

Respecting Appearances: a Phenomenological Approach to Consciousness

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1. The Call for Clarification

The explanation of consciousness is often seen as one of our greatest intellectual challenges. If so, we surely need to start from an adequate conception of just what is to be explained. And since the right way to understand talk about consciousness is notoriously unclear and disputed, this is no simple matter. This call for clarity arises not just from an interest in seeing consciousness explained, but from the desire to understand its place in our *knowledge* and in our *values*. So potentially much is at stake. This task of clarification is a central concern of phenomenology as I interpret it here.

Carrying out this task in a way that will help us address such topics requires we enter into basic controversies about how consciousness applies to sense experience and thought. For suppose we purport to clarify the “phenomenal” sense of ‘consciousness’ by saying that it has to do only with the “qualities” of our sensations. This will have consequences for how we think consciousness figures in our knowledge. For it will then be hard to see how sense experience (or the phenomenal aspect of it at least) could be anything more than a *cause* of our judgments about what we find around us; it will seem unable to *legitimize* them, and to “ground” knowledge in that sense. Against this, we might argue that sensory consciousness (the kind we adult humans have

anyway) is *not* mere sensation, but has “conceptual content” (and only because of this can legitimize belief). (This roughly, is McDowell’s (1994) argument against Davidson.) But this conflicts also with the view that, while experience indeed has a “representational” or “intentional” character (lacking in mere sensation), this is “non-conceptual” in a way that distinguishes sensing from thinking.¹ Such disputes bear not just on how to understand perceptual knowledge, but on how we think consciousness may be explained. For some (e.g., Dretske (1995) and Tye (1995, 2000)) see a specifically sensory form of representation as the key to a reductive naturalistic explanation of consciousness. And that theoretical strategy clashes not only with the McDowellian idea that perceptual experience is conceptually “permeated,” but with the view of others (such as myself (Siewert 2011b)) who argue that conceptual thought is phenomenally conscious.

These complicated disagreements about the richness and reach of consciousness gain further significance when we consider the question of how we know our own minds. Given what we should say about sensory experience and thought, can we somehow transpose an account of perceptual knowledge of our bodies and surroundings into an account of how we know our own minds? Should we posit an “inner” sense that provides us with such knowledge? And would this perhaps also yield a theory of consciousness (as advocated in Armstrong (1968), Carruthers (2000, 2004), Lycan (2004))? On the other hand, if inner sense is rejected—as in Dretske (1995), Shoemaker (1994), Siewert (1998, 2011c), and Tye (2000))—what, if anything, can we make of the notion of

¹ For debates on “nonconceptual content,” see Gunther (2002)

introspection and the role of consciousness in it? Finally, how should we best contrast such self-knowledge with—and relate it to—our knowledge of *others* and theirs of us? The view we take of the content of experience will affect our conception of how we experience other people and how this relates to our thoughts about them—and thus will affect our answer to “other minds” issues as well.

Just how we sort through all this will also impinge on questions about *value*. How does our conception of consciousness and its extent allow us to make sense of the ethical concern we have for the character of our own and others’ conscious experience?² How does this affect our understanding of the role of empathy in moral life? And how, if at all, might our accounts of consciousness illuminate aesthetic experience, and the role of art in extending and shaping the range of experience we recognize? To answer such questions we need to better understand how to situate consciousness with respect to imagination, emotion, and desire.

These issues demand careful examination of the distinctions we need. And this calls for ways of thinking that are recognizably philosophical. In saying this, I don’t intend to deny the pertinence of experimental research in psychology. I only want to say that no small part of the challenge before us concerns how best to describe and coherently organize what is already available to us prior to any new experiments and clinical studies—including what is available to us from the critical examination of personal experience. To take this seriously, we needn’t

² In Siewert (1998: Chapter 9), I argue that consciousness in the phenomenal sense is strongly intrinsically valuable.

purport to engage in a *purely* “a priori” inquiry—whatever that might mean. We do need to keep an open mind about the value of conceptual clarification and self-examination; to belittle this or deny its importance out of hand *would* be “a prioristic” in a deservedly pejorative sense.

Here I will summarize a few aspects of my efforts to provide the philosophy I say is called for, focusing mainly on just three foundational concerns. These are: first, the character of a phenomenological approach; second, its use to clarify the notion of phenomenal consciousness (or “phenomenality”); and finally, its application to questions about a specifically *sensory* phenomenality and its “intentionality” or “object-directedness.” Towards the end, however, I will briefly indicate some ways these ideas may be extended to engage a portion of the large issues to which I’ve alluded.

2. Phenomenology in What Sense?

In what sense is my approach phenomenological? Students of that part of the “phenomenological tradition” that stretches from Brentano through Merleau-Ponty will see its influence in what I say. I am glad to acknowledge that influence, and do not claim any great originality for my approach or results. But determining just where my views coincide or conflict with those of classical phenomenologists would take me into involved exegetical and historical questions I must largely set aside here (save for a few remarks in footnotes and in my conclusion), so that I can focus on the issues themselves.³ So let me start by briefly stating just what I

³ More detail about how I view the relationship of classical phenomenology and analytic philosophy of mind can be found in Siewert (2011e).

take phenomenology to be. And that is this: *a sustained and unified effort to clarify our understanding of philosophically or theoretically relevant distinctions, with recourse to an underived and critical use of first-person reflection.*

To clarify your understanding of distinctions is to explain what you mean by a term or phrase. To do this you may offer positive examples—real and hypothetical—of what you are talking about, and contrast these with negative examples—cases where you take it the expression does or would not apply. This clarification can, but needn't always, also involve statements of strongly necessary, or sufficient, or necessary-and-sufficient conditions. Does this then purport to be an analysis of “our” concepts? The understanding phenomenology seeks is, of course, rooted in ordinary, shareable applications of language that precede it. However, it does not primarily aim simply to reflect or analyze that prior usage, but to use it as a starting point to *create* an articulate understanding of terms that will serve us well in addressing questions that arise regarding what we had already been speaking of. And this may well involve drawing and sharpening distinctions that were not recognized before. Thus phenomenological clarification is not measured by strict faithfulness to some prior pattern of usage, or by how well it analyzes concepts previously in currency, but by the extent to which it can generate an understanding that has relevance for philosophical or theoretical issues—including those mentioned above.

I've said phenomenology involves the use of “first-person reflection.” That means: it asks you to clarify your understanding by relying on a way of judging about your own attitudes, thought and experience—and a type of warrant in so

judging—distinctive of the *first-person* case, in consideration of real and hypothetical cases. This use is *critical* insofar as it regards such judgments as fallible but correctible through an indefinitely renewable process of making them coherent and explicit by questioning that draws out implications and exposes neglected distinctions. This proceeds on the basis of a warranted if defeasible presumption that one understands the terms in which one expresses the first-person judgments in question, which entails that one enjoys some competence in thus using them to state what is so. Phenomenology accordingly makes what I call an “underived” use of first-person reflection. It does not assume that the warrant we have for first-person claims about experience is limited to what they can derive from the fact that granting them some sort of accuracy best explains “third-person” observational data acquired *without* reliance on first-person reflection. I have no right to assume the warrant I have for speaking of my own experience is entirely derived from that which others would have for speaking of me.

