View A theorist? The View B theorist can unproblematically accept the nested contents account of this type of experience, since they are not committed to the transparency thesis.

To summarise, I have argued that Byrne's epistemic rule following account of self-knowledge presupposes a particular view on the metaphysics of content - View A. View A is compatible with the transparency thesis. I have outlined a competing view - View B - which is not compatible with the transparency thesis. The truth of View A is necessary for the success of the epistemic rule following account because information about the modal provenance of an experience needs to be included in that experience's content for the rule following account to work. On View B, information about the modal

provenance of an experience is not included in the experience's content. Content can be shared across modalities, so knowledge of content alone does not give us enough information to rationally follow any epistemic rules. If View B is true, Byrne's account immediately falls prey to the evidential objection.

So Byrne's account requires View A to be true. However, if View A is true, this seems to make it irrational to follow any epistemic rules. In the search for features of content which *would* make it rational for us to follow epistemic rules, we come across only contradictions and solutions which are incompatible with the transparency thesis. Hence, Byrne's epistemic rule following account of self-knowledge fails.

The consequences of this for the acquaintance theorist's project are thus: firstly, we have good reason to believe that self-knowledge immediate and is not a product of inference. This is because the best available inferentialist account - the rule following account - fails to get us self-knowledge.

Secondly, we have good reason to believe that a View A-type theory of content is false. This is because we cannot explain our self-knowledge of state type on this view. This is also promising for the acquaintance theorist, since the opposing view - View B - allows for the phenomenology of state type which is necessary for self-ascription on the acquaintance account. However, in only arguing against View A, I have not yet given a positive argument for accepting View B. In the next section I will argue that we have further good reasons to believe in an account of the metaphysics of experience which commits us to a phenomenology of state type.

## 5. Explaining Away Transparency

A central claim of View B is that there are phenomenologically salient features of experience which can't reasonably be attributed to an awareness of the objects of experience. Instead, these features constitute an awareness of the *experience itself*. For View B theorists, awareness of these features is an awareness of the mode of presentation of a content (for example, an awareness of the *visual* presentation of the content 'that is a red bike'). Thus, it can be said that on View B we are aware of some phenomenal character which corresponds to state type.

In the anti-transparency literature, a popular line of argument against the transparency thesis is to 'point' to something we are aware of in experience which doesn't seem to us to be a property of the objects of experience. The claim is then made that the thing we are aware of must be a property of the experience itself, hence, it is claimed, transparency is false.

By way of giving further argument for View B - and, by extension, for a phenomenology of state type - I want to consider some of these anti-transparency arguments and the responses given by transparency theorists. I will consider two well known cases - the case of *blur* and the case of *after images* - both of which, it is argued, show the falsity of the transparency thesis. I will then consider the various responses to these cases given by transparency theorists. The general strategy of transparency theorists when faced with these cases is to 'explain away' the purported non-transparent feature of experience by framing it as a property of the objects of experience, rather than a property of experience itself. But I will not comment on whether or not I think these arguments are successful with respect to blur and after images. Instead, I will show that, when extended to phenomenology of state type, these 'explaining away' arguments are unsuccessful. I will conclude that, since phenomenology of state type

resists a 'transparent' explanation, we have further reason to believe that the transparency thesis is false.

## 5.1 Blur and After-Images

Appeals to the phenomena of blur and after-images are frequently made by anti-transparency theorists to demonstrate the purported non-transparent nature of experience. Though both have been discussed in the literature many times, their original discussion with respect to transparency can be attributed to Boghossian and Velleman (1997).

I shall begin with the phenomenon of blur. Some visual experiences are, in some way, blurry (for example, the visual experience I have when I take my glasses off and look at objects which are far away from me). In these experiences, it is argued, the blurriness *does not seem* to be a property of the objects experienced. To see that this is the case, we must consider a second, phenomenally different occurrence of blur: a clear experience of a blurry object (for example, a visual experience of a picture of some people where the faces have been blurred out).<sup>12</sup> Here, the blurriness *does* seem to be a property of the object experienced. The phenomenal difference between these two experiences, according to the anti-transparency theorist, can be attributed to the fact that in the former the blur seems to us to be a property of experience itself, and in the latter the blur seems to us to be a property of the experienced object. Hence, it is concluded, experience is not transparent.

The after-images argument runs along similar lines. Sometimes we experience after-images (such as the bright white fuzzy dot which seems to 'get in the way' of our vision

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<sup>12</sup> This phenomenal contrast case is due to Block (2003).

for a while after we've had a camera flashed in our eyes, or have looked directly at the sun). In these experiences, the after-image does not seem to us to be a property of anything in the world. It is certainly not experienced as a property of any object of experience; it gets in the way of these objects, it is experienced as being *in front of them*, but not as a part of their world. The anti-transparency explanation of this phenomenon is that the after-image seems to us to be a property of experience itself. Hence, it is concluded, experience is not transparent.

Blur and after-images are the two most commonly cited phenomena appealed to by anti-transparency theorists wishing to demonstrate the opacity of experience. I have been arguing that a third phenomenon - the phenomenology of state type - also demonstrates this opacity. Given this, to assess the plausibility of my claim, we can consider the transparency theorist's responses to the cases of blur and after-images and see if any of these arguments also work against phenomenology of state type.

### 5.1.1 Intellectual Seemings

Laura Gow attempts to reconcile blur and after-images with transparency by appealing to *intellectual seemings*. An intellectual seeming is a state where some content is presented with a sort of cognitive phenomenology of 'recommendation'. The state "assures" or "recommends" its content (Varga, 2017, p.377). For example, if I have an intellectual seeming with content *p*, in this state, *p* is being recommended to me as true. Along with their 'recommending' nature, Gow states two other important features of intellectual seemings: firstly, they are *not part of our perceptual experiences*, and secondly their phenomenology can *override* the phenomenology of other occurrent states (Gow, 2019, pp.415-417).

Now that we have a basic idea of what intellectual seemings are, we can see how Gow employs them to explain away the anti-transparency arguments. Let us first consider the case of blur. In the problematic case, I take my glasses off and things look blurry, however the blur doesn't seem to me to be located *out there*, in the world and its objects; it seems to me to be a feature of experience itself. Gow rejects this explanation. She argues that, in fact, in our visual experience, we do experience the blur as seeming to be *out there*, however at the same time we have an intellectual seeming which recommends to us that this is not the case; it recommends to us that the blur is phenomenally *within*, as a property of the experience itself (ibid., p.417). The phenomenology of the intellectual seeming overrides the phenomenology of the visual experience, and this is what makes it seem to us, overall, that the blur is a feature of experience itself. Visual experience itself remains transparent, but its *phenomenal* transparency is overridden by the intellectual seeming.

Gow argues that the phenomenology of after-images can be explained in the same way. She says that in visual experience, after-images are given, phenomenally, as being features of the world, but when we experience an after-image we simultaneously have an intellectual seeming which overrides this after-image's original phenomenal seeming (ibid., p.419). This intellectual seeming recommends to us that the after-image is a feature of experience itself. Again, visual experience remains transparent, but its phenomenal transparency is overridden by the seeming.

The success or failure of Gow's argument for blur and after-images is not important for my project here. Instead, I wish to see if we can use the same line of reasoning to explain away phenomenology of state type's purported opacity. Such an argument would go as follows: when we have a visual experience, the *visualness* really does seem to us to be *out there*, as a feature of the world. However, at the same time, we have an

intellectual seeming which recommends to us that the visualness is *within* - that it is a feature of the experience itself. The phenomenology of the intellectual seeming overrides the phenomenology of the visual experience.

This argument does not succeed in maintaining the transparency thesis. This is because there is a significant disanalogy between state type phenomenology, and the phenomenology of blur and after-images. This disanalogy, I argue, gives us reason to believe that the claim that ‘in visual experience, visualness is experienced as *out there*’ is implausible.

Here is the disanalogy: whilst blur and after-images can plausibly be construed as part of an experience’s content, visualness can’t. Neither the transparency theorist nor the anti-transparency theorist wants to say that experienced objects have the property of ‘visualness’. After-images, on the other hand, can much more easily be thought of as part of the content: <that is a bright white dot>. The same can be said for blur: <that is a blurred tree>. To say that visualness is part of the content is a step too far, and makes the initial claim, which Gow’s argument rests on, implausible. The intellectual seemings response can’t reconcile transparency with phenomenology of state type.

### 5.1.2 Under-Representation

A second attempt to reconcile blur and after-images with transparency is made by Michael Tye. Tye argues that these cases can be explained as instances of our visual experience *under-representing* the objects of experience.<sup>13</sup> One’s experience under-represents objects when it doesn’t seem to specify information about the boundaries of

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<sup>13</sup> Note Tye himself does not use the phrase ‘under-representation’. This is the term which Keith Allen gives to Tye’s view (Allen, 2011, p.266).

those objects. In other words, experience “makes no comment about where exactly [an object’s] boundaries lie” (Tye, 2002, p.148).

Tye employs the notion of under-representation to explain what is going on when we have blurred vision:

In seeing blurrily, one undergoes sensory representations that fail to specify just where the boundaries and contours lie. Some information that was present with eyes focused is now missing. In particular, there is less definite information about surface depth, orientation, contours, etc. (ibid., pp.147-148)

Here we can see that Tye intends blurriness to be understood as seeming to be a feature of the objects represented in an experience’s content. The object that is represented in the content is represented without comment on the specific location of its boundaries. The object *out there* is given by experience as having non-specific boundaries. Blurriness is therefore experienced as a property of objects, not as a property of experience itself.

Tye presents the same explanation of after-images (albeit by first making the claim that after-images are “illusory experiences” of objects hovering in space (ibid., p.149)). Take my after-image experience of the bright white fuzzy dot that I get after looking directly at the sun. According to Tye, this can be explained as an illusory visual experience of a bright white dot hanging in front of me, which is represented without comment on this dot’s boundaries. The after-image object (though illusory) is experienced as being *out there* in the world, and its fuzziness is explained as an under-representation of its boundaries.

Regardless of whether Tye’s account accurately explains blur and after-images, it should be fairly obvious that it won’t work for phenomenology of state type. Again, this is down to the aforementioned disanalogies between state type on the one hand, and blur and after-images on the other. One can say, as Tye does, that experience’s seeming



blurriness is actually down to our experience ‘withholding comment’ on an object’s boundaries, but it makes no sense to say that experience’s seeming *visual* is down to our experience ‘withholding comment’ on anything. This is precisely because the property of ‘visualness’ is not experienced as a property of any object. Tye’s explanation of blur and after-images, like Gow’s, cannot be extended to reconcile transparency with phenomenology of state type.

### 5.1.3 Over-Representation

Keith Allen (2011) argues that blurry experiences are in fact instances of *over-representation*. Rather than experience failing to comment on an object’s boundaries, Allen argues that in the case of blur, experience provides “too much, inconsistent information about an object’s spatial boundaries by representing them as being simultaneously located at multiple locations” (ibid., p.267).

It should be clear that this argument fails to reconcile transparency with phenomenology of state type for the same reasons as the under-representation thesis: it makes no sense to say that an experience’s seeming *visual* is down to our experience providing too much inconsistent commentary on anything. Allen’s over-representation explanation does not extend to phenomenology of state type.

In summary, by way of attempting to extend the above three arguments to phenomenology of state type, I have argued that there is a significant disanalogy between this phenomenon and other purportedly opaque phenomena. All the above arguments rely on it being plausible to construe the supposedly opaque phenomenon as a part of the experience’s content. Whether or not this is indeed plausible for blur and after-images, it is not plausible in the case of phenomenology of state type. We can

conclude from this that if any phenomenon evidences the opacity of experience, it is phenomenology of state type.

## 6. Conclusion

The arguments in this section are intended to be considered together as amounting to the following three claims:

1. Transparency accounts of self-knowledge are unsuccessful.
2. The transparency thesis is false.
3. There is a phenomenology of state type.

This is what is required by the acquaintance theorist in order to explain self-ascriptions of state type.

To these aims I have considered what I take to be the best available transparency account of self-knowledge - Alex Byrne's epistemic rule following account. I have argued that this account presupposes a particular view on the metaphysics of content - View A - a transparency view according to which content type is unique to each sensory modality. I have highlighted an alternative non-transparent view - View B - which, if true, would make Byrne's rule following account prey to the evidential objection.

The best available inferentialist account of self-knowledge therefore requires the truth of View A. However, when considered in more detail, there are further epistemic requirements to Byrne's account which cannot be met if View A is true. The consequences of this for the acquaintance theorist's project are thus: firstly, we have good reason to believe that self-knowledge is not a product of inference. This is because the best available inferentialist account - the rule following account - fails to provide us with self-knowledge. This lends support to the claim made in the introduction that self-

knowledge is the product of an *immediate* process. Secondly, we have good reason to believe that a View A is false. This is because we cannot explain our self-knowledge of state type on this view.

Finally, by way of giving further support to View B (and for the claim, entailed by View B, that there is a phenomenology of state type), I considered some responses to well-known objections to the transparency thesis. I concluded that phenomenology of state type evades the ‘transparent’ explanations given to blur and after-images because it cannot reasonably be considered a part of the experience’s content. This conclusion, alongside the failure of transparency accounts of self-knowledge, leads me to conclude that there is a phenomenology of state type, and furthermore, that it is our awareness of this which explains our ability self-ascribe the type of mental state we are in.

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## Chapter 3

# Acquaintance and Knowledge of Content

### 1. Introduction

I have argued that we are acquainted with the phenomenal properties of our current conscious mental states. That is, we are immediately, indubitably aware of, and stand in a metaphysically direct relation of perfect presentation to these properties. I have also argued that for acquaintance to be able to explain self-knowledge, it must be able to explain both how we know what type of mental state we are currently having, and how we know what that mental state is about. In other words, acquaintance must be able to explain our awareness of *state type* and *state content*.

The resources available to the acquaintance theorist to explain this awareness are a state's phenomenal properties, since these are the properties we have conscious access to. If, for any conscious mental state, the state's content and the state's type are

indicated in the phenomenal character of that state, then the acquaintance theorist has the means to explain self-ascriptions; they can say that we are aware of the type and the content of the mental state we are in because we are acquainted with the phenomenal properties which express these features.

In the previous chapter, I argued that our mental states have at least some phenomenal properties which correspond exclusively to state type, and that it is our acquaintance with these phenomenal properties which explains our ability to self-ascribe state type. In this chapter, I will consider awareness of content. I will argue that the content of a mental state is expressed by (at least some of) that state's phenomenal properties. It is our acquaintance with these properties which explains our ability to self-ascribe state content.

It is not my intention in this chapter to offer an argument for any one particular view on the relationship between a state's content and its phenomenology. Rather, I wish to show that the acquaintance theorist has at their disposal several independently plausible accounts of this relationship with which to fulfil their requirements. Given this, the chapter will survey the main accounts of this relationship which exist in the literature. These are *separatism*, *representationalism*, and *phenomenal intentionality*. I will argue that certain versions of both representationalism and the phenomenal intentionality thesis meet the requirements of the acquaintance theorist whilst also being independently plausible. Moreover, versions of three above views which are *not* compatible with the requirements of the acquaintance theory are found to be independently *implausible*. The resulting conclusion is that the acquaintance theorist can claim that we are able to self-ascribe the content of our mental states by being aware of these states' phenomenal properties. Several of my arguments in this chapter will rely on the claims about phenomenology of state type which I made in the previous chapter.

After establishing this conclusion, I consider an objection; that externalism about the individuation of mental content threatens to undermine the claim that there is any relationship between content and phenomenal character which is of use to the acquaintance theorist. I will argue that since no plausible externalist account of the kind of content the acquaintance theorist is concerned with can be given, externalism poses no problems for the acquaintance account.

Before I begin these discussions, however, it will be useful to make some preliminary remarks. In the next section I will define some terms, and explain the requirements of the acquaintance theory when it comes to awareness of content.

## 2. Preliminary Remarks

When I make the self-ascription '*I am having a visual experience of a green tree*', I ascribe to myself a mental state with content. The content of a mental state is typically characterised as what the mental state 'says', or 'expresses', or 'represents', or 'is about'. For example, My visual experience of a green tree *represents* a green tree, so has the content which can be expressed as <green tree>. Similarly, my thought that Sheffield United didn't play well in the 20/21 season *says* just this, and so has the content which can be expressed as <Sheffield United didn't play well in the 20/21 season>. To give another example, my tactile experience of a smooth tabletop *represents* the table top as smooth, so has the content which can be expressed as <smooth tabletop>.<sup>1</sup> Content is also sometimes referred to as 'intentional content' because it is the way in which mental states exhibit *intentionality* or *aboutness*: "[W]hen a state has a certain content, we can say

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<sup>1</sup> Bear in mind that these are only linguistic expressions of content. I will not be making any assumptions about the structure of content itself - for example whether it is propositional or nonpropositional in nature - at this point in the thesis. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of this topic.

that it (intentionally) represents that content” (Mendelovici, 2018, p.8). It is also sometimes referred to as ‘representational content’, and the properties of content are sometimes referred to as a mental state’s ‘representational properties’.

The phenomenology of a mental state - or its *phenomenal character* - is typically characterised as the feature of a mental state which makes that state *feel* some way for the subject who is having it. States with phenomenal character feel some way to the subject, states without phenomenal character don’t feel any way. Other ways to characterise states with phenomenal character are as being *conscious* as opposed to *non-conscious*, or as there being “something it is like” for the subject to be in that state (Nagel, 1974).<sup>2</sup>

I have said that we are acquainted with phenomenal *properties*. Phenomenal properties are the properties, instantiated by a mental state, which give that state its phenomenal character. I have argued that they are the properties of mental states that we are immediately aware of via acquaintance.

There is an intuitive case to be made for the existence of an important metaphysical relationship between a state’s content and a state’s phenomenology (though exactly how we spell out this relationship is up for debate). Horgan and Tienson (2002) give a succinct account of the intuitive case:

[A] total visual experience with [its] overall phenomenal character is richly intentional, since it presents a temporally extended scene comprising various objects that instantiate various properties and relations at various spatial locations relative to one's centre of visual awareness. This total visual experience is also richly phenomenal, because there is an overall what-it's-like of experiencing the whole scene. (ibid., pp.521-522)

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the term ‘conscious’ here is taken to mean ‘phenomenally conscious’ as opposed to ‘access conscious’ (Block, 1995).



The idea presented here is that an experience's phenomenal character is key to its being an intentional state. There is *something it is like* for me to experience the objects and properties that my experience represents in its content. My visual experience of the green tree, for example, represents the tree and its greenness, and there is something that it is like for me to be representing these things - I have an experience with *green-ness* and *tree-like* phenomenology. I will call this view - the view that certain kinds of mental content are somehow also phenomenal - the *Intuitive Thesis*, and I will be referring back to it throughout this chapter. If we want to explain the Intuitive Thesis, positing some kind of explanatory metaphysical relationship between phenomenology and content seems to be an obvious option.

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, there are multiple existing accounts of this relationship in the literature. Some of these accounts serve the requirements of the acquaintance theory, others do not. It is the purpose of this chapter to survey such accounts and establish that there is at least one independently plausible account of the relationship between content and phenomenology which meets the requirements of the acquaintance theory. In order to help with this task, it is necessary to establish some criteria for assessing such views:

For the acquaintance account of self-ascription to be successful, there must be an account of the relationship between phenomenology and content which:

1. Allows that acquaintance with (at least some of) a mental state's phenomenology gets us immediate awareness of that state's *content*.
2. Allows that acquaintance with (at least some of) a mental state's phenomenology gets us immediate awareness of that state's *type*.
3. Is independently plausible.

If there is an account of the relationship between content and phenomenology which fulfils *all* of these criteria, then the acquaintance theorist has at their means a way to explain the self-ascription of mental states. Additionally, it is desirable that there is *no* account of the relationship between content and phenomenology which *doesn't* fulfil criteria (1) and (2), but which *does* fulfil criterion (3), since this would mean that there are no competing accounts which threaten the acquaintance theorist's project. However, if such competing accounts do exist, the acquaintance theorist can still try to show that the acquaintance-compatible accounts are *better* explanations of the content-phenomenology relationship than any acquaintance-incompatible accounts.

I will argue that there are two accounts of this relationship - a version of representationalism, and a version of the phenomenal intentionality thesis - which fulfil the aforementioned criteria. I will also give some reasons as to why other existing accounts which *don't* fulfil (1) and (2) have less independent plausibility. I will conclude from this that the acquaintance theorist can explain the self-ascription of current conscious states.

### 3. Separatism

For all that the Intuitive Thesis proposes, *separatism* is the view that there is *no* metaphysically important relationship between a mental state's content and its phenomenology. The term 'separatism' was coined by Horgan and Tienson (2002), but the view itself has been discussed for much longer.<sup>3</sup> According to those who endorse the separatist position, content and phenomenology are two metaphysically separate features of mental states, hence, neither one bears any important or illuminating

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<sup>3</sup> See Siewert (2016) for an insightful historical overview of the separatist position.

relationship to the other. Jaegwon Kim (2010) is perhaps the most well-known contemporary proponent of the separatist view.

Kim's argument for separatism takes the form of a series of counterexamples to the claim that there is *always* a metaphysically important relationship between the content and the phenomenology of our mental states. Starting from the assumption that there *is* such a relationship, Kim offers at least three cases where no such relationship seems to be present:

1. *Emotions*: according to Kim, some emotions have content, but are not felt (have no phenomenology). He gives the example of being unhappy about the government's continual large budget deficit. "Must your unhappiness be accompanied by some special felt quality? Probably not" (Kim, 2010., p.275). Here then we have an example of a contentful mental state (the state is *about* the government and its budget deficit), which arguably has no phenomenal character. Such states, if possible, would show there to be no necessary relationship between content and phenomenology.
2. *Unconscious beliefs and perceptions*: it seems that some of our beliefs and perceptions are not conscious, and hence have no phenomenal character. Examples of such mental states include dispositional beliefs, and unconscious perceptions such as blindsight.<sup>4</sup> Such states arguably have content - there are things that they represent and are about - but they do not have phenomenal character since they are not conscious for the subject. The possibility of such states, Kim argues, shows there to be a metaphysical gap between phenomenology and content (ibid.).

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<sup>4</sup> Suppose someone asks you if you believe that Usain Bolt is a faster runner than Boris Johnson. Before being asked, you have never *consciously* had this belief, but it is clear that in some sense you have always held it to be true. This is a dispositional belief.

3. *Moods*: moods such as elation, melancholy, or anxiety seem to have phenomenal character; there is something it is like to feel very low, or anxious, or to be ecstatic. Moods do not, however, seem to have any content - it is hard to specify what it is they represent or are about. Here then we have examples of mental states with phenomenal character but seemingly no content; a counterexample which works in the other direction to the aforementioned examples of unconscious states and emotions.

It should be clear what the consequences of Kim's arguments, if successful, have for the acquaintance theorist. If there are some mental states that seem to exhibit a disconnect between phenomenology and content (by having one but not the other), then it seems we are in a fair position to claim that, even in states where both features are present, there is no necessary connection between the two. And if no such connection exists, we cannot move from awareness of phenomenology to awareness of content in the way the acquaintance theorist requires. Separatism does not allow the acquaintance theorist to explain self-ascriptions.

It is not clear, however, that a blanket conclusion can be drawn about the relationship between phenomenology and content based on these counterexamples alone. For one thing, Kim himself doesn't actually endorse a position on which there is *never*, for *any* type of mental state, a content-phenomenology relationship. Rather, Kim's aim seems to be to demarcate the *various* relationships that appear to stand between phenomenology and intentionality - relationships which, he asserts, are dependent on the type of mental state one is in. For example, he says:

Mental states come in two groups - those of which the subject is aware and conscious, and those of which the subject is not consciously aware ... conscious states can be divided into two sub-groups: *those that are type-individuated on the basis of their phenomenal*

*character, and those that, even though they may be accompanied by qualia, are not type-individuated in terms of it.* (ibid., p.277) [emphasis added]

Here it is evident that Kim does not advocate for a homogeneous account of the relationship between content and phenomenology. In fact, he sees this relationship as one which can vary depending on the type of mental state one is in. Of particular interest to the acquaintance theorist is this class of mental states which Kim says, “are type-individuated on the basis of their phenomenal character” (ibid.). He gives the examples of “pain, the smell of ammonia, the visual sensing of green” (ibid.) to be states in this class. To say that these intentional states are type-individuated on the basis of their phenomenal character seems to be to say that it is in virtue of their phenomenal character that they have the content they do. In other words, if phenomenal character individuates mental states, then awareness of this character is what allows us to identify them *as* the mental states that they are. For the acquaintance theorist, this is exactly what is needed for self-ascription to be possible. Moreover, it is exactly *these kinds* of mental states that the acquaintance theory purports to explain our knowledge of; perceptual states, sensory states, and inner-perceptual states fall under the scope of the acquaintance theory *because* they are states with phenomenal character. The acquaintance theory aims to explain self-knowledge of any phenomenally conscious occurrent mental state.

Separatism, then, isn't immune from the force of the Intuitive Thesis. For at least some mental states, the phenomenology of those states plays a key role in their being the representational state that they are. However, without an explanation as to *why* some states exhibit this relation while others don't, Kim's claims seem a little ad hoc.

David Chalmers (2004) offers an explanation as to why, for some mental states, there appears to be a relationship between content and phenomenology, whereas for others

(Kim's counterexamples, for instance), there appears to be no such relationship.

Chalmers highlights the difference between the relational properties of 'entailment' and 'equivalence', and argues that it is plausible that the relationship between content and phenomenology exhibits the former property but not the latter.

If a property *entails* another, it is necessarily the case that whatever has the first property will also have the second. Entailment can be asymmetric: property A can entail property B but not vice versa. Or it can be symmetric: property A can entail property B *and* property B can entail property A. When we get a case of symmetric entailment, the two properties exhibit *equivalence* (i.e., they are identical). If the entailment is only one way, then the properties are not equivalent.

With regards to phenomenology and content, Chalmers argues that the relationship is that of one-way entailment: necessarily if a mental state has certain phenomenal properties it will have certain representational properties, but the instantiation of representational properties does not entail the instantiation of phenomenal properties. This seems to take care of Kim's counterexamples: emotions, unconscious beliefs and unconscious perceptions exhibit representational properties, but since representational properties needn't entail phenomenal properties, these states aren't phenomenally conscious. It also explains the Intuitive Thesis: states captured by the Intuitive Thesis are phenomenally conscious and their phenomenal properties entail the instantiation of certain representational properties - their content. Chalmers says of these states, "it is necessarily the case that a subject with a certain phenomenal character represents the world as being a certain way" (ibid., p.157). As for Kim's final counterexample - that of phenomenal, non-representational moods - it seems there are two options for dealing with this. Either one argues that moods *are* intentional, that they do represent things and do have content, in which case their phenomenal properties entail their

representational properties. Or one argues that not all phenomenal character is necessarily representational - that there are some phenomenal properties which do not entail representational ones (phenomenal properties of this kind are usually known as 'qualia').

To summarise, separatism cannot avoid positing a relationship between phenomenology and content in at least some mental states. To hold this whilst also claiming that there is no metaphysically interesting relationship between phenomenology and content *in general* is inconsistent, and to claim on the other hand that there is a metaphysically significant relationship for some mental states and not others without further explanation seems ad hoc.

I have argued that we can utilise Chalmers' notion of asymmetric entailment to offer an explanation as to why some mental states seem to exhibit intentionality, and hence have content, without exhibiting phenomenal character. Representational properties don't entail phenomenal properties; hence, some representational states lack phenomenal character. But (at least some) phenomenal properties entail representational properties; hence why, for many states, the presence of a certain phenomenal character (for example *green-ness*) will entail that that state has a certain content (it represents something as green).

For the acquaintance theorist, this conclusion is good news; it lends further support to the Intuitive Thesis, and explains away the problem initially posed by Kim's counterexamples. A totally separatist view on the relationship between phenomenology and content is implausible because it cannot capture the nature of conscious representational states - precisely the kind of states the acquaintance theorist is interested in. The implausibility of separatism thus establishes that for conscious

representational mental states, there *is* a relationship between their being conscious and their being representing which requires elucidation.

This conclusion gets the acquaintance theorist one step closer to where they need to be. We have established the existence of the connection between phenomenology and content - in the types of mental state we are concerned with - which is required to explain self-ascription of content. Criterion (1) has thus been met. What is now required is an account of the relationship between phenomenology and content which *also* meets criteria (2) and (3); it must allow space for there to be a phenomenology of state type, and it must be independently plausible. In the next section I will assess the *representationalist* account of this relationship against these final two criteria.

#### 4. Representationalism

Representationalism is a view about the relationship between a mental state's content and its phenomenology. Though there are different varieties of representationalism, all accounts share the same general premise that a state's content *determines* its phenomenology. That is, there are representational properties, instantiated by mental states, in virtue of which those states have the phenomenology that they do. We can call this kind of view a *content-first* view of the relationship between content and phenomenology, since on this view, phenomenal character is at least in part a product of that state's representing something.

Representationalists are divided about exactly *which* representational properties of mental states can determine a state's phenomenal properties. *Content representationalists* argue that a mental state's phenomenal properties are determined only by the state's content. *Mode representationalists*, on the other hand, argue that a mental state's



phenomenal properties are determined by both the state's content *and* the mode in which that content is presented (where a 'mode' is roughly analogous to a sensory modality). In the next section we shall see how each view fares with respect to fulfilling the criteria (2) and (3) set out by the acquaintance theorist.

## 4.1 Content Representationalism

Content representationalism is the view that an experience's phenomenal character is determined *wholly* by its content. That is, the experience has no phenomenal character over and above that which is determined by *what* the experience represents. Take for example my visual experience of a green tree. Content representationalists argue that the phenomenal character of this experience is determined only by your mental state's representing both this tree and its greenness. Those who advocate content representationalist views of phenomenal character include Tye (1995; 2002), Dretske (1995), and more recently Bourget (2017).

