

Inner Awareness as a Mark of the Mental¹

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Abstract: While for Brentano it is a mark of the mental that any mental state is an object of inner awareness, this suggestion is notably rejected by the Higher-Order Thought Theory (HOTT) of consciousness that posits non-conscious inner awareness, which ordinarily isn't an object of inner awareness, and yet is mental. I examine an objection against the HOTT, according to which inner awareness is phenomenally present in ordinary consciousness. To assess the objection, I investigate arguments of Chalmers and Montague in favor of this phenomenal presence. I argue that while these arguments may show that experience is not transparent, they crucially fail to demonstrate that 'inner transparency' must be false too, i.e. that inner awareness is phenomenally present. I conclude that non-conscious inner awareness is an open possibility and Brentano's posit of inner awareness as a mark of the mental thus looks unpromising.

Keywords: Mark of the mental, Inner awareness, Phenomenal consciousness, Higher-order-thought theory, Transparency

Franz Brentano (1874) famously viewed intentionality as a *mark* of the mental, i.e. a feature that distinguishes mental phenomena from non-mental ones. It is less known that he thought that it is another mark of the mental that any mental state is a state we are aware of,² where this 'inner awareness' (often called *inner perception* by Brentano) renders the state conscious

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² "Another characteristic which all mental phenomena have in common is the fact that they are only perceived in inner consciousness, while in the case of physical phenomena only external perception is possible" (Brentano 1874, p. 95). Brentano attributes this idea to Hamilton, who held that consciousness is an essential element of mental phenomena (see Hamilton 1859, p. 126).

(Brentano 1874, p. 132).³ This notably applies to inner awareness itself: as a mental phenomenon, it is itself an object of inner awareness, hence it is conscious.⁴ Brentano's suggestion that being an object of inner awareness is a mark of the mental, then, means that he viewed all mental phenomena as conscious (see Brentano 1874, p. 143; Kriegel 2013, p. 23). In contrast, many endorse the *non-conscious-inner-awareness view*, according to which we are ordinarily unaware of inner awareness, construed as non-conscious yet mental. If this view, embraced e.g. by proponents of the Higher-Order Thought Theory (HOTT) of consciousness, is correct, being an object of inner awareness cannot – *pace* Brentano – be a mark of the mental. I shall examine an objection against the non-conscious-inner-awareness view, raised by Joseph Levine (2018), Uriah Kriegel (2003) and others. According to this *phenomenological objection*, we are ordinarily aware of the *awareness* of our mental states, and not only of these states themselves, hence inner awareness is phenomenologically present. I shall assess the phenomenological objection in light of arguments of David Chalmers (2013) and Michelle Montague (2016) for the phenomenal presence of inner awareness. While for Chalmers the phenomenal presence of inner awareness is suggested by cases of blurred vision, Montague argues that denying this presence would render mysterious the fact that we naturally distinguish between the objects we perceive, and our perceivings thereof. I will explain that while these arguments may cast doubt on the so-called 'transparency of experience', they fail to demonstrate that inner awareness is phenomenally present.

After outlining two conceptions of inner awareness in section 1, the phenomenological objection in 2, and phenomenological testimonies that dispute it in 3, I evaluate Chalmers's

³ Brentano (1874) does not comment on whether the two marks necessitate one another. According to Kriegel (2013), he, nevertheless, saw a sort of necessitation relation between the intentional nature of mental states and their being objects of inner awareness. Kriegel (2013, p. 25) explicates what he views as Brentano's insight by arguing that a token state is representational, hence intentional, just in case it betokens a representational type, the core tokens of which self-represent, hence are objects of inner awareness. This would mean that the intentionality mark entails that at least some token mental states must be objects of inner awareness. Dewalque (2020) agrees with Kriegel in holding that Brentano distinguished (at least) the two mentioned marks of the mental but rejects the self-representationalist reading of Brentano. He views the inner-awareness mark as self-sufficient and additional to the intentionality mark, arguing that Brentano aimed to capture several *converging* marks of the mental and thus arrive at a *natural classification* of phenomena (Dewalque 2020, p. 28). Crucially, this issue does not affect the question of whether our phenomenology speaks against unconscious inner awareness which is my main concern in this article, and I thus remain neutral between these two interpretations.