Elsewhere (Siewert 2007a, 2007b, 2011a) I have defended my version of phenomenology as relatively theoretically neutral in methodologically desirable ways. Though I cannot now recapitulate those arguments, I should say this about limiting initial presuppositions. I ask us not only to be on guard against latent behaviorist epistemology, but to beware of overconfidence in our grasp of overworked terms of art such as “qualia,” “representation,” “intentionality,” and “content” so often used to define the controversies in philosophy of mind. That is not to say we can find—by contrast to such vocabulary—one that is purely

presuppositionless, fit to serve as our special “phenomenological language.” But we can try to start relatively close to the ground, by rooting our discussion in the use of language with which we need to assume some competence, if we are to develop any credible understanding of the sort of jargon just mentioned. Accordingly, I seek to anchor my phenomenology in the use of homely terms such as ‘experience,’ ‘look,’ and ‘feel.’

I have not identified phenomenology by reference to a special subject matter, and have left open just how we are to understand the “first-person reflection” on which it relies. But that is as it initially should be; phenomenology cannot *start* with a positive account of its domain and rational basis, since these are issues it has to investigate. However, in anticipation I might say that phenomenology as I pursue it leads to a rich and broad conception of what we might call the “field of appearances.” And for me phenomenology is ultimately (as its etymology suggests) a rational account “respecting” appearances in the sense that it is *about* them. But I also want my phenomenology to “respect” these appearances in another sense: to see them as worthy of careful attention in their own right, and not just as a source of intellectual anxiety we must still, or as mere surface to be sloughed off on the way to the “really real.”

3. A Phenomenological Conception of Consciousness

I propose three distinct but mutually supportive ways of introducing the notion of phenomenal consciousness, designed to help us fairly address the issues in which it figures, drawing on (and hopefully improving on) suggestions

already in circulation. Taken together, they make up my basic phenomenological conception of consciousness. So as to start from what is most likely to be common ground, I will focus on sensory cases.

I begin with what I call *the subjective experience conception*. One sometimes hears it said (e.g., in Block 2002) that anything that is *an experience* is conscious in the phenomenal sense. But we need to say more to specify the sense of ‘experience’ at issue. Consider: those who study the nervous systems of sea slugs speak of these creatures “learning from experience.” And we may find ourselves saying that a sea slug “experiences” an electric shock. Or even that, as a result, it “experiences” a chemical change in its nervous system. And we might say what it thus experiences are its experiences. There does seem to be some sense in which an animal like the sea slug can, fairly uncontroversially, be said to have “experience.” But if this is uncontroversial, it seems that’s only because we’re saying no more than that something *happens* to it that *affects* it in some way. An experience is just something it has “been through” or undergone. And that is *not* all I understand by the notion of experience invoked in relation to (phenomenal) consciousness.

What *do* I understand by this? Notice there is a sense in which you can say you feel *pain*, an *itch*, or *pleasure*—and consider *what is felt* in each case to be none other than *the very feeling of it*. The pain you feel in your hand just *is* feeling pain, as the itch you feel in your back is a feeling, and the pleasure you feel holding a loved one in your arms is: none other than this very feeling of pleasure. Then, in each case, you *feel a feeling*—in the “internal accusative”

sense in which you may also be said to “dance a dance.” At least you can so interpret true statements about what you feel. Furthermore, in these very cases you can also speak of *how a feeling feels to you*, and of *differences* in how feelings feel to you: how the pain feels to you differs from how the itch feels to you, how one pain or itch feels to you differs from how another does, and so on.

Now let us take such cases (in which one *feels a feeling*) to be *species* of the broader class: *experiencing an experience*. And let us now take *how feelings feel to you* to be species of *how you experience experiences*. We thus begin to recognize the sense of ‘experience’ I wish to make evident. In this sense your experience *coincides* with your experiencing it (in the way the feeling felt coincides with feeling it), and an experience differs from others with respect to *how it is experienced by you* (as the feelings you feel differ with respect to *how they feel to you*).

The next step is to see how the relevant sense of ‘experience’ can extend well beyond the cases just invoked (where it is natural to speak of “feelings” and of “how they feel”). So, for example, there is a sense in which, normally, when you see something somehow colored and shaped, its color and shape *look* somehow to you. Now we don’t normally speak of *looking* as a kind of *feeling*, nor do we say there is a way something’s looking red *feels* to us. But in the same sense in which you experience your feelings, you can *experience* something’s looking to you as it does; in that sense *you experience its visual appearance*. Its looking to you as it does is thus an experience in the coincident sense. Further, you may speak of *differences* in *how you experience* something’s looking to you

as it does. So, for example, something may look blue and circular to you. And how you experience its looking blue and circular to you may change—say, as lighting, orientation, and focus of attention alter. We may also say, when this happens, *how* it looks colored and shaped to you changes, as long as we recognize that this does not entail that something then *appears to you to change shape or color*. In fact, during this change in how you experience the appearance of a certain shape and color, it may nonetheless *appear or look the same* in shape and color.

We will come back to this point (about phenomenal constancy) in connection with the “objectuality” of sensory appearance. For the moment the crucial point is just this. In the same (internal accusative) sense in which you may experience a feeling, you may also experience something’s looking to you somehow colored and shaped. And just as we may speak of differences in *how your feeling feels* to you, so we may speak of differences in *how you experience something’s looking blue and circular* to you. And we may take these latter also to determine differences in how something looks to you. But all this is compatible with saying: what looks blue and circular to you is not the *experience*, the *visual appearance* of color and shape. For even as the experience *changes*, what looks blue and circular may also both *look* and *be constant* in color and shape.⁴

Now return to our friend the sea slug. We can see that the concept of experience I have explained is not the same as that which unquestionably

⁴ My conception of the coincident sense of ‘experience,’ and of phenomenal constancy as the preferred starting point for clarifying the idea that sense experience is intentional (hence my notion of “objectual sensing” to be discussed below) are heavily indebted to my reading of Husserl (2001: Investigation V, Chapters 1 and 2).