With regards to the acquaintance theorist's criteria, it is clear that the content representationalist will not be able to account for (2). Criterion (2) is the requirement that a theory of the relationship between content and phenomenology should also allow that acquaintance with at least some of a mental state's phenomenology is able to get us awareness of state type. The reason that content representationalists can't meet criterion (2) follows from my arguments in the previous chapter regarding phenomenology of state type. Since content representationalists argue that phenomenology is only determined by *what* is represented, they are committed to the transparency thesis, and hence to a View A type account of the metaphysics of content. This would mean that content representationalists would be unable to explain how it is possible for us to have self-knowledge of the type of mental state we are in (since, as I have argued in the

previous chapter, transparency theorists cannot explain self-knowledge of state type).

Therefore, given it doesn't meet criterion (2), content representationalism is incompatible with the requirements of the acquaintance theory.

However, the very reasons for which content representationalism does not fulfil criterion (2) are also the reasons for which it cannot be independently plausible (hence, not fulfilling criterion (3), either). This means it is no threat to the acquaintance theorist's project. I have argued that the inability of transparency theorists to explain our self-knowledge of state type gives us reason to reject the view in favour of an account on which awareness of a phenomenology uniquely associated with state type explains our knowledge of state type. Since content representationalism is a transparency account of experience, and transparency is false, content representationalism is false. The threat which it poses to the acquaintance theory is neutralised by its own shortcomings.

## 4.2 Mode Representationalism

Mode representationalism is the view that a mental state's phenomenal character is determined by a combination of that state's *content*, and its *mode*.<sup>5</sup> We have already defined 'content' as what the state represents, or is about. 'Mode' can be characterised as the way in which this content is presented to the subject.<sup>6</sup> To take the example of my visual experience of the green tree, the mode representationalist would argue that this has the content which can be expressed as <green tree>, and that this content is

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<sup>5</sup> In the literature, mode representationalism is has a variety of different names: Chalmers (2004) calls it 'impure representationalism', Pautz (2010) calls it 'relation-content intentionalism', Mitchell (2020) terms it 'mode intentionalism', and in Bourget (2017) it is given the name 'intramodal representationalism'. These views, whilst they may differ in name, are all varieties of mode representationalism.

<sup>6</sup> It has also been characterised - by Crane (2000) - as the relation in which the subject stands to a content. See Chapter 2, Section 3.1.2 of this thesis for more on this way of explicating mode.

presented in the *visual mode*. Of an auditory experience - say, of middle C - they would say that the content expressed as <middle C> is presented in the *auditory mode*. There is a different mode for each sensory modality through which it is possible to have an experience. And, when taken together, content and mode determine the phenomenology of the experience. They do this by being expressed in a way which is phenomenally conscious.

It should be obvious that mode representationalism fulfils both (1) and (2) of the acquaintance theorist's criteria. Since, on mode representationalism, phenomenology is determined by both content *and* mode, there is phenomenal character which corresponds to both content and state type. Mental states have a phenomenology of state type in virtue of their representational *mode* properties, and they have a phenomenology of content in virtue of their representational *content* properties.

Awareness of these phenomenal properties - since they are expressions of mode and content - gets us awareness of state type and of content, respectively. And this is the awareness necessary for us to be able to self-ascribe our conscious mental states.

As for mode representationalism's independent plausibility, it is clear that it does not fall prey to the same problems faced by content representationalism. Mode representationalism is able to explain how we can self-ascribe state type, since it is not committed to the transparency thesis. It explains our ability to self-ascribe state type as a product of our awareness of the phenomenal properties expressed by representational mode properties. And it is not committed to transparency, since these phenomenal properties are experienced by us as features of experience itself, not as features of the objects of experience. As I have argued, no transparency account of experience will be able to explain first-person knowledge of state type.

## 4.2.1 Multimodal Experiences: A Problem for Mode

### Representationalism

Bourget (2017) presents a problem for mode representationalism which is independent of the issues of self-knowledge and transparency. Bourget's objection, if successful, casts doubt on the independent plausibility of mode representationalism, and hence the acquaintance theorist's hopes of employing mode representationalism in their account of self-knowledge.

Bourget considers the phenomenon of *multimodal experiences*. Multimodal experiences are those where we experience a single object as having two or more properties, and where these properties are each represented in a different sensory modality. An example will help to explain. Consider your experience of a barking dog.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, this experience is composed of a number of different states; there is your visual experience of the dog, its shape, its colour; then there is the auditory experience of the barking noise it is making; then there is a sense in which you experience the dog as *causing* the barking noise, perhaps as some kind of cognitive state. Yet it is also clear that, in some sense, this experience of the barking dog is an experience *sui generis*, over and above the individual states that compose it. It is this *sui generis* sense to which Bourget is referring when he talks of multimodal experiences - the ubiquitous everyday experiences of objects, to which we attribute features that are experienced in differing modalities.

The notion of *subsumption* plays a key role in Bourget's explication of multimodal experiences. He gives the following definition of subsumption:

By x subsumes y, I mean that having y is a *necessary part* of having x. (ibid., p 254)

[emphasis added]

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<sup>7</sup> This is the example used by Bourget.

Bourget argues that subsumption is “the key marker of multimodal experiences ... they are instances of phenomenal states that subsume phenomenal states in different modalities” (ibid.). Take again the example of the barking dog. The multimodal experience you have of the barking dog *subsumes* the visual experience of the dog, the aural experience of the barking, and the cognitive experience of causation. This means that when you instantiate the multimodal experience of the barking dog, you necessarily also instantiate all of the experiences which are subsumed by it. Therefore, you cannot have an experience of a barking dog without also having the visual, auditory, and cognitive experiences that this overall experience subsumes.

Bourget argues that mode representationalists cannot give a plausible account of multimodal experiences because they cannot account for subsumption. And since multimodal experiences are ubiquitous in our everyday mental lives, doubt is cast on the overall plausibility of any theory which cannot explain them. To see why the mode representationalist has difficulty accounting for multimodal experiences, we should again consider the example of the barking dog. The multimodal experience of the barking dog (which Bourget calls “B-dog”) must subsume the component experiences of the dog, the barking, and the causation. This means that *all* features of the component experiences must also be features of the multimodal experience. However, when the mode representationalist tries to explain the structure of multimodal experiences, they are faced with a dilemma: either they flout subsumption, or they cannot properly account for the experience’s phenomenal character.

Let us consider how the mode representationalist arrives at this dilemma. Since, according to the mode representationalist, all experiences have both a content and a mode, it seems natural to say that the multimodal experience must have this structure too. The *content* of the multimodal experience is easily expressed as <barking dog>, but

when we consider what the *mode* of this experience might be, we face difficulties, since any suggested modes seem to be unable to account for the subsumption of the component experiences.

Bourget considers that the mode of “B-dog” might be some kind of *cognitive* mode, or even a kind of *neutral* mode that is had by all and only multimodal experiences. But the problem is that it is not clear how a cognitive or neutral mode is supposed to be able to subsume the component experiences when not all of the component experiences have cognitive or neutral modes. The component visual experience of the dog has a visual mode, and visual modes are not entailed by cognitive or neutral modes, and the component auditory experience of the barking has an aural mode, and aural modes are not entailed by cognitive or neutral modes either. Any proposed ‘neutral’ or ‘cognitive’ mode seems to be unable to subsume B-dog’s component experiences.

Bourget then considers that perhaps the overall mode of the multimodal experience could itself be composed of the modes of its component experiences. He calls this a “piecemeal mode” since it is a mode made up of other modes (those of the component experiences). In the case of B-dog, there is a piecemeal mode made up of visual, aural, and cognitive modes; so in B-dog the dog is represented by the visual part of the piecemeal mode, the barking by the aural part, and the causation by the cognitive part. This avoids the subsumption problem faced by positing a neutral mode (all the component experiences are now entailed by the multimodal experience). But, Bourget argues, the mode representationalist is now unable to explain the distinctive phenomenology of the multimodal experience itself. In B-dog, it is not just that the dog, the barking, and the causation are presented to you as co-occurrent, yet free-floating; it is that the dog is presented *as causing* the barking noise. If each of these component experiences were merely co-occurrent, there would be no way of telling whether your

experience was one of a dog causing a barking noise, or a barking noise causing a dog. However, B-dog is clearly phenomenally an instance of the former. It is this phenomenology of the dog as causing the barking that is present in the multimodal experience of B-dog over and above the phenomenal characters of the individual component experiences. If we construe the mode of B-dog as a piecemeal mode composed only of the modes of the component experiences, then - Bourget argues - we are unable to account for the overall phenomenology of the multimodal experience.

Bourget's argument, if successful, seriously threatens the independent plausibility of mode representationalism, and by extension, the plausibility of the acquaintance theory. However, I believe there is room for the mode representationalist to question some of the assumptions Bourget makes in his argument against their view.

Let us return to the second horn of the dilemma - the claim that positing piecemeal modes of multimodal experiences cannot capture the overall phenomenology of multimodal experiences. In explaining the phenomenal character of B-dog, we have to account for the phenomenal character of four different states: (1) the visual experience of the dog, (2) the aural experience of the barking, (3) the cognitive experience of the causation, *and* (4) the multimodal experience of the dog causing the barking. To account for the phenomenal character of the first three states (the constituent states) we simply posit a content and a mode for each. But how do we account for the phenomenal character of the fourth state - the multimodal experience? For the multimodal experience, we need to posit a *content* over and above the content of the constituent states to account for the fact we experience *dog causing barking*, and not *barking causing dog*. Let us look at this content in more detail:

<dog causing barking>

We can break this content down into four constituents. The first three constituents are the contents of the subsumed states. The fourth constituent is whatever it is that ‘orders’ or ‘glues’ these contents together in this particular way (call this the ‘multimodal glue’):

1. Content: <dog>
2. Content: <barking>
3. Content: <causation>
4. Multimodal glue

When broken down like this, however, it is not obvious why the piecemeal mode already discussed cannot account for the phenomenology of this experience. Bourget argues that a piecemeal mode comprised of visual, auditory, and cognitive modes is unable to account for the fact that we phenomenally experience the dog as causing barking rather than the barking as causing a dog. But it is unclear why this phenomenal character must be explained by appeal to a mode at all.

To see this, consider the following claim. Bourget argues that mode representationalists are committed to the view that: “[E]ach perceptual content can be attributed a sensory modality” (Bourget, 2017, p.13). That is, if some content is represented, it is necessarily represented in a particular mode. There can be no content without a mode of presentation of that content.

Let us return to our breakdown of the constituents of the content of the multimodal experience (the contents <dog>, <barking>, and <causation>, plus the multimodal glue). By Bourget’s own definition, it is only *content* which requires a particular mode to present it. So it is only the first three constituents - the contents <dog>, <barking>, and <causation> - which are important for explaining the overall *mode* of B-dog.

Multimodal glue, whatever it is, is not content. It is the *ordering* of content. It affects the



phenomenal character of experience without being a representational or modal property of that experience (much like say, 'qualia', or 'salience' does). Hence, we don't need to appeal to any further mode to explain the 'multimodal' phenomenal character of multimodal experiences because it is not mode which explains this character. It is explained, instead, by multimodal glue arranging the content in a particular way.

This would require a minor amendment to the mode representationalist thesis. Instead of claiming that *only* mode and content determine the phenomenal character of experience, the mode representationalist must allow that there are also phenomenal properties associated with multimodal glue. That is, that the properties of multimodal experiences which provide *order* to subsumed contents also entail phenomenal properties.

The mode representationalist has good reason to allow this. They define 'mode' as a way in which an experience's content is presented. Multimodal glue also affects the way in which content is presented. If 'mode' and 'multimodal glue' are both working in this way - to present content - then it is more consistent for the multimodal representationalist to claim that *both* of these features are expressed phenomenally. Mode representationalism, therefore, *does* have the resources to explain multimodal experiences.

For the acquaintance theorist, this is good news, since it means that there is no serious threat to the independent plausibility of mode representationalism from multimodal experiences. Mode representationalism, then, seems to fulfil the acquaintance theorist's criteria for an account of the relationship between content and phenomenal character. It allows the acquaintance theorist to account for awareness of content, since at least some phenomenal properties are determined by the representational content of experience. It allows them to account for awareness of state type, since at least some phenomenal

properties are determined by the mode of experience. And it is independently plausible, since it avoids the problems faced by content representationalism, and can explain multimodal experiences. The acquaintance theorist can thus appeal to mode representationalism to explain how self-ascription of conscious mental states is possible.

## 5. Phenomenal Intentionality

I will now discuss the *phenomenal intentionality* account of the relationship between content and phenomenology. Phenomenal intentionality theorists, much like representationalists, aim to explain the nature of the relationship posited in the Intuitive Thesis. The difference, however, is that where representationalists argue that a state's content determines its phenomenology, phenomenal intentionality theorists argue the opposite; that a state's phenomenology determines its content. We can call phenomenal intentionality a *phenomenology-first* view of this relationship, since on this view, a state's representing something is a product of that state's phenomenal character. For phenomenal intentionality theorists, my visual experience of a green tree has some greenish, tree-like phenomenal properties, and it is *because* of the instantiation of these phenomenal properties that the experience can be said to *represent* the green tree and thus have the content it does. Advocates of the phenomenal intentionality thesis include Siewert (1998), Loar (2003), Horgan and Tienson (2002), Mendelovici, (2018), and Pitt (2004).

Since the phenomenal intentionality theory is a *phenomenology-first* view, not a content-first view, it has had to contend with at least one problem which representationalism does not face. This is the problem of unconscious states. If phenomenology determines content, how do we explain the possibility of states with representational content but no phenomenology? These are states such as dispositional beliefs and unconscious

perceptions. For example, my belief that Sifan Hassan only held the women's 10,000m world record for two days can be both conscious (as when I bring it to my mind right now) or non-conscious (as when I am not currently thinking about it). In the first case, the phenomenal intentionality theorist has no problem explaining how this belief gets its content. In the second case, however, there seems to be content without any phenomenal properties to determine it - something which, on the phenomenal intentionality view, can't be possible.

Here, phenomenal intentionality theorists must advocate an *eliminativist* view of unconscious representational states, such as the one espoused by Mendelovici (2018).

Eliminativists deny the reality of unconscious representational states; if there are no such things as unconscious representational states, then they cannot cause a problem for the phenomenal intentionality theorist. Mendelovici's eliminativist strategy is to argue that whilst such unconscious states might share some properties which are *necessary* for representation in their conscious counterparts (such as their ability to track items, and their having certain functional roles), these properties alone are not *sufficient* for representation. For that, we require phenomenal consciousness (ibid., pp.186-187). Hence, unconscious states do not have representational content. And if there is no such thing as unconscious representational content, then there is no problem with claiming that a state's content is determined by its phenomenology.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that we cannot ever utilise the notion of an unconscious representational state in, say, our psychological theories. As Mendelovici (2018) and Graham et al. (2007) argue: it is often explanatorily useful to think of unconscious states as representing things, even if they do not.

It is also worth noting that if one finds the eliminativist strategy unconvincing, then the phenomenal intentionality theory is rendered implausible. However, one could still endorse mode representationalism, which escapes the problem of unconscious representation. There are, therefore, still options for the acquaintance theorist at this stage.

Now that the problem of unconscious states can be avoided, I can explain the different varieties of the phenomenal intentionality thesis. As with representationalism, there are variations of the phenomenal intentionality thesis. The accounts differ in their views on exactly which features of mental states are determined by phenomenology:

1. *Strong Phenomenal Intentionality* - on the strong phenomenal intentionality thesis, *all* of a mental state's phenomenology is representational. That is, a mental state's phenomenal character is exhausted by its content; phenomenal character determines *what* the state represents, and nothing else.

It should be clear that the strong phenomenal intentionality thesis is incompatible with the requirements of the acquaintance theorist. Whilst it allows us to account for awareness of content, it does not allow us to account for awareness of state type. This is because on the strong phenomenal intentionality thesis, phenomenal character determines *only* content, and not any other features such as mode. Hence, an experience's state type is not indicated by the phenomenal character of that experience.

Given this, however, I believe that strong phenomenal intentionality is independently implausible for the same reasons as content representationalism: it cannot account for our self-knowledge of state type. This is because, in arguing that phenomenal character *only* corresponds to content, strong phenomenal intentionality theorists committed to the transparency thesis, and hence to a View A type theory of the metaphysics of content. Strong phenomenal intentionality's inability to fulfil criterion (2) is therefore not a worry for the acquaintance theory.

2. *Intermediate Phenomenal Intentionality* - on the intermediate thesis, the phenomenal character of a mental state determines that state's representational content *and* its mode. We can think of this thesis as analogous to mode representationalism,

albeit phenomenology-first rather than content-first. To give an example, the intermediate phenomenal intentionality theorist would argue that my current visual experience of a green tree has greenish, tree-like, and visualness phenomenal character, and it is in virtue of this that it represents the content <green tree> in the visual mode.

Intermediate phenomenal intentionality is compatible with the first two requirements of the acquaintance theory; phenomenology individuates both content and state type, so in being acquainted with this phenomenology we are aware of both of these things.<sup>9</sup> We can also amend this view to account for multimodal experiences in the same way that we amended mode representationalism. Since ‘multimodal glue’, much like ‘mode’, affects the way in which an experience’s representational content is presented, we can allow that this feature is also determined by an experience’s phenomenal properties.

3. *Weak Phenomenal Intentionality* - on the Weak thesis, phenomenal character needn’t always determine a state’s type or content. The weak thesis allows that whilst some kinds of phenomenal properties do determine the content and mode of a state, other kinds of phenomenal properties have no relation to representational features. The main motivation for such a view is that it allows us to reconcile phenomenal intentionality with the claim that some mental states seem to have phenomenal character which *isn’t* in any way intentional. Consider the aforementioned examples given by Jaegwon Kim in favour of separatism; moods which don’t seem to be intentional, yet have a distinct phenomenal character. Consider also examples of so called ‘mental latex’ - phenomenal features of experience which don’t seem to represent anything (Block, 1996,

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<sup>9</sup> Horgan et al., (2004), and Pitt (2004) endorse versions of this view.

p.29) - such as phosphenes. If one is unpersuaded by intentionalist explanations of such features of experience, then the weak phenomenal intentionality thesis offers the space for a non-intentionalist account of such features.

The weak thesis also makes room for the first two demands of the acquaintance theorist; by allowing that *some* of a state's overall phenomenal properties determine the content and mode of that state, we can get awareness of these features via acquaintance with these properties.

So there are versions of the phenomenal intentionality thesis which are consistent with both of the first two requirements of the acquaintance theory. Moreover, the version of this thesis which is *not* compatible with the requirements of the acquaintance theory - strong phenomenal intentionality - is independently *implausible*. Hence, the phenomenal intentionality thesis (in its intermediate and weak forms) is available for use by the acquaintance theorist to explain the self-ascription of content and state type.

To summarise, there are versions of representationalism *and* versions of the phenomenal intentionality thesis which both explain the Intuitive Thesis and are amenable to the aims of the acquaintance theorist. The acquaintance theorist therefore has plausible explanations of the Intuitive Thesis that they can make use of in order to explain self-ascriptions. There is, however, one further issue which threatens the acquaintance theorist's hopes of showing that we can read a state's content off its phenomenology. This is the problem of content externalism.

## 6. Self-Ascriptions and Content Externalism

The final threat to the acquaintance theorist's project in this chapter comes from the thesis of content externalism. Content externalism is a view about how the content of

mental states is individuated. More specifically, it is the view that the content of mental states is individuated by factors which are *outside* of the physical boundaries of the subject. According to content externalists, it is worldly objects, social contexts, and the like which determine a mental state's content, and not any internal physical or phenomenal constitution of the subject.

To see how content externalism poses a problem for the acquaintance account, we must investigate how it interacts with the other theses that the acquaintance theorist is committed to. What the acquaintance theorist has to say about the individuation of phenomenal properties, the relationship between phenomenology and content, and the order of priority of this relationship will all have an effect on the potential consequences that content externalism poses for their view.

Primarily, content externalism threatens the acquaintance theorist's claim that we can read a mental state's content off its phenomenal character. The problem arises from a seeming incompatibility between the thesis that *content* is individuated *externally*, and the thesis that *phenomenology* is individuated *internally*. The thought is that if some mental content is determined by external factors, and phenomenology is determined by internal factors, then this casts doubt on the supposed relationship between content and phenomenology that allows us to read one off the other. A gap is created which seems to undermine the acquaintance theorist's motivations for employing representationalism or phenomenal intentionality in explaining how self-ascriptions are possible.

I will begin by explicating the traditional arguments given for content externalism. I will argue that, whilst these arguments might successfully show that the content of our *beliefs* is externally individuated, they do not establish that the content of our *current conscious experiences* is externally individuated. Since the acquaintance account I am proposing does not purport to explain self-knowledge of beliefs, only self-knowledge of current

conscious states, standard arguments for content externalism do not pose a problem for acquaintance. I will then look into whether a plausible argument for externalism about current conscious states can be given. I will discuss two arguments for externalism about the content of conscious *perceptual* experiences: one from Jonathan Ellis, and the other from Martin Davies. I will argue that Ellis's argument conflates perceptual content with cognitive content, and hence doesn't establish the sort of externalist conclusion that would threaten acquaintance. I will argue that Davies's argument, whilst it gets the *type* of content right, ultimately fails due to its being incompatible with too many other intuitive theses about phenomenology, content, and the relationship between the two. I will conclude that, since no plausible argument for externalism about perceptual content can be given, we should be internalists about this type of content. Hence, there is no threat to the acquaintance account from content externalism.

Before I begin, however, I will briefly lay out the position on the individuation of phenomenal properties that I am committed to in this thesis. Since the acquaintance theorist's views on the individuation of phenomenal properties will have an effect on the threat that content externalism poses for their thesis, it is important to clarify what these views are before we get into the discussion on individuation of content.

Much like with the content of an experience, there is a debate about how the phenomenology of experience is individuated. Those who argue that phenomenal properties are individuated *externally* hold that it is external factors - worldly objects and their properties - which individuate the phenomenal properties of experience. Those who argue that phenomenal properties are individuated *internally* hold that it is internal factors - the physical constitution of the subject, brain states, and the like - which individuate the phenomenal properties of experience. By far the majority position in the



literature is phenomenal internalism and this is the view that the acquaintance theorist is committed to.<sup>10</sup>

The acquaintance theorist's commitment to phenomenal internalism is an obvious consequence of their claims regarding phenomenology of state type. In the previous chapter I argued that mental states have phenomenal character, at least part of which corresponds to state type. I also argued that this phenomenal character *must* be present if we want to be able to explain self-ascription of state type. This character, I argued, comes not from an awareness of any objects and properties in the world, but through an awareness of the properties of experience itself. Since experience itself is *internal* to the subject, it is not external factors which determine a mental state's phenomenology of state type. Hence, if there is a unique phenomenology of state type, phenomenal properties must be internally individuated. Thus, the conclusions about state type both commit the acquaintance theorist to, and serve as their argument for, phenomenal internalism.

Now that this has been clarified, we are in a position to begin discussing the arguments for content externalism.

## 6.1 Traditional Content Externalism

Content externalism is traditionally motivated by Twin Earth-style thought experiments such as the following: I exist on this planet, but there is another planet - Twin Earth - which is exactly like this one in all ways except for the substance which fills its oceans and rivers, and comes out of its taps. On *our* Earth we call this substance water, and it is made of hydrogen and oxygen. On Twin Earth, this substance looks, tastes, and acts

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<sup>10</sup> See the introduction to Ellis (2010) for an overview of which philosophers endorse these positions.

exactly the same as our Earth's water - Twin Earth's residents even call it 'water' - but it is not made of hydrogen and oxygen, it has a completely different chemical structure. Twin Beth (the physical, and hence mental duplicate of me who exists on Twin Earth) and I one day both have the same thought: '*water is wet*'. In consciously having this thought, Twin Beth and I both instantiate the same mental and physical properties, but arguably our thoughts do not have the same content. This is because these thoughts do not have the same *meaning*. They do not have the same meaning because they each have different referents and truth conditions; Twin Beth's thought that '*water is wet*' will only be true on Twin Earth and will not be true on Earth, whereas my thought that '*water is wet*' will only be true on Earth and will not be true on Twin Earth. This is because each belief is made true by a different feature of the environment; mine on Earth by a hydrogen and oxygen-constituted substance, Twin Beth's by a differently-constituted substance.<sup>11</sup>

What this thought experiment seems to show is that it is external environmental features that determine our mental contents, not any of the subject's internal features. Twin Beth and I have the same physical and mental constitution - we are duplicates - yet when we think '*water is wet*' we have different thoughts. Hence, mental content must be externally individuated.

However, it is not immediately clear how thought experiments of this nature are supposed to impact the project of the acquaintance theorist. This is for the following reason: the above argument is concerned with the content of *thoughts*. The acquaintance theory, on the other hand, limits itself to explaining self-knowledge of uncontroversially phenomenally conscious states - *perceptual* and *sensory* states. It is controversial whether

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<sup>11</sup> This thought experiment is originally due to Putnam (1975). See Burge (1979) for a similar argument employing a Twin Earth scenario to establish content externalism.

or not thoughts fall into this category, with most philosophers regarding them as being closer to states like beliefs and desires, and hence falling into the category of *cognitive* states. The question of whether cognitive states are phenomenally conscious in the same way that perceptual and sensory states are, is fiercely debated, and I will not be addressing it here.<sup>12</sup> I will assume that there is at least some difference between the content of cognitive states and the content of perceptual states, and hence the Twin-Earth thought experiment requires tweaking if it is to cause serious problems for the acquaintance theorist.

So, to see whether content externalism is a threat to the acquaintance account, we must first consider whether a convincing argument can be given for externalism about *perceptual* content. The traditional for arguments for content externalism concern *cognitive* content, and hence their implications fall outside the scope of the acquaintance account.

To my knowledge there have been two attempts to argue for externalism about perceptual content, both of which employ a modified version of the Twin Earth thought experiment. I will first assess the modified Twin Earth argument given by Jonathan Ellis, before moving onto discuss the account given by Martin Davies.

## 6.2 Externalism and Perceptual Content

### 6.2.1 Ellis's Account

Martin Ellis (2007) sets up the Twin Earth argument using the example of colour perception. Ellis asks us to imagine a world exactly the same as our own, but where the inhabitants have slightly different colour concepts to our own. On this twin earth,

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<sup>12</sup> See Chudnoff (2015) and Bayne & Montague (2011) for more on this debate.

colour concepts correspond to what we in the actual world would call complementary colours:

Since red and green are complementary colors, let us say that what English speakers in the counterfactual world mean by “green” is: *green* if observed before the year 4000, and *red* otherwise. Their word “green” means what we (following Goodman, 1955) mean by “gred.” Likewise, their word “yellow” means what we mean by “yue”: *yellow* if observed before the year 4000, and *blue* otherwise. (Ellis, 2007, p.52)

Imagine, then that both Beth and Twin Beth are having a visual experience as of some grass in the year 2022. Actual Beth introspects on this experience and forms the judgement ‘*I am having a visual experience of something green*’. Twin Beth similarly introspects on this experience and forms the very same judgement: ‘*I am having a visual experience of something green*’. Both make the same judgement, both have an experience with indistinguishable phenomenal character, yet - Ellis argues - the *contents* of their experiences differ. On Twin Earth, what Twin Beth *means* when she says “green” is what we in the actual world would call “gred”, since on Twin Earth, *after* the year 4000, the word “green” is used to refer to the colour red. “Gred” captures this dual meaning in the actual world. Twin Beth’s experience has the content expressed by <gred>, whereas actual Beth’s experience has the content expressed by <green>. Since there is no way of distinguishing this difference in contents through either what is spoken by each subject, or through any difference in the phenomenal character of their experiences (they both say the same thing and instantiate indistinguishable phenomenal characters), Ellis’s externalist conclusion seems to entail that there is perceptual content which is beyond the realm of the phenomenal, and hence beyond the grasp of the acquaintance theory.

An immediate response one might make to Ellis's argument is to employ the distinction between narrow and wide content.<sup>13</sup> Typically, the narrow/wide distinction is employed to deal with the problem that traditional Twin Earth arguments cause for our knowledge of the content of our own beliefs. The thought is that mental states have two types of content: narrow and wide. Wide content is the content that *differs* between Beth and Twin Beth's thoughts about water, whereas narrow content is the content which is shared, and which makes it seem, on the face of it, that they are both having the same thought. Wide content is externally individuated and narrow content is not, hence, room is made for at least some of a mental state's content to be determined by features internal to the subject.

Perhaps it is possible to make the narrow/wide distinction in the case of perceptual content too. In this case, the part of the content which captures the meaning of colour words in each society (i.e., <gred> or <green>) would be widely individuated, whereas the part of the content which is bound up in phenomenal character (i.e., the content which Beth and Twin Beth share) would be narrowly individuated. The acquaintance theorist can then argue that, since narrow content is phenomenally determined, we can make self-ascriptions of a state's narrow content without any problem.

It is not clear, however, that it is possible to make the narrow/wide distinction in the case of perceptual content. For one thing, perceptual content is a prime candidate for wholly narrow content precisely because it seems to be wholly phenomenally determined. To argue that perceptual content also has a wide aspect certainly goes against what we would ordinarily consider to be the nature of perceptual content.

Alone, this intuition seems to leave us in a confusing position. Does a rejection of the narrow/wide distinction support Ellis's argument, or does it stand against it? I believe

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<sup>13</sup> See Loar (2003), Horgan et al. (2004) for arguments which employ this distinction.

that a rejection of the narrow/wide distinction for perceptual content actually stands against Ellis's argument, since it points us towards the real reason that his position is flawed. To see why, we have to look back at the details of Ellis's account. According to Ellis, Actual Beth's uttering of "I am having a visual experience of something green", if spoken on Twin Earth, would be false. This is because the word "green" has a different meaning on Twin Earth than it does in the actual world. Ellis takes this to show that at least some of the content of our perceptual colour experiences themselves is externally individuated, as social context seems to determine the meaning of our colour concepts.

