

Representationalism, peripheral awareness, and the transparency of experience

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Received: 16 August 2006 / Accepted: 19 February 2007 / Published online: 30 May 2007
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Abstract It is often said that some kind of peripheral (or inattentive) conscious awareness accompanies our focal (attentional) consciousness. I agree that this is often the case, but clarity is needed on several fronts. In this paper, I lay out four distinct theses on peripheral awareness and show that three of them are true. However, I then argue that a fourth thesis, commonly associated with the so-called “self-representational approach to consciousness,” is false. The claim here is that we have outer focal consciousness accompanied often (or even always) by inner peripheral (self-)awareness. My criticisms stem from both methodological and phenomenological considerations. In doing so, I offer a diagnosis as to why the fourth thesis has seemed true to so many and also show how the so-called “transparency of experience,” frequently invoked by representationalists, is importantly relevant to my diagnosis. Finally, I respond to several objections and to further attempts to show that thesis four is true. What emerges is that if one wishes to hold that some form of self-awareness accompanies all outer-directed conscious states, one is better off holding that such self-awareness is itself unconscious, as is held for example by standard higher-order theories of consciousness.

Keywords Representationalism · Self-representationalism · Peripheral awareness · Transparency of experience · Higher-order thoughts

1 Introduction

It is an interesting and somewhat curious fact that two claims based on phenomenological observation are at the heart of contemporary defenses of some forms of representationalism. Representationalism is, generally, the view that phenomenal consciousness can be explained in terms of the intentional features of experience. More precisely, a representationalist will typically hold that the phenomenal properties of experience (that is, the

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“qualia” or “phenomenal character” or “what it is like of experience”) can be explained in terms of the experiences’ representational properties. The first phenomenological assertion is that, in addition to our frequent focused (or attentional) awareness of outer objects, we also have peripheral (or inattentive) conscious experience at the “edges” of consciousness. It is often said that some kind of peripheral conscious awareness accompanies our focal consciousness. Indeed, it seems reasonable to suppose that conscious awareness is broader than those aspects of conscious experience to which one is paying conscious attention. The second claim is that there is what has been called the “transparency of experience;” namely, that when we try to introspect, say, our visual experiences we “look through them” only to find the outer objects of those experiences. I say that it is a ‘curious fact’ because many representationalists are motivated by a desire to reduce consciousness to intentionality without any reference to phenomenal terms, or at least to render consciousness explicable in naturalistic terms. This desire is often accompanied by a decided third-person approach to consciousness and sometimes even a disdain for introspective or phenomenological methods.

In this paper, I will argue that these two themes are related in important ways and can shed light on each other. More specifically, after a brief outline of three kinds of representationalism, I lay out (in section three) four distinct theses on peripheral awareness and show that three of them are true. However, I then argue that a fourth thesis, commonly associated with the so-called “self-representational approach to consciousness,” is false. My criticisms stem from both methodological and phenomenological considerations. Moreover, some of my diagnosis as to why it is false and why the first three theses are true importantly involves discussion of the transparency of experience. Finally, in section four, I respond to several objections and to further attempts to show that thesis four is true. What finally emerges is that if one wishes to hold that some form of self-awareness accompanies all outer-directed conscious states (as I do), one is better off holding that such self-awareness is itself *unconscious*, as is held for example by standard higher-order theories of consciousness.

2 Varieties of representationalism

There is a dizzying array of possible representationalist positions which cannot be surveyed here (see Chalmers 2004; Lycan 2005). However, for my limited purposes, it will be useful to describe three general flavors of representationalism. (1) First-order representational (FOR) theories of consciousness refer to theories which attempt to explain conscious experience primarily in terms of world-directed (or first-order) intentional states. Probably the two most cited FOR theories of consciousness are those of Dretske (1995) and Tye (1995, 2000), though there are many others as well (e.g. Byrne 2001). Like other FOR theorists, Tye for example holds that the representational content of my conscious experience (that is, what my experience is about or direct at) is identical with the phenomenal properties of experience. Aside from reductionistic motivations, Tye and other FOR theorists often invoke the notion of the “transparency (or diaphanousness) of experience” in support of their view (Harman 1990; Tye 2002). This is an argument based on a phenomenological first-person observation which goes back to Moore (1903). The idea is that when one turns one’s attention away from, say, the blue sky and onto one’s experience itself, one is still only aware of the blueness of the sky. The experience itself is not blue; rather, one “sees right through” one’s experience to its representational properties, and there is nothing else to one’s experience over and above such properties.

(2) There is also a long tradition that has attempted to understand consciousness in terms of some kind of higher-order awareness. For example, John Locke (1689/1975) once said that “consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man’s own mind.” This intuition has been revived by a number of philosophers, most prominently David Rosenthal (1986, 1997, 2004, 2005) and William Lycan (1996, 2001), but also by myself (1996, 2004, 2005). In general, the idea is that what makes a mental state conscious is that it is the object of some kind of higher-order representation (HOR). A mental state *M* becomes conscious when there is a HOR of *M*. A HOR is a “meta-psychological” state, i.e., a mental state directed at another mental state. So, for example, my desire to write a good article becomes conscious when I am (non-inferentially) “aware” of the desire. Intuitively, it seems that conscious states, as opposed to unconscious ones, are mental states that I am “aware of” in some sense. Any theory which attempts to explain consciousness in terms of higher-order states is known as a higher-order (HO) theory of consciousness. It is best initially to use the more neutral term ‘representation’ because there are a number of different kinds of higher-order theory, depending upon how one characterizes the HOR in question. The most common division is between higher-order *thought* (HOT) theories and higher-order *perception* (HOP) theories. HOT theorists, such as Rosenthal, think it is better to understand the HOR as a thought of some kind. HOTs are treated as *cognitive* states involving some kind of conceptual component. HOP theorists, such as Lycan, urge that the HOR is a *perceptual* or *experiential* state of some kind which does not require the kind of conceptual content invoked by HOT theorists.