applies to this creature—where to experience something is merely to be affected by it. If in that sense, we can speak of *how the slug experienced the shock*, this would most plausibly mean: *how the shock affected the slug* (what it caused). But since here “experiencing the shock” amounts to *being affected by* what is experienced (the shock), the experiencing does not *coincide* with the experience, as required by the phenomenal sense. Similar remarks would apply if we speak of the change to the slug’s nervous system as something it “experiences.” None of this, of course, is meant to assert or deny phenomenally conscious experience to the slug. That is not the issue. The point is just to distinguish the *phenomenal* sense of ‘experience’ from another, which is without question applicable to slug—a sense in which to “experience” something is just to be affected by it.⁵

I can now sum up my first way into the notion of phenomenality. A state of S is *phenomenally conscious* just in case it is an experience S experiences in the *coincident* sense, and differs from other experiences with respect to *how it is thus experienced*. Differences in how experiences are experienced are differences in their *phenomenal character*. And to experience experiences differing in phenomenal character is to have different *phenomenal features*. To this I would add, not just the aforementioned looking and feeling, but *sensory appearances generally*. Instances of something’s *sounding, tasting, smelling*, or (tactually) *feeling* somehow to someone are phenomenal—provided they are experienced in this internal accusative sense. Whether experiences are *all* sensory in nature we leave undecided for now. This I call the “subjective experience” conception of phenomenality, since it utilizes a conception of experience on which this is

⁵ I wish to thank Anna Christina Soy Ribeiro and Dan Zahavi for discussion on these points.

something that coincides with the subject's experience of it, and differs insofar as the subject experiences it differently.

Now let's look at the second conception of phenomenality—what I'll call the *subjective contrast* conception. This aims to *make consciousness conspicuous by its absence*. We appeal to first-person reflection on real and hypothetical cases to contrast situations in which certain types of phenomenal states occur from otherwise similar situations in which they are absent. My point of departure is an interpretation of the condition known as “blindsight.” Subjects suffering damage to the visual cortex deny seeing types of visual stimuli in circumstances where—pre-trauma—they would have affirmed it. All the same, some of them can still successfully identify the stimulus type, when “forced” to select from a list of set options. One way to interpret this: to say that such subjects have “blindsight” is to say that in *one* sense they *do see* the relevant stimulus, and in *another* they are *blind* to it (and their denials of seeing it are correct). We can interpret talk of an object *looking* somehow to someone so as to make sense of this. That is, we can grasp a specifically visual sense of ‘look’ in which no object *looks* any way at all to you in a lightless room, while we can interpret ‘see’ in such a way that you cannot be rightly said to see something that *looks* to you no way at all. Then we may further interpret this use of ‘look’ and ‘see’ so as to say that the blindsighter correctly denies *seeing* the stimulus; it doesn't *look* anyway to her. Nonetheless, she accurately reports on it because of the activity it triggers in what's left of her visual system. And that too we may call a kind of “seeing.”

It would be enough for my purposes if this were merely an *intelligible hypothetical* case. But it is reasonable to believe that *actual* cases of blindsight are as I've described. However, we may refine our understanding by going on to consider forms of blindsight that are apparently merely hypothetical. We may conceive of the blindsighter being able to make “blind” visual discriminatory judgments regarding at least some restricted range of stimulus types, not just in response to “forced choices,” but spontaneously, unprompted by some menu of options. Accordingly, we may conceive of a form of blindsight in which one thus discriminates shapes, position, orientation and movement of optically presented figures with no less accuracy and acuity than one would in cases where the stimuli *do* look somehow to the subject, though only very *blurrily*—in a way that would put one well within the territory of so-called “legal blindness.”⁶

Further refinements are possible. But what I've said so far is enough to convey the basic strategy. Imagine being a blindsight subject as described, and contrast the case (a) where the stimulus looks to you no way at all, though you still spontaneously judge it to be there when it stimulates your visual receptors, with (b) the case where it does look to you somehow—albeit quite blurrily—so as to afford at best very low acuity discriminations. Now we say: the sense of ‘look’ that allows you to intelligibly contrast (a) and (b) is a sense in which something’s looking somehow to you is for it to *phenomenally* visually appear somehow to you. And its appearing to you this way constitutes a *phenomenally conscious* state. If adoption of a theory of mind would rationally commit you to denying the

⁶ This is the sort of case I describe (Siewert (1998: Chapter 3) as “spontaneous amblyopic blindsight.” It corresponds to what Block (2002) calls “superblindsight.” Our expositions differ somewhat in their details, however, and mine does not utilize a contrast with what Block calls “access consciousness.”

intelligibility of the sort of scenario just described—if it implied that once you rightly understood whatever consciousness we possess, you should find blindsight as (purportedly) just conceived ultimately *incoherent*—then that theory implicitly denies the reality of phenomenal consciousness.

Thus, on this “subjective contrast” conception: phenomenality is that feature exemplified in cases of something’s *looking* somehow to you, as it would not be in blindsight as just conceived—cases whose very reality would be denied in denying intelligibility of such blindsight. Such instances of its looking somehow to you are, necessarily, *phenomenally conscious visual states*. Building on this, we may define ‘phenomenal *character*’ as that subjectively discernible respect in which phenomenally conscious states, and *only* phenomenally conscious states may differ. Finally, for subjects to have different phenomenal *features* is for them to have states differing in phenomenal character.⁷

I intend this “subjective contrast” conception to converge with the first “subjective experience” conception. For what we are supposing the blindsighter to lack visually is a certain type of *experience* that is somehow *experienced by her* in the *coincident* sense: she does not experience a visual appearance of the stimulus. We may well also theorize that there are *some* visual, perhaps representational states mediating stimulus and discriminatory response in blindsight judgment. But then we should want to recognize that the visual states postulated would not themselves be *experienced by the subject* in a sense in which her *experiencing* them would *coincide* with states experienced.

⁷ This is roughly the conception of consciousness I articulate in Siewert (1998: Chapter 3).

Now to introduce the third, “what it’s like” or “subjective knowledge” conception of phenomenality. Recall that the term ‘experience’ was liable to be construed in away that did not capture what we were after. Similarly, while we may wish to say (with Block (2002)) that what makes a state phenomenal is that there is “something it’s like” to be in it, we must recognize that we can speak of there being something it’s like for someone to be in a state, even where its phenomenality cannot be assumed. For example, one may know or be curious about “what it’s like” for someone to be over seven feet tall, or have a conjoined twin, or walk on the moon. On the face of it, the “something it’s like” criterion of phenomenality embraces too much for it to ground our understanding of what consciousness, specifically, is supposed to be.

But as before, a few refinements will meet the difficulty. Consider how there may be “something it’s like” for one to have certain features only *non-essentially* or in a manner that is *derivative* from what it’s like for one to have other features. This is relevant to helping us to sharpen the notion of phenomenality, inasmuch as those features that, by contrast, have this status (of there being “something it’s like” for one to have them) *essentially and non-derivatively* will be the bona-fide *phenomenal* features—those whose instances constitute phenomenally conscious states.