However, in making this argument, Ellis seems to be conflating the content of the *experience itself* with the content of a *judgement* made about that experience. Whilst both of Ellis's subjects make a judgement about their experience which differs in meaning, the phenomenal character of their respective experiences remains indistinguishable. Twin Beth may, owing to her society's different use of colour words, *judge* something different of her experience than Actual Beth might, but that doesn't mean that the two subjects' experiences differ in themselves. What we judge of our experience can be separated from the experience itself.

In actual fact then, Ellis's thought experiment is really not all that different from the original thought experiments of Putnam and Burge. The content it shows to be externally individuated is the content of judgement - a cognitive state - rather than any perceptual or sensory content. We can see now why the narrow/wide distinction causes confusion for Ellis's argument: what we claim is *wide* content - the content that differs between twin subjects - is actually part of the content of a judgement. The content of the experience itself remains untouched by Ellis's argument for externalism. Whether this perceptual content is wide, narrow, externally, or internally individuated is not

established by Ellis's argument. The acquaintance account is not threatened by the conclusions of this particular thought experiment.

### 6.2.2 Davies's Account

A second version of the Twin Earth thought experiment regarding perceptual content is advanced by Martin Davies (Davies, 1997, p.321). Davies's argument - unlike Ellis's - steers clear of any mention of the judgements that subjects might make about their perceptual experiences. Hence, we can be sure that the conclusions of Davies's argument really do apply to the contents of perceptual experiences, rather than the content of judgements made about those experiences.

Davies's thought experiment differs slightly in format from the traditional format used by Ellis and Putnam. In Ellis's and Putnam's Twin Earth scenarios, two things are held fixed: the *perceivable properties of the relevant objects* in each world (in Putnam's example, water looks the same on both planets; in Ellis's example, both subjects are looking at the same colour), and the *physical state of the subject* in each world (i.e., the brain states of the subject and their other-worldly twin are exactly the same). In Davies's experiment, however, we are asked to imagine a scenario where *only* the physical states of the subjects are held fixed, whilst the perceivable properties of the relevant objects differ.

Davies argues that the following scenario is plausible: two subjects - Beth on this Earth and her physical duplicate Twin Beth on Twin Earth - are both in brain state S1. Their worlds are fairly similar, except for the fact that on Actual Earth, brain state S1 is instantiated when *circles* are perceived by the subject, and on Twin Earth, brain state S1 is instantiated when *ellipses* are perceived by the subject. So our subjects, though they are each experiencing objects with different perceivable properties, both instantiate exactly

the same brain state. Davies argues, however, that despite the two subjects having identical brain states, the *contents* of their experiences will differ according to the differences in the perceivable properties of the objects perceived. Actual Beth perceives a circle and so will have an experience with the content <circle>, whilst Twin Beth perceives an ellipse, so will have an experience with the content <ellipse>. Given that, in each case, the content differs whilst the internal state of the subject remains the same, Davies concludes that perceptual content cannot be determined by internal factors - it is individuated externally in accordance with the properties of the objects perceived.

Two internalist responses immediately spring to mind. Firstly, one might argue that Davies is wrong to suppose that the content of each subject's experience differs; that in fact, both Actual Beth and Twin Beth - in virtue of them both instantiating the same internal state S1 - are both having an experience with the content <circle>. In this case, it can be said that Twin Beth *misperceives* the ellipse, representing it in her experience as a circle. Davies himself considers this response and argues that such a situation is implausible, since a subject who consistently misperceived circles as ellipses would consistently behave in ways inappropriate to their environment, and this seems too unlikely a scenario (*ibid.*, p.322). I am inclined to agree with Davies on his intuitions about this internalist response, but there remains another option for the internalist, one which Davies does not consider in his paper. Instead of claiming that the twin subjects' experiential content is identical, the internalist could go the other way, and *deny* that the twin subject's *physical state* is identical. In other words, the internalist rejects the initial assumption in Davies's argument that it is possible for two subjects to instantiate the *same* physical state in response to *different* perceived objects. If Beth and Twin Beth truly are duplicates, the internalist argues, then it should not be possible for them both to be in S1 whilst one is perceiving a circle and the other an ellipse. These two experiences



must correspond to the instantiation of two *different* physical states (say, S1 and S2), and hence the door is still left open for an internalist explanation of perceptual content.

I suspect that Davies does not consider such a response because he flatly disagrees with the intuition that his twin earth scenario is impossible (after all, it is certainly conceivable). However, if there are further problems with his externalist account of perceptual content which render it implausible, then the internalist is free to argue that, in Davies's argument, we have a case of the conceivable yet implausible, and that, in fact, the 'different object/different state' account of the Twin Earth scenario is the correct one. We will see that, once Davies's argument is considered alongside both phenomenal internalism and the Intuitive Thesis, this is exactly what happens.

I will now discuss how Davies's account fares alongside the thesis of phenomenal internalism. As I have explicated it so far, Davies's account makes no mention of the role that phenomenal character has in the experiences of each of the subjects. He mentions only the external perceived object, the physical state of the subject, and the content of their experience. Davies himself notes, however, that when phenomenal character is taken into consideration, his account runs into difficulties. This is because of the Intuitive Thesis - the thesis that perceptual content is somehow phenomenal. The problem that Davies highlights follows from two independently plausible, yet - when considered alongside content externalism - inconsistent claims: first is the claim that if we want to explain the Intuitive Thesis then we have to posit a supervenience or identity relation between perceptual content and phenomenal character. And second is the claim that phenomenal character is plausibly *internally* individuated by the physical states of the subject, not externally individuated by objects in the world. When we take this second claim and plug it into Davies's Twin Earth argument, we get the scenario that phenomenal character supervenes on S1 (the internal physical state of the subject).

However, when we take the *first* claim and plug it into Davies's argument, we get the contradicting scenario that phenomenal character supervenes on external features (since the first claim holds that phenomenal character is identical to, or is in a supervenience relation with, perceptual content, and perceptual content is - according to Davies - externally individuated). Since, in these scenarios, we have two contradicting conclusions about the individuation of phenomenal character, it seems that if content externalism is true, then the Intuitive Thesis and phenomenal internalism can't also both be true. Hence, something is awry with either Davies's argument for content externalism, or with the Intuitive Thesis and phenomenal internalism.

However, Davies argues that the above contradiction can be avoided once we account for the fact that there are two types of supervenience at play in the Twin Earth scenarios: local supervenience (supervenience between properties within a world), and cross-world supervenience (supervenience between properties across worlds). Davies argues that supervenience can be local without being cross-world, and, once this is taken into consideration, the contradiction disappears. Locally, for a particular subject in a particular world, perceptual content bears a supervenience relation to phenomenal character. This means that if the phenomenal character of a subject's experience changes, so too does the content of that experience. At the same time, across worlds, for actual and counterfactual twins, phenomenal character bears a supervenience relation to the physical states of a subject. This means that if the physical state of the subject changes, then so too does the phenomenal character of that subject's experience. The result of this is that because of local supervenience, phenomenal character remains internally individuated by a subject's physical states, but because of cross-modal supervenience, the relation it bears to externally individuated perceptual content is still honoured.

Plugging this into the Twin Earth scenario, we get the following situation: Actual Beth in the Actual World perceives a circle, instantiates physical state S1, and has an experience with the content <circle> which has *circle-ness* phenomenal character. Twin Beth in the Twin World perceives an ellipse, instantiates physical state S1, and has an experience with the content <ellipse>, yet which *also* has *circle-ness* phenomenal character. This is because phenomenal internalism is a kind of cross-world supervenience, whilst the Intuitive Thesis is a kind of local supervenience.

The result of Davies's attempt to reconcile his content externalism with phenomenal internalism and the Intuitive Thesis is that twin subjects can have experiences with different perceptual content, yet indistinguishable phenomenal character.

If such a scenario is plausible, then perceptual content externalism presents a serious threat to the aims of the acquaintance theorist. What Davies gives us is a scenario where at least one of the subjects, if she tries to form a belief about her perceptual content based on her awareness of phenomenal character, is going to be in error. Twin Beth judges that her experience has the content <circle> based on her awareness of *circle-ness* phenomenal character, but, since the actual content of her experience is <ellipse>, her ascription of <circle> is incorrect. Hence, if Davies's arguments are correct, we cannot get knowledge of content from awareness of phenomenal character.

Luckily for the acquaintance theorist, however, Davies himself finds this scenario to be unpalatable. He argues that, in trying to reconcile content externalism with phenomenal internalism *plus* the Intuitive Thesis, the content externalist's account is rendered implausible. This is because no account of the local supervenience between internally individuated phenomenal character and externally individuated perceptual content can be given which allows us to sensibly explain their correlation. To see this, consider the Twin Earth example again: in the Twin Earth scenario given above, we allow for twin

subjects to have experiences with different contents, yet an indistinguishable phenomenal character. Yet we also want to respect the Intuitive Thesis that there is a relationship between perceptual content and phenomenal character. The following question thus arises: how much can perceptual content vary whilst still being related to one particular phenomenal property? In the Twin Earth scenario, the contents <circle> and <ellipse> both correspond to *circle-ness* phenomenal character, but can we give an explanation of this correlation which allows for this level of variation, whilst at the same time ruling out scenarios where, for instance, contents such as <square> *also* correspond to *circle-ness* phenomenal character? Davies argues that we cannot. On the one hand, if the correlation between content and character is fairly constrained, it must be governed by some further theoretical principles, but, Davies argues, it is not obvious where such constraining principles could arise from. On the other hand, if the correlation between content and character is relatively unconstrained, then we make way for the possibility of bizarre cases where one phenomenal character can correspond to “wildly different representational properties” (ibid., p.325). Davies’s final conclusion, then, is that, despite its initial intuitive appeal, we ought to reject internalism about phenomenal character in favour of an externalist account. This, for Davies, is the only way that we can respect both externalism about content (as argued for with the Twin Earth scenario), and the Intuitive Thesis that perceptual content is phenomenal (as argued for at the beginning of this chapter).

We can conclude from this that externalism about perceptual content is incompatible with internalism about phenomenal character. This particular combination of views is therefore out of the question. For the acquaintance theorist, this is partially good news, since it means that the possibility of not being able to read a mental state’s content off its phenomenal character is ruled out; if content and character are both *externally* individuated, then we remove the need to bring in to the two varieties of supervenience

to explain their relationship, appeal to which caused the rift between content and character in the first place. However, at the beginning of this section I argued that the acquaintance theorist is committed to phenomenal *internalism*. Hence, Davies's double externalist conclusion presents a further problem for the acquaintance theorist: the argument he gives for content externalism, if sound, threatens the plausibility of the core commitments of the acquaintance theory.

Luckily for the acquaintance theorist, there is a way out of this situation. Recall that at the beginning of this section, I argued that the *reason* the acquaintance theorist is committed to phenomenal internalism – because of their commitment to phenomenology of state type - also serves as an argument *for* phenomenal internalism. If there is a phenomenology of state type (as I have argued in Chapter 2 that there is), then phenomenology is internally individuated. This is because state type phenomenology cannot be individuated by any external factors as there are no external properties to which it can correspond. Given this argument for phenomenal internalism, the acquaintance theorist is now in a stalemate with the perceptual content externalist; each has a plausible argument for their view, but neither view is compatible with the other.

I believe, however, that the acquaintance theorist has a way out of this situation, and that this leads us to the correct view on the individuation of perceptual content. The reason for this is due to the aforementioned gap in Davies's argument, which Davies himself does not consider, which leaves room for a potential internalist explanation of the individuation of perceptual content. Recall the setup of Davies's initial argument for content externalism: two physically identical subjects, both in physical state S1. Davies argues that it is plausible that one subject - Actual Beth - perceives a circle and has an experience with the content <circle>, whereas the other subject - Twin Beth - perceives an ellipse and has an experience with the content <ellipse>. The fact that, in this

scenario, the subjects have identical physical states yet have experiences with different contents leads Davies to conclude that perceptual content must be individuated by external factors. However, it remains open to the internalist to argue that this situation, though conceivable, is the less-likely one. The internalist - instead of agreeing with Davies that twin subjects perceiving different objects would be in identical physical states - can deny this, and instead argue that it is not the case that twin subjects perceiving different objects are in identical physical states. Instead, they can claim that the most likely scenario is that Actual Beth perceiving a circle on Actual Earth is in physical state S1, whereas Twin Beth perceiving an ellipse on Twin Earth is in physical state S2. An internalist explanation of perceptual content can therefore be given in this scenario since the internal physical states of the subjects differ.

As I have already mentioned above, Davies does not consider this as a potential alternative explanation. Yet the way he sets up the Twin Earth scenario certainly makes room for it, and he does not say anything which would rule such an explanation out. I argue that given the incompatibility between perceptual content externalism and phenomenal internalism, and given that the acquaintance theorist already has a compelling argument for phenomenal internalism, the fact that Davies cannot rule out an alternative internalist explanation poses a large threat to his view. I argue that in light of both the incompatibility problem and the acquaintance theorist's already existing argument for phenomenal internalism, we have reason to endorse the internalist reading of the Twin Earth argument, rather than Davies's externalist reading. And since internalism about perceptual content, when combined with the Intuitive Thesis, allows us awareness of content via awareness of phenomenal character, the acquaintance theorist can therefore explain self-ascriptions on this view.

To summarise this discussion, content externalism was posed as a potential obstacle to the acquaintance theorist's ability to explain self-ascriptions. This is because externalism about content, when combined with internalism about phenomenal character, seems to allow for scenarios where the contents of two experiences can differ, yet their phenomenal character remains indistinguishable. If such a scenario is possible, then there are cases where awareness of phenomenal character alone will not allow us to make a correct judgement about the contents of our experiences. And since the acquaintance theorist only has phenomenal character at their means when explaining self-ascription, this scenario would be bad news for them.

In investigating the consequences of content externalism for the acquaintance theory, I first discussed traditional arguments for externalism. I argued that these do not establish that externalism is true of the content of uncontroversially conscious states - the type of content that the acquaintance theorist wishes to explain our knowledge of. I then discussed two arguments specifically formulated to establish externalism about perceptual content. I argued that the first - from Jonathan Ellis - fails because it conflates perceptual content with the content of beliefs. The second - from Martin Davies - is more promising, but ultimately also fails. This is due to a gap in Davies's argument which allows for an internalist explanation to be given, which, when considered alongside the Intuitive Thesis and the arguments for phenomenal internalism, is ultimately a more plausible position than his alternative externalist explanation. Therefore, since no convincing argument for externalism about perceptual content can be given, I take it that we ought to adopt the internalist position, which presents no threat to the acquaintance theorist.

## 7. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explain how, on the acquaintance account, we are able to self-ascribe the content of our current conscious states. To this end I have established what must necessarily be the case for the acquaintance theorist to be able to explain self-ascriptions of content: a relationship between phenomenology and content where acquaintance with the former gets us immediate awareness of the latter. It has not been my intention to defend any one particular view of this relationship, rather, I wanted to show that there are several plausible accounts of this relationship which are compatible with the requirements of the acquaintance theory, and that the acquaintance theorist need not be committed to an obscure or implausible account of mental representation in order to explain the self-ascription of current conscious states.

I first discussed what I have called the ‘Intuitive Thesis’: the claim that an experience’s being phenomenally conscious is key to its being intentional. The Intuitive Thesis is so called because it captures how things seem: It *seems* that, for example, one’s visual experience of a green tree represents a green tree because it has a *greenish* and *tree-like* phenomenal character. For the acquaintance theorist, this is a promising starting point, because even before the details of any such relationship have been spelled out, it seems that there is, in the first place, a relationship to be explained.

I then discussed the three main accounts of this relationship which can be found in the literature. Of the three, the separatist position was initially the most problematic for the acquaintance theorist, since the separatist denies that there is any important metaphysical relationship between a mental state’s content and its phenomenology.

However, without positing any such relationship, the separatist has difficulty accounting for the intentionality of conscious states such as perceptions and sensations. I argued that the separatist position should be rejected because it cannot explain the nature of



these states, and because the explanatory force of the relationship highlighted in the Intuitive Thesis overrides the power of any counterexamples that the separatist may pose against it. Furthermore, as we have seen throughout the chapter, those who reject separatism in favour of representationalism or phenomenal intentionality are well equipped to explain away the difficulties that such counterexamples present to the Intuitive Thesis.

The second position discussed was representationalism. Of the two main varieties of representationalism, only mode representationalism was found to be compatible with the requirements of the acquaintance theorist. This is because mode representationalism allows for both the state type *and* the content to determine the phenomenology of an experience. Content representationalism, on the other hand, only allows for content to determine the phenomenology of an experience. However, that content representationalism doesn't allow for a unique phenomenology of state type turns out to be the downfall of the position. This is because, in not allowing for a phenomenology of state type, content representationalists are committed to attempting to explain our first-person knowledge of state type in ways compatible with the transparency thesis - something which, I have argued in the previous chapter, is not possible. The remaining representationalist position - mode representationalism - can explain first-person knowledge of content *and* state type, whilst also overcoming a potential problem for the view in explaining how multimodal experiences are possible. The plausibility of mode representationalism means that the acquaintance theorist can legitimately utilise it in their theory of self-ascriptions.

The alternative position on the relationship between content and phenomenology is the phenomenal intentionality theory. Like representationalism, there are versions of the phenomenal intentionality thesis on which there is a relation between phenomenology

and content *only*, and there are versions on which there is a relation between phenomenology and content *and* phenomenology and state type. Accounts of the first type are implausible for the same reason that content representationalism is implausible; they are committed to transparency, and hence cannot explain first-person knowledge of state type. Accounts of the second type present a viable option for the acquaintance theorist, and can be utilised in the acquaintance theorist's account of self-ascriptions.

In short, the failure of separatism, and the implausibility of content representationalism and strong phenomenal intentionality, leaves us with two remaining options in the theoretical space: mode representationalism and an intermediate or weak phenomenal intentionality theory. Ultimately, whether the content-first account or the phenomenology-first account is correct is a matter which needs determining, but I will not attempt to settle the matter in this thesis. Since the acquaintance theory is compatible with both, we can just adopt the one which turns out to be true.

I finally discussed the potential problem that content externalism poses for the acquaintance theory. Content externalism, I argued, seems to be at odds with the acquaintance theorist's commitment to phenomenal internalism. The thought is that if some mental content is determined by external factors, and phenomenology by internal factors then this disturbs the supposed relationship between content and phenomenology that allows us to read one off the other. I argued that traditional arguments for content externalism fail to establish externalism about the content of uncontroversially conscious states. Moreover, when arguments for externalism about this kind of content *were* given, they were found to be either miscategorising the content (in the case of Ellis) or incompatible with both phenomenal internalism and the Intuitive Thesis (in the case of Davies). Since Davies's argument leaves room for an internalist explanation of his Twin Earth scenario, and since I have given prior

arguments for both the Intuitive Thesis *and* phenomenal internalism in this chapter, I argued that we should endorse an internalist view on the individuation of perceptual content. Content externalism about conscious content was shown to be implausible, and is therefore not a threat to the acquaintance theorist's project of explaining self-ascriptions.

We can now take stock of the progress made towards the acquaintance theory of self-knowledge in this chapter and the last. I argued at the very beginning of Chapter 2 that self-knowledge of our current conscious mental states takes the form of a self-ascription which, when justified, amounts to an instance of knowledge. Self-ascriptions contain information about the *type* of mental state we are currently in, and the *content* of that state. Hence, in order to explain how they are possible, one must explain how it is we come to be aware of the content and the type of our mental states. I have argued that both the content and the type of our mental states is indicated in the phenomenology of these states, and is therefore something we can be acquainted with. The acquaintance theorist can therefore explain self-ascriptions because we are acquainted with phenomenal features of our mental states which indicate the state's content and type. It is because I am acquainted with state type phenomenology, and phenomenal content, that I am able to ascribe my current conscious mental states.

Finally, by way of these arguments, I have lent support to one of the assumed positions of the first chapter - the claim that acquaintance gets us *epistemically immediate* awareness of our current conscious states. Recall that according to the immediacy claim, this awareness is immediate in the sense that it is not inferred and requires from us no prior knowledge or awareness of anything else. The arguments made throughout this and the previous chapter respect the immediacy claim. We need only have awareness of the phenomenal character of our mental states to get immediate awareness of their content

and state type. This is because both the content and the state type of our current conscious mental states is expressed in the phenomenal character of those states.

## Chapter 4

# Justifying Self-Ascriptions

### 1. Introduction

In working towards an acquaintance account of self-knowledge, we have so far established the following three things: what acquaintance is, the role it plays in self-ascriptions, and how such self-ascriptions are possible. Establishing these features of the account has so far largely been a matter of answering metaphysical questions; questions about the nature of the awareness relation between the subject and their mental states, and questions about how the structure of these mental states affords them the right kind of access to self-ascribe them. However, the account as it stands, whilst it gets us to self-ascriptions, does not get us to self-*knowledge*. For self-ascriptions to count as genuine instances of knowledge, we must answer further, epistemic questions. Specifically, we must answer questions regarding the *justification* of the beliefs we come to hold when we make self-ascriptions. Answering these questions will be the task of this chapter.

When one self-ascribes a mental state, one forms a belief (such as the belief ‘*I am having a visual experience of a blue book*’). Simply holding a belief which takes the form of a self-ascription, however, is not enough for genuine self-knowledge. I cannot be said to *know* that I am having a visual experience as of a blue book merely because I have formed this belief. In order for this belief to count as knowledge, further epistemic conditions must be met. I must have sufficient *evidence* for the truth of my belief, and good enough *reasons* to form it and hold it. Without this evidence and these reasons, my belief is not justified. It does not count as knowledge.

When it comes to the issue of justification, we can ask two things of the beliefs which constitute our self-ascriptions:

1. Can we be justified in holding them?<sup>1</sup>
2. If yes, *how* are we justified in holding them?

Regarding the first question, I am taking the answer to be ‘yes’. In this thesis I am taking it for granted that we can and do have self-knowledge of our conscious mental states. My task is to try to explain *how* this knowledge is possible. Given that we *do* have self-knowledge, it follows from this that the beliefs which constitute our self-ascriptions are justified. What remains, then, is to answer question (2); to give an account of *how* our self-ascriptions are justified. In this chapter I will propose an answer to this question.

The issue of justification as it pertains to self-knowledge is a complex one. What one can say about justification will depend on the claims one makes about a variety of other debates: the structure of experience, the role of the subject in justification, the other epistemic features of self-knowledge, and the relations which ought to stand between

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the language of both of these questions, I will be assuming that the *subject’s being justified in holding a belief* and the *belief’s being justified* are just two ways to express the same thing. If a belief is justified, it is because the subject is justified in holding it. This is what a belief’s being justified amounts to. I will therefore use these two turns of phrase interchangeably throughout this chapter.

the subject, their belief, and the thing that makes the belief true. In giving an account of justification, the acquaintance theorist will also have to have something to say about these other debates.

The discussion in this chapter will centre around a well-known problem for the justification of experiential beliefs - Wilfred Sellars's (1956) problem of the Myth of the Given. The Myth of the Given presents a dilemma to those who try to give an account of how our experiential beliefs are justified. I will argue that this dilemma is ultimately unfounded, but in doing so we shall see that it provides us with an extremely useful tool for investigating the metaphysical, structural, and epistemological commitments that *any* theorist must make when proposing a viable account of the justification of experiential beliefs.

I will begin by first explaining the problem of the Myth of the Given, and highlighting two key presuppositions it makes. These are *access internalism* about justification, and *non-conceptualism* about the content of experience. I will explain how these two positions, when taken together with the claim that experiences can justify beliefs, give rise to an inconsistency. I will then move on to look at John McDowell's (1994; 2008) two influential responses to the Myth of the Given, both of which take the form of a rejection of non-conceptualism about the content of experience. I will argue that ultimately, both of McDowell's strategies fail; the first because it is incompatible with the phenomenology of experience, and the second because it is incompatible with access internalism. I will argue that this gives us reason to look not towards alternative accounts of content, but towards alternative accounts of justification in order to solve the problem of the Myth of the Given. I then make a distinction between two different forms of access internalism: strong access internalism, and weak access internalism. I argue that it is the presupposition of strong access internalism which leads us into the

Myth of the Given, and that if a plausible account of weak access internalism can be given, we can explain how self-ascriptions are justified. I then go on to develop a weak access internalist account based on the recognitional accounts of perceptual knowledge given by Alan Millar and Michael Pace. I will show how the same principles can be extended to self-knowledge, and that a weak access internalist account of justification which appeals to recognitional capacities can explain the justification of our self-ascriptions.

## 2. The Myth of the Given and its Commitments

The phrase “Myth of the Given” was originally coined by Wilfred Sellars (1956), but other philosophers have since raised similar worries; it is the trap we fall into if we hold two independently plausible claims about the nature of conscious experience and the nature of justification.<sup>2</sup> The Myth of the Given is originally presented as a problem for *perceptual* knowledge - the knowledge we have of the *world* due to our conscious experience of it. However, since self-knowledge on the acquaintance account also involves awareness of conscious experience, it too has to face up to the problem of the Myth of the Given.

If the claims of Sellars and others are correct, our self-knowledge is under threat because experiences, conceived of as a kind of brute, sensory ‘Given’, cannot serve as a justifying reason for our self-ascriptions. Since justification is typically seen as necessary for knowledge, if our self-ascriptions cannot be justified, they will not count as instances of knowledge. A seemingly absurd conclusion follows: we cannot have self-knowledge.

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<sup>2</sup> See Davidson (1983) for a notable endorsement.



Our self-ascriptions take the form of beliefs. To see why there is a difficulty in explaining how experiences can justify these beliefs, it is instructive to see first how *beliefs* can justify other beliefs. Take my belief that ‘*Mark likes Bubbles*’. If someone asked what my justification is for this belief, I could quite plausibly say that I inferred it from my existing beliefs that ‘*Mark likes guinea pigs*’, and ‘*Bubbles is a guinea pig*’. These two beliefs are my reasons for my holding the belief that ‘*Mark likes Bubbles*’. They thus serve as justification for the initial belief. But how is it that they are able to play this justifying role? They can play this role because, as beliefs, they express propositions in their content.

Propositions are expressed by sentences and can stand as premises in an argument. Various logical relations can hold between the different propositions in an argument - for example, the relation of inference, or of identity. As rational subjects we have the ability to recognise when these logical relations hold or don’t hold, and to recognise whether an argument is valid or invalid based upon this awareness. We can test out different inferences, and substitute in different propositions to see what effect this has on the conclusion of the argument. When we do so, we are engaging in a particular kind of reasoning, operating in a particular logical space. This is the space that Sellars calls our “Space of Reasons” (ibid.). It is in this space where, according to Sellars, justification happens.

Because beliefs express propositions (have *propositional content*) they are able to enter this logical space. And once they are in this logical space, they can become the objects of our logical scrutiny. We are able to ascertain whether or not they are the constituents of a valid argument, whether they can be employed as a reason for some further proposition. By doing this we are able to ascertain whether we are justified in holding some particular belief.

Going back to the example of my belief that '*Mark likes Bubbles*', it is now easy to see how this belief is justified: the beliefs which serve as its evidence can stand as premises in an argument, which then allows a valid inference to the conclusion that '*Mark likes Bubbles*'. When Sellars talks of justification happening in the 'Space of Reasons' this is what he means; justification being the product of a process of reasoning done *by the subject*, with materials that the subject themselves has access to, and inferences that they themselves can make. The subject, therefore, does all the work when it comes to justification, and because of this, the tools and methods required for justification must be available to them in a format which they can comprehend. Propositions and the rules of inference are these available, comprehensible tools and methods.

In contemporary epistemology, this 'Space of Reasons' account of justification falls under a particular category of views on the nature of justification. This is the category known as *access internalism* (Conee & Feldman, 2004, p.55). Access internalists argue that, in order for a subject's belief to be justified, two conditions must be met: (1) The subject must be able to access the thing which constitutes the *reason* for their belief, and (2) The subject must be able to see for themselves that this reason is an appropriate reason for their belief (Bergmann, 2006, p.16). We can see how the Space of Reasons allows us to meet these conditions: the subject has access to the things which count as reasons for their belief (their other beliefs), and is able to see for themselves that these count as appropriate reasons for their belief (by scrutinising them according to the rules of inference).

Access internalism is at one end of a continuum of views on the nature of justification. On the other end of this continuum is the doctrine of *externalism*. According to externalists, the subject plays no role in the justification of their beliefs; justification is a matter of factors external to the subject, their access, and their reasoning. Most

externalists argue instead that our beliefs are justified when they are formed as a result of a reliable (perhaps causal) process. If the belief-forming process reliably produces true beliefs, then, the externalist argues, these beliefs will be justified.<sup>3</sup> Typically, *inner sense* accounts of self-knowledge rely on wholly externalist accounts of justification. This is because inner sense theorists conceive of self-ascriptions as the output states of the functioning of a reliable ‘experience-scanning’ mechanism. If the mechanism is functioning correctly, the self-ascriptions it produces will be justified. No action on part of the subject is required for justification.

In terms of intuitive plausibility, access internalism has the upper hand over externalist positions, especially when it comes to the issue of justifying self-ascriptions. A key reason for the intuitive plausibility of internalism comes from its ability to explain what Alston calls the “dialectical element” of justification (Alston, 1989, p.236). If somebody asks you why you are justified in holding some particular belief, it is natural for you to cite something that you are aware of - a current experience, some fact about the world, another belief you hold - as your reason. Moreover, in order for it to be rational for you to cite any particular reason over another, you arguably must be aware of what it is that makes that particular reason a *good* reason for you to hold the belief. This is a line Bergmann expresses in what has come to be known as the “Subject’s Perspective Objection”:

If the subject holding a belief isn’t aware of what the belief has going for it, then she isn’t aware of how its status is any different from a stray hunch or an arbitrary conviction. From that we may conclude that from her perspective, it is an *accident* that her belief is true. And that implies it isn’t a justified belief. (Bergmann, 2006. P.12) [emphasis added].