It is important, however, to keep in mind that when a conscious mental state is a first-order world-directed state the higher-order thought (HOT) is *not* itself conscious; otherwise, circularity and an infinite regress would follow. When the HOT is itself conscious, there is a yet higher-order (or third-order) thought directed at the second-order state. In this case, we have *introspection* which involves a conscious HOT directed at an inner mental state. When one introspects, one’s attention is directed back into one’s mind. For example, what makes my desire to write a good article a conscious *first-order* desire is that there is a (nonconscious) HOT directed at the desire. In this case, my conscious focus is directed at the article and my computer screen, so I am not consciously aware of having the HOT from the first-person point of view. When I introspect that desire, however, I then have a *conscious* HOT (accompanied by a yet higher, third-order, HOT) directed at the desire itself.¹

(3) Another related version of representational theory holds that the meta-psychological state in question should be understood as *intrinsic* to (or part of) an overall complex conscious state. This stands in contrast to the standard view that the HO state is *extrinsic* to (i.e., entirely distinct from) its target mental state. This assumption, made by Rosenthal for example, about the extrinsic nature of the meta-thought has increasingly come under attack, and thus various hybrid representational theories can be found in the literature. To varying degrees, these views have in common the idea that conscious mental states, in some sense, represent *themselves*, which then still involves having a thought about a mental state, just not a distinct or separate state. Thus, when one has a conscious desire for a cold glass of water, one is also (peripherally) aware that one is in that very state. The conscious desire both represents the glass of water and itself. It is this “self-representing” which makes the state conscious. One reason for this trend is renewed interest in a view closer to the one held by Franz Brentano (1874/1973) and various other followers who are

¹ For a more complete introduction to varieties of higher-order theory, see Gennaro 2004a and the essays and references therein.

normally associated with the phenomenological tradition, such as Husserl and Sartre. This general approach is most forcefully advocated today by Uriah Kriegel (e.g., Kriegel 2003, 2006) and is the subject of an entire anthology debating its merits (Kriegel and Williford 2006). Kriegel has used several different names for his “neo-Brentanian theory,” such as the SOMT (= same-order monitoring theory) and the “self-representational theory of consciousness.”²

3 Four theses on peripheral awareness

In order to examine the notion of peripheral awareness in a systematic fashion, it will be useful to recognize from the outset that peripheral awareness could be directed at the outer world or directed back at one’s own mental states as some form of peripheral “self-awareness.” Moreover, peripheral (or inattentive) awareness is obviously to be contrasted with focal (or attentional) awareness, for which there are again two possibilities: outer-directed (perception) or inner-directed (introspection). There are therefore four possible combinations: (1) outer focal, outer peripheral; (2) inner focal, inner peripheral; (3) inner focal, outer peripheral; (4) outer focal, inner peripheral. Thus, using the obvious abbreviations, we have the following four theses:

(OFOP) We (at least sometimes) have outer focal consciousness accompanied by outer peripheral conscious awareness.

(IFIP) We (at least sometimes) have inner focal consciousness accompanied by inner peripheral conscious (self-) awareness.

(IFOP) We (at least sometimes) have inner focal consciousness accompanied by outer peripheral conscious awareness.

(OFIP) We (at least sometimes) have outer focal consciousness accompanied by inner peripheral conscious (self-) awareness.

I propose to examine each thesis separately, at least to the extent possible. Which of the four are true and which are false? Why? What examples can be used to illustrate each thesis? What, if any, interesting connections exist between them? It is crucial, however, to make two preliminary points: First, it should be clear that each of the four theses is logically independent of the others. That is, none of them logically follows from any of the others, though there may be other interesting analogies and relations between them.

² There are two other related and somewhat hybrid views worth noting here. I have argued that, when one has a first-order conscious state, the HOT is better viewed as *intrinsic* to the target state, so that we have a complex conscious state with parts (Gennaro 1996, 2004, 2006). I call this the “wide intrinsicity view” (WIV) and also argue that Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory of consciousness can be understood in this way (Gennaro 2002). I hold that conscious mental states should be understood (as Kant might have today) as global brain states which are combinations of passively received perceptual input and presupposed higher-order conceptual activity directed at that input. Higher-order concepts in the meta-psychological thoughts are presupposed in having first-order conscious states. Robert Van Gulick (2004, 2006) has also explored the alternative that the HO state is part (in some sense) of an overall global conscious state. He calls such states “HOGS” (= higher-order global states) whereby a lower-order unconscious state is “recruited” into a larger state, which becomes conscious partly due to the implicit self-awareness that one is in the lower-order state. Both Van Gulick and I have suggested that conscious states can be understood materialistically as global states of the brain, and it would be better to treat the first-order state as part of the larger complex brain state. To be sure, the notion of a mental state representing itself or a mental state with one part representing another part is in need of further development and is perhaps somewhat mysterious. Nonetheless, there is agreement that conscious mental states are, in some important sense, reflexive or self-directed.