⁴ I use 'inner awareness' broadly, to denote the ubiquitous, non-introspective awareness of a mental state that renders it conscious. In characterizing this awareness as non-introspective, I am suggesting that it is not reserved for occasions of introspection, when one attends to the nature of one's mental states. Instead I view it as necessary for even ordinary, non-introspective experience. This understanding of inner awareness is meant to remain neutral on the issue of whether this awareness itself contributes a specific phenomenology to our overall experience and is meant to allow for the view that it is not phenomenally manifest at all.

argument for conscious inner awareness in 4. I discuss Montague's suggestion that conscious inner awareness best explains 'Strawson's datum' in 5, sketching an alternative explanation consistent with the unconscious-inner-awareness view in 6. In 7, I conclude that the phenomenological objection lacks support, hence Brentano's posit of inner awareness as a mark of the mental looks unpromising.

1

Since, for Brentano (1874, p. 95), any mental phenomenon is an object of inner awareness and inner awareness is itself a mental phenomenon, his account may seem to face an infinite regress: being in a mental state may seem to entail being in an infinity of mental states, which looks implausible. Brentano attempts to avert this regress by suggesting that a mental state, e.g. one of seeing a tree, isn't conscious in virtue of being an object of *another mental state* that would constitute the inner awareness of the former state. Instead, the former state – apart from presenting a tree – presents itself too, thus constituting inner awareness of itself, that is of the whole state, in which both presentations are fused in a union. Brentano (1874, pp. 134-135) writes:

[...] the consciousness of the presentation of the sound clearly occurs together with the consciousness of this consciousness, for the consciousness which accompanies the presentation of the sound is a consciousness not so much of this presentation as of the whole mental act in which the sound is presented, and in which the consciousness itself exists concomitantly.

This means that Brentano would endorse the following *conscious-inner-awareness* thesis:

- (1) The inner awareness that makes us aware of a mental state, thus making it conscious, is itself always an object of inner awareness, hence it is always conscious.

I take it that Brentano would also accept that (1) entails the following *phenomenal-inner-awareness* thesis:

- (2) Inner awareness itself always occurs in our phenomenology, notably including ordinary, non-introspective phenomenology.

Here the idea is that one's phenomenology, i.e. what it is like for one to be in a conscious state (Nagel 1974), involves a ubiquitous phenomenal appearance of inner awareness.

(1) and (2) are rejected by proponents of the *non-conscious-inner-awareness view*. According to a popular version of this view, the HOTT, a mental state is conscious iff one has a suitable HOT that one is in that state (Rosenthal 2002). Phenomenally conscious states, i.e. those which there is something it is like for one to undergo are thus construed as mental states we're aware of being in.⁵ Crucially, HOTs are – leaving introspection aside – construed as non-conscious, which means that HOT theorists endorse the following *non-conscious inner-awareness* thesis:

(3) We are ordinarily unaware of our inner awareness of mental states, hence this awareness is ordinarily (i.e. in non-introspective experiences) non-conscious.

(3) is integral to the HOTT as usually formulated⁶ and implies the *no-inner-awareness-phenomenology* thesis:

(4) Inner awareness is ordinarily (i.e. in non-introspective experiences) phenomenologically absent from experience.

(4) follows from (3) since *non-conscious* awareness could not be phenomenally present, so there could not be inner-awareness-phenomenology associated with it. If it were phenomenally present – i.e. if it felt like something –, it would be conscious.

(3) and (4) define the *non-conscious-inner-awareness view*. Apart from the HOT theorists, this view is endorsed, e.g., by Michael Lockwood (1989), who models awareness as an unconscious process disclosing qualitative states to us (see section 3 for discussion). The non-conscious-inner-awareness view challenges Brentano's claim that being targeted by inner awareness is a mark of the mental since its proponents deny that inner awareness itself is ordinarily so targeted despite its being a mental act.

⁵ According to Rosenthal (e.g. 2002), this only applies to sensory states as he thinks that only those have a qualitative nature, but this restriction is non-essential to the HOTT. See footnote 15 for discussion.