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<sup>3</sup> See Goldman (1979) for an outline of the externalist position.

Externalists cannot easily account for the dialectical element of knowledge. Nor can they explain how, from the subject's perspective, it is rational to hold beliefs, since they deny that a subject's awareness of 'reasons' has anything to do with justification.<sup>4</sup> It is for these reasons that access internalism is preferable over an externalist account of justification.

So, from the appeal to the Space of Reasons, we can see that access internalism is thus one of the presuppositions at work in the Myth of the Given. The other presupposition at work is the assumption that experiences differ from beliefs in a crucial respect: their content. Experiences, not being beliefs, *do not* express propositions in their content. They represent the world without expressing propositions - a view known as *non-conceptualism* about the content of experience. The proposition-expressing content of beliefs, on the other hand, is known *conceptual content*. We are now in a position to see where the problem for self-knowledge arises.

If we maintain that the justification of self-knowledge ought to occur in the same way that beliefs justify other beliefs, yet also maintain that the content of experiences is non-conceptual, then it follows that experiences cannot justify beliefs. This is because experiences, not having conceptual content, cannot stand as premises in arguments, hence, they cannot stand in inferential relations to the contents of a self-ascription. They cannot stand in the Space of Reasons, and as such, we cannot justifiably make the jump from the content of an experience to the content of a self-ascription. We as subjects cannot 'see' for ourselves that our experiences match up with our ascriptions of them because there is nothing about the content of an experience which indicates to us whether the content of a given belief is true. The two types of representation are so

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, what the access internalist calls a 'reason' (one's mental states, facts about the world, one's other beliefs, etc.) would not class as a reason at all on the externalist account. These things are the things that make the belief *true*, to be sure, but for the externalist, they are not the reason the belief is *justified*.

radically different, it is argued, that the move from one to the other is not one that the subject could rationally perform. The view that anything given in experience could ever justify our self-ascriptions is thus branded as ‘a myth’.

We are now in a position to identify the premises which make up the Myth of the Given:

- P1** Beliefs have conceptual content.
- P2** Justification is access internalist. (1<sup>st</sup> Assumption of the Myth of the Given)
- P3** If justification is access internalist, it happens in the Space of Reasons.
- P4** If justification happens in the Space of Reasons, then only things with conceptual content can be reasons for belief.
- P5** Experiences do not have conceptual content. (2<sup>nd</sup> Assumption of the Myth of the Given)

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**C** Experiences cannot be reasons for belief.

Here we are able to see more clearly the assumptions at work in the Myth of the Given. Our options for avoiding the Myth of the Given are also made clear. If one can convincingly show either P5 to be false, and give a plausible alternative account of experiential content, or show P2 to be false, and give a plausible alternative account of justification, then the Myth can be avoided. In the next sections, I will consider two responses - the earlier and later accounts of John McDowell - which take the first line.

### 3. The Myth of the Given and The Content of Experience

As I have illustrated, the Myth of the Given arises as a result of two independently plausible assumptions which, alongside the claim that experiences can justify beliefs, are jointly incompatible. The first of these assumptions is access internalism about justification, the second is non-conceptualism about the content of experience. If either of these assumptions is shown to be false, then we potentially have a way out of the dilemma which the Myth raises.

Non-conceptualism is a view about how the content of experience is structured. Recall that an experience's content is *what* it represents. The *structure* of content can be thought of as the *form* that this content comes in. Non-conceptualists argue, primarily, that the content of experience *does not* express any concepts.

The non-conceptualist assumption has been challenged forcefully by John McDowell. McDowell argues throughout his work that the solution to the Myth of the Given, and the answer to the question of how experiential beliefs are justified, can be found if we drop the non-conceptualist's constraints on the structure of content. By advocating a view that has come to be known as *conceptualism* about the structure of experience, McDowell argues that problems about the justification of experiential beliefs can be resolved.

To give it a general definition, conceptualism is the view that the content of experience is structured by the concepts that apply to the things an experience represents. For example, a conceptualist would say that my visual experience of a blue book somehow employs the concept BLUE and the concept BOOK *within* its content. The employment of concepts in the content of experience is, according to the conceptualist, what allows experiences to stand in the Space of Reasons. And once we allow experiences into this logical space, we allow them to justify our self-ascriptions. The

precise account of the *way* in which concepts are employed in content is important, but it is also, as we shall see, up for debate.

In order to assess the plausibility of conceptualism as a solution to the problem of the Myth of the Given, we need to set out some criteria. For any version of conceptualism to succeed in solving the problem, it must present us with an account of the content of experience which is:

- a) Compatible with the access internalist account of justification.
- b) Independently plausible.

Regarding criterion (a), this is necessary to ensure that the justification of self-ascriptions is actually achievable. The content of experience, however it is construed, must allow for that experience to be accessible to, and assessable by, the subject as a reason for their self-ascriptions. If the account of content espoused by the conceptualist does not allow for this, then it is once again prey to the Myth of the Given. Regarding criterion (b), this condition is necessary to assess the conceptualist account independently of its relations to justification and belief. A conceptualist account of content may be compatible with access internalism, but if it is not independently plausible, then we do not have reason to endorse it.

In what follows, then, I will assess two versions of conceptualism according to these criteria, beginning first with McDowell's earlier account - propositional conceptualism - before moving on to discuss his later account - a non-propositional version of conceptualism which he calls 'intuitionism'. I will argue that propositional conceptualism meets criterion (a) but not (b), and that intuitionism meets neither. In light of this, I will argue that we ought to look to amend the account of justification, rather than the account of content, when trying to avoid the Myth of the Given.

## 4. Conceptualism

### 4.1 Propositional Conceptualism

Propositional conceptualism is the first of the two conceptualist solutions to the Myth of the Given. It is also McDowell's earlier position on the structure of content. It is the account of conceptualism which is assumed in the problem of the Myth of the Given as set out above, and is what most philosophers mean when they speak of 'conceptual content'. On propositional conceptualism, the content of experience employs concepts by expressing a proposition about the way the world is. In this sense, propositional conceptualism amounts to a rejection of P5 of the Myth of the Given (that is, a rejection of the claim that experience does not have conceptual content). McDowell says:

*That things are thus and so* [a proposition] is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgement: it becomes the content of a judgement if the subject decides to take the experience at face value. So it is conceptual content. (McDowell, 1994, p.26).<sup>5</sup>

To avoid confusion it is worth clarifying here exactly what is meant by a proposition's 'being the content of the experience'. In the literature, there are two potential readings of propositional content. On a first reading, a state has propositional content if it is intentionally directed towards an object and has accuracy conditions; that is, if it can be accurate/right, or inaccurate/wrong (Mitchell, 2019, p.4). On this reading, sometimes known as 'weak propositionalism', propositional content needn't be *conceptual*, but it must be *representational*. It must be able to represent what is there in the world, accurately or inaccurately, but it needn't express concepts like the content of a belief does. On the

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that McDowell is talking about perceptual judgements here, not introspective judgements. Thus, we can ignore his talk of 'taking experiences at face value', for this is a condition specific to the justification of perceptual judgements, not introspective ones.



second reading, a state has propositional content if its content has a sentence-like structure and expresses concepts. This is the type of propositional content we typically take beliefs to have, and it is this type of propositional content that conceptualists also take experiences to have. On this stronger notion, a proposition is something that is true or false, not merely accurate or inaccurate. It is this, combined with its comprehensible sentence-like, concept-expressing structure, that allows it to stand as a premise in an argument and play the role of an access internalist reason for our perceptual beliefs. Propositional content on the former reading, taken as a type of non-conceptual, representational content, cannot play this role because it cannot stand as a premise in an argument. So if experiences only have weak propositional content, they cannot justify belief on the access internalist epistemic framework.

So if we concede that experiences express propositions (in the strong sense defined above), it is easy to see how the Myth of the Given can be avoided. Take again my visual experience of the book in front of me. Based on my acquaintance with this experience, I make the following self-ascription: *'I am having a visual experience as of a blue book'*. According to the propositional conceptualist, the very part of this ascription that is relevant to its justification is also given to me in experience through the experience's content. The content of the experience is quite literally the proposition 'that is a blue book'. So when it comes to justifying this self-ascription, I cite my experience because I am able to recognise that the content of this experience is identical to the relevant part of the content of my judgement. Hence, experiences are able to justify our self-ascriptions in the way required by the access internalist account.

McDowell proposes that experience has this kind of content because the conceptual capacities that are active in belief and reasoning are also active in experiencing. Hence, the overall name of 'conceptualism' for this view. Instead of the traditional idea that we

exercise our conceptual capacities *on* what is given in experience (a view which allegedly leads to the Myth of the Given), McDowell argues that experiencing *itself* involves the use of our conceptual capacities:

[O]n pain of the Myth of the Given, capacities that belong to the higher cognitive faculty must be operative in experience. In giving one things to know, experience must draw on conceptual capacities. (McDowell, 2008, p.5)

The thought is that our conceptual capacities shape what is given in experience, just like they shape the contents of our beliefs. Crucially, this is supposed to give experience the type of content needed for it to play the justificatory role required of it by the access internalist.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, if conceptual capacities are at work in experience, then experience has the type of content which allows it to enter the Space of Reasons and stand in relations of inference to the contents of belief. It has *conceptual, propositional content*. This is how conceptualists like McDowell propose that we approach the Myth of the Given.

In summary, the propositional conceptualist solution to the Myth of the Given amounts to a rejection of P5 of the Myth. Instead of accepting the claim in P5 that experiences have non-conceptual content, an alternative account of the content of experience is

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<sup>6</sup> McDowell's commitment to access internalism - the epistemic framework of the Myth - is evident in his endorsement of the Space of Reasons. Throughout *Mind and World*, he draws upon the notion of a Space of Reasons. In the following remark, it is clear he intends the Space of Reasons to be understood internalistically:

“[The Space of Reasons] exclu[des] an externalistic view of epistemic satisfactoriness, a view according to which one can be entitled to a belief without being in a position to know what entitles one to it” (McDowell, 2008, p.1)

The intended strength of his internalist position is also displayed in his arguments against non-conceptualist solutions to the Myth of the Given. McDowell says of Peacocke's (1992) non-conceptualist view that it fails to establish that the “content attributable to experiences can intelligibly constitute *a subject's reasons for believing something*” (McDowell, 1994, p.163). Similarly, he says that experience must not just be “part of the reason why, but yield *reasons for which* a subject forms her beliefs” (ibid. p.164) [emphasis added]. All this points towards attributing an access internalist view of justification to McDowell, according to which a subject must be able to access, recognise, and cite the reasons for their belief.

advanced. On this alternative account, the content of experience expresses a proposition, just like the content of belief, and does so because the conceptual capacities which are active in the processes of believing and reasoning are *also* active in experiencing. This, according to the propositional conceptualist, allows experiences to enter the Space of Reasons, and hence to justify our self-ascriptions.

## 4.2 Assessing Propositional Conceptualism

Propositional conceptualism offers a neat solution to the Myth of the Given, and is clearly compatible with the access internalist framework of justification that the Myth presupposes. However, a number of objections can be raised against its independent plausibility. I will outline three such objections here. Of these, though the two objections I will first discuss are the ones most commonly levelled against the propositional conceptualist's position, both of these lead into much larger debates that are beyond the scope of this thesis. The third objection, however, follows from arguments already given in previous chapters. Hence, it is the third objection that I will take to be the defining problem for the independent plausibility of propositional conceptualism.

The first issue with propositional content is that it doesn't seem to allow for the common-sense idea that often, the information given in experience seems to be of a much *finer grain* than anything we could ever judge of it. According to those who advance this problem, we do not have the concepts to classify everything that is given to us in experience (for example I do not possess the concepts for all the different shades of blue) but we are still able to have these experiences. This idea runs up against propositional conceptualism because if the content of experience expresses a proposition, it expresses concepts. And if we do not possess these concepts, the absurd

conclusion follows that we shouldn't be able to have this experience either. This objection, which is often called the *richness of experience* objection, has been levelled against propositional conceptualism by a number of theorists.<sup>7</sup>

The standard response to the richness of experience objection is to appeal to demonstrative concepts. The idea here is that experience can be conceptually and propositionally structured even if we do not possess the exact concepts that correspond to what is given in that experience. In such a case we can use a demonstrative concept such as *THIS SHADE*, or *THAT SHAPE* (where '*this*' and '*that*' pick out a quality of what is given) and by doing so we "give linguistic expression to a concept that is exactly as fine-grained as the experience, ... in which the demonstrative exploits the presence of the sample" (McDowell, 1994, p.57). Whether or not the appeal to demonstrative concepts allows the propositional conceptualist to avoid the richness of experience objection is an ongoing debate, and since I believe that there are other objections to propositional conceptualism that are more forceful, I will not discuss the problem any further here.

A second objection turns the richness of experience objection on its head. According to this second objection, the problem of fineness of grain can just as easily be levelled against *judgment* as it can against experience, because it is possible to form judgements about one's experiences that are seemingly conceptually much richer than the content of that experience (McDowell, 2008, p.4).<sup>8</sup> This objection can be illustrated like so: two people are looking at the same object - a red bird. Plausibly, their respective visual experiences have the same content. Person 1 is an ornithologist, and she immediately judges this object to be a cardinal. Person 2 doesn't know much about birds at all, he

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<sup>7</sup> See Heck (2000), Kelly (2001), Peacocke (2001) for versions of this objection.

<sup>8</sup> McDowell credits a discussion with Charles Travis as having convinced him of this problem. (McDowell, 2008, p.4).

merely judges the object to be a red bird. Now if their experiences have the *same content*, and this content takes the form of a proposition, intuitively this content must be <that is a red bird>, since this is the content of the judgement that Person 2- the person with the weaker ornithological conceptual repertoire - makes. Person 2 does not possess the concept CARDINAL, so, intuitively, this concept doesn't figure in the content of his experience. If Person 1's experience has the same content as Person 2's, then the concept CARDINAL doesn't figure in the content of her experience either. But if it is merely the proposition 'that is a red bird' which is the content of both of their experiences, then the content of Person 1's judgement (*that is a cardinal*) outstrips the content of her experience (<that is a red bird>). On propositional conceptualism, the contents of experience "must include *everything* the experience enables its subject to know noninferentially" (ibid., p.3), but this does not allow for the common-sense view that, as we learn, we can apply new concepts to experience which don't obviously figure in that experience's content.

It is this objection, which I shall call the *richness of judgement* objection, that has led McDowell himself to reject propositional conceptualism in favour of an alternative version of conceptualism - a view which he calls *intuitionism*. Due to this move by McDowell, the richness of judgement objection plays a large part in the assessment of intuitionism in the next section of this chapter. As such, now is not the time to discuss it in depth.<sup>9</sup>

Both of these objections point to a mismatch between experience and judgement with regards to the kind of information that each is able to express. We can conclude from this that the trouble with attributing the same type of content to both experience *and*

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<sup>9</sup> I will say, however, that although I remain neutral on richness of judgement, the claim, if it is true, causes more damage to the conceptualist's solution to the Myth of the Given than it was clearly intended to.

judgement - as the propositional conceptualist does - is that we now have difficulty explaining the apparent differences between them. Not only is this clear when considering concepts, it is also apparent when considering the *phenomenology* of these two types of state. It is this phenomenological problem, I argue, that does the most damage to propositional conceptualism's independent plausibility. The crux of the phenomenological objection is this: propositional content just doesn't seem to be compatible with the phenomenal character of experience.

Here's why: in the previous chapter I argued that we have good reason to believe that a mode-inclusive version of either representationalism or the phenomenal intentionality theory is true. That is, that the content of a mental state determines some of the phenomenology of that state or vice versa. From this we can make the following argument: if the content of an experience determines its phenomenology (or vice versa), and the content of experience is identical to the content of belief, then experiences should be phenomenologically identical to beliefs. But they are not. Experiences and beliefs are phenomenologically very different. The qualitative character of my conscious experience when I am having a visual experience is very different to the qualitative character of my conscious beliefs. Having a belief feels nothing like having a visual experience. So experiences cannot have propositional content.

Propositional conceptualism, then, must miss the mark when it comes to explaining how the content of experience is structured. As the above arguments have shown, propositional conceptualism does not allow us to respect the obvious differences - both conceptual and phenomenal - between experiences and beliefs. It renders experience too similar to belief, and is therefore not a plausible account of the content of experience. What conceptualists need to solve the Myth of the Given is a view on which conceptual capacities are still operative in experience, and so *shape* the content of our

experiences, but where this content is *distinct* enough from the content of beliefs to respect their phenomenological and conceptual differences. This is the aim of the second version of the conceptualist solution; intuitionism.

### 4.3 Intuitionism

Intuitionism is a second kind of conceptualist response, also developed by John McDowell, to the Myth of the Given. On the intuitionist's view, conceptual capacities are still operative in experience, but the content of experience *does not* express a proposition. This content McDowell calls 'intuitional content', and it is characterised as conceptual, nonpropositional, and reason-giving.

Exactly how is it possible for the content of an experience to be nonpropositional when it owes its structure to the operation of conceptual capacities? McDowell, in his later work, argues that such nonpropositional-yet-still-conceptual content is possible because our conceptual capacities work differently in experience to the way in which they work in belief. In belief and reasoning, conceptual capacities are in 'active' operation, whereas in experience their operation is 'passive' (Coliva, 2016; Gersel et al., 2017). Accordingly, the content of each type of mental state differs, but it is still conceptual in each case.

The content of belief and the content of experience are *both* conceptually structured, but the difference in the level of operation of the conceptual capacities in each case ensures that this conceptual structure manifests differently in experience to the way it does in belief. McDowell sets out this difference in terms of *articulation*. In belief, when the conceptual capacities are *active*, the resulting content - the content of your beliefs - is what he calls *articulated* conceptual content. To articulate something is to put it into words, of the kind that can constitute a proposition. When your conceptual capacities are active, McDowell claims, they are working to articulate content, which is why the

content of your beliefs is propositional in form. In experience, on the other hand, the operation of these conceptual capacities is merely *passive*. This means that they *do not* work to articulate the content they provide you with; they merely provide you with a sort of nascent form of conceptual content, unarticulated, but which has the possibility to be articulated should you wish to take it up into a judgement (McDowell, 2008, p.8). The active operation of conceptual capacities in belief involves articulation, whereas their passive operation in experience does not. Articulation yields a proposition, which is why the content of belief is propositional and the content of experience is not. Both have conceptual content, but this conceptual content takes on two different forms.

So how does the content of experience, conceived of as 'intuitional', allow for experiences to justify our propositionally-structured introspective beliefs? According to McDowell, it is able to do so owing to the *unity* which the operation of conceptual capacities bestows upon content. Because our conceptual capacities operate in experience, this ensures that the content of experience exhibits what he calls a "conceptual unity" (ibid., p.9). What this means is that the content of experience is unified in a way which corresponds with the concepts we have and would employ in judgement. Experience gives you birds, trees, and books *as* birds, trees, and books, rather than as a collection of shapes and properties which we later apply these concepts to. On the intuitionist's view, experiential content thus already comes conceptually packaged (albeit, in a non-propositional way). Due to this conceptual packaging of content, there is a *recognisable* relation of identity between the content of experience and the content of judgement. My experience *says* (nonpropositionally) '*bird*', and I judge '*there is a bird*' and I recognise that this experience is the reason for my judgement. This is how intuitionism avoids the Myth of the Given whilst maintaining access internalism, by positing conceptually packaged content which can stand in a revised Space of Reasons. Without this conceptual packaging of content, we fall back into the



Myth of the Given because the content of experience does not give anything we can rationally recognise as a reason for our self-ascriptions.

In summary, intuitional content - a conceptual-yet-nonpropositional content - promises a neat way for conceptualists to avoid both the Myth of the Given *and* the problems faced by the propositionalist version of their view. The intuitionist does not posit experience as having identical content to belief, meaning the phenomenological differences between experience and belief can be respected. And yet intuitional content's status as conceptually structured means, according to the intuitionist, that it is available for use in the Space of Reasons. It is, however, notably obscure, making its independent plausibility difficult to assess. This will become apparent in the next section.

## 4.4 Assessing Intuitionalism

### 4.4.1 Is Intuitional Content Compatible with Access Internalism?

Recall that in order to successfully avoid the Myth of the Given, any alternative account of the content of experience must be both compatible with access internalism, *and* independently plausible. We have already seen how the intuitionist proposes to meet the first of these criteria. Firstly, they propose that the content of experience is *conceptually* structured, and that the things given in experience are given as falling under concepts that we would also express in belief. Secondly, the intuitionist proposes that the subject is able to recognise the relation of identity between the content of their experience and the content of their belief, and so can recognise the experience as being their reason for their belief. Because of this, the intuitionist claims, experiences can justify beliefs according to the access internalist framework.

This all seems fine, until we recall the richness of judgement objection that was levelled against the first conceptualist view, propositional conceptualism. According to this objection, it should be possible for the content of an introspective judgement to be more fine-grained than the content of the experience it is a judgement about. This claim arises due to the intuitive thought that two people, each possessing more and less detailed concepts relating to, say, birds, plausibly don't see this conceptual difference reflected at the level of experience; whilst their judgements may differ in the concepts they employ, arguably their experiences do not.

If the intuitionist takes this objection seriously (as indeed McDowell does in his development of the position), then it ought to be the case that many of the concepts that we can and do express in judgment are *not* present in the content of experience; that experience, whilst still conceptually structured, is less conceptually rich than our judgements about it can be. However, in holding this position, the intuitionist faces the unintended consequence that their view is rendered incompatible with the very view of justification it is meant to respect: access internalism. This is because, on this narrowed intuitionist view, fine-grained perceptual judgements (such as '*that is a cardinal!*') cannot be justified on *purely* access internalist grounds, as I will now explain.

Consider again the abovementioned objection that the content of experience is probably not as conceptually rich as the judgements we are able to make about it. In light of this objection, McDowell, in his account of intuitional content, argues for a limit to the type concepts that can shape experience. He says:

Some concepts that figure in knowledge afforded by an experience can be excluded from the content of the experience itself... a natural stopping point, for visual experiences, would be proper sensibles of sight and common sensibles accessible to sight. (McDowell, 2008, p.5).

In other words, according to McDowell, the content of experience, though conceptual, only expresses basic sensible concepts such colour, movement, and shape concepts, like RED, ROUND, and MOVING. These concepts are *unified*, and do present us with objects, but no finer-grained, non-basic conceptual identification of these objects is given in the experience itself. Non-basic concepts, like BOOK, CARDINAL, and OAK TREE, do not feature in the content of experience.

An example applied to introspective judgement will help to illustrate this view. Take the content of my mental state when I am having a visual experience of a cardinal.

According to McDowell, this content would be something like <round red moving object>. <sup>10</sup> It would not be <cardinal> because the concept CARDINAL, being a non-basic concept cannot figure in the content of experience.

Thus, we are able to see where the problem lies. As a budding ornithologist, I may be able to *judge* based on this experience: '*I am having an experience of a cardinal*', but the content of this experience is not sufficient, on an access internalist framework, for me to *justify* this judgement. The content <rounded, red, moving object> may imply any number of propositions: '*I am having an experience of a rolling cricket ball*', '*I am having an experience of a falling apple*' etc. I can't, on the evidence I have alone, rationally make the move from <rounded, red, moving object> to '*I am having an experience of a cardinal*'.

This conclusion, at best, means the scope of the conceptualist approach is reduced. If access internalism is maintained, we would only be able to justifiably judge very basic things of our experience: colours, shapes, and movement. Any judgements about experience which contain non-basic concepts will not be justified on access internalist grounds. To proceed with a *wholly* access internalist account of justification for *all*

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<sup>10</sup> Note that on McDowell's view proper, this content would be unarticulated (whatever that might amount to - see pp.174-177, this chapter, for a discussion of this), I am merely 'articulating' it now so as to better illustrate the view.

introspective judgements would mean to fall - at least sometimes - into the Myth of the Given.

One might, in response to this, argue that these judgements are *not* wholly introspective. For example, one could claim that whilst my judgement that '*I am having an experience of a round red moving object*' is an instance of a wholly introspective knowledge, my judgement that '*I am having an experience of a cardinal*' is not. That is to say that although the judgement is partially formed as a result of introspection, the portion of it in which I judge that what I am experiencing is a *cardinal*, is not formed as a result of introspection. Rather, it is inferred from my introspective knowledge plus some prior beliefs I have about cardinals. However, this runs into a similar problem. To claim that introspection/perception only gives us knowledge of very basic features of our experiences and environments is to propose an extremely limited conception of these kinds of knowledge. Since it is preferable to have an account of introspective knowledge with as much explanatory power as possible, I do not think we should endorse such a limited account.

One thing which is immediately worth noting is that the richness of judgement objection doesn't threaten intuitionism per se, but rather the revised, reduced version of conceptualism to which the intuitionist must be committed in order to avoid the richness of judgement objection. To see this, consider that if we were to revise propositional conceptualism in the same way - to only allow that basic sensory concepts can figure in the propositional content of experience - we would still face the same problem. If the content of an experience is the proposition 'that is a rounded, red, moving object' we still can't, on an access internalist account of justification, rationally judge based on this experience that '*that is a cardinal*'. What this tells us is that intuitionism doesn't actually solve the problem that it was developed to solve.

Regardless of whether the content of experience is intuitional or propositional, if we take the view that only basic sensible conceptual content is given in experience, we will run up against the richness of judgement problem.

This being said, I have argued that the phenomenological objection gives us reasons to favour the intuitionalist version of the view, rather than propositionalism. Given this, I will continue to assess the richness of judgement as an objection to intuitionalism. If some version of intuitionalism can survive this problem, then because of intuitionalism's other advantages over propositional conceptualism, it remains the account that the conceptualist should favour.

It would be unfair to McDowell to claim that he hadn't foreseen this incompatibility between intuitional content and access internalism when developing his account. It seems that McDowell is aware of this issue, or something like it, when he makes the claim that the justificatory gap between judgements involving basic and non-basic concepts can be bridged by appeal to *recognitional capacities*. He says, when discussing the issue of richness of judgement, that despite only basic sensible concepts figuring in experience, "my *recognitional capacity* enables me to know noninferentially that what I see is a cardinal" (ibid., p.4) [emphasis added]. The thought here is that even though the concept CARDINAL does not figure in the content of your experience, if you are able to *recognise* cardinals when you see them, then you are in possession of a recognitional capacity which explains why you are justified in making the judgement '*that is a cardinal*'.

In order to assess the strategy of appeal to recognitional capacities, it will be instructive to say a little more about what recognitional capacities (or as they are sometimes known, recognitional *abilities*) are and what their supposed role is in justification. A number of philosophers appeal to recognitional abilities to explain how we acquire empirical

knowledge<sup>11</sup>. The idea is roughly thus: particular experiences invoke in us recognitional responses; that is, given a particular experience, we recognise and are able to discern the particular object or property which is presented in this experience *as* a property or object of a certain type. If we have the concept which corresponds to this object, we are also disposed to apply it in a judgement. Such a response is *immediate*, and involves no inference by the subject.

One can be said to possess a particular recognitional ability if one becomes highly reliable at forming true judgements as a response to a certain experience (Millar, 2019, p.83). Take the example of the cardinal. If I possess the ability to recognise experiences of cardinals when I have them, and I possess the concept CARDINAL EXPERIENCE, I will be disposed to judge, when having this experience, that '*I am having an experience of a cardinal*'. Importantly, the concept CARDINAL EXPERIENCE need not figure in the content of this experience for this to happen.

The problem with invoking recognitional abilities to explain how judgement can be conceptually richer than experience is that this move is not obviously compatible with an access internalist account of justification. This is because the role that recognitional abilities play in knowledge acquisition removes the need for the subject's role as an assessor of evidence in the justification process. On the access internalist account, for a belief to be justified, a subject needs to be able to access the reasons for their belief, and recognise for themselves that these reasons are their reasons for their belief - a process which requires that experience itself be structured in a way such that the subject could appreciate it as a reason. If recognitional abilities, as defined above, play a part in knowledge acquisition, they essentially do the justificatory work for the subject. They function as a process which reliably true produces beliefs, and these beliefs are justified

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<sup>11</sup> See Peacocke (1992), Brogaard (2013), Dorsch (2018), Millar (2019).

because they are the outcome of a process which ensures they have a high chance of being true. The epistemic work of the subject becomes irrelevant to justification; the subject does not need to be able to see for themselves the correspondence between their experience and their belief because a reliable process ensures this correspondence will always be there. Appeal to recognitional capacities in knowledge acquisition essentially admits to an externalist account of justification.

Not only does appeal to recognitional abilities undermine access internalism, it also undermines the motivation for trying to find a conceptualist solution to the Myth of the Given. If the subject is no longer required to scrutinise the adequacy of their reasons, the experience need not have conceptual content. The very motivation for positing conceptual content is that this is seemingly the only type of content which allows experience to stand in the Space of Reasons, allowing the subject to compare it to the content of judgement and see for themselves that one holds the relation of identity to the other. If we are now to deny access internalism then there is no reason to posit conceptual content just to fit a justificatory framework. The successful exercise of recognitional abilities doesn't require experience to have conceptual content - McDowell himself admits this in his original appeal to them. But if this is the case, we may as well just be non-conceptualists.<sup>12</sup>

In a paper on McDowell's intuitional conceptualism, Gersel et al. also identify that this situation is a problem for the conceptualist project. They argue, however, that the appeal to recognitional abilities *can* be made compatible with an access internalist account of justification. On their account, which they call the 'authority model', justification requires not only the possession of a reliable recognitional ability, but that

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed Peacocke (1992) explicitly argues for an account in which the successful exercise of recognitional abilities relies on the structure of the non-conceptual content of experience.

the subject has *knowledge* of this ability and its reliability, and that this knowledge is constitutive of the possession of the recognitional ability (Gersel et al., 2017, p.99).