Second, we should keep in mind the distinction between conscious attention and conscious awareness. It seems reasonable to suppose that conscious awareness is broader than those aspects of conscious experience to which one is paying conscious attention. We consciously attend to only a subset of that which we are conscious.³

3.1 OFOP

OFOP is certainly the least controversial of the four theses. Nonetheless, it is still important to be clear about why. For example, classic examples from visual perception tend to confirm OFOP and the idea that conscious awareness is broader than (focal) conscious attention. I am now consciously focused on my computer screen, but it is not as if everything else in my visual field has “gone dark.” I do of course sometimes shift my attention to the keyboard or the papers and books on my desk, but then the same goes for those experiences. Whatever I may be focusing on in the outer world, there is also an accompanying peripheral consciousness of objects in my peripheral visual field. In my case, the calendar on my wall and the bookcase to my right would fall into that category.

Importantly, the same seems to go for the other modalities; for example, when I am consciously focused on listening to a Jimmy Page guitar solo in a Led Zeppelin song, it is not as if that’s all that occupies my conscious awareness. I am still, in some lesser peripheral sense, consciously aware of the bass and drums in the background. Finally, a case can be made that there are cross-modal instances of OFOP, such as the peripheral tactile sensations and auditory experiences I have when I am (visually) consciously focused on the computer screen.⁴ All this seems to be fairly uncontroversial support for OFOP. While it is true that one can *also* acquire information entirely unconsciously (e.g., as in subliminal perception and blindsight), these cases seem quite different from outer peripheral conscious awareness. After all, when I am typing and looking at the computer screen, it is not as if I am like the blindsight patient with respect to the rest of my visual field.

It is also clear that all three representational theories introduced in section 2 can and should recognize the truth of OFOP. There doesn’t seem to be any reason for them to reject OFOP, nor does the truth of OFOP conflict with any of them.

3.2 IFIP

IFIP is interestingly different than OFOP. I am inclined to think that it is true as matter of phenomenology; however, it is less clearly so than OFOP. IFIP is basically claiming that, at least sometimes, when I introspect (i.e., consciously think about) my mental states, I am peripherally aware of other mental states that I am not currently focused on. I say “peripherally aware of other *mental states*” because of the “I” in IP. My focus is inner; hence, the “IF.” However, my peripheral awareness is also claimed to be inner; hence, the “IP.”

³ This is not of course to say that we are always consciously aware of everything that we consciously attend to, as seems to be one lesson learned from cases of inattention blindness (Mack and Rock 1998). I will not discuss this important phenomenon in this paper.

⁴ See Kriegel 2004b, pp. 177–178, for a nice discussion of this point.

What would be an example of IFIP? Well, suppose that I am introspecting with the purpose of deciding what I believe about something, say, the death penalty. Provided that we allow for some kind of very minimal specious present, it seems phenomenologically accurate to say that I am more aware of some mental states than others during any short interval of introspection. I may be consciously focused on my feelings about the victim's family while, at about that same time, only peripherally aware of my desire to be sure that innocent people aren't put to death. Or I may be consciously focused on my belief in equal justice under the law while, at that time, only peripherally aware of my sympathy for the victim. It does indeed seem that there is a phenomenological aspect to the peripheral (self-) awareness in these cases. Such mental states seem to be "in the background" even when I am consciously focused elsewhere. Another case might be thinking about my desire for another piece of cake. This conscious thought about my desire can certainly take center stage in my phenomenology. However, it seems to me that I often at the same time (or nearly at the same time) have non-focal (i.e., peripheral awareness) of feeling guilty about having another piece or of the belief that having another piece is not healthy. It seems that, when we introspect, we often are able to hold a number of mental states in mind, though some of them will not be objects of focal consciousness.

Notice, however, that we must be careful not to construct a case where one's conscious focus simply shifts from one inner state to another for that would only show that the IF part of IFIP is true, which can easily be demonstrated by any sequence of introspected mental states. Of course, we should again presumably treat the "moment" of introspecting as a short specious present, but we must be careful not to let IFIP simply reduce to IF depending on the examples used. We can perhaps talk of a brief "temporal spread" analogous to the spatial spread involved in outer perception, but that still seems quite different than the considerations which favored OFOP. There is, to be sure, however, something more slippery about IFIP than OFOP.

Perhaps the reason for this is that, unlike a classic visual perception case of OFOP, there is no spatial array of objects when one introspects such that we can mark off a distinction between focal and peripheral consciousness. There is no spatial array of objects that one can appeal to in support of IFIP. Now this observation has its best-known origins in the Kantian view that, while the outer world is revealed to us both spatially and temporally, inner sense has time as its only "form of intuition." That is, we must experience the outer world as spatial and temporal and thus, according to Kant (1781/1965), space and time are the "forms of outer sense." However, Kant urged that time alone is the form of inner sense. Interestingly, some have even tried to use this phenomenological fact about how introspection differs from outer experience to argue that the mind-body problem itself, or at least the "problem of consciousness," can never be solved due to the inherently different perspectives involved (McGinn 1989, 1995). I am not convinced that such a drastic "mysterian" conclusion is warranted by these facts, but will not pursue the topic here. Nonetheless, the differences between IFIP and OFOP may be an underlying source of the sense that what is an essentially first-person activity (consciousness) cannot be explained in terms of third-person methods which necessarily involve a spatial component and thus the application of spatial concepts. Of course, we do sometimes say that "such and such is in the back (or corner) of my mind," suggesting a spatial analogue to outer perception. But it is not clear that this is anything more than metaphorical language use.