To see how this would work, consider what it’s like to walk on the moon. Plausibly, there is something it’s like to walk on the moon, only because there is (for instance) a way it *feels* to one to walk on the moon (and there is something *that* is like for one). But then there will be something it’s like to walk on the moon

only accidentally or non-essentially, if lunar walking could possibly occur *without the feeling* (or other—e.g., visual—experiences). Moreover, suppose (for the sake of argument) that no lunar walking could occur without being *felt*. There might still only *derivatively* be something it's like for one to walk on the moon.

Let me explain this last point. What it's like to have some feature F “entirely derives from” what it's like to have some other feature just when one could *know* what it's like to have F if and only if one knew what it's like to have some *other* (maybe highly complex) feature G, to which having F is inessential—and other necessary conditions obtained, which didn't consist in knowledge of what it was like to have some feature. Plausibly, what it's like to moon walk is derivative in this sense. For one could know what that was like, just by knowing (e.g.) how it *felt* (plus knowing things like: that's the way it feels to walk on the moon). And it's reasonable to suppose one could (e.g.) *feel* that way without actually walking on the moon (some kind of virtual moonwalking, or walking on a planet similar to our moon might do).

By contrast, there is *essentially and non-derivatively* something that it's like to *feel* the way the moon walkers feel. At least we will think so, if we think that one couldn't possibly feel this way, when there was just *nothing* that was like for one, and we can identify no further feature, to which feeling this way is inessential, such that what it was like feel to this way derived entirely from the presence of *that* feature.

So far my exposition of this “what it's like” conception has relied on this locution without attempting to explain it in other terms. But we can say something

more about the relevant interpretation of this handy if puzzling phrase. To begin: there is something it's like to have some feature just when that feature is of a kind suited for one to claim or desire *knowledge* of what it's like to have it. And, I propose, knowledge of what it's like for one to have a feature is a knowledge of *what feature it is*, of a kind that requires either *having that feature oneself* or else *being able to imagine having it*. In that sense, it is a kind of knowledge whose possession demands that—as Nagel (1974) suggests—we “take up the subject’s point of view.” It is then, a “subjective knowledge” of the feature in question. This is the sort of knowledge we want when we express a curiosity not only (for instance) about how some unfamiliar food tastes or color looks, but when we wonder what it's like for someone to undergo a religious conversion, be falsely condemned to death, play virtuosic jazz saxophone, or grow up in a remote Amazonian tribe. The knowledge longed for (maybe futilely) is, I want to add, “*non-theoretical*” in this sense: here knowledge of *what the feature in question is* (e.g., knowing what it is to be converted) does not require that one can give a theoretically satisfying *account or explanation* of what that feature consists in.

So, by this criterion, there can indeed be “something that it's like” to have all kinds of features—phenomenal and non-phenomenal alike. But there is something it's like to have a non-phenomenal feature only when it's appropriately associated with some phenomenal feature, that is, with *some feature essentially and non-derivatively suited for one to claim or desire a non-theoretical subjective knowledge regarding what feature it is*. This then I offer as the “subjective knowledge” (or “what it's like”) conception of phenomenality. A phenomenally

conscious state—an experience—is just an instance of a phenomenal feature, so understood. And we may say: different phenomenal features differ phenomenally (their instances differ in phenomenal character), just when they differ in some way such that it's suitable for one to claim or desire a subjective, non-theoretical knowledge of what that difference is. I believe this conception coordinates well with the previous two. Phenomenal differences, understood as differences in “what it's like” (as just interpreted), correspond to differences in *how an experience is experienced by a subject* in the coincident sense. And as for the “subjective contrast” conception: whatever “visual states” may mediate the blindsighter's retinal stimulation and her discriminatory judgment, there is nothing it is *essentially non-derivatively* like for her to be in just *those* states—thus they are not phenomenal. But there is, essentially and nonderivatively, something it's like for something to look chartreuse to you, for example.

The conception of phenomenality I have just summarized combines three ways of getting at phenomenal consciousness (*subjective experience*, *subjective contrast*, and *subjective (“what it's like”) knowledge*), elaborating on each of these to yield distinct but mutually reinforcing accounts. The merit I claim for this threefold conception is that it coherently unifies and refines different, prominent, intuitively appealing ways of identifying the topic—phenomenal consciousness—in a manner that can prepare us to address the controversies this arouses without making needless assumptions about their correct resolution.

Let me say a little to underscore this claim that I desirably avoid certain prejudicial assumptions. First, talk of “experiencing an experience” may suggest

to some that, in being experienced, the experience is itself “represented”—or maybe “self-representing.” But we have not taken this step. So far all we are saying is that the way you experience your experience simply *is* its phenomenal character. We have as yet given no reason to think any inner representation of the experience is involved. Neither the subjective experience conception of phenomenality—nor I would add, the subjective contrast and subjective knowledge conceptions—by themselves take sides for or against “self-representational,” “higher-order” or “inner sense” theories of phenomenal consciousness.

Notice too that this initial conception leaves open questions about the *range* of phenomenal differences—whether they somehow incorporate differences in a subject’s conceptual understanding, and whether they straddle some distinction between sense experience and conceptual thought, and just how they relate to the notion of intentional or representational “content” generally. We have appealed to examples of sensory appearance to fix the sense of ‘experience’ we’re after. But this does not immediately tell us whether phenomenal character is purely a matter of “sensory qualia,” or whether it is “intentional” or “representational,” and if so whether it is “conceptual” or “non-conceptual.” Nor does it preclude believing that we also *experience* our own conceptual thought—and not merely sensory appearances and imagery—and that differences in how we experience our own thinking are inseparable from the exercise of our conceptual abilities. Finally, notice that, while I speak here of “subjective experience,” nothing in this conception implies that experience is

something entirely “internal” to the subject, exclusive of anything in the “external world.” For all that has been said so far, experiences may or may not be entirely “in the head,” and it may or may not be that environmental entities are constituents of experience. Subjective experiences are experiences “in the subject.” But equally, the experiencing subject may essentially be “in the world”—an embodied agent at grips with its surroundings. Finally, note that nothing in this conception of consciousness directly forces our hand in disputes between physicalism and dualism. All this is (rightly) left open in our *initial* conception of phenomenality.

4. Sensory Appearance and Intentionality.

Of course the relative neutrality of this threefold conception of consciousness will be methodologically beneficial, only if it helps us to justify answers to at least some of the questions initially left in suspense. So I now want to indicate how to put it to work, first addressing questions about the “intentional” or “representational” status of conscious sense experience and how it is related to our “conceptual capacities.” This comes first, since I think we must deal with such questions in order to answer the others (e.g., regarding the phenomenality of conceptual thought, and the nature of introspection).