These extra requirements are necessary to ensure an account of justification in which the subject plays the crucial epistemic role, and thus to keep the account internalist. To illustrate, on Gersel et al.'s account, when I judge '*I am having an experience as of a cardinal*' my judgement is justified if *a*) I possess the ability to recognise cardinal experiences when I have them, and *b*) I know I have this ability and I know that it reliably allows me to make true judgements.

Requiring that one have knowledge of one's own recognitional ability is obviously an internalist condition, but it is the *constitutive relation* between knowledge of recognitional abilities and possession of recognitional abilities which, according to Gersel et al., secures this account its access internalist status. According to Gersel et al., possessing a recognitional ability is dependent on one having knowledge of oneself possessing it.

They say:

[There is a] constitutive connection between the capacity to be in the relevant state of seeing or recognizing and the possession of certain background knowledge. (ibid., p.100)

In other words, you cannot have a recognitional ability if you don't know you have it, since knowledge of it is one of the features of such an ability. In this way, the role of the recognitional ability in justification is *dependent* on the meeting of access internalist conditions. This, according to Gersel et al., is what allows us to reconcile an appeal to recognitional abilities with an access internalist account of justification.

If the authority account of Gersel et al. holds up, then we have a solution to the seeming incompatibility between access internalism and recognitional capacities. One which respects McDowell's intuitions that only basic sensible concepts can shape the



content of experience. However, the plausibility of Gersel et al.'s authority account is not immediately apparent. For one, it does not align with the way that we talk of abilities more generally. A person can have many abilities that they may not know that they possess; either because they have never performed the relevant task, or simply because they fail to recognise that they have that ability. For example, I have the ability to run fast, but I did not know this until I first took part in a race. My mother has the ability to be a good listener, but if she did not see this in herself, and nobody told her as much, she might never know she possessed this ability. Of course, there are plenty of examples where a subject can know that they possess a certain ability, but as ability talk in general shows, this does not mean that this knowledge is constituted by their possession. To single out recognitional abilities as the exception to this rule solely for the purposes of reconciling them with access internalism seems ad hoc.

There may be a way to reconcile recognitional capacities with access internalism, but as yet neither McDowell nor Gersel et al. provide it. Thus, when faced with the task of reconciling a sparse conceptualism (where only basic sensory concepts feature in the content of experience) with access internalism, it seems the intuitionist's best option is to backtrack on sparse conceptualism entirely. To save their account, the intuitionist must instead show the richness of judgement objection to be unfounded. They can then embrace a rich conceptualism about the content of experience, where experience presents things *as* experiences of books, birds, and trees, rather than as experiences of blue rectangles, round red objects, and tall green things. Importantly, this is something the intuitionist can do whilst still maintaining that the content of experience is intuitional, rather than propositional. Embracing a rich conceptualism means that the intuitionist need not appeal to recognitional abilities to bridge the justificatory gap which occurs when the content of experience is conceptually more basic than the content of judgement. This would allow them to maintain access internalism and

protect the whole motivation for conceptualism as a solution to the Myth of the Given. However, whether or not the richness of judgement objection is true is not a question I will attempt to answer here. I merely wish to show that the task of defending intuitionism about content is not a straightforward one.

#### 4.4.2 Is Intuitional Content Independently Plausible?

The question of whether intuitional content is compatible with access internalism remains, for now, unanswered. Its answer is dependent on the truth or falsity of the richness of judgement objection. Assuming that the intuitionist *can* show the richness of judgement objection to be false, they can answer positively the question of whether their account is compatible with access internalism. However, for their account to successfully avoid the Myth of the Given, they must *also* be able to answer positively to the second question: is intuitional content independently plausible?

Due to the relatively obscure descriptions given of intuitional content, its plausibility is difficult to assess. As it stands, we only have an idea of intuitional content as ‘conceptual, non-propositional content’. This doesn’t tell us very much. Ideally we need a much better understanding of what intuitional content ‘looks like’ in order to assess whether it is a plausible account of the content of experience, and whether it can play its justificatory role.

To help us here, we can consider some of the things McDowell says about the structure of intuitional content. Unfortunately, McDowell does not say with any great argument about the structure of intuitional content. He makes a variety of different remarks

which, when considered together, don't seem to constitute a coherent view.<sup>13</sup> But perhaps, if a plausible notion is found, it could be possible to reinterpret McDowell's other claims in light of this. In what follows, then, I will consider 3 remarks which represent a summary of his views:

- i. Intuitional content is like propositional content, but without singular reference (McDowell, 2013 p.145; 2019, p.396).

On this first view, the thought is that the content of experience, unlike the content of judgement, doesn't refer to a particular object. Whereas the content of judgement might be <that is a blue book>, the content of experience would be something like <blue book> - not picking anything out or predicating in the way that a proposition contained in judgement does. The problem with this characterisation is that it doesn't really differ *enough* from propositional content, and since McDowell wants to avoid the claim that the content of experience is propositional, he should avoid characterising intuitional content in this way. The content <blue book> may not be predicating 'blue bookness' of anything, so isn't strictly a proposition, but like the propositions expressed in beliefs (where 'proposition' is taken in the strong sense), it still expresses concepts through a linguistic structure. Intuitional content, when characterised in this way, is similar enough to propositional content to leave it vulnerable to the phenomenological objection. On this reading of intuitional content, having an experience would feel phenomenologically similar to having a belief - something which demonstrably isn't the case. Dropping singular reference may allow McDowell to avoid the claim that the content of experience is strictly a *proposition*, but aside from this it doesn't distinguish it from

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Browning (2019) argues that when considered together, some of McDowell's claims about the structure of intuitional content actually contradict each other.

propositional content in any meaningful way, and leaves the intuitionist vulnerable to the phenomenological objection.

So the claim that intuitional content is like conceptual content but without singular reference doesn't get us to a plausible view of intuitional content. This leads us to McDowell's second remark:

- ii. Intuitions immediately reveal things to be the way they would be judged to be in judgement. (McDowell, 2008 p.12)

By saying that intuitions reveal things to be the way they would be judged to be, it seems that McDowell is making a claim about the role of judgement in knowledge. We might ordinarily think that it is the role of judgement to characterise and categorise what is given in experience, however, McDowell thinks that this is to downplay the role of experience in knowledge acquisition. If experience *reveals* things to be the way they would be judged, then it seems that experience *itself* is the characteriser and categoriser of the things it presents. The role of judgement is therefore diminished; judgement is merely another way of expressing what has already been expressed through the content of experience.

With this in mind, we must ask: what is meant by 'another way of expressing what has already been expressed'? There are two ways of reading such a claim:

1. The content of experience is the same in structure as the content of judgement - if the judgement expresses the proposition 'that is a blue book', then so does the experience, as judgement merely expresses again what has already been expressed.

If this is the case, we are once again faced with the phenomenological objection. We should therefore look to the second way of reading the claim:

2. The content of experience is somehow different in kind to the content of judgement, yet similar enough that nothing new is learned about the experience in the act of judgement.

Once again we are faced with the mysterious nature of intuitional content. How can something express what can also be expressed in a proposition, whilst at the same time not being propositional in structure? We can look to McDowell's final remark in order to shed some light on what this difference might be:

- iii. Discursive [propositional] content is articulated. Intuitional content is not.  
(McDowell, 2008, p.8)

McDowell uses this distinction - a distinction between articulated and unarticulated content - a lot when talking about intuitional content.. What this amounts to is the claim that the content of experience is the *unarticulated* content of judgement. So if the content of the perceptual judgement is the proposition 'there is a blue book', the content of experience features the unarticulated version of this proposition.

Before I assess this view, it is worth saying a little more about what 'unarticulated content' might look like. Jacob Browning (2019) claims there are two ways we could interpret the notion of 'unarticulated content'. The first is the *Same Structure View*. On this view, the content of experience and the content of judgement have exactly the same structure, their difference lies in the fact that the experience's content is a sort of 'dormant' version of the content of judgement (Browning, 2019, p.91). Since the content of judgement expresses a proposition, the content of experience is thus an expression of a 'dormant' proposition. So unarticulated content, on the Same Structure View, takes the form of an expression of an *unarticulated proposition*.

One might find this notion of an unarticulated proposition rather odd - propositions articulate the meanings of other things; they do not articulate an unarticulated version of themselves. Surely either the content of experience expresses a proposition, or it has a different structure entirely to the content of judgements.

Given this, in what follows, I will thus read 'unarticulated content' in line with Browning's second reading of McDowell; as endorsing the *Different Structure View*. According to this view, the structure of intuitional content is different from the structure of judgement; experience's content does not express an 'unarticulated proposition', it is something else. I believe it is best to think of this difference as being a difference in the *medium* of expression, where experience is just another medium through which to express concepts. Propositions are one way of expressing them, and experience is another. Both conceptual, but with a different structure. In fact, this fits well with what McDowell says about how we actually form perceptual judgements:

To make such an aspect of the content of an intuition [experience] into the content associated with a capacity that is discursive [propositional] in the primary sense, one would need to carve it out, as it were, from the categorially unified but as yet unarticulated content of the intuition by determining it to be the meaning of a linguistic expression, which one thereby sets up as a means for making that content explicit. (ibid., p.8).

In other words, when we make a perceptual judgement, we 'articulate' the experience's content by picking it out and identifying it as the meaning of the judgement we are making. The experience and the judgement express the very same thing - a concept - but the former does so in a non-linguistic manner. In the judgement, all we are doing is putting into words something which is not itself expressed in words. And the point of putting such content into words is to be able to use it in thought and reasoning.

This proposal - the Different Structure View of unarticulated content - represents a sharp contrast to the account of introspective judgement which a non-conceptualist about the content of experience would give. On the non-conceptualist account, experience and judgement do not express the same thing. Instead of merely putting the content of experience into words, judgement on a non-conceptualist account is a process of *conceptualising* the information which is non-conceptually given in experience. On this type of account, judgement does a much bigger job, and this bigger job is necessary due to the fact there are no conceptual capacities passively shaping experience as there are on the conceptualist account. The passive exercise of conceptual capacities in experience essentially does some of the job that we would ordinarily take judging to do - it shapes the input from the world into something which is already unified according to a concept. According to the conceptualist, conceptualising is done in the act of experiencing itself, not in the act of judgement.

So on the reading of intuitional content as 'unarticulated' and 'differing in structure to propositional content', we are given an insight into the roles of and relationship between experience and judgement on the conceptualist account. However, I argue that this characterisation of intuitional content places *too much* of the definition of the content of experience on the notion of judgement, rather than on the experience itself.

To see this, consider the following. Intuitional content is defined *in terms of* its contrast to the content of judgement. Where the content of judgement is defined as 'propositional articulated content', the content of experience is defined only as the 'unarticulated version' of the content of this judgement. All I can know about what the content of experience 'looks like' is based on what I know about what the content of judgement 'looks like'. I have no way of assessing intuitional content independently of its relationship to judgement. This means that when assessing the plausibility of

intuitional content, we have to take judgement into account too. I see this as posing two problems for the conceptualist:

Firstly, if we define intuitional content in terms of its relationship to judgement, then we cannot independently assess whether it can play the role of a reason for judgement. This is because the very fact that it is a reason for judgement is now presupposed in the definition of intuitional content. Though this is not a reason to immediately reject the view, it would be preferable to have a notion of content that is not so closely tied to the thing it has been posited to explain.

Secondly, if we define intuitional content in terms of its relationship to judgement, then the content of a judgement becomes a datum by which we can assess the notion of intuitional content. The problem with this is that an introspective judgement would express the same proposition whether the content of experience was intuitional *or* non-conceptual. We cannot tell from *this data alone* which account of content is correct. But unfortunately, we have nothing else to go on. The proposition expressed in the content of an introspective judgement doesn't tell anything about the content of experience because it expresses *exactly the same thing* regardless of the account of experience's content we give. By characterising intuitional content as the unarticulated content of judgement we cannot rule out the possibility that it is actually just non-conceptual content.

Of course, this doesn't show that intuitionism is false, but it does put the position into doubt. Without independent means of assessing the notion of intuitional content, and without a response to the richness of judgement objection, the intuitionist is left with an account which doesn't do the job required of it, and which we have no good reason to accept over its rival. This, I argue, gives us good reason to abandon the route of intuitionism as a solution to the Myth of the Given.



## 5. Back to the Myth of the Given

With both propositional conceptualism and intuitionism failing to give us a plausible conceptualist position, we must re-assess our available responses to the Myth of the Given. Recall that the Myth of the Given can be expressed as follows:

- P1** Beliefs have conceptual content.
  - P2** Justification is access internalist. (1<sup>st</sup> Assumption of the Myth of the Given)
  - P3** If justification is access internalist, it happens in the Space of Reasons.
  - P4** If justification happens in the Space of Reasons, then only things with conceptual content can be reasons for belief.
  - P5** Experiences do not have conceptual content. (2<sup>nd</sup> Assumption of the Myth of the Given)
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- C** Experiences cannot be reasons for belief.

The strategy of overcoming the Myth of the Given by denying P5 was the strategy of the conceptualist. Propositional conceptualism was shown to be incompatible with the phenomenology of experience, and intuitionist conceptualism also came up against serious problems. Both of these positions attempted to formulate alternative accounts of the content of experience in order to make experience compatible with the one thing they believe should be held fixed: the access internalist account of justification (P2). But since no alternative account of the content of experience has been given which is both plausible and compatible with access internalism, the alternative content strategy seems

to bring us out at a dead end. This suggests that, when it comes to explaining the justification of self-knowledge, what really needs to change is not the content of experience, but the account of justification.

Recall that access internalism requires that a subject can a) access the reason for their belief (let us call this the *awareness condition*), and b) recognise that this is their reason for their belief (let us call this the *assessibility condition*, since, in order to recognise it as a reason, the subject must first assess the suitability of it as a reason). When it comes to self-ascriptions, this requires that a subject can a) access the experience they are self-ascribing, and b) recognise that this particular experience is their reason for their self-ascription. This second condition allows us to bridge the gap between mere awareness of an experience and the belief formed about this experience, and it does so by appealing to the actions of the subject alone.

As I have argued, it is at this point where access internalism rubs up against non-conceptualism. If experience has non-conceptual content, then no action, no process of reasoning by the subject, will allow the gap between awareness of this experience and a belief formed about this experience to be bridged in a way which justifies this belief. To appeal to the rational role of the subject is to make the requirements for justification *too strong* to be compatible with the structure of experience.

The obvious alternative would be to endorse a wholly externalist account of justification. But as I have argued in the first section of this chapter, an externalist account of justification does not allow us to explain two key features of justification; its dialectical element (our ability to cite reasons), and its ability to explain why it is rational to make particular judgements. Both of these require that the subject has access to the reason for their judgement - their own conscious experience. To say that the subject's awareness of their own conscious experience has nothing to do with either the

rationality of their judgement about it or their ability to explain this judgement, is to say something which seems unlikely. For these reasons, the awareness condition is hence desirable in an account of the justification of self-ascriptions.

What this suggests, then, is that we can still retain the spirit of access internalism (where awareness plays a key role in justification) whilst looking for alternative ways to bridge the gap between awareness and a justified belief. If the awareness condition is met, but the assessibility condition is replaced by an alternative gap-bridging principle, then perhaps we can maintain access internalism, albeit in a weaker form. This would be preferable to the alternative - having to endorse a wholly externalist account of justification - which for reasons I have already stated, is less desirable when it comes to explaining the justification of self-ascriptions.

Let us call access internalism which requires that both the awareness *and* assessibility conditions be met *strong access internalism*. When McDowell, and Sellars and Davidson speak of justification in relation to the Myth of the Given, they are speaking of a strong access internalist account.

On the other hand, an account on which it is claimed that the assessibility condition is *not* necessary for justification, but awareness plus some alternative gap-bridging principle *is*, will be called *weak access internalism*. In the final sections of this chapter, I will argue that a plausible weak access internalist account of justification can be put forward which allows us to both maintain non-conceptualism and to avoid the Myth of the Given. The first step towards developing this account is to explain how the gap between awareness of an experience and a judgement about that experience can be bridged in a way which confers justification on that judgement.

## 6. Bridging the Gap

### 6.1 Initial Attempts

We can look to the literature for some examples of attempts to bridge this gap.

Laurence Bonjour, in his internalist account of justification, puts forward an account in which, instead of a second ‘gap-bridging’ condition, the awareness condition *alone* is deemed sufficient for our self-ascriptions to be justified. This is because the awareness we have of our own current conscious experiences, according to Bonjour “constitutes a kind of *reason* for thinking that the description [the content of the introspective judgement] is correct” (Bonjour, 2003, p.72) [emphasis in original]. The idea here is that self-ascriptions can be thought of as *descriptions* of our conscious mental states, and our awareness of these mental states provides us with a means of assessing the accuracy or inaccuracy of these descriptions. If we introspect our current experience and judge it to fit the description of it given in our self-ascription, then this self-ascription is justified.

The problem with this is what it leaves unexplained; what exactly is it about your introspective awareness of your current conscious experience that gives you a reason to judge that it fits the description contained within a self-ascription? What is it about my awareness of my current visual experience of a blue book that gives me a reason to judge that my self-ascription of this experience is accurate? What Bonjour’s account tells us is that there is something special about this awareness which confers justification, but without any further information about *what* makes it do this, the account is incomplete, and the gap has not been bridged.

Richard Fumerton’s account of justification can be seen to fall into a similar trap.

Fumerton argues that there are three conditions necessary for justification: the subject’s awareness of their current conscious experience; their awareness of the content of their

self-ascription; and their awareness of the correspondence which holds between the two. He says:

[w]hen everything that is constitutive of a thought's being true is immediately before consciousness, there is nothing more that one could want or need to justify a belief (Fumerton, 1995, p.75)

Here, we might ask of Fumerton a similar question to the one asked of Bonjour: what is it about my experience, or my awareness of it, that allows me to judge that this experience *corresponds* to my self-ascription? What does this 'correspondence' amount to? As I have argued in the previous sections of this chapter, the only way for the subject themselves to be aware that an experience and a judgement correspond is if the content of experience matches with the content of judgement in a way that allows the subject to recognise this correspondence, i.e., if the content of experience is conceptual, and justification takes place in the Space of Reasons. But we have already seen that neither of these things are plausible. Fumerton himself does not endorse a conceptualist account, but is instead notably obscure about the nature of this correspondence, saying, "Correspondence is not like anything else; it cannot be informatively subsumed under a genus, and it cannot be analysed into any less-problematic concepts" (ibid., p.76). This is convenient for him, but unsatisfying for us.

So Fumerton's account falls into the same traps as conceptualism, whilst Bonjour's account leaves more to be explained. I believe we must revisit a notion already touched upon in this chapter in order to explain how the gap between awareness of experience and a justified self-ascription can successfully be bridged. This is the notion of *recognitional capacities*.

## 6.2 Weak Access Internalism: a Recognitional Capacities Account

We have seen from the discussion in Section 5 that the key to an account of the justification of our self-ascriptions lies in a successful weak access internalist account. Such an account requires that justification is a result of the following two conditions being met:

1. The subject has access to the reason for their judgement, their current conscious experience (awareness condition).
2. The gap between this awareness and the self-ascription is bridged by a process which confers justification, but *does not* involve an act of reasoning on the part of the subject.

Condition 1 ensures that the account is access internalist. Condition 2 ensures that this is a *weak* access internalism.

Recall the earlier discussion of intuitional content. In particular, recall McDowell's amendment to his intuitionist account in the face of the *richness of judgement* objection. McDowell argued that to overcome the issues that this raised for his account of experiential knowledge, we ought to allow that, sometimes, judgements can be justified if they are formed as a result of the successful exercise of a *recognitional capacity*. I argued that recognitional capacities are *not* compatible with strong access internalism since they remove the role of the subject, but I will show that they hold the key to a successful weak access internalist account.

To illustrate this, I will draw upon the recognitional accounts of *perceptual* knowledge proposed by Alan Millar and Michael Pace.<sup>14</sup> I will then explain how a similar account

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<sup>14</sup> Related accounts have also been advanced by Peacocke (1992), Dorsch (2018) Brogaard (2013), and of course McDowell (2008). Though not all of these theorist explicitly use the label 'recognitional capacity'.

which employs the same basic principles can be extended to *introspective* knowledge, and can explain how we bridge the epistemic gap between awareness of experience and a justified self-ascription. The resulting weak access internalist account, I will argue, can successfully explain the justification of our self-ascriptions, and hence get us to self-knowledge.

Alan Millar argues that the notion of *recognition* plays a key role in acquiring perceptual knowledge. According to Millar, perceptual knowledge is a matter of *recognising* the objects and properties presented to us in perception *as* objects and properties of a certain type (Millar, 2008; 2009; 2011; 2019). The reason that a mere act of recognition, according to Millar, can lead us to perceptual knowledge is that recognition involves the exercise of a particular kind of capacity. Importantly, it involves the exercise of a capacity to *reliably apply the correct concepts to the objects and properties that we see* (Millar, 2011, pp.333-334). To illustrate, consider once again my experience of the blue book before me. Millar argues that I come to know that the object before me is blue, and is a book, by recognising the presence of the qualities of blueness and book-ness. If I recognise the presence of these qualities, it is because I possess the ‘visual-recognitional capacities’ to tell that something has these qualities from the way that thing looks. That is, I have the visual-recognitional capacity to recognise, from the way something looks, that it is blue, and I have the visual recognitional capacity to recognise, from the way something looks, that it is a book. These capacities constitute a reliable ability to correctly apply the concepts of BLUE and BOOK to what I see. Furthermore, if I did not have these capacities, then I would not be inclined to apply such concepts. It is for these reasons, Millar argues, that I know that what I am seeing is a blue book.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> One may notice that there is no mention in this example of my *belief* or *judgement* there is a blue book - only my *knowledge* that there is a blue book. This is because Millar subscribes to a *knowledge-first* view of perceptual knowledge. According to such a view, knowledge is not to be analysed in terms of further criteria such as justified beliefs which are analysed independently of knowledge, rather, justified beliefs are

Two things are important for our purposes here: the first is a capacity's being an ability to *reliably apply the correct concepts*. The second is its being a capacity to reliably apply these concepts *to things that we see*. With these two notions, we are able to fulfil both of the conditions of the weak access internalist account of justification. Firstly, a particular visual recognitional capacity will only be exercised in response to my awareness of a particular visual experience - it is because I am consciously aware of the presence of certain qualities in my environment and not others, through perceiving them, that I am able to exercise the visual recognitional capacity in the first place. This means that condition (1) - that the subject is aware of the experience their judgement is about - is met. The capacity as being a 'reliable ability to correctly apply concepts' to the things that we see ensures that condition (2) is met; the gap between awareness and judgement is bridged by appeal to the reliable ability to judge of the qualities of which we are aware that they fall under a certain concept. The justification of perceptual knowledge is therefore explained partly by the subject's awareness of the presence of a particular quality, and partly by their exercise of a reliable ability to recognise the presence of this quality and form a true judgement about it on the basis of this recognition.

When it comes to introspective knowledge - our first-person knowledge of current conscious states - I believe a similar account can be given. The only difference being that the subject exercises a reliable recognitional ability in response to the presence of a particular quality *of a conscious mental state*, rather than a quality of some object in the world. These qualities are, of course, *phenomenal qualities*. For example, phenomenal blueness, visualness, squareness, and the like. A subject who has the introspective-

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to be accounted for in terms of knowledge. This is why Millar says "[I]n exercising the relevant recognitional abilities I both see that there are tomatoes in the basket and thereby tell that there are and so know that there are. Indeed, *seeing-that is just a mode of knowing-that*." [emphasis added] (Millar, 2011, p.334). Though my account is based heavily in Millar's, it is not a knowledge-first account. On the picture I am proposing, recognitional abilities allow us to *judge-that*, and because of the reliability of these abilities (plus other conditions), this judgement is justified, resulting in knowledge.



recognitional capacity to recognise phenomenal blueness will, when they become aware of the presence of this property in the right sort of way, be able to immediately judge of their mental state that it is an experience as of something blue. Similarly, for the state type of their experience, if the subject has the introspective-recognitional capacity to recognise phenomenal visualness and they become aware of the presence of this property in the right sort of way, they will be able to judge of their experience that it is a visual experience. This is because it is constitutive of *having* an introspective-recognitional capacity that one forms a correct judgement about the thing one recognises. The recognitional abilities account can, therefore, quite easily be extended to account for the justification of self-ascriptions, and hence self-knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

What does it mean for one to become aware of a property *in the right sort of way*? And what is the importance of this for the present account? When the recognitional abilities theorist says that the subject must become aware of the presence of a property *in the right sort of way* for their recognitional ability to be exercised, they have two things in mind. Firstly, they have in mind the *way in which the subject becomes aware* of this property, and secondly they have in mind the *distinctive appearance* of this property. Regarding the first, the subject must become aware of the property in the way that their recognitional ability specifies. For example, for a visual-recognitional capacity to be exercised, the subject must become aware of the property visually, by seeing it. For an introspective-recognitional capacity to be exercised, they subject must become aware of the property introspectively, by being acquainted with it. If the subject does not become aware of the relevant property in the way specified by the type of recognitional capacity they are exercising (say, for example, they become aware of it via testimony), then they cannot be said to have *recognised* this property at all. Any judgement made on the basis of

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<sup>16</sup> Millar himself (2019. p.112) also extends his account to knowledge of experiences themselves, as well as perceptual knowledge.

something other than recognition won't count as an instance of perceptual (or introspective) knowledge. This is because such judgements will not be formed as a result of the exercise of a reliable recognitional capacity.

So that is the first thing meant by becoming aware of a property *in the right way*. The second concerns the *distinctive appearance* of a property. The thought here is that, in order to be able to recognise some property from the way it looks (or introspectively appears) to us, there must be a certain amount of regularity between instances of that property. That is, there must be something about a property such that, whenever it is instantiated, I am able to reliably recognise it over and over again as an instance of that particular property. I am able to visually recognise, for example, the colour blue when I see it, regardless of the object which instantiates it. Similarly, I am able to introspectively recognise the quality of visualness when I am acquainted with it, regardless of what it is I am visually aware *of*. To explain how this is possible, recognitional abilities theorists appeal to the notion of a *distinctive appearance*. A distinctive appearance is the appearance that an object or property has which it has in common with all other instances of that object or property, and which all other objects or properties do not have. Michael Pace says:

Following Lyons, we can define a phenomenal kind as follows: 'K is a perceptual [phenomenal] kind just in case the members of K are perceptually similar to each other in some respects and perceptually different from other things in those same respects' [Lyons, 2005, p.191]. If there is, for example, a way that elm trees look that differs from the look of other things, then it will be possible to classify them by this look. (Pace, 2017, p.237)

Similarly, Smith says:

[T]o say that lemons have a distinctive look is to say that there is a way of looking such that most things looking that way are lemons ... To ground perceptual knowledge, recognitional capacities must be responsive to distinctive looks. This ensures reliability and rules out a certain sort of luck. (Smith, 2017, p.122)

So, an object or property having a distinctive appearance is an objective, necessary requirement for recognition. If there was not, for example, some distinctive appearance that all blue things shared, then I would not be able to acquire the capacity to recognise blue things from the way they look.

We can extend this notion of 'distinctive appearance' from its use in accounts of perceptual knowledge to an account of *self*-knowledge. On the acquaintance account, conscious experiences, in virtue of their phenomenal properties, also have distinctive appearances. Instances of the phenomenal property of blueness all have an appearance which groups them as instances of *that particular phenomenal property*, and which excludes them from being instances of a different particular phenomenal property. It is this distinctive appearance which allows me to recognise phenomenal blueness when I am acquainted with it. Similarly, with state type, instances of the phenomenal property of visualness all have an appearance which groups them as instances of phenomenal visualness and excludes them from being instances of any other phenomenal property. It is this distinctive appearance which allows me to recognise phenomenal visualness when I am acquainted with it.

To summarise, a weak access internalist account which appeals to introspective-recognitional capacities can bridge the internalist's gap between the subject's awareness of the reason for their self-ascription, and the self-ascription being justified. The account holds that the subject's awareness of the reason is a crucial element in the ascription being justified, hence, maintaining the account's access internalist status. And

the account bridges the gap between this awareness and the justified self-ascription by appeal to the successful exercise of a reliable introspective-recognitional capacity of the subject. This ensures that the account avoids the problems which hampered the strong access internalist (namely, providing a plausible alternative account of the content of experience, and finding a solution to the problem of richness of judgement). The weak access internalist account outlined here does not have to make any claims about the structure of the content of experience, since for them, justification relies on a matter of awareness of and recognition of *distinctive appearances*, rather than the ability to ‘read’ experience’s content. And of course, the weak access internalist, since they need not endorse conceptualism about the content of experience, does not face the richness of judgement objection which caused so many problems for the conceptualist account. Finally, since it retains the *awareness condition*, it is able to explain both the dialectical element and the rationality of self-ascriptions, meaning it maintains an explanatory advantage over wholly externalist accounts (such as the ones endorsed by inner sense theorists). Therefore, a weak access internalist account based on reliable recognitional capacities provides us with a plausible alternative account of justification with which we can reject the second premise of the Myth of the Given.

## 7. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to give an account of how our self-ascriptions of current conscious mental states are justified. For the acquaintance account, this is the final step to explaining how self-knowledge is possible. As I explained in the introduction to this chapter, what one says about justification will impact the other structural, epistemic, and metaphysical claims one wants to make about self-knowledge. Nowhere is this made more obvious than in the problem of the Myth of the Given. In

this chapter I have used the Myth of the Given as a tool to guide the acquaintance theorist in the direction of the correct account of justification, to see what metaphysical, epistemic, and structural commitments *should* be held, and to see what account of justification can be built upon these.

The Myth of the Given occurs as a result of two independently plausible doctrines which, when held together with the claim that experiences can justify beliefs, form an inconsistent triad. These doctrines are access internalism about justification, and non-conceptualism about the content of experience. I explored the work of John McDowell who attempts to solve the Myth of the Given by rejecting the latter doctrine and offering a conceptualist account of the content of experience, supposedly compatible with access internalism. I argued that conceptualism is either implausible (as is the case with propositional conceptualism), or it is not actually compatible with access internalism at all (as is the case with intuitional conceptualism). Given this, I argued that the Myth of the Given is better solved by rejecting the account of justification on which it rests.