Once again, it seems clear that all three representational theories noted above in section 2 can and should recognize the truth of IFIP. There doesn't seem to be any reason for them to reject IFIP, nor does the truth of IFIP necessarily conflict with any of them. However, if something like the "inner perception" HOP model were true, one would expect the

analogy to OFOP to be clearer than it is. Of course, even HOP theorists do not claim that introspection is perception-like in the same exact way as outer perception is.

3.3 IFOP

Now IFOP might seem to be a curious combination. How can we be focused on some (inner) mental state while we are peripherally aware of outer objects? Nonetheless I think IFOP is true and something like it occurs often. Take the common experience of day dreaming while, say, listening to a lecture. Presumably, one is introspecting about something, i.e., consciously thinking about one's own mental states. For example, one might be thinking about one's own desire to be with one's children or about one's belief that the lecture is half over. We sometimes "zone out" while watching a television show and realize that we are thinking about something else in a deep introspective way. Now, in these cases and much like OFOP, it is not as if one becomes blind or deaf to one's outer surroundings. Unlike OFOP, however, IFOP has it that *all* of one's outer consciousness is peripheral to one's inner focal consciousness. The reason is perhaps very simple; namely, that one's sense organs are still functioning and are consciously able to pick up information coming in from the outside. However, one is not consciously attending to that incoming peripheral information. The same goes, I think, for the common experience of trying to remember something, say, for a test or in response to a question. I am in deep introspective thought directed at my own mental states, such as memories and beliefs. When I turn my attention inward to remember something, it is again not as if I don't also consciously see anything outside of me (unless I close my eyes, of course). However, such outer awareness is peripheral to the main focus of my consciousness, which is inner directed.

Instructive here is the much discussed case of the long-distance truck driver who has been driving for a long time and suddenly "comes to" realizing that he has been driving for a while without being consciously aware of the road (Armstrong 1968, 1981). Despite the temptation to agree with Armstrong and say that such outer-directed perceptual states are not conscious at all, it seems to me that this is better described as another good example of IFOP. Indeed, there seems to be a growing consensus that something like IFOP is the best way to handle this case. Several recent authors who are otherwise sympathetic to something like Armstrong's HOP theory seem to support such a view.⁵ Leaving aside the issue of whether or not the long-distance truck driver case can be used to support HOP theory, Lycan and Ryder (2003) do not believe that the driver (on autopilot) is entirely unconscious of the road. They state, for example, that we must "distinguish normal attention to the road from merely (or minimally) perceiving the road, because the driver does perceive the road but does not have a normal level of attention to road-features perceived, or possibly to any external-world features at all" (pp. 133–134). Similarly, they assert that "the autopilot driver does not completely lack awareness of the road (he does perceive the road features, or he would crash), though it is fair to say that he has only a low degree or minimal type of awareness of it" (p. 134).

The same point is made even more forcefully by Wright (2005) who offers empirical evidence in support of the view that without some form of outer conscious perception, the driver would very likely crash given the cognitive demands of driving. And more to the point of IFOP, Wright rightly then explains that since "the distracted [autopilot] driver

⁵ See Lycan and Ryder 2003; Wright 2005; but also see Janzen 2005 for some interesting discussion of the long-distance truck driver case.

manages to keep his car on the road for a considerable time, what we should instead conclude... is that he is the subject of visual states of which he has at least some minimal awareness” (p. 46). Wright correctly notes that there is only so much attention to go around and that attention comes in degrees, and so the “highly distracted driver is having what we might regard as very dim experiences [of the road] that receive greatly reduced attention....My claim is that the distracted driver is subject to visual states that are accompanied by enough awareness, a sufficient amount of attentional resources, to enable him to keep the car on the road...” (p. 47). As I noted above, perhaps part of the reason for this support of IFOP is simply that, as long as our eyes and ears are open while driving long distances lost in thought, it is still the case that one’s sense-organs are functioning and so are consciously able to pick up information coming in from the outside. In the case of driving long-distances, the combination of self-preservation and the cognitive demands of driving seem to dictate that one is at least peripherally consciously aware of the road and one’s outer environment.

Now, in other cases, e.g., when one is reflecting on what one is currently seeing, I believe that IFOP can also be helpfully explained with reference to the so-called “transparency of experience” frequently invoked by representationalists; namely, that when we try to introspect, say, our visual experiences we “look through them” only to find the outer objects of those experiences. Here we (focally) introspect perceptual states which are, at the same time, (peripherally) directed at their very content. Whatever one thinks of the transparency of experience,⁶ it is surely at least important to note that we are not of course introspecting the outer objects themselves.⁷ Indeed, the expression “transparency of experience” is somewhat of a misnomer; it is really the transparency of *introspection*. At minimum, we must keep in mind the distinction between the introspected *state* (or vehicle) and its *content* (i.e., what it is about). A belief in the transparency of experience, as Wright explains, “does not entail...that one is incapable of attending to one’s visual states, only that when one attends to one’s visual state, all that one will find are the features that figure into the state’s content” (2005: 63). Thus, given the transparency of experience, we can see how IFOP can easily occur. I may be introspecting my visual experience of the red tomato, but I become (peripherally) aware of the state’s content, that is, the red tomato itself.