⁶ HOT theorists endorse (3) as it is a way to block the following infinite regress: if the HOT-constituted inner awareness were construed as rendering its target mental states conscious and at the same time itself conscious, this would lead to the question of accounting for the conscious nature of inner awareness. Here inner awareness of a third order would arguably need to be invoked, but since that awareness is also conscious, we get an infinite regress. The HOTT proposal that inner awareness is non-conscious *unless* targeted by inner awareness of a yet higher-level (see Rosenthal 2002) blocks the regress without invoking the controversial notion of self-representation (Kriegel 2009).

2

Levine has written the following against the HOTT's take on an experience of a tomato:

On this theory the higher-order state is not itself conscious. But this seems phenomenologically bizarre. The consciousness of the experience of seeing the ripe tomato seems as much a matter of which we are conscious as the ripe tomato itself. How can we say that the consciousness itself is not something we are aware of from within the first-person point of view? (Levine, 2018, p. 119)

According to Levine, then, the HOTT distorts ordinary phenomenology that – apart from elements corresponding to the tomato – includes elements associated with our awareness of the tomato. Levine thus challenges (3) and (4) *on phenomenological grounds*, suggesting that ordinary phenomenology includes elements associated with the HOT-constituted inner awareness, hence this awareness isn't ordinarily unconscious.

When discussing peripheral elements of one's stream of consciousness (such as sounds from the street when one is reading), Kriegel writes:

[...] another constant element in the fringe of consciousness is awareness of one's concurrent experience. A full list of the peripheral elements in the [...] rainbow experience would have to include awareness of that very experience. This would be peripheral inner awareness in the normal go of things [...]. [...] peripheral inner awareness is virtually ubiquitous, in that it "hums" in the background of our stream of consciousness with nearly absolute constancy and is absent only when replaced by focal inner awareness (Kriegel 2009, p. 49).

According to Kriegel, then, inner awareness appears in phenomenology as a ubiquitous 'background hum', ruling out (3) and (4). Kriegel (2003) emphasizes that the HOTT is unable to account for this special phenomenology, with his self-representationalist alternative being more phenomenologically attractive.

According to the phenomenological objection, then, inner awareness is ordinarily conscious, hence it ordinarily phenomenally appears to us, thus supporting (1) and (2) while ruling out (3) and (4) (see Chalmers [2017], Montague [2016, 2017a] for other versions of the objection). If this objection is plausible, the non-conscious-inner-awareness view cannot be correct, which supports Brentano's conception of the marks of the mental.

3

Not everyone agrees that phenomenology speaks clearly for the phenomenological objection. Rosenthal (2002) denies that inner awareness is ordinarily phenomenally present arguing that it is unclear what it could feel like, qualitatively.⁷ Awareness-phenomenology is also rejected by Sam Coleman who defends an unorthodox form of the HOTT.⁸ Coleman writes:

In being aware of red, I just don't know what my alleged awareness of my awareness of red is meant to feel like; I find only the redness. When you ask me to attend to the relational property of my being aware of the redness, still all I find is the redness [...] (Coleman 2017, p. 271).

Outside the HOTT camp, the phenomenological presence of inner awareness was rejected on phenomenological grounds by Russell (1921), Lockwood (1989) and others. According to Lockwood's (1989, p. 163) so-called *disclosure view*, inner awareness is best described using the metaphor of a searchlight that discloses qualitative contents to us but is itself invisible to us. He writes, for example:

[...] it seems to me that we cannot be said to have a transparent conception of awareness. (Can one see the eye with which one sees?). To return to the searchlight analogy, what we see are the objects that the searchlight illuminates for us. We do not see the searchlight. Nor do we see the light: merely what the light reveals (Lockwood 1989, p. 169).

Similarly, Russell suggests that acts of awareness, which he calls 'sensations' (Russell 2021, p. 141), do not appear in phenomenology. He tells us that "the sensation that we have when we see a patch of colour simply is that patch of colour" (Russell 1921, p. 142; see also Stubenberg 2015).