I then explored the options for an alternative account of justification. The failure of the account of justification presupposed in the Myth of the Given was shown to be a result of what I referred to as the ‘assessability condition’. This, I argued, was too strong a condition on justification. However, in wanting to preserve the intuitively plausible claim that, when it comes to self-knowledge, justification is at least in part attained by the subject’s having an awareness of the experience their judgement is about, I argued that the acquaintance theorist should look to develop a *weak* access internalist account. Such an account maintains what I have called the ‘awareness condition’ on justification, but bridges the gap between this and a justified judgement without appealing to the Space of Reasons. I argued that the best option for bridging this gap lies in the

recognitional capacities accounts of perceptual knowledge advanced by Alan Millar amongst others. The subject's ability to recognise instances of certain properties or objects from the way these properties or objects look to them is taken to be the key to their perceptual judgements about these objects being justified. This is because 'recognition' constitutes a reliable ability to form judgements in which we apply the correct concepts to what we see. I argued that, given the account of the metaphysics of experience and acquaintance already advanced in this thesis, the recognitional capacities account can easily be extended from perceptual knowledge to self-knowledge; introspective-recognitional capacities replace perceptual ones, and distinctive appearances are accounted for easily due to the nature of the phenomenal properties with which I have already argued we are acquainted. With a weak access internalist account that employs the notion of introspective-recognitional capacities as defined, the acquaintance theorist is able to explain how self-ascriptions can be justified.

## Chapter 5

# The Problem of the Speckled Hen

### 1. Introduction

In the first four chapters of this thesis, I have argued for my acquaintance account of self-knowledge in detail. I have explained what acquaintance is, how it allows us to make self-ascriptions, and how these self-ascriptions are justified. In the next two chapters I will tackle objections. I will consider two objections commonly raised against accounts of self-knowledge which invoke acquaintance, and explain how my particular acquaintance account has the means to overcome them both. The first of these objections is known as the Problem of the Speckled Hen.

First raised by Gilbert Ryle to A.J. Ayer as a problem for sense-data theories of perceptual knowledge, the speckled hen has since appeared in many guises.<sup>1</sup> Hence, when I talk of the ‘Problem’ of the Speckled Hen, I am not referring to one singular

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<sup>1</sup> See Ayer (1940, p.124). See also Chisholm (1942). See Sosa (2003) for a contemporary restatement of the problem.

objection which speckled hens raise for the acquaintance theory. In fact, as we shall see, speckled hens (visual experiences of speckled hens, to be precise) threaten the truth of the acquaintance theory in two different ways; they raise problems for both the account of justification which acquaintance theories generally advance, and also the intentionalism upon which the acquaintance theory depends.

The two problems emerge when we consider experiences of a certain type, introspection of which seems to bring up counterexamples to the claims made by the acquaintance theorist. The type of experiences which raise these problems are visual experiences where a particular property is instantiated multiple times. Consider the visual experience one has when one looks at the speckles on a speckled hen; in this experience, the content seems to represent to you a very high number of speckles.

Such experiences - I will call them experiences of *numerosity* - are clearly not limited to the experiences we have when looking at speckled hens. Just looking around me now, I can spot in my current experience multiple instances of numerosity: all the windows in the tenements across the way; the books on my shelf; the branches on the trees outside. Windows, books, branches; there are *lots* of each of these things, they are all presented as *numerous* to me. That experiences of this type form so much of the bulk of our everyday visual experiences makes the problems they raise even more troubling for the acquaintance theorist.

This chapter will proceed as follows: I will first consider the problem that speckled hen-type experiences raise for justification. I will argue that the acquaintance account that I have put forward in this thesis, by virtue of its recognitional capacities account of justification, does not face any problems when it comes to the issue of speckled hens and justification. I will secondly consider the problem that speckled hen-type experiences raise for intentionalism. Intentionalism is the thesis that mental states are



representational states with content (Crane, 2001. Ch.5). The acquaintance theory relies on certain versions of intentionalism being true in order to explain how self-ascriptions are possible.<sup>2</sup> The problem of the speckled hen for intentionalism arises when we try to give an account of the content of speckled hen-type experiences; either speckled hen-type experiences have indeterminate contents, or they have determinate contents. If they have indeterminate contents, then the intentionalist must explain how it is possible to represent indeterminate contents without representing determinate contents. If they have determinate contents, then the intentionalist faces a problem from experiences of gradation. Explaining the content of speckled hen-type experiences thus poses a dilemma for the acquaintance theorist.

My response to this dilemma will be to neutralise it: I will argue that there are plausible ways for the intentionalist to avoid the problem whether they endorse determinacy or indeterminacy. Hence, the problems that speckled hen-type experiences pose for the acquaintance theorist are dissolved.

## 2. Speckled Hens, Acquaintance, and Justification

The Problem of the Speckled Hen for justification can be traced back to the debates surrounding foundationalism in epistemology. Foundationalists, in looking for a way to avoid the infinite regress which threatens their proposed theory of justification, have appealed to acquaintance with mental states as the foundation upon which all of a subject's other empirical beliefs can be justified. The idea is roughly that the beliefs we have about our own conscious mental states are justified *solely* because we are aware of these states via acquaintance. Because acquaintance is a kind of *immediate, indubitable,*

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<sup>2</sup> In Chapter 3 I have argued that the acquaintance theory relies on the truth of either the mode representationalist theory or an intermediate/weak phenomenal intentionality theory of intentionalism.

*direct*, and *perfectly presentational* awareness, it affords us access to *all* phenomenally conscious qualities of our mental states, and does so in an epistemically secure way. Therefore, foundationalists argue, no other beliefs, awareness, or knowledge are necessary for our beliefs about our conscious experiences to be justified. Such beliefs can therefore serve as the foundations upon which the rest of our empirical knowledge is built.

Speckled hen cases arguably serve as a counterexample to this foundationalist account of justification. That is, speckled hen cases seem to present us with a kind of experience whose qualities, when introspected upon, cannot be known solely via acquaintance with them. The resulting conclusion is that acquaintance must, therefore, be insufficient for immediate justification, as it does not allow us to have justified beliefs about *all* consciously available features of experience.

Consider the following: you are looking at the speckled hen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: A Sussex Speckled Hen.** Source: [mypetchicken.com](http://mypetchicken.com)

In your current conscious visual experience, a speckled hen is being represented.

Imagine now you are asked to introspect on this experience and report - *without taking the time to count* - on the number of speckles that this experience represents the hen as having. The problem that arises is this: you are *not* able to report immediately on this phenomenally available aspect of your current conscious experience. There is something about your experience which, despite being aware of it in its totality, you are unable to immediately know. You can immediately know that your experience of the hen represents the hen as having *many speckles*, but you cannot immediately know that your experience represents the hen as having, say, *48 speckles*.

What this is supposed to show is that experience and our acquaintance with it does not suffice for justification. And if this is so, then efforts to base foundational knowledge on the acquaintance relation will fail.

In order to respond to this argument, we must first investigate its underlying presuppositions. This version of the Problem of the Speckled hen presupposes a basic internalist account of justification. That is, an account of justification where the subject having access to the evidence for their belief is necessary and sufficient for that belief to be justified. In speckled hen cases, this criterion for justification is being met (we are consciously aware of our 48 speckle-representing experience, so we have access to the evidence), however, we are unable to form a justified belief about the number of speckles it represents. No conviction about the number of speckles even comes to us when we are presented with them, and any true belief we *did* make by guessing would be true only by accident. Accidentally true beliefs are not knowledge, and any account of justification which allows for accidentally true beliefs to count as such should be avoided.

In the literature, foundationalists have responded to this problem by denying that this rudimentary formulation of internalism is really a plausible account of justification; that relying for justification on a subject's access to evidence alone is always going to be insufficient. They argue that further conditions must be added both to explain the lack of immediate judgement in speckled hen cases, and to prevent accidentally true beliefs about them from counting as knowledge. However, foundationalists are limited in the alternative account of justification they *can* give by their wider epistemic aims. The task of foundationalists to provide an explanation of how, in the face of scepticism about the external world, empirical knowledge is possible, limits them to a *wholly* internalist account of justification. This is because total internalism is the only way to rule out the possibility of erroneous foundational beliefs, a possibility which would be introduced by reliabilist externalist accounts of justification.

Bonjour (2003) and Fumerton (1995) both advance alternative internalist accounts as a way to overcome the Problem of the Speckled Hen. Their approach is to add an extra internalist condition for justification on top of the condition of mere awareness via acquaintance. This extra condition takes the form of an act of comparison or assessment, of part of the subject, of their evidence. For example, Fumerton says:

[O]ne has a noninferentially justified belief that P when one has the thought that P and one is acquainted with the fact that P, the thought that P, *and* the relation of correspondence holding between the thought that P and the fact that P. (Fumerton, 1995, p.75) [emphasis in original]

Likewise, Bonjour says:

[A] foundational belief results when one directly sees or apprehends that one's experience satisfies the description of it offered by the content of the belief. (Bonjour, 2003, p.191).

In these accounts, the extra condition that the subject must be able to apprehend the correspondence between their experience and their belief allows foundationalists to avoid the Problem of the Speckled Hen. In the case of our experience of the speckled hen above, even if we *did* judge correctly that this experience represents 48 speckles, we are not able to immediately apprehend that the content of this judgement corresponds to the content of our experience. Therefore, the judgement will not be justified and will not count as knowledge. The foundationalist is thus able to explain why beliefs about numerosity are not justified whilst maintaining that foundational beliefs which do meet the justification criteria are still possible. The result is that the *scope* of possible knowledge based on acquaintance is reduced, but the threat to the account as a whole posed by speckled hen-type experiences is avoided.

I have argued in the previous chapter that these ‘apprehension of correspondence’ accounts of justification are implausible. This is because the notion of ‘correspondence’ on which they rely can only be motivated if the content of our experiences is conceptual. Since, as I have argued, no plausible account of conceptual content can be given, an account of justification that relies on an apprehension of the correspondence between the content of experience and the content of judgement will always fail.<sup>3</sup>

Thankfully, the account of justification for which I *have* argued in the previous chapter has the means to overcome the problems raised by speckled hen cases. Recall the weak access internalist account: in order for a belief about one’s current conscious experience to be justified, the belief must be the result of the successful exercise of a reliable recognitional capacity. These recognitional capacities, if possessed, are triggered by ‘distinctive appearances’. When we become aware (via acquaintance) of a particular

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<sup>3</sup> Note that in this thesis I am not committed to, nor am I arguing for a foundationalist picture of empirical knowledge. I am concerned with self-knowledge, and self-knowledge does not have to meet the indubitability requirements of foundational knowledge. Hence, I am not committed to a wholly internalist account of justification.

distinctive appearance, and we have the corresponding recognitional capacity, we recognise it *as* an appearance of a certain kind. It is this ‘awareness-plus-recognition’ combination which, when exercised, results in justified beliefs. The weak access internalist would therefore explain the speckled hen case as follows: though I am aware of the *48-speckledness* content of my current experience, for whatever reason, I do not possess the ability to recognise *48-speckledness* when I see it. It is because of this lack of ability to recognise *48-speckledness* that I am unable to form an immediate judgement regarding the numerosity of this speckle experience, and that any accidentally true beliefs I may form about the number of speckles will not be justified. Moreover, this does not mean that *none* of my introspective beliefs will ever be justified - only beliefs about properties for which we do not possess corresponding recognitional capacities will lack justification.

For the acquaintance theorist, this of course means that the scope of the acquaintance account is reduced somewhat. For as I have said, it isn’t just speckled hens which affect us in this way. We have an inability to form judgements about numerosity in experiences more generally. I do not have the reliable capacity to recognise *24-windowness* when it appears to me, nor *32-branchness*, or *18-bookness*. But our inability to form judgements about such properties should not be taken as a problem with the acquaintance account specifically. What it exposes is arguably not a limit of acquaintance, but the natural limit of human recognitional capacities when it comes to numerosity.

One reason to think that such a natural limit exists is that it can be explained by our inability to *subitise* large numbers of objects. Subitising is the cognitive ability which allows us to rapidly and accurately apprehend the number of a small number objects immediately, without needing to count them. It has been proposed that we can subitise

for groups of six and below, whereas for groups of numbers higher than this, we must estimate or count (Kaufman et al., 1949, p.521). It seems reasonable to suggest that our subitising capacities are actually recognitional capacities which, when possessed, are triggered by distinctive appearances of sets of six or fewer objects. If our visual experience of the hen presents six or fewer speckles, we can immediately know the amount because we have the ability to subitise it. If it presents more than six speckles, then because we cannot subitise numbers this high, we will not recognise any particular number of speckles, and no immediate judgement will come to mind.<sup>4</sup>

Subitising is a cognitive ability used in many domains, not just introspection.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the limits it poses are not solely limits to acquaintance. Given this, and given the way that subitising can be explicated in terms of recognition (or lack thereof), we can invoke it in an explanation of why an acquaintance account which employs a recognitional capacities account of justification can correctly capture what is going on in the case of the speckled hen.

To summarise, the first Problem of the Speckled is a counterexample to acquaintance accounts that rely on a wholly internalist account of justification. The counterexample illustrates that an account of justification which relies solely on the subject's conscious awareness of some phenomenal property will not be sufficient for introspective knowledge. This is because there are phenomenal properties of which we are consciously aware, but about which we cannot form an immediate identifying judgement. These phenomenal properties are found in experiences of numerosity.

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<sup>4</sup> Ferretti & Marchi (2020) also argue that subitising is the explanation for our lack of ability to make immediate judgements about numerosity. They, however, do not make the further claim that subitising is a type of recognitional capacity.

<sup>5</sup> Studies have shown that, as well as in visual perception, subitising is used in the tactile and auditory domains (Riggs et al., 2006; Camos & Tillmann, 2008).

I have argued that the acquaintance account developed in this thesis has the means to deal with this counterexample. Firstly, I advanced the claim of contemporary foundationalists that the fact that we cannot have immediate knowledge of the amounts of some objects in our experience does not threaten introspective knowledge in general. If a plausible explanation can be given as to why we cannot make immediate justified judgements about numerosity, but can make immediate judgements about other aspects of our experience (such as, for example, about the shape or colour or type of object represented), then speckled hen-type experiences do not threaten introspective knowledge. Secondly, I argued that the recognitional capacities account of justification developed in the previous chapter can provide us with such an explanation: we do not have reliable capacities to recognise the precise quantity of high amounts of a particular quality when presented with it. This is why we cannot make justified judgements about numerosity. Finally, I appealed to the general cognitive capacity of ‘subitising’ to explain why it is that we lack recognitional capacities when it comes to numerosity. Our inability to subitise amounts larger than six plausibly explains why we cannot recognise instances of numerosity greater than six when they are represented in our conscious experience. The Problem of the Speckled Hen for justification therefore does not threaten the acquaintance theory. In the next section I will discuss another version of the Problem of the Speckled Hen, explaining the dilemma it poses for the intentionalism upon which the acquaintance theorist relies for their explanation of self-ascriptions.

### 3. Speckled Hens, Acquaintance, and Intentionalism

I have shown that speckled hen cases are not an issue for the acquaintance theory’s ability to explain how self-ascriptions are justified. In doing so I have advocated a response to the original problem of the speckled hen which takes issue with the claim



that acquaintance with an experience gets us immediate knowledge of the consciously available features of that experience.

However, to take this line is to ignore the fact that there could be an alternative solution. One such solution is to argue that the objector is somehow mistaken in their characterisation of speckled hen-type experiences; that, in fact, there are *no* consciously available features of experience of which I cannot have immediate knowledge. Several theorists argue that this is the case because the property of *48-speckledness* which causes all the problems for the acquaintance theorist is *not in fact present* in your experience. This is because experiences can represent *indeterminate* contents.

Indeterminate content is content which represents a property without representing a determinate amount of that property. In the case of the speckled hen, this means that your experience represents the hen as *speckled* or *many-speckled*, without representing it as having 48 speckles (or any other determinate number of speckles). As Michael Tye says:

There is no number N such that your experience represents the hen as having N speckles. Your visual experience does not 'comment upon' the precise number of speckles. (Tye, 2009, p.259)

Similarly, Declan Smithies says:

Even if there are 48 speckles that I experience, it does not follow that my experience represents that there are 48 speckles; indeed there may be no determinate number N such that my experience represents that there are exactly N speckles. (Smithies, 2012, p.729)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, amongst the original discussions of the speckled hen, this view also seems to be taken. Ayer says, "If the sense-data do not appear to be enumerable, they really are not enumerable" (Ayer, 1940, p.124). However, these remarks concern sense-data, rather than representational content.

If the content of experience is indeterminate - if it represents many speckles without representing  $N$  speckles - then the proponent of the Problem of the Speckled Hen has no grounds to claim that there are features of our conscious experience about which we cannot make immediately justified judgements. The reason that it seems that I cannot form an immediate judgement about the number of speckles represented is because there *is* no determinate number of speckles represented. It is not anything to do with the failure of acquaintance to confer immediate justification.

Given the acquaintance theory I have advanced in this thesis, what should we make of the indeterminists claims? Firstly, we should note that the indeterminacy thesis is perfectly compatible with the recognitional capacities account of justification. There is not a problem with holding both the claim that justification can be accounted for in terms of recognitional capacities, and the claim that speckled hen-type experiences represent indeterminate contents. It is just that we need not now invoke the recognitional capacities account to explain why we are unable to have immediate knowledge of numerosity; now, this lack of knowledge is explained by indeterminacy instead. Furthermore, given that I have argued that a recognitional capacities account of justification is the only way to avoid the Myth of the Given, it seems we must endorse it regardless of whether or not indeterminacy turns out to be the right account of the representational content of speckled hen-type experiences.

But this compatibility doesn't get us any closer to uncovering the true nature of content in speckled hen cases. Either speckled hen experiences represent determinate contents, or they represent indeterminate contents. If they represent determinate contents, their unknowability is explained by the recognitional capacities account of justification. If they represent indeterminate contents, their unknowability is explained by their indeterminacy, regardless of the recognitional capacities account. In order to fully

explain what is going on in speckled hen-type experiences, we therefore need an answer to the question of whether or not they represent indeterminate contents.

Unfortunately for the acquaintance theorist, when we investigate the indeterminacy vs. determinacy debate, we start to see that each avenue presents further problems for their account. This is because the intentionalist theory of experience which is presupposed by the acquaintance account runs into trouble whether determinism or indeterminism is true. The result is that speckled hen-type experiences present a threat to intentionalism *in general*. And since the acquaintance theory relies on intentionalism in order to explain the possibility of self-ascriptions, speckled hen-type experiences present a threat to the acquaintance account, too.

### 3.1 The Dilemma for Intentionalists

I will first explain the dilemma, before going on to discuss both sides' options for responding. The dilemma is as follows:

#### *Indeterminacy*

If experiences can represent indeterminate contents, then a puzzle arises: how can experiences represent indeterminate contents without also representing the determinate contents in which these indeterminate contents are grounded? To give a more concrete example: how is it possible for an experience to represent the hen as *many-speckled* without first, or also, representing it as having 48 speckles? The experience gets its property of *many-speckledness* in virtue of its representing speckles, so how can it represent speckles without representing some number of them? As Jessie Munton argues, this line of response to the speckled hen runs entirely against the grain of how we ordinarily think of the instantiation of these properties in similar contexts:

There are certain contexts in which the instantiation of determinable properties relies on determinate properties. When it comes to objects in the real world, this is the order of priority. Objects instantiate general or determinable properties in virtue of instantiating more specific, determinate properties. An actual hen can have the property of being speckled only in virtue of having some lower-level property such as a determinate number of speckles. (Munton, 2019, p.649)

So if the intentionalist wants to explain the content of speckled hen-type experiences by appeal to indeterminacy, they must explain how indeterminate representation is possible without determinate representation.

### *Determinacy*

On the other side, of the dilemma, we have the determinacy view.<sup>7</sup> According to this explanation of speckled hen-type experiences, we *are* aware of a determinate number of speckles being presented to us. Experience represents to us a determinate number of speckles (say, 48), of which we are aware, but which, due to our lack of recognitional capacity, cannot immediately be known. This view does not face the issue of explaining how indeterminate representation is possible, however, it does face a different problem. This is the problem of *gradation experiences* for intentionalism.

Consider the following: I am presented with two speckled hens side by side. These hens are exactly identical in every aspect except for one: the first hen has 48 speckles and the second hen has 47 speckles (the speckles are arranged identically on each of the hens, except for one speckle is missing at random from the second hen). Given that my

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<sup>7</sup> Sosa (2003), Schellenberg (2016), and Fantl & Howell (2003) all explicitly endorse the determinacy view.

experience represents determinate contents, it represents the first hen as having 48 speckles and the second hen as having 47. However, when I introspect on this experience, it *seems* to me that the hens are exactly the same. They appear to me, phenomenally, to be *indistinguishable*. I cannot tell them apart. Next, consider that the 47-speckled hen is taken away and replaced with another hen, identical to both the 48- and the 47-speckled hen in every respect except for the fact that this one has 60 speckles. With the 48-speckled and the 60-speckled hen side by side, I am able to tell them apart; they seem to me to be phenomenally different. But when the amount of speckles changes by only one, I cannot tell the difference. This is the phenomenon of gradation.<sup>8</sup>

Gradation raises a serious problem for intentionalism. Intentionalists uphold the claim that representational content determines phenomenal character (or vice versa), and so all difference in representational content corresponds to a difference in phenomenal character. When the content changes, so does the character. According to the gradation problem, however, it is possible to have two experiences with differing representational contents, yet indistinguishable phenomenal character. Such a scenario, however, is implausible. This is due to the problems raised when we try to account for the level of variation allowed between multiple contents determining one phenomenal character. If we want to allow that representations of both 48 speckles *and* 47 speckles can ground the same phenomenal character, we must explain how to avoid a slippery slope leading to allowances of a single phenomenal property being able to be determined by two completely different representational contents. Recall Martin Davies's argument from Chapter 3 that such an explanation cannot be given: if the correlation between content

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<sup>8</sup> Gradation with respect to the speckled hen specifically is discussed by Ayer (1940, pp.129-130), and Fantl & Howell (2003, p.379). David Armstrong (1968) presents version of the gradation argument regarding colour patches which has become known as the 'phenomenal sorites' and is much discussed (See: Graff, 2001; Keefe, 2011). Timothy Williamson, in his anti-luminosity argument, uses the phenomenon of temperature sensation to present a version of the gradation problem (Williamson, 2000, p.97).

and character is fairly constrained, it must be governed by some further theoretical principles, but, Davies argues, it is not obvious where such constraining principles could arise from. On the other hand, if the correlation between content and character is relatively unconstrained, then we make way for the possibility of bizarre cases where one phenomenal character can correspond to “wildly different representational properties” (Davies, 1997, p.325).

So the phenomenon of gradation which is allowed by determinate contents therefore *also* threatens to render intentionalism false. Now, with neither the indeterminacy solution nor the determinacy solution making any obvious space for intentionalism, we are pushed towards a scepticism about the possibility of *any* representational states. This is a conclusion which would render the acquaintance theory impossible. However, I will argue that plausible options for responding to the dilemma can be found on both sides, hence, the indeterminist *and* the determinist have the means of overcoming their respective problems.

### 3.1.1 Indeterminist Responses

Those who explain speckled hen-type experiences as instances of indeterminate representation are faced with the problem of explaining how experience can represent an indeterminate number of speckles without also representing a determinate number of speckles. Faced with this puzzle, we seem to have two options for responding.

Firstly, one could respond by *denying* the claim that, in speckled hen cases, no determinate properties are being represented. Instead, one could claim that experience *does* represent indeterminate properties in virtue of representing determinate ones, but that we are only *aware* of the indeterminate ones. The determinate properties are

represented in the content of experience, but for whatever reason do not feature in the experience's phenomenal character; only the indeterminate properties are featured in this way. In the example of the speckled hen, this would mean that your experience represents *many-speckledness* in virtue of its representing *48-speckledness*, but *48-speckledness* does not feature in the phenomenal character of your experience.

First we must note that this solution is only available to representationalist theories of intentionalism, and not phenomenal intentionality theories. This is because, on the phenomenal intentionality theory, an experience represents what it does in virtue of the phenomenal character that it has, not vice versa. On the phenomenal intentionality theory, if we are not aware of the determinate phenomenal character *48-speckledness*, then our experience does not represent *48-speckledness*. So to say that there is *48-speckledness* content which is not phenomenally conscious is to say that the phenomenal intentionality theory is false. Representationalist theories, however, give metaphysical priority to content rather than character, thus making theoretical space for an experience to have representational content which is not phenomenally conscious.

This 'unconscious determinate properties' solution would allow the indeterminist to explain exactly how the representation of indeterminate properties is possible, but it is difficult to motivate, since ordinarily when we are consciously aware of determinables, we are also consciously aware of determinates. For example, when I am aware of some experience of red, I am aware of a specific determinate shade of red. And when I am aware of something as shaped, there is some specific determinate shape that I am aware of it as having. Given this, one can legitimately ask what grounds we have for treating numerosity any differently.

Moreover, it is not obvious that space *can* be made for determinates which don't ground phenomenal character. Whilst it is true that not all representational content needs to

ground phenomenal character (dispositional beliefs and unconscious perceptions are examples of intentional states without phenomenal character), it seems odd to say that the determinates which ground phenomenally conscious determinables aren't themselves phenomenally conscious. They are both degrees of representation of the same thing - the speckles of a hen - so why is only one of them phenomenally conscious? Where does the phenomenal character of the determinable property come from if not from the phenomenal character of the determinate which grounds it? This solution to the indeterminacy puzzle seems to commit us to an implausible version of representationalism.

One might argue instead that indeterminacy can be motivated if we reject the intentionalist theory of experience, but it is not clear how this is possible either. On a naïve realist account of experience, we are directly aware of objects in the world and their properties, and since objects in the world do not instantiate indeterminate properties, there will be no experiences of indeterminacy.

A third option for responding to the puzzle for indeterminists is to argue that the representation of determinate/determinable properties in the content of experience somehow *differs* from the instantiation of these properties in the world. If the representation of determinates and determinables in experience does not follow the same hierarchy as the instantiation of determinates and determinables in the world, then perhaps we have an explanation as to how experience can represent indeterminate contents without also representing determinate contents. This is Munton's own line of response to the indeterminacy puzzle. She says:

To free ourselves of the puzzle of the speckled hen, we need to give up the idea that visual experience always has a form we could print, "so-to-speak" or otherwise ... [The puzzle] dissolves if we give up any implicit pictorialist assumptions, because with them



goes any reason to think that we can only visually perceive general, or determinable properties in virtue of more specific local or determinate properties. (ibid., p.650)

Munton appeals to the phenomenon of *statistical summary representation* to argue that representation in experience need not always start from a point of determinacy. In the field of vision science, empirical work “attests that we can visually perceive properties of a set or scene independent of a precise experience of the elements in virtue of which the set or scene has the relevant properties” (ibid., p.654). Statistical summary representation has been demonstrated in our perception of many different properties, including hue, size, speed, orientation, motion direction, and even facial expression and gaze direction (ibid.). Munton argues that this suggests that indeterminate representation is common in experience, and hence we have reason to think that we should reject the ‘pictorialist’ assumption that indeterminate representation is only possible in virtue of representation of determinates.

I am not going to assess Munton’s argument here. I merely want to show that there are ways in which the dilemma for the intentionalist can be avoided. Munton’s argument gives a route by which the indeterminacy position can be made plausible. If the indeterminacy position turns out to be false, however, then the intentionalist will have to adopt the determinacy position.<sup>9</sup> Then they must explain how to get around the problems caused by experiences of gradation.

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<sup>9</sup> There are other reasons to think that the indeterminacy solution is false. Sosa, for instance, uses the example of an array of parallel lines of increasing numbers of dots to argue that indeterminacy is false (Sosa, 2003, pp.131-132). He argues that if we see the first line which contains only two dots as fully determinate, and we see that each line increases by only one dot, then we must see a determinate number of dots on the final line as well.

### 3.1.2 Determinist Responses

Those who explain speckled hen-type experiences as instances of determinate representation are faced with the problem of gradation. Experiences of gradation seem to be instances of experiences where two different representational contents determine one phenomenal character. This renders intentionalism (and, hence, the acquaintance theory) implausible, since, as Martin Davies (1997) argues, no satisfactory account can be given of how this kind of ‘varying’ determination is possible.

Fortunately for the acquaintance theory, I think there are several epistemic and phenomenological presuppositions in the gradation argument that can be questioned. I believe that the presupposed explanation of what gradation experiences are phenomenally like for the subject can be challenged, and that an accurate account of the phenomenology of gradation experiences reveals subtle phenomenal differences between ‘indistinguishable’ pairs of experiences. Therefore, gradation does not threaten intentionalism.

To see this, consider the main claim that the gradation argument rests upon. This is the claim that my experiences of the 48-speckled hen and the 47-speckled hen are *phenomenally indistinguishable*, that I cannot tell them apart. I believe we have grounds to be sceptical about this claim. Firstly, this phenomenal claim is ‘awareness *that*’ disguised as ‘awareness *of*’. That is, it purports to be a claim about the mere awareness you have of the hens and their speckles, but it actually contains an implicit judgement about the character of your experience. In asserting that the phenomenal character of my experiences is indistinguishable, I am making a *judgement* about these experiences. I am *comparing* two phenomenal characters and judging them to be the same. Comparison is not merely a neutral investigation of the phenomenal character of experience, it will always involve some judgement. And though the acquaintance theory holds that the

mere awareness *of* experience gained via acquaintance is indubitable, it does not hold the same of the judgements made *about* experience. In judgement we move from mere awareness of experience to a characterisation of that experience, and it can always be the case that this characterisation is wrong. Judgement therefore makes room for error on part of the subject.