The larger issue at hand is typically cast as the main dispute between representationalists and non-representationalists about the existence of qualia or, more specifically, non-representational properties of conscious experience (Block 1996). If there is more to an experience than its representational content (as Block thinks), then representationalism is false. If we can introspect non-representational properties of experience, then, *contra* the representationalist, the phenomenal character of experience is not *exhausted* by its representational content. The issue turns, as Block (1996, p. 29) puts it, on whether or not there are “mental properties of experience that don’t represent anything” which he calls “mental latex.” In contrast, “mental paint” is characterized as the “mental properties of the experience that [for example] represent the redness of the tomato” (p. 29).

My purpose here is not to engage directly into this dispute though my sympathies do lie more with the representationalist. However, we must still be careful to distinguish between what is doing the representing (i.e., the state or vehicle) and that which is represented (the content). And my main point here has been that something like the transparency of

⁶ This is of course a very complex issue in itself. See e.g. Kind 2003 for some discussion including important distinctions between various kinds of transparency of experience.

⁷ This is one of many points made in a wonderful paper by Daniel Stoljar 2004.

experience can help us to understand (at least one way) how IFOP can be true. Kind (2003) likens at least one notion of the transparency of experience, by analogy, to looking through a pane of glass. We can look through the glass to an object on the other side, but we could also focus on the pane of glass itself. I would add that even when one is focusing on the pane of glass, one can still be peripherally aware of the object on the other side. This suggests another analogy in line with the paint metaphor: If my wood fence is painted over with a *clear stain*, I can still look “through it” to see the fence. However, I can also focus, with some additional effort, on the stain itself. When I do so, however, I still perceive the wood fence, at least peripherally. Perhaps the transparency of experience resulting from introspection is more like seeing through a “mental stain” in the sense that one normally sees right through it to its represented object given the intimate connection between a state and its content. Now one could also adopt a special reflective attitude (or attentional state) such that one primarily focuses on the mental stain itself, but the represented object would still be part of the phenomenology, albeit peripherally. This is closer to what Loar (2003) calls “oblique reflection” which he argues is still compatible with the transparency of experience. Oblique reflection, Loar claims, is a kind of introspecting not properly recognized by representationalists.

In any case, it seems to me that all three representationalist views can acknowledge the truth of IFOP. This is perhaps clearer, however, for FOR and HOR theories. I will argue in the next section that the self-representationalist view sometimes confuses IFOP for OFIP.⁸ It is also worth recalling that recognizing something like IFOP (e.g., by Lycan and Ryder) illustrates the fact that HOP theories are not really supported by the famous long distance driver cases.

3.4 OFIP

Unlike the above three theses, I believe that OFIP is false. If so, then the sometimes defended and much stronger version of OFIP, which says that outer focal consciousness is *always* accompanied by inner peripheral conscious (self-)awareness, would also obviously be false. We can label this stronger thesis OFIP* and keep it in mind as well. Thus:

(OFIP*) Outer focal consciousness is *always* accompanied by inner peripheral conscious (self-) awareness.

And recall:

(OFIP) We (at least sometimes) have outer focal consciousness accompanied by inner peripheral conscious (self-) awareness.

Once again, we must keep in mind that neither OFIP nor OFIP* follow from OFOP, IFIP, or IFOP. I am inclined to think that both OFIP and OFIP* are false for a number of reasons, some of which I have articulated in great detail elsewhere (Gennaro 2006).⁹ Perhaps the most vigorous current supporter of OFIP is Uriah Kriegel (see, for example, Kriegel 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2006) but it is also important to acknowledge that this view has enjoyed a long and formidable tradition. Kriegel actually holds the stronger OFIP* thesis and takes such inner peripheral conscious self-awareness (IP) to be *essential* for one to have a

⁸ I also argue in Gennaro 2006 that self-representationalism cannot explain introspection at all.

⁹ The context in that paper was to show in great detail that there is a viable middle position between what I called “pure self-referentialism” and “extrinsic HOT theory.”

conscious mental state. As was noted in section 2, this view has come to be known as the “self-representational theory of consciousness.”

However, I disagree with the plausibility of even the weaker OFIP for several reasons. First, recall that although it is true that there are degrees of conscious attention, we have seen that the clearest examples of inattentive (or peripheral) consciousness are outer-directed; for example, perhaps some of the awareness in one’s peripheral visual field while watching a concert or working on one’s computer. Indeed, these are frequently the kinds of examples used, by analogy, to support OFIP. But cases of OFOP obviously do not show that any such peripheral consciousness is *self-directed* at the same time when there is outer-directed attentional consciousness. This is again just to say that OFIP does not follow from OFOP.

Second, what is the most direct evidence for such self-directed inattentive consciousness? That is, what is the evidence for the IP in the OFIP thesis? It is based on phenomenological considerations. I must confess that I do not ever find such inner-directed peripheral consciousness (= IP) *alongside* my outer-directed attentive experience. Conscious experience is, at the very least, so often completely outer-directed that I deny we have such marginal or peripheral self-directed conscious experience when in first-order conscious states. It does not seem to me that I am consciously aware (in any sense) of my own experience when I am, say, consciously attending to a play or the task of building a bookcase.¹⁰