Since these testimonies support theses (3) and (4), it seems that appeals to phenomenology are, on their own, highly unlikely to adequately support the phenomenological objection, according to which inner awareness is ordinarily phenomenally present.⁹ In the absence of further arguments, we are, then, dealing with a deadlock concerning awareness-phenomenology, hence the objection cannot help the proponents of the Brentanian conception. I shall therefore now examine two arguments that can be invoked in support of the objection.

⁷ In fact, I think Rosenthal would deny that HOT-constituted inner awareness is *ever* phenomenally present, given HOTs' non-sensory nature (see footnote 15 for discussion).

⁸ See also section 4.

⁹ This is not to suggest that debates about phenomenology could not move us towards a resolution of the issue. See e.g. Zahavi & Kriegel (2015) for a suggestion that the opponents of the phenomenology of inner awareness fail to identify this phenomenology due to their misconception of its nature.

Chalmers (2013) argues for the *phenomenal-inner-awareness* thesis (2) by invoking our ability to notice changes in visual experience that do not correspond to changes concerning the perceived external properties. When one's vision becomes blurry because of squinting, one notices a change but nothing about the perceived objects has changed, hence the change plausibly concerns one's experience, or a manner of one's awareness of these objects, reasons Chalmers (2013, p. 347). This suggests, according to Chalmers, that we can attend to our awareness of apparent external properties (and not just to these properties) (Chalmers 2013, 347–8).

Chalmers originally used this case to argue against Benj Hellie's (2013) *transparency thesis*, according to which we cannot attend to phenomenal features of experience, but rather only to physical properties of external things. Insofar as Chalmers's case shows that we can attend to a change in experience that doesn't correspond to a change in the perceived properties, Hellie's thesis cannot be true.

Importantly, however, Chalmers also invokes this case when critiquing Coleman's (2017) version of the HOTT. According to Coleman, HOTs make us aware of irreducible qualitative properties he calls 'unconscious qualia' (Coleman 2021). While normally unconscious, these qualitative properties become conscious when they are targeted by suitable HOTs. Crucially, the awareness-constituting HOTs are always unconscious, for Coleman, hence they cannot appear in experience, ordinary or introspective.¹⁰ Against this, Chalmers (2017, p. 202) suggests that we are aware of our awareness of qualities, which means that awareness of qualities¹¹ must appear in phenomenology, hence Coleman's account does not do justice to phenomenology.¹² In support, Chalmers invokes the case of blurred vision, although he doesn't explain its relevance in much detail.

Perhaps Chalmers's suggestion is that while Coleman's HOTT theory might account for the elements of phenomenology corresponding to the sensible properties of worldly things, it fails to account for the phenomenology corresponding to our being aware of these things in a certain way – first our visual awareness is clear, then it gets blurred, etc. Chalmers, then, allows that

¹⁰ Coleman (2017, p. 280, fn. 87) thus rejects Rosenthal's claim that HOTs – while ordinarily unconscious – become conscious in introspection in virtue of being targeted by thoughts of a yet higher order.

¹¹ I'm leaving it open here whether the awareness of qualities Chalmers invokes counts as inner awareness. Later I'll explain why I think it does not.

¹² Chalmers (2017, p. 202) writes: "It seems introspectively obvious that we are aware of qualities (indeed, I think we are aware of our awareness of qualities [...])."

the phenomenology associated with the external properties can be accounted for in terms of the qualities our HOTs make us, according to Coleman, aware of. As our ability to notice a phenomenal change that doesn't correspond to a change in the worldly properties indicates, however, we are at least sometimes aware of our *awareness* of these external properties too. This change arguably concerns *the way we are aware* of these properties: clear awareness gets blurred, for example. Since, however, we notice this change concerning our awareness of qualities, the reasoning goes, we must be aware of this awareness, hence what I call 'inner awareness' must sometimes be phenomenally present. If Chalmers's argument is plausible, then, inner awareness at least sometimes shows up in phenomenology and since blurry vision cases, as I'll explain, needn't be introspective, this conclusion would rule out thesis (4), integral to the HOTT.