One could claim then that though I *believe* my experience of the 48-speckled hen and the 47-speckled hen to be phenomenally indistinguishable, I am actually mistaken in this belief. Instead, my experiences do differ phenomenally, but the difference is so slight that I mistakenly judge them to be the same. If this is the case then one can maintain that there really is a phenomenal difference which corresponds to the representational difference, and the plausibility of intentionalism is maintained.

But what grounds do we have for thinking that this is the case? Without further evidence on either side, the intentionalist is stuck in a stalemate with those who propose the gradation problem, each side affirming that *their own* account of the phenomenology is correct. By exposing the hidden judgement at play in the gradation problem, the intentionalist has certainly made room for their alternative explanation of the phenomenology, but they haven't yet given us a reason to favour it over the original indistinguishability claim.

I believe that the intentionalist can appeal to the phenomenon of *salience* to show that their account of the phenomenology is the correct one. Salience is a phenomenal feature of experience. It is the way in which the overall phenomenology of an experience changes depending on the part of the experience on which one directs their attention.

Wayne Wu says:

[Phenomenal salience] is characterized by simultaneous contrast between attended versus unattended objects: the attended object is experienced as highlighted,

accentuated, spotlighted, emphasized or more salient in contrast to unattended objects concurrently perceived. (Wu, 2011, p.94)

To see how salience can explain the phenomenology of gradation we must consider a further scenario: Imagine now that I have now carefully inspected both of the hens, and come to identify exactly which speckle it is that is present on the 48-speckled hen and missing on the 47-speckled hen (much like one would with a 'spot the difference' puzzle). After identifying the missing speckle, the two experiences no longer seem to me to be phenomenally indistinguishable; instead I become aware that there is something missing from my experience of the 47-speckled hen which is present in my experience of the 48-speckled hen. The phenomenal character associated with the missing speckle has become a *salient* feature of my experience, rising from the background in which it - crucially - *has always been present*, but has not always been noticed.

One might argue in response to this that if one doesn't *notice* something, then one is not aware of it. Hence, before you noticed it, the phenomenal character associated with the missing speckle was *not* a part of the overall phenomenal character of your experience, and the 48- and 47-speckle phenomenal characters really were the same. But this is not obviously the case; there are features of my experience - which contribute to its overall phenomenal character - which go unnoticed by me. In everyday perception, I don't notice the objects at the edges of my visual field unless I attend to them. Similarly with the speckled hens - it is only when I attend to the missing speckle (though it might take me quite a while to figure out, in an array of similar speckles, which one the missing one is) that I notice it. Once I notice it, it becomes salient to me, and I am able to see that it is the reason for the new, more obvious, phenomenal difference between the two hens.

Recall that the acquaintance account is committed to the view that not all of an experience's phenomenal character determines or is determined by that experience's content; that there is some phenomenal character - such as the phenomenal character which expresses state type - which is determined independently of *what* is represented. This is how the acquaintance account is able to explain self-ascription of state type.

Because they are committed to this view, the acquaintance theorist easily make room for the notion of salience, and can do so in a way which aids the plausibility of their explanation of the phenomenology of gradation experiences. The acquaintance theorist can argue that salience is a phenomenal property of experience which, much like phenomenology of state type, is not determined by the content of experience. Instead, (like state type) it plays a role in determining *how* the content is presented. It can therefore have an effect on the phenomenal character associated with *what* is represented, augmenting, or diminishing it depending on the direction in which it is working. It is important to note that it does not change the *quantity* of this phenomenal character, merely the *quality*. In the case of the speckled hen, this means that the missing speckle is always a part of the experience's phenomenal character (owing to it's being represented in the content), but salience (or lack of) alters the quality of this phenomenal character, making it more (or less) noticeable.<sup>10</sup>

So by appeal to salience, the acquaintance theorist can argue that the underlying presupposition of the gradation problem is wrong. Firstly because it conflates mere awareness with judgement, and judgement makes room for error. And secondly because error in judgement is revealed to be the real reason behind what is problematic about

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<sup>10</sup> Wu (2011) argues that the phenomenology of salience has a cognitive explanation: when we have a demonstrative thought about an object, we attend to that object. The object becomes salient because it is the "anchor [of our] demonstrative thoughts about it" (ibid., p.96). Wu also argues that the phenomenon of salience is best explained by an account of impure (mode) representationalism (ibid., pp.108-116).

gradation: the indistinguishability. We erroneously judge that the phenomenal character of our experiences is the same, when in fact it is just at first glance indistinguishably *similar*. Once the phenomenon of salience is appealed to, we have a satisfying explanation of how experiences can have phenomenal features of which we are aware but which go unnoticed. This allows us to maintain that, in gradation experiences, there remains a difference between the experiences' phenomenal character which corresponds to the differences in their content. Therefore, gradation is not a threat to intentionalism, and by extension, not a threat to the acquaintance theory.

#### 4. Conclusion

To summarise, we have seen that the Problem of the Speckled Hen was traditionally levelled at the notion of acquaintance employed by foundationalist theories of justification. Such theories invoke acquaintance with conscious mental states in order to establish a set of foundational beliefs, and explain how these foundational beliefs can be justified. Such accounts of justification must necessarily be wholly internalist. Speckled hen cases are counterexamples to the foundationalist picture because they are cases in which acquaintance with a conscious mental state does not allow one to have immediate knowledge of it, and in which accidentally true beliefs end up counting as knowledge.

The acquaintance theory of self-knowledge, however, is not committed to foundationalism. Acquaintance theorists are therefore not committed to a picture on which acquaintance with a conscious mental state necessarily gets one immediate knowledge of it, nor are they committed to the wholly internalist account of justification which ends up allowing accidentally true beliefs to count as knowledge. I have argued that the weak internalist account of justification developed in the previous chapter (on which the exercise of a reliable recognitional capacity in response to a distinctive

appearance is necessary for justification) can explain what is going on in speckled hen cases. Since we lack a reliable capacity to recognise large numbers of objects or properties, we are unable to immediately form true beliefs about the number of such objects or properties. This explanation is also compatible with the phenomenon of ‘subitising’ recognised by cognitive scientists.

I then discussed the problem that speckled hen cases raise for the intentionalist theory of experience. Speckled hen cases pose a dilemma for intentionalism when it comes to explaining the true nature of their content, and since the acquaintance theorist is reliant on intentionalism being true, they must also answer to this dilemma. Either speckled hen-type experiences represent indeterminate contents, or they represent determinate contents. If they represent *indeterminate* contents, then the intentionalist must explain how this is possible without the experience also representing the relevant determinate contents. If speckled hen-type experiences represent *determinate* contents, then an argument can be made against intentionalism using the phenomenon of gradation experiences. I have argued that there are ways out of both horns of this dilemma. Indeterminists can appeal to Jessie Munton’s arguments to show that indeterminate representation need not require determinate representation. Determinists can argue that the gradation problem, as it is standardly given, gets the account of the phenomenology of gradation experiences wrong, and that an accurate account of the phenomenology of gradation experiences does not cause problems for intentionalism. Hence, the dilemma for intentionalism can be avoided, and the acquaintance theorist faces no problems from speckled hens.

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## Chapter 6

# Acquaintance and Introspective Error

### 1. Introduction

In this final chapter, I will be discussing a problem for self-knowledge in general. This is the problem of *introspective error*. To give it its most basic definition, an introspective error is a false introspective judgement made about one's own mental state. That is, a judgement we make about our conscious experiences, on the basis of introspection, that we get *wrong*.

We have already seen - in the discussion of speckled hen cases as well as elsewhere - that it is possible to be wrong about one's current conscious experiences. Contrary to what classical foundationalists and Cartesians might argue, our introspective judgements are *not* infallible; in judgement we *can* be mistaken about the nature of our conscious experiences. Recently, much attention has been given to the uncovering the potential ways in which we can be wrong in our introspective judgements. The resulting charges of error are numerous and varied, and include our introspective judgements about

imagery and emotional phenomenology, visual field clarity, dreams, cognitive phenomenology, and the richness of experience.

The purpose of this chapter is as follows: firstly I will aim to provide some clarity on the problem of introspective error for acquaintance. I will revisit the claims that were made about the nature of acquaintance and the nature of self-knowledge in the beginning of this thesis. We will see from this that there are some categories of error which are a concern for the acquaintance theorist, and others which are not. Errors which are a concern for the acquaintance theorist are instances of justified false beliefs.

From a review of the literature, I will identify three kinds of introspective judgement where it can be argued that an introspective error of this type - a justified false belief - occurs. These are our judgements about visual imagery, visual field clarity, and the richness of experience. For each, I will argue that although certain readings of these judgements *do* threaten the acquaintance theory, the most plausible interpretation of each does not. Hence, the acquaintance theory faces no uniquely damaging problems from introspective scepticism and error.

## 2. Preliminary Remarks: Introspection, Error, Acquaintance, Self-knowledge

In order to get a firmer grasp on the problem of introspective error, it will be necessary to say a little more about the nature of introspection, and to briefly review the features of acquaintance and self-knowledge. We will then be able to see with greater detail how introspective errors can threaten acquaintance and self-knowledge.

The term ‘introspection’ has been used in a variety of ways, to refer to a variety of different acts. It is hence necessary to qualify exactly what is meant by ‘introspection’ in

this chapter. In its most general sense, introspection is used to refer to the way in which we investigate our inner lives from the first-person perspective. However, this general use of the term is not fine-grained enough for the purposes of the acquaintance theory. The acquaintance theory purports to explain how we can investigate, from the first-person perspective, a particular *realm* of our inner lives - that of our *current conscious experiences*. The acquaintance theorist is not interested in explaining knowledge of, say, dispositional mental states, past experiences, or nonconscious states. These are beyond the realm of acquaintance, hence, when I talk of introspection in this thesis I do not mean the way in which we acquire knowledge of these other kinds of inner states.

Introspection in this thesis is also meant as a particular *method* of investigation. It is the method of *attending* to our own current conscious experiences, probing them, and investigating their qualities. Acquaintance is a proposal about the way that such attending might be made possible; the acquaintance theorist argues that we can attend to our current conscious mental states due to our being acquainted with them.

It is this sense of introspection that is under threat from the problem of introspective error. Eric Schwitzgebel - the theorist who provides most of the contemporary discussion of cases of introspective error - describes introspection in exactly this sense, saying, "I happen to regard [introspection] as a species of attention to currently ongoing conscious experience" (Schwitzgebel, 2008, p.248). Henceforth, I shall mean by introspection just this: the particular method (whatever that may be, though I argue it is via acquaintance) of attending to our current conscious mental states in order to investigate their qualities. Introspective error, then, is when the judgements we make about our current conscious mental states, via attending to them, are incorrect. For example, we attend to our mental state, and on the basis of this judge it to be an experience as of *p*, but in actual fact, it is an experience as of *q*.

To see the problems that cases of introspective error raise for acquaintance and self-knowledge, we must return to the features of acquaintance and the features of self-knowledge that were defined in the Introduction and in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Self-knowledge of current conscious mental states was defined as being *privileged, immediate, fallible, and limited*. Briefly, this means that the knowledge we have of our own current conscious mental states is acquired in a unique first-personal way, is not inferred from any other knowledge or beliefs, can be incorrect, and has certain limits. Defined in this way, self-knowledge allows for cases of introspective error; it is fallible and limited and hence makes room for cases where we judge incorrectly about our current conscious mental states.

Acquaintance was defined as a *metaphysically direct, perfectly presentational, relation of awareness* between a subject and the phenomenal properties of that subject's conscious mental states. These metaphysical features of awareness were argued for by way of being the best explanation for the epistemic features of this awareness: *immediacy* and *indubitability*. That is, the awareness we have of our current conscious mental states is not inferred, or due to our awareness of any other thing (immediacy), and owing to this awareness, it is impossible to doubt the existence and appearance of our current conscious mental states (indubitability).

In the first chapter, the metaphysical features were argued for and the epistemic features were assumed. Throughout this thesis, I have given arguments which support the Immediacy Claim. I have, for instance, argued against the transparency thesis, and endorsed a form of mode intentionalism which explains how we are immediately aware of the content and state type of our conscious mental states. However, I have not yet said much in the way of support of the Indubitability Claim. That is, I have not

defended the claim that the way our current conscious mental states *appear* to us is the way they are in reality.

There are certain cases of introspective error which threaten to undermine the Indubitability Claim. It is these cases of introspective error that will be my focus in this chapter. Some cases of introspective error threaten the Indubitability Claim because they are instances where the source of the error is plausibly at the level of acquaintance. In these cases, we are acquainted with our current conscious mental state, but there are arguably phenomenal features of this state of which we are *not aware*. This would undermine the Indubitability Claim, since it would be a case of a current conscious mental state not appearing to you the way it wholly is in its reality. And this in turn would have devastating consequences for the acquaintance theory, undermining both the argument from acquaintance's epistemic features to its metaphysical ones, as well as the theory of self-ascriptions, which relies on acquaintance with phenomenal properties as the means by which we are aware of the content and type of our mental states.

Since self-knowledge itself is compatible with introspective error, the acquaintance theorist need only deal with cases of introspective error which threaten the specifics of their account (i.e., cases which threaten the Indubitability Claim). The extent to which introspective error threatens self-knowledge *in general*, despite its compatibility with the features of self-knowledge, is beyond the scope of this discussion. And since these general problems will be problems for *any* account of introspective self-knowledge, not just acquaintance, addressing them is not a priority for the acquaintance theorist. In the remainder of this chapter, my focus will, therefore, be solely on introspective errors which threaten acquaintance alone.

### 3. Error and Acquaintance

The introspective errors which threaten the acquaintance theorist's Indubitability Claim all have one thing in common: they are instances of justified, false beliefs.<sup>1</sup> It is only *justified* false beliefs that threaten acquaintance, and not *unjustified* false beliefs, because only justified false beliefs are properly made on the basis of one's awareness of the evidence for these beliefs. Recall from Chapter 4 that the justification of introspective judgements requires one to be *aware* (via acquaintance) of the property one is self-ascribing, and to possess the capacity to *recognise* that property from the way it appears to you. If either of these things - the awareness, or the recognitional capacity - is missing from judgement formation, then the judgement will not be justified. It is *justified* false judgements that threaten the acquaintance theory because these are judgements which *are* made on the basis of awareness and recognition. The fact that they are false, and yet still justified, suggests that it is at the level of acquaintance where the error is made; that is, it suggests that what we are aware of via acquaintance somehow does not get us the complete phenomenal information about a mental state. In other words, it suggests that the Indubitability Claim is false.

For clarity, let us contrast this with some examples of introspective error which fall into the category of *unjustified* false belief, and hence *aren't* a problem for the acquaintance theory. Consider firstly the possibility, argued for by Schwitzgebel, of a complete phenomenal hallucination; a scenario where we judge that we are instantiating some conscious mental state, but in fact no such mental state is present. Schwitzgebel says:

If you admit the possibility that you are dreaming, I think you should admit the possibility that your judgment that you are having red phenomenology is a piece of

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<sup>1</sup> 'Justified' here means justified according to the weak internalist recognitional capacities theory defended in Chapter 4.

delirium not accompanied by any actual reddish phenomenology ... if malevolent neurosurgeons from Alpha Centauri might massage and stoke our brains, I see no reason to deny them the power to produce directly the judgment that one is having reddish phenomenology, while suppressing the reddish phenomenology itself. Is such a power so patently impossible? (Schwitzgebel, 2011, p.124)

On the acquaintance theorist's recognitional capacities account of justification, such a judgement will not be justified since it is not made on the basis of one's awareness of one's own experience. As Declan Smithies says of Schwitzgebel's claims:

The introspective errors involved in Schwitzgebel's delirium scenario ... are basing errors, rather than brute errors. In these cases ... [subjects] form false beliefs in a way that is not properly based on the justifying evidence that is provided by their own experience. (Smithies, 2013, p.1180)

Since there is no awareness of the relevant experience going on here, there is no acquaintance. Hence, since it is not due to any failure of awareness, this kind of introspective error is not a problem for the acquaintance account.

A second kind of introspective error which falls into the category of unjustified false belief is error due to the misapplication of concepts. This kind of error is widespread and happens when we misidentify some feature of our experience due to applying a concept incorrectly. For example, one may introspect on one's current conscious experience of a sparrow and judge that it is an experience as of a *house sparrow*, when it is in fact an experience as of a *tree sparrow*. Perhaps you have been taught incorrectly that house sparrows are tree sparrows, or frequently get the two mixed up, and owing to this are liable to misapply the concepts for each in judgement. In these kinds of cases, the subject *is* aware of their current conscious experience, but it is not at the level of awareness where the error occurs. The error occurs at the level of judgement and is

down to the subject not possessing the correct concepts for the thing they are trying to identify. Such judgements will be unjustified because the subject cannot be said to have the capacity to properly *recognise* the thing they are making a judgement about.

Recognitional capacities require not just that one is responsive to an object's distinctive appearance, but also that one is disposed to apply the *correct concepts* to that object in judgement (Millar, 2011, pp.333-334). When one responds to a distinctive appearance, yet applies an incorrect concept in judgement, the judgement will therefore be unjustified.

Hopefully these two cases of *unjustified* introspective error help us to see more clearly why it is only cases of *justified* introspective error which directly threaten the acquaintance account. In cases of justified introspective error, the subject will be aware of their current conscious experience, and there will be no failure of or absence of recognitional capacities. The error can, therefore, plausibly be traced further back, to the level of awareness; we are wrong because our awareness gets it wrong. We are wrong about the way things seem to us because the awareness we have of our own conscious mental states is not the all-revealing form of awareness that the acquaintance theorist takes it to be.

On the face of it, it seems odd to think that there are phenomenal features of our conscious mental states of which we are not aware. After all, phenomenal properties are usually taken, by their very nature, to be properties that we are aware of. However, certain cases of introspective error do open up the possibility that this is not the case - that instead, there are two 'levels' to phenomenal consciousness, one of which evades acquaintance's grasp.

Anthony J. Marcel argues that "several considerations do suggest such a separation between levels or aspects of consciousness" (Marcel, 2003, p.172). He says:



There is a distinction between two aspects of what is referred to as consciousness, (a) experiential phenomenology or phenomenal experience (what it's like) as opposed to nonphenomenal states, and (b) awareness of something (a kind of knowing - by acquaintance) as opposed to its lack. (ibid., p.171).

According to Marcel, the cases of introspective error which I will discuss in the next section show that what we are aware of - (b) - does not always match up with what is phenomenally conscious - (a). In other words, there is phenomenal character which overflows or outruns the bounds of our awareness via acquaintance. The problem with this is that if we are not aware of this phenomenal character, then we are also not aware of the intentional content which it determines (or is determined by). If we are missing some information about the content of our mental states, we are therefore liable to make erroneous introspective judgements about these states.

Schwitzgebel also makes various claims which seem to support a two-level view. Though it is not his main concern (this has always been to establish scepticism about the reliability of introspection in general), he does seem to be sceptical about the level of access we have to the phenomenal features of our own mental states. When discussing our introspective uncertainty about the finer phenomenal details of emotions and imagery, he says:

Introspection itself fails us. The questions challenge us not simply because we struggle for the words to describe a patently obvious phenomenology. It isn't like knowing perfectly well what particular shade of tangerine your Volvo is, and being stumped only about how to describe it. Rather, in the case of emotion, *the very phenomenology — the qualitative character of our consciousness — is not entirely evident*, or so it seems to me.

(Schwitzgebel, 2011, p.134) [emphasis added]

We could certainly take Schwitzgebel here to be implying that there are phenomenal features of our experience which, for whatever reason, we cannot get a clear grasp on. Perhaps, for example, there are cases where the overall phenomenal character of an experience is distinct but the awareness I have of it is murky or indeterminate, and for these reasons I am liable to judge incorrectly about the content of my mental state.

So there is philosophical support for doubting that acquaintance is an indubitable form of awareness, or as Marcel puts it, for doubting that our consciousness itself is ‘transparent’ (Marcel, 2003, p.171). The acquaintance theorist must therefore confront those cases of introspective error where the error is plausibly down to this failure of awareness. In the next section, I will discuss the three cases of introspective error where the error could be attributed to failure at this level. In defence of acquaintance, I will argue that for all of these three types of error, the *most* plausible explanation for the error is not at the level of acquaintance. Thus, we have no good reason to endorse a two-level view of phenomenal consciousness, and the Indubitability Claim of the acquaintance theorist is preserved.

### 3.1 Error 1: Variation in Introspective Reports About Visual Imagery

Studies have shown that the introspective reports that subjects give about the level of detail and vividness of their visual imagery can vary greatly. It can be questioned, however, whether such variation is also genuinely present at the level of phenomenology. If it is not, then we have reason to believe that some subjects are incorrect in the reports that they make about their visual imagery. Such reports would be utterances of justified beliefs (since they are based on a subject’s awareness of and

recognition of their imagery phenomenology), yet false. Hence, there is room for an explanation that the error occurs at the level of acquaintance; that there are phenomenal properties of our imagery experiences which may escape acquaintance's grasp.

Eric Schwitzgebel gives an argument which moves from variability to error. He discusses the results of a visual imagery study undertaken by Francis Galton in the 1870s. Galton asked his subjects to imagine a particular scene - their kitchen table at breakfast - and describe the details of the image they formed. Schwitzgebel points to the seemingly extreme levels of variability in Galton's subjects' reports:

Galton's respondents populate the full range, from people who claim to have no imagery whatsoever to people who claim to have imagery as vivid and detailed as ordinary vision (or even more so), with a considerable number of apparently normal respondents at each extreme. (Schwitzgebel, 2002, p.40)

Despite this reported variation in introspective judgements about imagery, Schwitzgebel argues that there cannot be such variation present in the imagery itself. He gives two arguments for this claim, each of which I will assess in turn. The first I shall call the '*Human Variability Argument*' and the second I shall call the '*Visual Imagery Test Argument*'. I will argue that neither succeed in establishing the mismatch in variability between reports and phenomenal character that Schwitzgebel requires in order to motivate his scepticism. We can conclude from this that variation in introspective reports does not indicate an error at the level of acquaintance. In fact, it does not indicate an error at all.

### 3.1.1 Human Variability Argument

In his first argument, Schwitzgebel invokes considerations about the constraints on human variability in general. He argues that human variability in all domains keeps to

certain limits, limits which appear to be flouted by visual imagery (if Galton's subjects and the like are to be believed). Schwitzgebel argues that this level of variation in imagery is *not* to be expected given the limits on human biological and social variation; therefore, some of these subjects must be wrong in their judgements about visual imagery experience.

In the case of human biology, such limits to variation are to be expected. As Schwitzgebel says, "human livers may be larger or smaller, but none is made of rubber or attached to the elbow" (Schwitzgebel, 2011, p.133). We can also expect certain levels of conformity in the social sphere: "we wager our lives daily on the predictability of drivers", and "no one turns up to department meetings naked" (ibid.). But since phenomenology of visual imagery is not a product of social conventions or human physiology, it does not follow that it must be similarly restricted. In fact, with instances of visual imagery being conscious *mental* states, and the process of visualisation being a *mental* task, it would seem that it is not constrained by any organ of sense at all (unlike, say, the eye constraining visual perceptual phenomenology). The lack of physiological or social constraints in the domain of visual imagery suggests that it does not conform to strict limits. In fact, it may even be *expected* to vary from person to person, perhaps depending on a variety of factors such as the purposes for which we have the imagery, our level of concentration, our background beliefs and theories, or how imaginative we are.

Perhaps Schwitzgebel's argument would have more force if we were to continue to find variability in reports when what we are requested to visualise is constrained, thus mimicking the biological constraints on variation found in other areas of human life. Galton's request to subjects to visualise their kitchen table at breakfast is vague. It does not specify the purposes for which the visualisation is taking place. For example, if you

were trying to visualise your kitchen table at breakfast to remember whether you left your keys on there, it is likely you would create a different image than if you visualised your kitchen table so that you could draw a sketch of it. It also neglects to mention the fact that presumably, everybody in the study is visualising a different kitchen table - their own - so there is no standard marker being conformed to. Moreover, some of the subjects may not pay much attention at all to their kitchen table at breakfast. Perhaps they are still too sleepy, or are busy reading a newspaper or listening to the radio, or are distracted by their children, or are thinking about the upcoming day at work, to pay sufficient attention to what the table looks like. All of these things may affect one's ability to perform the visualisation task.

Questionnaire methods of investigating visual imagery, such as the *Vividness of Visual Imagery Questionnaire* (VVIQ) (Marks, 1973), aim to impose constraints on the visualising task, and as such may avoid the problems we face when trying to draw conclusions from Galton's study. In the VVIQ, subjects are asked to visualise four things: a relative or friend, a rising sun, the front of a frequented shop, and a countryside scene. They are then asked four questions about the vividness of specific details in those scenes (for example, when visualising a friend, they are asked about the vividness of their friend's face, posture, walking action, and the colours of their friend's clothes). Vividness is rated from (1): No image at all (only "knowing" that you are thinking of the object), to (5): Perfectly clear and as vivid as normal vision. Perhaps these requests to visualise the more specific details of a specific scene will sufficiently constrain our visualisation capacities, leading to a greater homogeneity in reported levels of vividness and lending support to the idea that the variation reported in Galton's study arises because subjects are given free rein to interpret the visualisation request however they wish.

However, subjects taking part in the VVIQ (and other, similar visual imagery questionnaires) also report vividness that ranges from no imagery whatsoever, to imagery that is as vivid as normal vision (Marks, 1973; Sheehan, 1967). It seems that even when stricter limits are placed on *what* is visualised, our reports still vary. This suggests that, at the very least, the *vividness* of visual imagery phenomenology really does vary from subject to subject.

Further support for this conclusion comes from cases of subjects with *aphantasia*. This is a condition where subjects report experiencing no visual imagery whatsoever.

Neurologist Adam Zeman - who coined the term, and estimates that two or three in every hundred people have the condition - has carried out a number of studies on people with it. Zeman et al. had subjects with aphantasia and subjects with reported normal visual imagery complete the aforementioned VVIQ test whilst having their brains scanned. When 'normal' subjects undertook this task, scans showed activity in the posterior visual network of the brain associated with imagery creation, often called the 'Mind's Eye region'. Conversely, when subjects with aphantasia undertook this task, scans showed no activity in this network, and subjects reported "(1): No image at all (only 'knowing' that you are thinking of the object)" for all questions on the VVIQ (Zeman et al., 2010).

The results of Zeman et al.'s study provide further support to the claim that variability in the vividness of imagery is to be expected, and doesn't conform to limits akin to those in human biology and social spheres. This is because the neural activity observed in the brain scans of aphantasia vs. non-aphantasia subjects supports their introspective reports; when no imagery is reported, little or no activity is observed in imagery networks. Arguably, this is not because the aphantasia subjects are unacquainted with

their own imagery phenomenology; the lack of neural activity suggests that it is because no such visualising is occurring, hence no such phenomenology is present.

Schwitzgebel's Human Variability Argument therefore fails to provide us with any reason to doubt that the level of variation reported in visual imagery is reflected at the level of phenomenology. It therefore fails to provide us with a reason to think that there is a genuine introspective error occurring at any level, let alone at the level of acquaintance.

### 3.1.2 The Visual Imagery Test Argument

Perhaps Schwitzgebel's second argument from variability - the Visual Imagery Test Argument - will have more success. The Visual Imagery Test Argument also draws on the data from the various aforementioned visual imagery questionnaires. Schwitzgebel reasons that if the variation in reports made in the questionnaires highlights a genuine variation in the phenomenal character of visual imagery across subjects, then there will be corresponding variation in the scores of subject's performances on visual imagery related tests. Such tests involve "spatial transformation of visualised objects, such as mental rotation tasks; tests of visual creativity; and tests of visual memory" (Schwitzgebel, 2002, p.43).

In one such test, subjects are presented with an image of two 3D shapes, each made up of ten cubes. The shapes are set at different angles, and the subject is then asked whether the two shapes are identical. It is thought that the subject completes this task by creating a visual image of the shapes, and mentally rotating one of them to get it to the same angle as the other to see if it matches. The test measures both the accuracy of the subject's response and the time taken to formulate it. For example, in Figure 2

below, subjects are asked to confirm whether or not the two shapes under each 'A' and 'B' are identical:

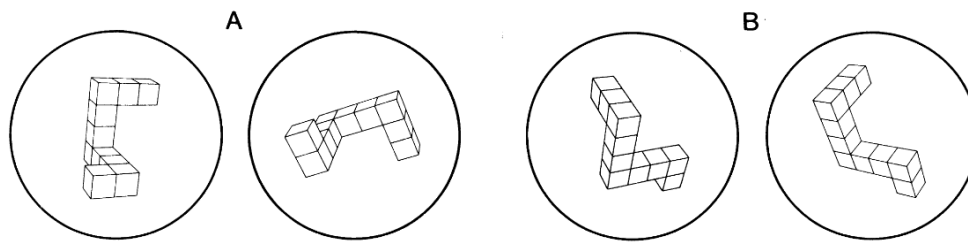


Figure 2: Mental Rotation Task (Shepard & Judd, 1976, p.192).

Schwitzgebel argues that if our introspective reports are correct, and really do indicate variation at the level of phenomenology, then a subject who reports a high level of vividness or detail in their visual imagery in a VVIQ should perform *better* on these visual imagery tasks, with regards to both speed and accuracy. Possibly, this is because their ability to produce imagery of a better quality (i.e., one which is more vivid and detailed) makes the task easier for them.

However, a meta-analysis of VVIQ scores and visual imagery task scores shows that this is not the case; that there is no significant relationship between high visual imagery questionnaire scores and high visual imagery task scores (McKelvie, 1995). Schwitzgebel takes the results of this meta-analysis as evidence that some subjects must be incorrectly reporting their visual imagery phenomenology. This is because, despite subjects supposedly employing the same visualisation abilities to complete each task, their reported visual imagery in the VVIQ doesn't correlate with their scores in the rotation tasks. This mismatch suggests to us that something, somewhere, is wrong. Schwitzgebel argues it is the subject.