Kriegel (2003) draws an important distinction between “intransitive self-consciousness” and “transitive self-consciousness.” He first rightly explains the latter in much the same way that a HOT theorist might: “...a transitively self-conscious state is *introspective*, in that the object is always one of the subject’s own mental states...” (2003, p.105). On the other hand, “...an intransitively self-conscious state is ordinarily not introspective, in that usually its object is an external state of affairs.” So far so good. Like the HOT theory, each outer-directed first-order conscious mental state (M) contains a meta-psychological component (which is arguably a form of self-consciousness). But when the shift to introspection occurs, then there is a *conscious* meta-psychological thought directed at one’s own mental state. The key point, however, is that Kriegel takes the intransitive self-consciousness itself (i.e., the IP) to be conscious based on phenomenological observation. As I mentioned above, I strongly disagree and so my view is much closer to HOT theory, at least in this respect.¹¹ Kriegel uses a number of rather vague characterizations of the alleged IP in OFIP, such as “subtle awareness of having M” and “dim self-awareness...humming in the background of our stream of consciousness” (2003, pp. 104–105). I have no objection to these expressions, but it is still not clear to me that IP is conscious in any phenomenological sense. Rather, I think it is far better to construe any such higher-order awareness as *unconscious*. I thus prefer to speak of unconscious “meta-psychological thought awareness” or “non-reflective self-consciousness” (e.g., in Gennaro 1996, 2002).¹²

Third, in an attempt to diagnose the phenomenological error committed by supporters of OFIP, I suggest that they are really “reflecting” on the experiences themselves in such cases. If so, then they are *consciously attending* to their experiences, which is really

¹⁰ It is worth noting that some who are well known for emphasizing the importance of phenomenological data do not even side with Kriegel on this point. See, for example, the discussion in Zahavi 2004 and Stewart 1998, chapter six. These authors, however, also reject any form of higher-order theory.

¹¹ Again, for much more detail, see Gennaro 2006.

¹² It is also worth noting here that if Kriegel is correct, then there is no chance of obtaining a reductionist account of conscious mental states in mentalistic terms, which I take to be another major disadvantage, though I won’t argue for this preference here. In Gennaro 2006, I similarly argue that self-representationalism doesn’t really *explain* what makes a mental state conscious, which is a major deficiency.

introspective consciousness. Thus, we no longer have a phenomenological analysis of *first-order* conscious states; that is, there is no longer any OF at all but instead a shift to IF. And, of course, a shift to either IF thesis cannot show that OFIP is true.

For example, we are asked to “suppose... that you suddenly hear a distant bagpipe. In your auditory experience of the bagpipe you are aware primarily, or *explicitly*, of the bagpipe sound; but you are also *implicitly* aware that this auditory experience of the bagpipe is *your* experience...” (Kriegel 2003, p. 104). But it seems to me that the very act of performing this mental exercise results in an act of introspection or reflection. That is, Kriegel is asking us to focus *consciously* on M (e.g., the experience of hearing a distant bagpipe) in considering his example. We are being asked to *reflect on* the hypothetical case in question. How can we pretend to “consider” such a state of mind without shifting our phenomenological attention onto the experience itself? To the extent that we really can do so, I think that our consciousness is completely outer directed, for example, when I am absorbed in a doing a chore or taken with a beautiful painting. Such conscious states can still have the structure of standard HOT theory, but there is no conscious notice at all of any higher-order component. Kriegel is not fallaciously conflating the distinction between introspection and first-order conscious states, but he is relying on one’s reflective response to his examples in order to make the case that IP is itself conscious. The same goes for any example about, say, one’s occurrent visual experience. It is crucial to remember that, say, HOT theory also holds there is an implicit self-awareness involved in any conscious state, but this is not to say that such self-awareness is itself conscious. Indeed, if it were, then we would have a case of introspection, not a world-directed conscious state. It is often difficult to know how to settle these phenomenological disputes, but I have at least tried to explain how one might mistakenly conclude that IP always accompanies OF.¹³

All of the above is particularly important to the extent that we want a *general* theory of state consciousness (i.e., of what makes a mental state conscious). Although it is true that there are degrees of conscious attention and self-consciousness, it is desirable to offer an explanation of what *all* first-order conscious states have in common. On my view, this is the fact that there is an unconscious meta-psychological thought directed at M, both of which are parts of the complex conscious state (Gennaro 1996, 2006). I suggest that such a general account can only be offered if the meta-thought is itself unconscious because we are so often entirely consciously focused on outer things. Moreover, if we are to allow for, say, animal and infant consciousness, the idea that the meta-thought (or IP) is itself conscious seems very unlikely. Believing otherwise could lead to the problematic conclusion that such creatures are incapable of having conscious states at all. It seems better to hold that any allegedly genuine case of a consciously experienced IP is really an instance of introspection, and thus any first-order conscious state is, at best, only accompanied by an unconscious meta-thought. In short, the problem of animal and infant consciousness applies with even greater force to supporters of OFIP than to a supporter of standard HOT theory.

The importance of this can also be seen in David Woodruff Smith’s (2004, Chapter 3) recent retreat from what appeared to be previous adherence to OFIP* (in Smith 1986,

¹³ I do agree with Kriegel that “there is something artificial in calling a mental state conscious when the subject is *wholly* unaware of its occurrence” (2003, p. 106, emphasis added). But this leaves open whether such meta-awareness is conscious or not. Kriegel’s use of the expression “wholly unaware” suggests both “consciously and unconsciously unaware,” but we might instead hold that a state is conscious when the subject is *unconsciously* aware of its occurrence. Kriegel’s argument can really only justify the weaker claim that “there is something artificial in calling a mental state conscious when the subject is *not at least unconsciously aware* of its occurrence.” But this is precisely one key issue at hand between Kriegel’s view and, say, standard HOT theory.