While Chalmers's argument clearly challenges Coleman's HOTT, which denies that inner awareness is ever conscious and phenomenally manifest (Coleman 2017, p. 280, fn. 87), it could be objected that the conclusion of the argument is *compatible* with the mainstream, e.g. Rosenthal's, HOTT. According to this objection, the argument shows at most that we can become aware of inner awareness in *introspection*, i.e. when we attend to our mental states themselves, and not in ordinary consciousness. In reply, it's implausible that we can only notice that our vision is (or has become) blurred when we introspect: plausibly, one can become aware of one's vision being blurry even when one is focused on external objects. One can, for example, squint and notice the resulting blurriness while remaining fully focused on a computer screen, and thus arguably not introspecting. While looking at a beautiful Paris scenery, I may, to take another example, suddenly notice that my vision is somewhat blurrier than usual, perhaps due to fatigue (as I spent the day working on my laptop). While this observation may result in me turning attention away from the scenery to my visual states themselves, i.e. in introspecting, this turn of attention arguably need not happen (I may just continue looking at the scenery). More importantly, I wouldn't have had a reason to start introspecting if I hadn't become aware of my worsened eyesight while still focused on the scenery, i.e. while not introspecting. I conclude, then, that the sort of awareness of one's awareness Chalmers invokes is far from limited to introspection and can easily occur in ordinary awareness. Chalmers's argument, then, if successful, establishes that we are occasionally aware of inner awareness in ordinary experience, hence inner awareness is occasionally phenomenally manifest in ordinary

experience. This would rule out theses (3) and (4), endorsed by the HOTT, and thus challenge the mainstream HOTT, in addition to clearly challenging Coleman's HOTT.¹³

In my view, however, Chalmers's critique, when applied to the HOTT, can be resisted. Note that, in the shift from clear to blurred vision, we plausibly notice a change in the manner or quality of visual awareness. Can this be the inner awareness that, according to the HOTT, makes us aware of sensory states and is normally unconscious? Here one may suggest – and this is important – that HOT theorists can account for the phenomenology of visual awareness that shifts from clear to blurred in terms of the first-order states, perhaps in combination with the way they are represented to us, and that this account is compatible with the inner-awareness-constituting HOTs not being ordinarily phenomenally present to us. It is the sensory state, after all, that, according to the HOTT, makes us aware of external properties. Instantiating this sensory state can then be characterized as being in a state of *outer awareness* (Kriegel 2009), awareness of worldly or bodily properties. Since the first-order state is sensory, it represents these properties qualitatively (Rosenthal, 2005, p. 119) and one would expect that this qualitative aspect should reflect a degree of clarity and blurriness. If the degree of clarity and blurriness is 'built into' the first-order sensory state, the shift from clear to blurred vision is a change from a clarity-involving sensory state to a blurriness-involving sensory state: Their difference, after all, clearly is qualitative. The HOT theorists, moreover, predict that we can become aware of this change if the sensory states are conscious while this *inner* awareness of the change is itself unconscious. Its non-conscious nature is, however, compatible with outer awareness – shifting from clear to blurred – being conscious, and appearing in phenomenology, hence accounting for our awareness of our vision becoming blurred.

This response fits well with Coleman's (2015) HOTT, according to which HOTs play no role in determining our phenomenology apart from selecting the first-order qualities that appear in consciousness. According to Rosenthal, on the other hand, the concepts employed in one's HOTs impact one's phenomenology: a wine connoisseur will – thanks to her richer conceptual repertoire – have a richer phenomenology than a first-time drinker, despite instantiating the same types of sensory states (Rosenthal 2002). Rosenthal may, then, argue that our visual

¹³ Even if we granted that the awareness of blurred visual awareness only occurs in introspection, the mainstream HOTT would have a hard time addressing it *by invoking its account of introspection*. Recall that when our awareness gets blurred, the phenomenological change is broadly *sensory*. The mainstream HOTT, however, construes introspection as awareness of HOTs, which, as Rosenthal (e.g. 2002) emphasizes, precisely do not have a sensory nature. It is unclear, therefore, that the mainstream HOTT's construal of introspection can plausibly accommodate blurriness cases, even if they only occur in introspection. Still, as I shall explain, there is a natural, non-introspective, account of the blurriness case the theory can provide.

awareness is blurred because it is represented by HOTs as representing the world blurrily, or with poor resolution. Here HOTs play a more significant role in determining phenomenology than according to Coleman's approach. Still, this role of inner-awareness-constituting HOTs is compatible with their not appearing in phenomenology since what determines phenomenology, according to this approach, is the sensory states that HOTs represent one to be in. What phenomenologically appears to us, then, is the content of the HOTs, i.e. *what they are intentionally about*, not the HOTs themselves, considered as vehicles.