The discussion so far not only offers us a way of understanding what it means to say that sensory appearances are phenomenal, it also affords us a way of focusing specifically on *sensory* appearances and questions about their

phenomenal character. The “subjective contrast” conception of consciousness makes *certain types* of conscious states conspicuous by their absence in blindsight. And those types are specifically *sensory* forms of appearance—in this case *visual*—marked by a use of the term ‘look.’ Analogous considerations could yield a similar result for other commonly recognized modalities. (So, for example, we could think of auditory appearances as what would be missing in hypothetically considered “deaf-hearing”—in which you correctly judge as to the occurrence of sounds that didn’t *sound* anyhow to you.) And then, using the subjective experience and “what it’s like” conceptions of phenomenality, we could inquire about the phenomenal character of these sensory appearances by asking about *how they are experienced* (in the coincident sense) or (equivalently) about *what it’s like for us* (essentially and non-derivatively) for something to appear (look, sound, etc.) to us as it does.

Notice that this approach does not rely on introducing the notion of phenomenal sensory appearances (as have some) by *contrasting* the allegedly “phenomenal” or “phenomenological” use of “appears-“ talk (‘look,’ ‘sound,’ ‘taste,’ etc.) with some supposedly distinct “intentional” or “epistemic” use. On the conception I’ve offered, ‘That wine looks yellow to me’ and ‘It looks to me as if that wine is yellow,’ can both count as reports of “phenomenal” looks.⁸ It won’t automatically cancel this if we say that the second also attributes to me an intentional or representational state of some sort. And my notion of phenomenal sensory appearance does not tie its expression to specific *grammatical forms* (so that, e.g., ‘looks like,’ and ‘looks as if’ would not count as expressions for

⁸ Here I borrow an example from (and contrast my position with) Maund (2003).

phenomenal appearances). All this is desirable in how it leaves open at the outset questions about the relation among sensory appearances, intentionality, and the exercise of conceptual abilities. I maintain it leaves these open, because when I say that the 'looks' in 'It looks to me as if that wine is yellow' counts as a phenomenal 'looks,' I don't mean to assume that it can't be somehow analyzed into two aspects: one, a phenomenal "non-intentional, and purely qualitative" aspect, and one, a separable *non*-phenomenal and "intentional" or "representational" aspect (perhaps a dispositional *belief* of some sort). That sort of issue is yet to be resolved.

To help us resolve it, we need to get clearer about what I will call "objectual sensing." I have already hinted at this notion. Commonly, when something *looks* somehow shaped to you (in the phenomenal sense operative in consideration of blindsight), *how you experience* the appearance of its shape varies (*what it's like* for it to look to you as it does changes). And so in *some way* how it *looks* to you changes, even while *it constantly appears the same shape* (it looks the same in shape) throughout. Moreover, in these situations, the *way* the experience of the shape-appearance varies is what determines it to be, discernibly to first-person reflection, the appearance of a constant shape. By discerning *how you experience* the disk's looking to you as it does (a.k.a., *what it's like* for it to look to you as it does) when it rotates, or when you shift your attention, you can tell that throughout it *looks circular*—and does *not* appear to "morph." In first-person reflection, you can also—by contrast—discern what it's like for something to look to you as it does (how your experience of its

appearance alters) and thereby tell that sometimes something *does* appear to you to change shape; it does look differently shaped to you as you are looking at it. If we speak of this *looking*, this visual appearing, as a kind of *sensing*, we may redescribe this contrast as one between two conditions: (a) *how you sense* some feature of something changes (though you do *not sense it to change* in that respect), and (b) you do *sense something to change* in that very respect. Wherever there is such an (a) type constancy in *what* is sensed amid fluctuation in *how* it is sensed—where there is this form of *phenomenal sensory constancy*—I will speak of “*objectual sensing*.” Here, in sensing, something “stands firm,” “thrown against the sensory flux”—an “ob-ject”—so that *what is sensed* does not simply *coincide* with *how it is sensed*.

From a traditional empiricist perspective one might challenge my remarks, claiming that nothing ever really *phenomenally* looks constant in shape as orientation changes or attention wanders. It’s only that some special ways of appearing to morph give rise to separable judgments about some stable object behind them, which are hypothesized as causes of the “Protean” display—whereas *other* ways of appearing to morph do not.

In response I would first ask: just what *is* the difference in appearance that occasions the difference in judgment? The straightforward way to characterize it is this: in some cases something *appears or looks the same* (in shape or color) throughout the change in manner of appearance, while in others it *appears to change* (shape or color). But the “Protean” view cannot accept this. And if it offers no clear alternative way to describe the difference in appearance, we

should stick with the description that recognizes phenomenal constancy. Second, it is doubtful that the Protean view can account for the appearance of *depth*. For example, as the disk tilts towards the viewer, the Protean would have to say that the boundary appears to bend and stretch out horizontally in a certain way. But for the edge to appear in depth, and look, as it does, *now farther, now nearer*, it must appear rigid, unbending, as it approaches. If it apparently morphed by horizontally bending and stretching in the envisaged manner, it would not be *looking nearer*. And it is untenable to deny that we really do experience appearances of depth. Otherwise, how are we to describe the often quite vivid visual *illusions* of depth in two dimensional images?

Finally, I would ask: if we do not admit the reality of phenomenal sensory constancy, how are we to make sense of what I'll call the "experience of disillusionment"? Consider a case where a flat surface appears protuberant, as it might if skillfully painted trompe l'oeil style. As you get a better look at what appears to you, the illusion vanishes, when what had appeared protuberant now appears flat, *though in the meantime it appeared unchanging in shape*. But there was disillusionment only if a conflict in appearance was resolved. And something can present conflicting appearances over time, only if what appears to have first the one shape, now the other, also appears unchanged in shape throughout. For otherwise, there is no *conflict* to be resolved, only an *appearance of change*. It seems you can deny apparent shape constancy here, while acknowledging you can somehow correct illusory appearances of shape by getting a better look at something, only if you try to reconstruct this as proceeding by way of an

inference—from the belief that some surface *appeared to flatten out*—to the belief that *it was actually flat all along*. But if those who experienced visual disillusionment would not avow this inference or its premise, we have no reason to attribute it to them, and there would, in any case, be no accounting for why, in these instances, something’s appearing to *become* flat should give one a reason to think that it (or something else “behind” it) was *already* flat.