1989). He continues to insist that “...the formal analysis of inner awareness [IP]... is a task for phenomenology” (2004: 80). However, this now leads him to abandon his earlier view that *all* first-order conscious states have such inner awareness (Smith 2004, pp. 109–116). Smith now allows for basic levels of outer-directed consciousness which lack any self-consciousness or inner-awareness; for example, when “I am unselfconsciously hammering a nail, or driving down the highway, or choosing to hit the tennis ball crosscourt rather than down the line...” (2004, p. 109). Thus, “On the view now emerging, inner awareness is an integral part of higher levels of consciousness, realized in humans and perhaps other animals, but it is not present in lower levels of consciousness in humans and other animals” (2004, p. 110). To the extent that Smith no longer advocates OFIP*, then I agree. However, I think he should really give up the view that such “inner awareness” is phenomenologically revealed at all. If he had done so, then he would have recognized that *all* outer-directed conscious mental states can still have a HOT theory-like structure without giving up the belief that inner-awareness (of some kind) is indeed built into the structure of those states. Smith is correct, however, in recognizing the existence of outer-directed conscious mental states not accompanied by a *conscious* IP. This is enough by itself to falsify the stronger thesis OFIP*. We have also seen, however, that even the weaker OFIP cannot withstand scrutiny.

Two final points: (1) One might still wonder: Why should *only* OFIP be false? One answer can be found in a clear disanalogy between OFIP and IFOP. There is no analogy between IFOP and OFIP primarily because there is no analogue to an open “sensory channel” or “sense organ” for OFIP. When we have a case of IFOP (as we saw) we can make sense of the OP precisely because of open (outer-directed) sensory channels even when we are introspecting. This allows for the somewhat unusual combination at hand. However, nothing like this is the case for any alleged example of OFIP; that is, when having outer focal awareness, there is no open sensory channel which can justify the presence of IP. Moreover, in cases of OFOP and IFIP, both kinds of awareness are either both directed outer or both inner.

(2) As in our discussion of IFOP, the transparency of experience can be instructive here. It can help to explain why we don’t *notice* the shift to introspection, and mistakenly suppose that we have a case of OFIP instead of IFOP. Since the object of one’s introspection (the mental state) “contains” its content, it is easy to shift from IFOP to OFIP. That is, when we “look right through” the mental state to its content during introspection, we are tempted to think that our focal consciousness is really outer and not inner, but this is merely an understandable error given the transparency of experience.

To conclude this entire section, then, I think we have good reasons to accept the first three theses, but neither OFIP nor OFIP*. If one wishes to hold that some form of self-awareness accompanies all outer-directed conscious states (as I do), one is better off holding that such self-awareness is itself unconscious. Finally, it seems to me that advocates of FOR and HOR theories can and should reject OFIP and OFIP* since these theses are so closely aligned with the self-representational view.

4 Three more attempts at OFIP

4.1 Functional and evolutionary considerations

In another paper, Kriegel offers a somewhat different approach in favor of OFIP (Kriegel 2004b). He hypothesizes that evolutionary and functional considerations might give us

good reason to accept OFIP. Kriegel first, however, plausibly explains how having the OP in OFOP serves a crucial functional role. Given our limited attentional resources and to avoid the risk of informational overload, “the functional role of peripheral awareness is to give the subject ‘leads’ as to how to obtain more detailed information about any of the peripheral stimuli, without encumbering the system overmuch” (2004b, p. 181). Although admittedly speculative, Kriegel then extends this logic to OFIP by similarly suggesting that peripheral awareness of mental state M makes it possible for the subject “to easily (i.e., quickly and effortlessly) obtain fuller information about M” should the need arise (p. 181). Since such peripheral awareness is a good thing to have, it is thus not surprising that it would appear in the course of evolution.

There are several problems with this attempt to support OFIP. First, once again, it is not clear that the move from outer peripheral awareness (OP) to peripheral self-awareness (IP) is warranted. As we saw earlier, moving from arguments about OP to IP involves much more than just a “simple extension” (181) of reasoning. Second, if we are to take this argument seriously and really view it through the lens of evolution, it would seem that we should also extend Kriegel’s reasoning about IP to many other animals. However, as we have seen, holding OFIP (let alone OFIP*) makes it that much more difficult to believe in animal (and infant) consciousness in the first place. But if IP is such a good thing to have from an evolutionary standpoint, then it would seem that many other animals should also have it.

Third, it is unclear why we are forced into believing that we and other animals have IP based on this approach instead of, say, having *unconscious* HOTs (during outer directed focal consciousness). Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that there are good evolutionary reasons to suppose that actual unconscious HOTs accompany outer directed consciousness, as opposed to having no HOTs at all (Gennaro 2004, pp. 50–52). Unconscious HOTs can presumably become conscious HOTs more quickly resulting in *introspective* conscious mental states. The ability of an organism to shift quickly between outer- and inner-directed conscious states is surely a crucial practical and adaptive factor in the evolution of species. For example, an animal that is able to shift back and forth between perceiving other animals (say, for potential food or danger) and introspecting its own mental states (say, a desire to eat or a fear of one’s life) would be capable of a kind of practical intelligence that would be lacking otherwise. Having unconscious HOTs can thus be understood, from an evolutionary perspective, as a key stepping stone to the capacity for introspection. In a sense, then, I agree with Kriegel that having *some kind* of self-awareness of conscious states is very useful for evolutionary reasons. However, it is unclear to me why having unconscious self-awareness isn’t sufficient to do the job, or why having conscious peripheral self-awareness will be so much quicker or effortless when it comes to making the shift in question. The kind of “information” Kriegel has in mind can clearly also be gathered unconsciously which, in turn, will be available to the subject upon introspection. Recall also that supporters of OFIP are sometimes arguably in danger of conflating introspective consciousness with conscious first-order states. In addition, even if such information never becomes conscious at all, it can still be used to guide behavior in importantly relevant ways. After all, it is widely held that unconscious mental states can cause behavior and fill a functional role within an organism.