I believe, then, that Chalmers's critique doesn't succeed, as HOT theorists can hold that in the blurred vision cases, it is a change concerning outer awareness, or concerning what outer awareness is represented to be like, that accounts for the phenomenal change we're aware of. Crucially, HOT theorists can accept that we're aware of outer awareness, denying merely that we're ordinarily aware of inner awareness, as captured by theses (3) and (4).

5

Another argument for the phenomenal-inner-awareness thesis (2) has been suggested by Michelle Montague. Montague (2016) defends a neo-Brentanian conception, according to which inner awareness – called 'awareness of awareness' or simply 'AOA' by Montague – is conscious and phenomenally present for us *nebenbei*, or 'by the way'. She writes:

Brentano's idea here, which I endorse, is that AOA is not only an awareness of the awareness [presentation] of the sound, but of the entire conscious episode, which includes AOA itself. This self-revelatory nature of consciousness allows us to catch a glimpse of AOA [...] (Montague 2017a, p. 378).

Here inner awareness is portrayed as phenomenally present in non-introspective experience, as (2) requires, hence we can 'catch a glimpse' of it. Its phenomenal presence is for Montague captured by the idea that conscious experience is self-revelatory, revealing its nature to us.

Crucially, according to Montague (2016), the existence of conscious inner awareness is the best explanation of a feature of experience she calls *P.F. Strawson's datum*. Strawson (1979/2002, p. 98) describes this feature as follows:

[I]t seems to me as certain as anything can be that [...] we distinguish, naturally and unreflectively, between our seeings and hearings and feelings—our perceivings—of objects and the objects we see and hear and feel [...].

Our distinguishing between perceivings, and perceived objects is thus not a matter of reflection, but rather a part of mature visual experience for Strawson. This *datum* is, Montague suggests, best accommodated if we posit conscious inner awareness. In particular, the datum is naturally explained, according to Montague, by the fact that in experience, apart from being aware of worldly features, we are also aware of the experience itself and that we are aware of experience as what it is, due to its self-revelatory nature (Montague 2017b, p. 2). It is thanks to conscious inner awareness, then, that we are aware of experience as what it is and thus as distinct from the objects we experience, which allows us to make the natural distinction between our perceivings and the perceived objects, required by Strawson (Montague 2016, p. 77).

To demonstrate the significance of conscious inner awareness, Montague contrasts her view with the *strong transparency thesis* (Kind 2003), which, she explains, conflicts with the existence of conscious inner awareness (Montague 2016, p. 72). This thesis states that

(5) it is impossible to become aware of our perceptual experience or its (intrinsic) features.

Here experience is construed as a transparent medium that makes us aware of external features, but never of itself. Montague correctly observes, I believe, that if (5) is true, it's unclear how we could (unreflectively) make the distinction between our perceivings and the objects perceived, required by Strawson's datum, since it is unclear how we could then be aware of our perceivings as perceivings. Transparency, Montague (2016, p. 77) argues, should then be rejected. Conscious inner awareness, on the other hand, looks like a prime candidate to account for Strawson's datum, she concludes.

Here someone could object that *non-conscious* inner awareness could make us aware of experience and help us account for Strawson's datum equally well. In reply, Montague seems to hold that only if inner awareness is conscious, experience is truly self-revealing: since inner awareness is what (partially) *constitutes* experience, if inner awareness were unconscious, then experience wouldn't be self-revealing. Only if inner awareness is conscious, can we be aware, according to Montague, of experience as what it is, i.e. as experience, which then allows us to make, naturally and unreflectively, the distinction required by Strawson. Only conscious inner awareness can, then, play the required explanatory role with respect to Strawson's datum. If, on the other hand, inner awareness is ordinarily unconscious, as according to the HOTT, then it only makes us aware of its *qualitative contents*, but *not of itself*. This arguably means that, if inner awareness is unconscious, we are not aware of experience as what it is, i.e. as *awareness*

of mental contents. Insofar as the explanation of Strawson's datum requires that we are aware of experience as experience, Montague, I think, rightly invokes *conscious inner awareness*.