All this, I argue, supports the phenomenology of “objectual sensing” sketched above. This is significant because it furnishes the rudiments of sensory *intentionality*, and prepares us to consider questions about “content” and “conceptuality.” The general notion of intentionality (“mental reference to an object,” “object directedness”) is admittedly vague. But an *objectual* sensing able to generate *conflicts in appearances* (hence *illusion* and *disillusion*) would seem to be sufficient for sensory *intentionality* on any reasonable construal. If this is right, then the idea that the phenomenal is specifically a domain of raw sensation, sense-data, or non-intentional qualia should be firmly rejected—and on *phenomenological* grounds.⁹ Should we worry that not just the occurrence of some stretch of experience, but the possession of certain *general abilities* is needed for having intentionality, even of the sensory sort? Then we may reasonably say that it’s enough for this that an animal has the *sensorimotor skills* to reliably generate appearances of stable objects in its environment, and to resolve conflicts in appearance through their exercise. This is not to assume that the character of the sensory appearances we and other animals ordinarily

⁹ I first made a version of this “argument from disillusionment” against sense-data in Siewert (1998: Chapter 7). I further discuss issues concerning the experience of disillusion and perceptual constancy in Siewert (2006, 2011c, 2011d).

experience can be divorced from the possession of such skills. But if it can be, we could then explicitly add them, to account for the intentionality of sense experience.¹⁰

Notice: *this* sort of “intentionalism” about phenomenal character doesn’t commit one to saying that it can be reductively explained in terms of representational content. For that matter, I’ve so far kept the very notion of representation at arm’s length. The question of whether sense-experience has “conceptual” or “non-conceptual content” is also still in suspense. The words ‘content’ and ‘representation’ are used repeatedly in philosophy of mind. Just what they convey is not always so clear. But about ‘content’ I would now say this. We have spoken of how phenomenal sensory appearances are experienced, and we have recognized a distinction between *how they are experienced*, and how the *objects* of appearance both *appear* and *are*. And we have said that how the appearances are experienced suffices for objectual sensing, hence for intentionality. If the “intentional content” of sense experience is regarded as that aspect of it in virtue of which it is objectual, in an intentional “refers to an object” sense, then we can indeed conclude that *how we experience experiences*—what it’s like for us to have them, their phenomenal character—constitutes a kind of “intentional content.”

¹⁰ I propose we understand sensory intentionality in terms of motor skills in Siewert (2011d), in criticizing what seems to me McDowell’s (1994) overly intellectualist notion of what’s needed for perceptual experience of spatial objects. In this article too I explain my interpretation of Merleau-Ponty (2003) in ways that indicate his influence on my proposal, and why I think a Merleau-Pontyan perspective is, nonetheless, more compatible than it might seem with the belief that rationality “permeates” our experience—even if this is not to be understood in quite the way McDowell would.

But does my phenomenology thus far support our regarding experiential content as “representational”? And should we see it as “conceptual”? Our answers depend, naturally, on what we think they would entail. We might think that wherever there is representation there is a “vehicle” of representation—something (like symbols or pictures perhaps) that “carries” the content. But we have as yet found no such symbol- or image-like vehicle separable from content in the phenomenology of sense experience. Also, it seems questionable that sensory experience is representational, if this assumes that the content of experience can be exhaustively captured somehow sententially or (quasi-) pictorially. If we consider cases where we “experience visual disillusionment,” it is hard to see how we could always distinguish appearances by the attribution of either sentential or (quasi-) pictorial content to them.¹¹ To regard experience as representational in this sense may be to force onto it a kind of determinacy alien to its character.

One might, however, have in mind a *thinner* notion of representation, whose application is warranted by the phenomenology. So: given how you are experiencing (and disposed to experience) visual appearances during a certain time, if there is then something with a certain shape in a certain location, the way it looks to you is accurate (and if not, then it’s inaccurate). In this sense having experience with a certain phenomenal character entails having experience with certain “accuracy” or “correctness” conditions.¹² And one might have a notion of

¹¹ I discuss this in Siewert (2005: 282-284).

¹² I argue (in Siewert (1998: Chapter 7) that since such “assessments for accuracy” follow, once the character of one’s experience and the condition of one’s environment are given, even without the need for additional “interpreting” conditions, visual phenomenal features should be regarded as *intentional* features.

“representation” thin enough that this by itself is trivially sufficient for making it true that your experience “represents” things as somehow shaped and situated.

Once we have these points sorted out, it remains to be determined whether phenomenal sensory content is “conceptual.” This, of course, will again depend on how one interprets the claim at issue. If we think that having experience with a certain “conceptual content” entails having certain conceptual (especially inferential) abilities essential to possessing certain concepts, then the claim is certainly questionable. We should not just assume that, e.g., if something looks shaped and situated in a certain way to S, then S “possesses the concept” of that shape and position—where this involves having the ability to make appropriate voluntary inferences regarding shape and location. There is evidently no good reason an animal could not enjoy objectual sensing of shape, size, movement and location in the sense discussed, without having the correlative *inferential* capacities.

Still, even if that is right, it may be that *typically*, the character of *adult human sensory* experience does also essentially involve inferential abilities tied to the possession of concepts with which its content would be characterized. But how might this be so? To look into this I suggest we start by considering what I’ll call “recognitional appearances.” The capacity to *recognize* a sensed object as *of a given type* is presumably often at least a *part* of having a concept of that type. So if *what it’s like* to recognize a sensed object as of a type involves the exercise of these recognitional capacities, and these are (rightly exercised) sufficient for

some kind of concept possession, then ordinary phenomenal sensory experience will essentially involve having concepts.

The question is not whether there is something it's like for one to recognize types of object by their sensory appearance. Once we acknowledge that there may only *derivatively* be something it's like, we should not be reluctant to grant this much. What is the issue then? The key question is whether there is essentially and non-derivatively something it's like for something to sensorily *appear* (e.g., look, sound) *recognizable as of a given type*.

What I mean by 'appear recognizable' is this. One can experience visual appearances of similarities and differences among objects in a sense that requires more than just seeing their spatial extent, color, and location. So, for example, faced with the task of selecting which visible figures are not like others in some group, one may see where all the variously colored objects in the group are, without yet seeing *which are alike and which dissimilar, and in what respect*. But then suppose one notices or is struck by some similarity (say, in shape) among a subgroup. The respect in which they appear similar constitutes a type, and they then "appear recognizable as of that type." This is a "recognitional" appearance. Here we might also consider examples of *ambiguous figures*—for example: a capital M might suddenly appear to you recognizable as a sigma turned on its side. Or we may reflect on cases where there is a *delay* in recognition. Consider, for example, the following sequence of characters: =):-)=. It may take you a moment to see it as a (sideways) picture of Abraham Lincoln (or of "a guy with hat and a beard")—in my terms: for it to *look to you*

recognizable as such a picture. One use of “looks like” marks what I’m after here, as when we say: “Now this looks to me like a sigma,” “Now that looks to me like a picture of Lincoln.” (These needn’t be interpreted as asserting a “mere resemblance.”)¹³

Reflecting on such examples, and employing the conception of phenomenality sketched above, we are in a position to ask: is there only *derivatively* something that it’s like to experience such recognitional appearances? That is, can we reduce what it’s like to experience them to how we experience appearances that are *not* recognitional? Can we identify *non-*recognitional appearances of an object, so that what it like for us to experience them is just the same as what it’s like for us to experience recognitional appearances?