How does this claim - the claim that our reports about the vividness of our visual imagery are often incorrect - threaten the acquaintance theory? It does so because there



is room for an explanation of this error according to which a subject makes an introspective report about an experience to which they don't have access to the complete phenomenal character. According to this explanation, there is phenomenal character associated with the vividness of our imagery experiences with which we are not acquainted. It is our lack of awareness of this phenomenal character which explains why we are incorrect in our introspective reports.

It is easier to assess this argument when set out formally. The argument is *modus tollens* and goes something like this:

- P1** People's reports of their visual imagery vary, some report seeing very vivid and clear imagery, others report dim or no imagery.
- P2** If such variation in reports is reflected at the level of phenomenology, then there should be a correlating variation in performance on visual imagery related tasks.
- P3** Meta-analysis of reports and performance on visual imagery tasks shows there is no correlating variation in performance on visual imagery related tasks.

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**C** Variation in imagery reports is not reflected at the level of phenomenology.

The most controversial premise, and the one I think can be challenged, is Premise 2. Schwitzgebel's reasoning, in this premise, is as follows: he argues that because the two mental tasks both involve the creation of *imagery*, those who are self-reported vivid visualisers should perform well on imagery tests. However, I argue that evidence from

studies on aphantasia subjects give us good reason to doubt that this correlation must be observed.

Evidence from studies on aphantasia subjects shows them to be competent at mental rotation tasks, despite no reported visual imagery whatsoever. Zeman et al. argue that the results of visual imagery tasks such as the mental rotation task can be dissociated from the phenomenal experience of visual imagery. In other words, performance on such tasks is not necessarily influenced by our visualisation abilities. Zeman et al. collated scores from subjects with aphantasia and subjects with normal reported imagery, both of whom were asked to complete the above-mentioned mental rotation task. They found that subjects *with* reported imagery took longer to decide whether the two 3D objects were the same if the angle of difference between the objects was greater. The relation between time taken and angle of difference was shown to be linear (Zeman et al., 2010). Zeman et al. suggest that this is because when the angle of difference is greater, it takes longer to rotate a visual image of the shape in the mind's eye.

When subjects with self-reported aphantasia completed this task, however, no such linear relationship was observed. Subjects with aphantasia took the same amount of time to answer on each test, regardless of the magnitude of the angle difference between the two shapes, and had higher levels of accuracy - getting every one right and taking about the same amount of time to do so (ibid.). This suggests that aphantasia subjects are *not* mentally rotating a visualised object in their mind's eye when they complete this task, for if they were, a linear relationship between the angle difference and time taken to answer would be observed.

The studies of Zeman et al. suggest that when performing mental tasks, we can employ a range of strategies to get correct results. They say:

[H]ealthy participants may adopt the use of a mental imagery strategy or a propositional strategy depending on the task and the effectiveness with which they can use each strategy. For example, mental imagery might be useful when tacit knowledge is insufficient. (Zeman et al., 2010)

Given this, it is no surprise that visual imagery reports do not correlate with visual imagery test scores. Subjects with poor reported imagery are likely employing propositional strategies to solve mental rotation puzzles, and as the scores of aphantasia subjects show, when these types of strategies are employed, we do not see the linear pattern of results that is observed in the results of those employing mental imagery.

These findings suggest that subjects with aphantasia are using non-imagery-based strategies to perform mental rotation tasks. If this is the case, then it is not necessary to be able to form vivid imagery in order to perform well in mental rotation tasks. The phenomena in each case come apart, and we have good reason to believe that Schwitzgebel's claim in P2 - that if variation is reflected at the level of phenomenology, we should also expect a correlating variation in performance on visual imagery related tasks - is false. Given this, Schwitzgebel's argument is not sound, and he cannot claim that the variation in imagery reports isn't reflected in variation at the level of phenomenology.

In summary, we have no good reason to believe that subjects are grossly incorrect in their introspective judgements about visual imagery. Such a claim can only be motivated if we have good reason to think that, across the population, the phenomenal character of imagery does not vary in the way that introspective reports suggest it should. I have argued that both of Schwitzgebel's attempts to establish that there is lack of genuine variation in imagery phenomenology fail. The Human Variability Argument has no good evidence, and the Visual Imagery Test Argument is subject to more plausible

explanations. Hence, we can conclude that the reported variations in the phenomenology of visual imagery are down to just that - variations in the phenomenology of visual imagery. There is nothing to suggest that our reports about our imagery are incorrect, either at the level of acquaintance or at the level of judgement. If Schwitzgebel had identified a genuine case of introspective error, then the onus would be on the acquaintance theorist to explain this away. But since there is no error, there is no threat to acquaintance.

### 3.2 Error 2: Judgements about Visual Field Clarity

The second type of introspective error which could plausibly threaten the acquaintance theorist's Indubitability Claim occurs when we make judgements about the area of clarity in our visual field. Schwitzgebel has argued that when we introspect our current visual field, and make a judgement about the size of the area which is presented to us with the highest amount of clarity, we are almost always incorrect.<sup>2</sup> We judge the area of clarity to be very wide when in fact, it can demonstrably be shown to be extremely small. Again, here we seem to have an example of an introspective judgement which is justified (based on awareness and recognition of phenomenology), yet false; it can be demonstrated that the phenomenal character is *different* to the way we judge it to be. Is this because there are phenomenal properties which escape the grasp of acquaintance?

Schwitzgebel asks of us:

Look around a bit. Consider your visual experience as you do so. Does it seem to have a centre and a periphery, differing somehow in clarity, precision of shape and colour, richness of detail? Yes? It seems that way to me too. Now, how *broad* is that field of clarity? Thirty

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Dennett (1991; 2001) has also presented an argument of this kind.

degrees? More? Maybe you are looking at your desk, as I am. Does it seem that a fairly wide swath of the desk (a square foot?) presents itself clearly in experience at any one moment, with the shapes, colours, textures all sharply defined? Most people, when I ask them, endorse something like that. They are, I think, mistaken. (Schwitzgebel, 2008, p.254)

Schwitzgebel explains that this area is in fact much smaller than the square foot that most of us believe we are experiencing, saying:

It is firmly established that the precision with which we detect shape and colour declines precipitously outside a central, foveal area of about one to two degrees of arc (about the size of your thumbnail held at arm's length). (ibid.)

He then proceeds to demonstrate this by asking us to perform the following task: focus on a point in the distance at the centre of your visual field and, holding a playing card at arm's length, slowly bringing it from the periphery of your vision to the point you are focusing on in the centre. The card, he claims, has to be brought almost exactly in line with your central point of focus before you can even make out what suit or number it is, thus demonstrating how small the area of clarity actually is.

The problem, then, is that we initially judge one thing about our experience, yet upon being told these facts about visual field clarity, and perhaps partaking in one of the above demonstrations, we come to judge another. Furthermore, this second judgement is at odds with the first; how can we go from believing our visual field has a square foot of clarity to believing it only has a thumbnail's worth? Schwitzgebel claims that the only explanation for this change in judgement is that we were previously *mistaken* about our visual field clarity; we may believe the right thing about our visual experience now, but we believed something wrong about it before. This makes room for the claim that, assuming that phenomenal character remains constant, when we made the first introspective judgement there were phenomenal properties of our experience with

which we were not acquainted. This would be a counterexample to the acquaintance theorist's Indubitability Claim.

It seems to me, however, that Schwitzgebel is making two implicit assumptions in his argument, both of which can be questioned. Firstly, he is assuming that in this introspective task, the naïve introspector and the informed introspector are operating with the same notion of *clarity*. This is important, because if it can be shown that Schwitzgebel's notion of clarity *differs* from the one we use in our ordinary naïve visual field introspection, then it may be this which is affecting our introspective report, rather than a genuine introspective error. Secondly, and relatedly, he assumes that the naïve introspector and the informed introspector are performing the very same introspective task. That is, that the introspective task with the playing card is the same process as naïve introspection on perceptual experience. If it can be shown that either of these assumptions are false, then we have room to argue against Schwitzgebel's claim that what is occurring is a genuine introspective error.

Let us begin with clarity. Schwitzgebel never explicitly gives a definition. However, when he first invites us to introspect, he asks us to judge the area that "presents itself clearly in experience at any one moment, with the shapes colours and textures all sharply defined" (ibid.). We will therefore take this to be his standard of clarity. The problem with this definition is that it fails to rule out the possibility that the area of clarity in your visual experience can appear bigger or smaller depending on the level of detail in the visual array before you - something which seems true of visual experience. When I look at a relatively *simple* visual scene, such as a white wall with a whiteboard hung on it, the area in which the scene seems sharply defined seems quite large - I can make out that the board is white, with some brighter spots where the light is reflected, that the border is black and rectangular, and that the wall beyond is also white. I

therefore judge the area of clarity to be quite large. On the other hand, when I look at a *complex* visual scene - such as a bookshelf full of books - and ask myself how much of the area is sharply defined, the area of clarity seems much smaller. I cannot make out all the different colours and words on the spines of the books because there is simply too much detail in the scene. This suggests that, for an ordinary naïve introspector, the area of clarity can vary - it is just as large an area as one needs to be able to see everything clearly. Simple shapes and colours and undetailed scenes will appear to be sharply defined for you when the words on the spines of books won't. This is because a notion of clarity which is characterised solely in terms of 'definition' will fail to rule out the influence that the level of detail in a scene has on the definition with which objects in that scene are presented.

It is possible that this explains the difference in the judgements made by the naïve and the informed introspector. However, since Schwitzgebel doesn't provide the naïve introspector with any instructions about what kind of objects they should have before them when they introspect their visual field, we cannot be sure if this is the case. What this discussion on definition and clarity *does* show, however, is that Schwitzgebel has failed to fix at least one variable which ought to be held fixed. Whilst this does not give us reason to reject his claims, at the very least it suggests that they are not made due to the results of any particularly rigorous introspective experiments.

Perhaps there are further criteria lurking in Schwitzgebel's notion of clarity which he doesn't make explicit in his original invitation to introspect. To see what these extra criteria could be, we must look to the introspective act that Schwitzgebel gets us to perform when he uses the playing card example to demonstrate to us the *actual* size of visual field clarity. When inviting us to introspect on the experience of the playing card, he makes us aware of the following fact: that "the precision with which we detect shape

and colour declines precipitously outside a central, foveal area of about one to two degrees of arc” (ibid.). What this means is that the clarity of objects presented in this tiny foveal area will be extremely sharp - it is the very most sharply defined part of your visual field. In making us aware of this fact, Schwitzgebel reveals the *true* definition of clarity with which he is operating; clarity as being the area of your visual field presented with foveal area-levels of sharpness.

This, then, is the level of precision Schwitzgebel presupposes when he originally invites us to introspect. However, in his original invitation, he fails to specify that this is the definition we - the naïve introspectors - are to operate with. Since he leaves this unsaid, we are left to interpret the level of precision required when he asks us to introspect. As our visual experience doesn’t descend into a blurring confusion immediately outside of the foveal area (it declines, yes, but we can still quite adequately make out shapes, colours, and textures a fair way beyond the two degrees of arc), it is likely that we set the level of precision by what we can *discern*, rather than what falls inside two degrees of arc. Arguably, since we are still able to discern shapes, colours, and textures well quite a way outside this narrow area, we would not be inclined to limit our standards of precision in such an extreme way.

To demonstrate this, think of the playing card experiment again. Bring the playing card from the periphery to the centre of your visual experience. A while before the card gets dead-centre, you can easily discern various features of it: its colour (a white card with red patterns on it) and its shape (small, rectangular), for instance. Imagine further that someone places a playing card that is twelve inches tall in the centre of your visual field at arm’s length and asks you to focus on it; you will be able to discern its shape, colour, and patterns, probably its suit and number too - and this is all on an area much larger than two degrees of arc. It seems there is a discrepancy between Schwitzgebel’s and our



standards of precision, with him demanding a much higher, fine-grained, standard than the one we ordinarily deploy in everyday visual experience (that of discernibility). This standard of precision is not made explicit in his original invitation to introspect, yet it is assumed. Moreover, this discrepancy is able to explain the difference in our introspective judgements; in the second, informed judgement, clarity is defined with a higher standard of precision than in the first, naïve judgement. And, when we are made aware of Schwitzgebel's standards of precision, our introspective judgement changes accordingly - we *do* find that the area of our visual field where colours, shapes, and textures are sharply defined (in the presupposed *narrow and precise* sense) is around two degrees arc.

All this lends support to a reading of the situation where *no* error has actually occurred. Rather, the naïve introspector - operating with the weaker notion of clarity - makes a *correct* judgement about the area of their visual field which falls under the area of clarity *as weakly defined*. Likewise, the informed introspector also makes a correct judgement, just not a judgement about the same thing. We have good reason to believe that Schwitzgebel's first assumption - that both introspectors are operating with the same notion of clarity - is likely not the case.

As for Schwitzgebel's second assumption - that the naïve and informed introspectors are performing the same type of introspective task - I believe this can also be challenged. To see this, we must consider what differs between looking around for a bit and considering how broad the field of clarity is at any moment (Schwitzgebel's first request), and holding your gaze at a fixed point whilst bringing a playing card from the periphery to the centre (Schwitzgebel's second request). The answer lies in eye movement. In the second request, your gaze is *fixed*. Nowhere in the first request does Schwitzgebel tell us to fix our gaze, to focus on one precise point in our visual field. In

the first request, we are engaging in introspection of *dynamic* vision, and as I will argue, dynamic vision produces phenomenology quite different to that of fixed-gaze vision.

When we visually perceive the world, our eyes perform fast, involuntary movements called *saccades*:

Saccades are rapid, ballistic movements of the eyes that abruptly change the point of fixation. They range in amplitude from the small movements made while reading, for example, to the much larger movements made while gazing around a room. Saccades can be elicited voluntarily, *but occur reflexively whenever the eyes are open*. (Purves et al., 2001)  
[emphasis added]

When they are open, our eyes rapidly perform these reflexive saccades, moving several times in a second. Each saccade has a different point of fixation, and hence a different area on which the fovea is focussed. Each saccade will therefore produce a visual scene with a different area of the highest degree of clarity (that is, the ‘two degrees of arc’ area of clarity will shift, depending on where the point of fixation of the saccade is).

Because saccades happen so quickly, we are not aware of the content provided by each one *individually* as it occurs. As Brentyn Ramm argues, if we were aware of individual saccades, our visual experience would be like “seeing the images of a film as static or moving, or a spinning flame on the end of a pole as a point of light rather than a circle of flame” (Ramm, 2016, p.108). But this is not the case. It seems, rather, that the visual system somehow *combines* information from current and immediately past saccades to create a dynamic, fluid visual scene. What this suggests is that when we introspect on this ordinary dynamic vision, we are introspecting on a visual scene that contains a mix of information from our current and just-past saccades. Such a scene may not, at the

level of the phenomenology, have a single clear-cut area of maximal clarity. If this is the case, then our naïve introspective judgement isn't incorrect.<sup>3</sup>

Contrast this with fixed-gaze vision - the sort we have when fixating on the playing card. When we fix our gaze, when we focus on one point for a duration of time, we are suppressing the eye's natural, involuntary saccadic movements. By doing this, we are *artificially simulating* what our visual experience would be like at a moment, for one saccadic fixation. However, since we cannot experience at such short durations, fixing our gaze allows the visual system to combine foveal information which has the same point of fixation over time. Since our gaze is fixed, the area the fovea is focussing on does not move, and so each bit of information processed by the visual system has the same area of maximal clarity. When this information is combined, it gives a visual scene where the area of maximal clarity phenomenally appears very small. The informed introspector's judgement is therefore also correct.

It is clear, then, that the two introspective tasks which Schwitzgebel asks us to perform are not the same. The first is a request to introspect on dynamic vision. The second is a request to introspect on fixed-gaze vision. I have argued that a difference in saccadic activity in each task arguably leads to a genuine difference in the phenomenology. This difference in the phenomenology explains the difference in introspective reports, such that neither the naïve nor the informed introspector is incorrect about the phenomenal character of their experience.

In summary, when a naïve introspector judges the area of clarity in their visual field to be fairly wide, and an informed introspector judges it to be very small, this is not because one of them is unacquainted with some of their experience's phenomenal

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<sup>3</sup> Ramm (ibid.), Hill (2011), Peels (2016), and Englebert & Carruthers (2010) all advocate explanations along these lines.

character. Rather, it is likely because each is performing a different introspective task, and operating with a different notion of clarity. Schwitzgebel's arguments therefore fail to establish that any genuine introspective error has occurred, and the Indubitability Claim of the acquaintance theory is not under threat from this scenario.

### 3.3 Error 3: Judgements about the Richness of Experience

The final type of error which threatens the acquaintance theorist's Indubitability Claim comes from disputes about the *richness of consciousness*. Some theorists argue that our phenomenally conscious experience is rich, and at any one time includes all conscious going's on in all modalities, including those we are not attending to.<sup>4</sup> Others argue that our phenomenally conscious experience is relatively sparse; that what is phenomenally conscious for us includes *only* that which we are currently attending to.<sup>5</sup> Schwitzgebel (2011, Ch.6) points to the inconclusiveness of such debates to show that introspection cannot reliably give us information about the richness of our experience, and that introspective judgements made about experience's richness are likely to be false. Similarly, Marcel (2003, p.172) argues that the debate supports his two-level view of consciousness, according to which there are phenomenal properties of experience which escape the grasp of acquaintance.

Some examples will help illuminate the issue under debate. Schwitzgebel (2011) uses the example of his drive to work. Some days, he says, he drives on autopilot. He arrives in the car park at work with little to no recollection of how he managed to get there. He remembers being preoccupied with other things - his thoughts about work, about the day's upcoming important meeting, etc. - but has no memory of a conscious visual

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<sup>4</sup> See James (1890), Searle (1992).

<sup>5</sup> See Jaynes (1976), Dennett (1991), Mack & Rock (1998).

experience of his journey. Naturally, the following question arises: *did he have a phenomenally conscious visual experience whilst he was driving?* He was not *aware* of having any such experience, but presumably he was reacting to the visual input of external stimuli - traffic lights, crossings, junctions, cyclists, and the like - otherwise he (or somebody else!) would not have made it to work in one piece. Can such visual input influence our behaviour *without* our also being phenomenally conscious of it?

A second example concerns pain. When you feel a pain, your attention is drawn to it. But it can be asked whether you had a phenomenally conscious experience of the pain before you attended to it. Was your attention drawn to it *because* it was phenomenally conscious, or was your attention drawn by sub-personal information, the act of attending *creating* a new phenomenally conscious experience which didn't previously exist? This question can be posed of any kind of experience: were you always phenomenally conscious of the birds singing, or did the noise become phenomenally conscious only when it attracted your attention just now? Can you always feel the sensation of your feet in your shoes, or has that only become phenomenally conscious because I just invited you to attend to it? Does phenomenal consciousness outrun awareness, or are they one and the same thing? The truth of the Indubitability Claim depends on the answer to this question.

One initial response available to acquaintance theorist is the following: they can claim that, in the above examples, what is being asked of the subject is not the sort of thing that the acquaintance theorist wishes to explain. For example, in the driving scenario, we are asked *after the event* whether we had a phenomenally conscious visual experience *at the time of the event*. Similarly in the pain/noise/shoes examples, we are asked whether the relevant experience was phenomenally present *before* we attended to it. In both of these cases, a temporal constraint on introspective self-knowledge is flouted; we are

asked to make a judgement about a *past* experience, and past experiences are not the domain of introspective self-knowledge by acquaintance. The acquaintance theorist is concerned with knowledge of *occurrent* experiences, the things that are happening to us right now. We cannot know via acquaintance whether we had a certain phenomenally conscious experience in the past, since we are not acquainted with past experiences.

Perhaps Schwitzgebel or Marcel could alter their questions in order to make us target our *current* experience. For example, they could ask, “are you *currently* having a phenomenally conscious experience of the sensation of your feet in your shoes?”. By asking us to introspect on a current experience, we are given a task which lies within the scope of acquaintance. However, it is not clear that this gets us any closer to the truth. As soon as you introspect and ‘search’ for the sensation of your feet in your shoes, you find it. It is there in your awareness with all its phenomenal character present. But this could mean one of two things:

1. You *create* the phenomenally conscious experience via the act of attention.
2. You begin attending to a phenomenally conscious experience that has *always been there*.

If correct reading of this scenario is captured by (1), then there is no problem for the acquaintance theorist. If the correct reading is (2), then we are back to the issue which this amendment to the original question is trying to avoid: the ‘problematic’ part of the situation described in (2) is a *past* experience, and is therefore not the sort of thing that can be investigated via acquaintance. There is no way of telling via acquaintance whether (1) or (2) is correct, because acquaintance does not give us information about our past mental states.

What about a less specific introspective judgement? For example, the judgement, based on my awareness of current conscious experience, that ‘*this current conscious experience is*

*phenomenally sparse*'. If my current conscious experience is actually phenomenally rich, and contains phenomenal character of which I am not aware, then this judgement - and the Indubitability Claim - will be false.

I think that reflection on this case gives us reason to favour an explanation which is compatible with acquaintance. The judgement, based on current awareness, that '*my conscious experience is phenomenally sparse*', is presumably formed because it genuinely does not seem to me that I am phenomenally conscious of every experience that - given the external input my senses are currently receiving - could be potentially happening to me right now, in every modality, at once. One may oppose this, as the rich theorist of course does, by claiming that, in fact, these experiences *are* happening to you and *are* phenomenally conscious, but you are not aware of them. However, it is not clear that this is a completely damaging scenario for the acquaintance account, since none of this phenomenal character - whether it is *potential* as the scarce theorist claims, or *actually present* as the rich theorist claims - is *completely* out of the reach of acquaintance. That is, it is not the case that I could *never* be acquainted with what the rich theorist says is phenomenally present. All I have to do is direct my attention in the appropriate way (to my feet, to my pain, to my auditory field, etc.) and I am presented with the relevant phenomenal character, perfectly and completely within my awareness. I can attend to these things *if I want to*. Whereas I could not attend to, say, vivid imagery if I did not have it in the first place.

So whilst the acquaintance theorist doesn't have the means to disprove the rich theory, they can at least claim that it doesn't actually cause them any problems if it is true. If the rich theory is true, then at any one time certain phenomenal properties may be hidden from awareness, but through the act of attention they can always be found. This would require a minor amendment to the claims made about acquaintance in Chapter 1. The

claim that acquaintance gives indubitable awareness of the phenomenal properties of current experiences would have to change. Instead, the acquaintance theorist must say that we have indubitable awareness of the phenomenal character of everything we are *attending to*, and *potential* indubitable awareness of the phenomenal character to which we are not currently attending. But this is not a problem, since there is no phenomenal character to which we could not have access if we wanted to. If true, the rich theory also has the consequence of reducing the scope of acquaintance in the sense that it does not allow us to make introspective judgements about the richness of experience. But this is also no problem, since the existing dispute in this area suggests that this was never a question that was going to be answerable by introspection anyway. If the rich theory is true, then the major claims of the acquaintance theory still stand. And if the sparse theory is true, then the acquaintance theorist can maintain their original position. Neither theory causes inescapable damage to the acquaintance account.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered the problem of introspective error for my acquaintance account. First of all, I argued that the fact that we sometimes make mistakes in the judgements we make about our current conscious experiences is not incompatible with self-knowledge as a whole. Self-knowledge of our current conscious experiences is privileged and immediate, but it is also fallible and limited. Therefore, introspective error as a general phenomenon is not a problem for self-knowledge. I identified, however, that certain types of introspective error *could* present a problem for the acquaintance account. These are introspective errors where the resulting judgement is justified, yet false. Because these errors are justified, it can plausibly be argued that the source of the introspective error is at the level of awareness; that there are phenomenal



features of our mental states with which we are not acquainted, and our lack of acquaintance with these features is what leads us to form an incorrect judgement. The possibility of such a scenario would threaten the claim made in Chapter 1 that the acquaintance relation gets us awareness which is epistemically indubitable.

From a review of the literature on introspective error, I identified three types of error which seem to threaten acquaintance in this way. My aim was to show that the correct interpretation of each situation does not involve an error at the level of acquaintance.

In the first, judgements about the vividness of our visual imagery are taken (by Schwitzgebel) to be false, since they suggest a level of variation which isn't plausibly present at the level of phenomenology. I have argued that neither Schwitzgebel's Human Variability Argument, nor his Visual Imagery Test Argument, succeed in establishing that this is genuinely the case. More plausibly, there is variation in the phenomenal character of imagery which reflects the variation in reported vividness. Therefore, no introspective error is occurring, and acquaintance isn't threatened.

A second error is taken to occur when we make naïve introspective judgements about the area of clarity in our visual field. However, I argued that no such error actually occurs; that the naïve introspector is operating with a different notion of clarity and performing a different introspective task. Hence their judgement is not erroneous, it is just about a different thing. Judgements about visual field clarity therefore do not threaten acquaintance.

Finally, I discussed the debate on the phenomenal richness of consciousness. If conscious experience has phenomenal character which outstrips attention, it seems that there is a case to be made for claiming that there is phenomenal character with which we cannot be acquainted. I argued that most of the time, examples which *seem* to indicate that this is the case are not actually asking us to introspect on our current

conscious experience at all. Since the acquaintance theory only explains self-knowledge of *current* conscious states, whether or not I can recall if I was *previously* aware of driving to work, or of a pain, or of my feet in my shoes, is an issue of memory, not introspection, and is hence beyond the scope of acquaintance. Moreover, if conscious experience *is* rich, and *does* contain phenomenal features which outstrip that which we are currently attending to, this doesn't cause any substantive problems for the acquaintance account. This is because if conscious experience is rich, the 'hidden' phenomenal character can always be attended to if necessary, and so can always be found. With some minor amendments to the Indubitability Claim, the acquaintance theorist can make room for richness without damaging the core claims of their account. On the other hand, if conscious experience is sparse, then the acquaintance theorist needn't make any amendments. Whichever position turns out to be true, there is no problem for acquaintance.

In summary, there are no cases of introspective error which directly threaten acquaintance. All the errors I have discussed are either not errors at all, or can be accounted for without damaging the main claims of the acquaintance theory. The acquaintance theorist therefore faces no unique issues from the problem of introspective error.

# Conclusion

The arguments in this thesis constitute my acquaintance account - an account of self-knowledge of current conscious states. By way of summary, let us return to the Master

Argument:

## The Master Argument

- P1** We have self-knowledge of current conscious mental states.
- P2** Our self-knowledge of our current conscious mental states takes the form of true, justified judgements with certain special features.
- P3** An explanation of how we form these judgements is an explanation of self-knowledge.
- P4** The acquaintance theory can explain how we form these judgements.
- P5** No other theory can better explain how we form these judgements.
- P6** We should accept a theory if it is the best explanation for some phenomena.

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C      Therefore, the acquaintance theory explains self-knowledge of current conscious mental states.

In the introduction, it was argued that the key premises in need of defence were P4 and P5. Premise 4 is the claim that the acquaintance theory can explain how we are able to form immediate, justified, first-person privileged judgements (which are potentially fallible and adhere to certain limits) about our current conscious mental states. Premise 5 is the claim that no other theory can better explain how we are able to do this. I will briefly explain how the arguments in this thesis have established these claims.

In Chapter 1, I answered the question ‘*What is Acquaintance?*’. I argued that acquaintance is a metaphysically direct and epistemically immediate relation of awareness between a subject and the phenomenal features of their mental states. As well as forming the basis of the acquaintance account, this relation explains the *first-personal*, perspectival aspect of self-knowledge. It explains why my knowledge of my own mental states is different to my knowledge of another’s states: it is only my own states with which I am acquainted.

In Chapter 2, I argued for a phenomenology of state type. This served a triple purpose. Firstly, it served as a partial defence of the claim made in Ch.1 that acquaintance gets us *immediate awareness*. Secondly, it served as a partial explanation of how we are able to make self-ascriptions. Thirdly, it served as a rejection of a rival theory - transparency - thus lending support to P5 of the Master Argument.

Chapter 3 completed the tasks begun in Ch.2; those of defending the immediacy claim made in Ch.1, and of explaining self-ascriptions. I argued that there is a relationship between content and phenomenal character such that one determines the other.

Awareness of (at least some of) a state's phenomenal character gets us immediate awareness of its content. This explains how we are able to self-ascribe content.

In Chapter 4, I explained how self-ascriptions based on acquaintance can be *justified*. I gave an account of justification where the subject's awareness of their current conscious state, plus the possession and employment of a relevant recognitional capacity, explains the rationality of self-ascriptions. This argument also served as support for the claim that self-knowledge of the kind we are concerned with is *immediate*. In this chapter I also rejected acquaintance's other main rival account - inner sense - on the grounds that its commitment to a wholly externalist account of justification is at odds with the intuitive appeal that internalism has with regards to first-person knowledge of current conscious states. This lent further support to P5 of the Master Argument.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I considered objections to the acquaintance account developed in the first four chapters. I defended acquaintance against two problems from speckled hens, and against a problem from certain cases of introspective error. The discussion in these two chapters also served to demonstrate how the acquaintance account allows for judgements about our current conscious states to be potentially *fallible* and subject to certain *limits*. In making a move from infallible awareness to judgement, there will always be space for error, whilst the limits to our recognitional capacities serve as at least one upper boundary on self-knowledge.

I hope this summary demonstrates how the acquaintance account I have developed and defended in this thesis meets the requirements for self-knowledge set out in the Master Argument. The acquaintance theory can explain how we are able to form immediate, justified, first-person privileged judgements about our current conscious mental states, and it provides a better explanation of this ability than rival accounts. Given this, we should, I think, accept it as the explanation of self-knowledge. It is a simple, intuitive

theory which, given its alignment with a relatively naïve picture of self-knowledge, has gone underappreciated. I hope to have shown that it deserves to be taken seriously, and to have highlighted that its virtue lies in its simplicity.

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