Montague's argument can be summarized as follows:

- a) We naturally and unreflectively distinguish between our perceivings, and the things we perceive (*Strawson's datum*).
- b) This fact is best explained by the fact that we are constitutively aware of our experience as what it is.
- c) We are constitutively aware of experience as what it is (*conscious inner awareness*).

6

Can proponents of the non-conscious-inner-awareness view resist this abductive argument? Since Strawson's datum, expressed in (a), looks plausible and since conscious inner awareness, expressed in (c), is incompatible with the non-conscious-inner-awareness view, the most promising line of resistance is to question step (b). I shall now examine this line of resistance. Recall first why Strawson's datum challenges the strong transparency thesis (5). If (5) is true, all we seem to be aware of in visual experience are external properties; our experience, or perceivings, don't enter phenomenology. As a result, it becomes mysterious how the datum could be accommodated (Montague 2016, pp. 77–84). It is, however, unclear that HOT theorists are committed to strong transparency (henceforth only 'transparency'). To see this, recall that while the case of blurred vision (Chalmers 2013) plausibly rules out transparency (see Smith 2008), it can be accommodated, as explained in section 4, by the HOTT. The moral there was that the case can be accounted for in terms of *unconscious inner awareness of our states of outer awareness*, which means that HOT theorists can allow that phenomenology – in addition to apparent external properties – also reflects how we are sensorily aware of these properties: for example, the fact that this awareness is clear or blurred. This can be expressed as the following *phenomenal-outer-awareness thesis*:

- (6) Our outer (e.g. visual) awareness phenomenally contributes to ordinary phenomenology.

(6) rules out the view that the only properties we are aware of in consciousness are external properties, which is associated with the transparency thesis. Instead, if (6) is plausible, outer awareness is not (always) transparent.

The suggestion that HOT theorists can allow that *outer* awareness isn't transparent, which I argued for in section 4, is consistent with their view that we are ordinarily unaware of the *inner* awareness that makes us aware of outer awareness, as expressed in the *non-conscious-inner-awareness* thesis (3). Allowing that outer awareness itself, and not only its objects, contributes to phenomenology is, then, consistent with inner awareness not appearing in phenomenology, as expressed in the *no-inner-awareness-phenomenology* thesis (4). The HOT theorists can then allow that outer awareness isn't transparent while consistently endorsing the following *inner-transparency* thesis:

- (7) Inner awareness isn't ordinarily phenomenally present, hence it's ordinarily transparent.

These considerations indicate that proponents of the non-conscious-inner-awareness view may be able to explain Strawson's datum after all. If, as (6) suggests, *the way we perceive* worldly objects – and not only sensible properties of these objects – is at least sometimes present in phenomenology and we are thus aware of it, then we are presumably also at least sometimes aware of the distinction between the perceivings and the perceived objects. The blurred vision case helps here: when our perceiving becomes blurred because of squinting, we don't normally think the perceived object has changed. This suggests that experiences like these, in which the phenomenological contribution of (outer) perceivings (as opposed to the contributions associated with the objects perceived) becomes salient, enable us to make the distinction between perceivings and perceived objects. To be clear, I don't believe we make this distinction on the *mere* basis of experiences of blurred vision. When we blink, our visual experience changes (or perhaps is disrupted) while we do not normally think that the objects changed, or that their existence was disrupted too (unless we enter a pseudo-Berkeleyan mode of thinking). Similarly, if one moves their head while looking at a computer screen, their visual perceivings will change, while they normally think that the screen, i.e. the object perceived, remained unchanged.