Here is a way I propose to start assessing this. Consider a case of someone with severe visual form agnosia. We may suppose that things do not *look recognizable to her as of kinds*—even though she may see with normal visual acuity how things are distributed in space around her. Now consider the experience you have when something you see at first does not look recognizable to you as of a given kind, and then it does—and the change in what it’s like for

¹³ So I intend ‘appear recognizable as an F’ to cover *both* cases in which one *successfully recognizes* an F, and cases in which one *mistakes* something for an F. There is a tricky question here about whether something could look to you recognizable as F even on an occasion in which neither condition obtained. I don’t want to have to *assume* it’s strictly impossible that someone might visually attend to some F for a brief time in exactly the same way as one who does visually recognize it as an F, but without such recognition, and without there being *at that time* a phenomenal difference in their visual experience. But if that is admitted I would still count both as cases where something appears *recognizable* as an F—hence as “recognitional appearances” in my terms. For *had* the experience of the non-recognizer occurred in the context of a general disposition to experience *other* such appearances, it *would have* constituted the exercise of a bona-fide skill for recognition. I am indebted to Kevin Connolly for making me aware of this complication.

you to see that thing when this happens. These will include cases of recognition as just illustrated with figures and pictures. But you might also consider ordinary cases where—because of absentmindedness, or unusual orientation or partial occlusion or “messy” surrounds—you see some F (a toothpaste tube, scissors handles, a pen) *before it looks recognizable to you as such*—and then it *does* so appear to you. Then ask yourself: if you now suppose what it is like for you when undergoing these changes were generally to become what it was like for the agnosiac to see things, would they *still* not look recognizable to her? In other words, can you sustain the supposition that she remains a visual form agnosiac, when you conceive of her becoming your visual phenomenal twin? If not, then you should think what it’s like to experience recognitional appearances is not generally reducible to what it’s like to experience non-recognitional ones.

If we accept this result, then we may go on to ask what range of types admit of *phenomenally* differing recognitional appearances. Shall we include here, for example: “looks like a *computer keyboard*,” “looks like a *pine tree*,” “looks like a *beckoning gesture*”? I believe we will not be able to justify an especially restrictive attitude about this, once we accept that, if the agnosiac were to become generally phenomenally visually like us, she would be cured of her agnosia. I should make it clear however, that I do not think this issue (or neighboring ones) can be quickly resolved just by first-person reflection on the sort of examples just mentioned. We need to look in more detail at the forms of agnosia (and at relevant psychological research generally) together with greater clarification of the issues, and more detailed reflection on cases. I should also

here make a bit more explicit the relationship of my position on recognitional appearances to the question of whether “high-level properties” (such as natural or artifactual kinds) are “represented in visual experience” (as Siegel (2006) argues). I do not regard this as settled once we admit recognitional appearances of, e.g., pine trees and gloves. For I do not think we can move straightaway from ‘It looks recognizable to me as a glove (or a pine)’ to ‘My visual experience *represents it to have* (or *attributes to it*) the property of being a glove (or a pine tree). For suppose that (by some unlikely twist) it turns out that what looked recognizable to me as a glove was actually fashioned for some *non-glove* purpose (which just happened to make it also perfectly *serviceable* as a glove). Or suppose the genetic background of a plant that looked recognizable to me as a pine kept it from being a genuine pine tree. It wouldn’t, I think, follow that the way it then *looked* to me, in virtue of the character of my visual experience, was *inaccurate*. Maybe we should just say: I only *falsely judged* it to be a glove (or pine tree) from its *accurate* “glove-y” (or “piney”) *appearance*. So these questions about “representational content” remain open.¹⁴ And there is still the additional matter of how the experience of recognitional appearances relates to conceptual abilities.¹⁵

So we may ask: is experiential content that is irreducibly recognitional “fully conceptual”? For this we need to consider whether the kinds of recognitional appearances we acknowledge as phenomenal are detachable from

¹⁴ I am grateful to Casey O’Callaghan for discussion of these points.

¹⁵ I regard Husserl’s (2001) subtle, though elusive and incomplete discussion of “categorical intuition” in the Sixth Logical Investigation as a still valuable resource for exploring these difficult issues about the borderland between “sensibility” and “understanding.”

having relevant *inferential* conceptual capacities. Again, the issue is complex. We should want to say that *some* phenomenal recognitional appearances can precede one's coming into the relevant inferential abilities. For example, one can recognize shapes before being able to make appropriate voluntary inferences regarding shapes, and can recognize beckoning or angry gestures before being able to make appropriate "theory of mind" inferences. (Here, incidentally, we see where the phenomenology of perceptual experience feeds into discussion of "other minds.") It seems such recognitional experience must come before full concept possession, if we are to *acquire* the relevant concepts *through* experience. However, it might also be that some skills of sensory recognition could conceivably be learned only against the background of a lot of relevant inferential ability. Think, for example, of the visual recognitional skills of a medical technician or an art historian.

This suggests that it will be misguided to ask simply whether experiential content in general is not only intentional, but *conceptual* as well. For the phenomenology I've been sketching tends towards the conclusion that while the "recognitional capacity" aspect of concept possession commonly helps constitute the phenomenal character of sensory appearance, its tie to the "inferential capacity" aspect is looser—though also not completely detachable. So we can say: when sense experience of space is non-recognitional (as it can be), it has non-conceptual content. But there also will at least be the (proto-conceptual?) content of recognitional experience. And if the latter is *sometimes* inseparable from background inferential abilities, we might say there is "conceptual content"

in experience, in a sense. But in a normal longish course of experience there seems to be no way to cleanly segregate—either running throughout or intermittently present—some distinct “layer” of purely non-conceptual content, or say just when some specific *fully* conceptual content is implied and when it’s not. And if that’s so, the notion of “non-conceptual content” cannot do much to reveal to us what distinguishes the intentionality of sense experience.

All this still leaves the question of how (or whether) we are to include the occurrence of *thinking* (as distinct from sensing)—which *is* as “fully conceptual” as we could wish—in the domain of the phenomenal. Thus we come to the issue sometimes discussed under the rubric of “cognitive phenomenology.” Is phenomenality confined to sensory experience, or is occurrent non-sensory conceptual thought and understanding also phenomenal? Here again I can only briefly outline my response, which I discuss elsewhere (Siewert 1998: Chapter 8, 2011b) in detail. To some extent my approach to the question of phenomenal thought parallels my treatment of recognitional sensory appearances. The issue is not just whether there is “something that it’s like” to engage in conceptual (not merely imagistic) thinking. In first-person reflection we can recognize that, for example, we may read a given passage without following it, without an on-going understanding of it, and then: we re-read it *with* such an understanding of meaning, a sort of semantic understanding that involves full-blown concept possession. And what it is like to read with understanding differs from what it is like to read without it, in the sense of “what it is like” previously explained. The question then is whether there is essentially and non-derivatively something it’s

like to enjoy some form of conceptual thought in these and other cases. I argue that we should address this question by asking whether we can identify some sensory appearances or imagery we could have in the absence of conceptual understanding, the experience of which we would judge to be phenomenally just the same as the experience in which understanding *does* occur. If we cannot, then (on the basis of this and additional considerations) we should include the sort of occurrent thought and understanding of which we are subjectively aware in our lives—and not just sensory appearances and imagery—within the realm of the phenomenal.