It seems to me that in having experiences like these we, naturally and unreflectively, make the distinction between our perceivings and the objects perceived, since such experiences (likely together with other perceptual experiences) taught us, during early-childhood practical encounters with the world, that perceivings can change (e.g. become blurred) without the objects perceived changing and, more generally, that perceivings are distinct from their objects. Crucially, since – as I explained in section 4 – HOT theorists can endorse the phenomenal outer

awareness thesis (6), they are able to account for such experiences. Their theory, after all, allows them to make sense of both the phenomenal features associated with the external objects presented by outer (sensory) awareness, and the phenomenal flavorings contributed by outer awareness itself: depending on the version of the HOTT, they will account for these either in terms of the first-order qualitative states (Coleman), or in terms of the first-order states in combination with the HOTs that represent them (Rosenthal). This means that they can argue that, in being conscious, we are aware of outer awareness in addition to being aware of various external properties, and in early practical encounters with the world we learn to distinguish between the two, so that distinguishing between them becomes natural and unreflective for us, mature subjects. If this suggestion is plausible, then, awareness of experience ‘as what it is’ is – *pace* Montague – not needed to account for Strawson’s datum, since awareness of outer awareness, which the HOT theorists can make sense of, can be invoked to account for the datum too.

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I conclude that proponents of the non-conscious-inner-awareness view can reject premise (b) of Montague’s argument as they can provide an account of Strawson’s datum that looks at least equally plausible as the one that appeals to conscious inner awareness.¹⁴ If my reasoning is plausible, then, Montague’s and Chalmers’s arguments fall short of establishing that inner awareness of sensory states is phenomenally present for one, which means that proponents of the non-conscious-inner-awareness view can reject the phenomenological objection.¹⁵ This

¹⁴ Montague (2016) also provides another argument for conscious inner awareness, according to which this posit best explains our attributions of properties in visual experiences. The rough idea here is that in virtue of our being consciously aware of various properties of our experience, e.g. phenomenal colours, we attribute corresponding objective properties (that resemble these due to having the same intrinsic nature) to external objects, e.g. colours as seen. In reply, a very similar way of attributing sensory properties to external objects seems to be also available to the proponents of the HOTT, who hold that we are (unconsciously) aware of sensory contents of experience (even though we are not strictly aware of experience) and who could allow that in virtue of this awareness we attribute corresponding sensory properties to external objects. Proponents of the HOTT thus arguably can explain such property attributions at least equally well. Proper discussion of this nuanced argument will have to wait for another occasion.

¹⁵ It could be suggested that there is another way for the HOT theorist to resist the objection. Recall that Rosenthal (e.g. 2002) holds that HOTs make one aware of *one’s* being in mental states. One could think that this renders one’s self, i.e. the subject of the conscious state, constantly phenomenally present for one, in addition to the sensory state’s being phenomenally present. One could then resist the phenomenological objection by suggesting that its proponents simply misdescribe this phenomenology of the self as the phenomenology of inner awareness. This proposal, if successful, would support my main claim that the phenomenological objection is unpersuasive. I don’t think this proposal withstands scrutiny, however. While Rosenthal thinks HOTs make one aware of the self, he would reject, I believe, the suggestion that we have any phenomenology associated with the self when we’re aware of it (as opposed to the phenomenology associated with the sensory states themselves). To see this, recall that Rosenthal holds that only conscious *sensory* states involve “what-it’s -likeness” (see

removes a crucial obstacle for their claim that inner awareness need not be an object of inner awareness and can thus exist unconsciously, which means that at least some mental states need not be objects of inner awareness. Brentano's suggestion that being an object of inner awareness is a mark of the mental then looks unpromising in the end.

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Rosenthal 2002, p. 412). His reasoning seems to be that only sensory (and not, e.g., purely intentional) states instantiate *qualitative properties*, which is why when these states are targeted by HOTs the resulting consciousness involves what-it's-likeness. Non-sensory mental entities, such as thoughts, or, crucially, the self, conceived as a 'raw bearer' of mental states (see Rosenthal 2005, p. 342), arguably lack any qualitative properties, since these are always associated with a distinct sensory modality (Rosenthal 2004, p. 163). Being non-qualitative, they do not appear in our overall phenomenology, or what-it's-likeness, Rosenthal would arguably say. This line of resistance to the phenomenological objection thus looks unpromising. Even if it could be made to work, it is crucially unavailable to Coleman who denies that the HOTs, construed as quotational frames, involve any reference to the self (see e.g. Coleman 2015).

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