Similar arguments proceed from reflection on cases where understanding of an utterance is momentarily delayed, and on cases where understanding of an ambiguous phrase “flips” or “switches”. (There’s something that it’s like for us when we suddenly seem to “get” what the speaker just meant, or when we suddenly reconstrue what she just said.) An absence of suitable sensory differences that might rightly serve as the sole locus of phenomenality, differences utterly detachable from the relevant conceptual understanding, should bid us to acknowledge that our own occurrent thought and understanding is not to be excluded from the realm of authentically phenomenal experience. None of this entails that conceptual thought can occur in atomistic isolation, or in the complete absence of a capacity to give it sensible expression, or in some solipsistic “de-worlded” soul or brain. It merely restores our cognitive lives to experience, from which recent philosophy has temporarily estranged them.

5. Applications

Though my account here has been (unavoidably) rather schematic, I hope to have said enough for us to see roughly how it connects with an array of philosophical issues. To start, consider the issues of intentionality and content broached in the last section. Many of the controversies in this area have tended to pit those who defend the idea of “non-intentional” or “non-representational” sensory “qualia” (or at least to non-representational differences among experiences) against proponents of “representationalist” accounts that purport to explain phenomenal character in terms of some notion of content that doesn’t presuppose it, hoping thereby to implement some physicalist or naturalizing program regarding the mind. The approach I indicated above suggests a different take on these issues. It starts from a phenomenological conception of consciousness illustrated by reference to sensory appearances (without necessarily being confined to them) understood in a way that neither affirms the existence of non-representational sensory qualities, nor appeals to notions of “content” drawn from discussion of propositions (and “propositional attitudes”) and pictorial and quasi-pictorial forms of representation. I proceed to argue on phenomenological grounds that the character of sense experience makes it “objectual” and susceptible to experiences of illusion and disillusion. If we therefore speak of phenomenal or experiential content as *intentional*, and of a kind of “intentionalism” about consciousness, this is not on the basis of any conception of mental representation that furnishes a means to explain

phenomenality in non-phenomenal terms. Recognition of this essential tie to intentionality can thus be severed from any reductionist project.

Further development of this phenomenology actually casts doubt on proposals for reducing consciousness to a sensory non-conceptual form of representation. Partly this is because it leads us to include occurrent conceptual thought and understanding in the phenomenal domain—not confine it to the specifically sensory. It does, however, agree with some reductionist representational theories that the intentionality of perception can precede the exercise of robust, distinctively conceptual capacities. But it also leads us to find recognitional capacities that are integral to concept possession irreducibly manifest in the phenomenal character of much normal human perception. And as it is doubtful we can everywhere divorce these capacities from background inferential abilities, it is doubtful too we can generally isolate some layer of “non-conceptual content” and restrict sense experience entirely to this.

My results not only help us in this way to evaluate strategies for explaining phenomenality, they also help us to understand the epistemic role of experience. For phenomenal sensing, being “objectual,” and capable of undoing the illusions to which it is vulnerable, makes it possible for thought to identify, with warrant, objects of predication. And being “recognitional,” it gives us warrant for these predications, since something’s *appearing recognizable* as F gives one some warrant for thinking it *is* F.

This perspective also prepares us to examine “higher-order” and self-representationalist strategies for explaining consciousness. I argue (in Siewert

2011c) that the sort of phenomenal constancy to be found at the first-order level (which there grounds the notion of objectual sensing) cannot be found at the second-order level (where the putative objects are states of one's own mind). And this speaks *against* the notion of "inner sense" some have associated with consciousness. This forms part of a larger case that we lack any basis (phenomenological or otherwise) for construing phenomenality as the mind's self-representation. Still, that is not to deny there is a distinctively "introspective" form of attention to one's own experience involved in the warrant peculiar to knowledge of it. There is, and phenomenology demands it. But such attention is not some additional layer of quasi-sensory scrutiny, but a special (and only occasional) cognitive form of attention, parasitic on first-order "looking outward." And cognitively "looking harder" at one's experience does not mean turning some gaze ever more firmly "inward." It involves attending indivisibly both to the world and one's experience of it, *while asking better, more probing questions about it*. This is, in fact, what I have been trying to do in phenomenological investigation.

Limitations of space prohibit further elaboration of these themes, and their extension to the questions about value raised at the beginning. But I hope that the foregoing conveys something of the feasibility of a contemporary phenomenological approach to consciousness. By taking seriously a critical use of first-person reflection, and striving to avoid precipitous theoretical commitments, we may gradually build up a conception of phenomenal consciousness—of experience—that restores to us an appreciation of its reach, its richness and its importance, one which can help us come to terms with

fundamental philosophical problems including (but not limited to) those that concern the form its *explanation* might take, its role in *knowledge* (of ourselves, our surroundings, and others), and its place in our *values*.

It might seem that much about my approach differs little from that adopted (though perhaps less self-consciously) by many in mainstream “analytic” philosophy of mind. So it may seem unwarranted to insist on the label “phenomenological” for philosophy not more closely and explicitly identified with that of classic figures from the “phenomenological tradition”—especially Husserl. But I am not especially worried about blurring the line between philosophy of mind and traditional phenomenology. On the contrary, I think it could be a salutary corrective to distortions wrought by taking the “continental/analytic” distinction too seriously. However, I also am not reluctant to admit that the views I’ve outlined here have more in common with those found in phenomenologists such as Brentano, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty than do those of the average “analytic” philosopher. And this—as I have said—is no accident. Methodologically, this influence can be seen in my unabashed reliance on critical first-person reflection to identify and clarify crucial distinctions, while simultaneously striving to limit presuppositions. Substantially, it is evident in my broadly inclusive and happily realist view of consciousness, and my defense of an intentionalist conception of perception, grounded in the phenomenon of object constancy, and linked to an understanding of bodily skill. Finally, like the phenomenologists I’ve named, I believe philosophy developed along these

lines—even though it advances no reductionist theory—can do much to further our understanding of the mind in positive ways.¹⁶

¹⁶ I want to thank Dan Zahavi and an anonymous reviewer for comments that helped me to clarify how I view the relationship between my account and the phenomenological tradition.

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