4.2 The argument from psychopathologies

Yet another attempt to defend OFIP is made by Ford and Smith (2006). They begin with standard cases of OFOP but then go on to argue that evidence from three

psychopathological cases shows how “same-act inner awareness can be an essential feature of every normal contemporary human conscious mental state” (p. 361). Thus, they argue for something like OFIP (perhaps even OFIP*), at least for the normal experience of humans. Ford and Smith assert that “within my peripheral awareness there are also—less palpable, as it were—presentations of my own experience, of my passing stream of thought and perception and emotion” (p. 360). Thus, they hold that the same conscious state can represent both the outer world and itself, much like the self-representationalist view. It is an interesting method based on the idea that empirical evidence from abnormal cases, where some form of “self-awareness” is missing, can inform us as to the presence of such self-awareness in the normal case. Without going into great detail, the three cases involve loss of proprioception, amnesia, and depersonalization. Drawing from the work of scientists such as Oliver Sacks, Ford and Smith rightly explain just how devastating these psychopathologies can be. Loss of proprioception leads to a serious deficit of “body-image”; that is, of not being able to feel one’s body and a debilitating lack of body control and coordination. Severe amnesia causes well-known problems of being locked into the present moment and a troubling lack of personal continuity. Depersonalization leads to bizarre cases such that the perceptions and actions of one’s body are believed to be happening to someone else. But the key idea, for Ford and Smith, is that if “we find that the impairment or removal of some part of the self-image has an impact on that person’s experience, then we may conclude that it must have been present in that person’s consciousness, even if the person was not explicitly aware of it...” (p. 367).

I am not, however, convinced by their argument for several reasons, though I do find their strategy intriguing and useful.¹⁴ First, as a simple matter of logic, just because the removal of something, e.g., normal proprioception, causes deficits in one’s conscious mental states, it surely does *not* follow that the *awareness* of that thing is part of normal conscious experience. The relation could be causal instead of constitutive. That is, the typical abilities and awareness in question might merely, in the normal case, *causally contribute* to the phenomenology of one’s conscious mental states without being part of the conscious state itself, even peripherally. There are many ways that normal consciousness can be disturbed or impaired, and surely we shouldn’t conclude that every such disturbance shows that the item or ability in question normally shows up in our phenomenology.

Second, following on the above theme, it may be that the meta-awareness in question is an *unconscious* awareness of the conscious state. Indeed, this is closer to my own view of such cases, as I have argued at length with regard to severe amnesia for example (Gennaro 1996, chapter nine). In this way, my view is closer to standard HOT theory which might take the meta-awareness (of, say, one’s past) as implicit but unconscious rather than a peripherally conscious part of a conscious state. Thus, I agree that having such meta-awareness is intimately intertwined with normal conscious experience. Perhaps having such implicit episodic memory is even necessary for consciousness at all. I also agree that removing or damaging such meta-awareness will severely impact one’s conscious experience. But these facts can be equally explained on my view because, as I noted above, lacking such states, or having abnormal variants on them, can still dramatically affect the nature of one’s conscious states. This can be the case, however, without the I-thoughts or “self-image” thoughts manifesting themselves in our normal phenomenology. Ford and Smith do not rule out this alternative explanation.

Third, and perhaps most serious, it is not even clear in the first place that any of these examples really involve the awareness of something *mental* at all. That is, if one is going to

¹⁴ I’ll ignore their discussion of neurophysiology for the purposes of this paper.

defend self-representationalism (or even just the more modest OFIP) it must be that the peripheral awareness in question is directed back at the *mental state*. However, Smith and Ford seem to have other intentional objects in mind while describing their examples. For example, in the case of loss of proprioception, what is lost is the sense of one's own body position. But even if proprioception is a peripheral part of all normal conscious outer-directed experience, we are surely no longer talking about OFIP because the IP is not directed back at a mental state but rather at one's own body. To be sure, this could be construed as a kind of self-representation or "bodily self-consciousness," but it is not the kind that supports OFIP. Indeed, this case is arguably closer to an instance of OFOP since our proprioceptive sense is often directed at the items in the world, such as the tactile consciousness of my pedaling the bicycle while I am riding through town (to use one of their examples). Thus, it is not clear that these cases are even instances of OFIP. At best, I think we should describe them as illustrating that there is an abnormal (but unconscious) "I-thought" presupposed in the resulting abnormal conscious state. Another way to put it is that the *reference* of the "I" in the "I-thought" can be one's body without the "I-thought" itself being conscious at all. Cases of depersonalization can be described in a somewhat analogous fashion; namely, that, for whatever reason, the reference of the "I" in the "I-thought" is in error which, in turn, leads to serious deficits of consciousness.¹⁵ In any case, Ford and Smith have not really shown that the features of the "self-image" to which they refer "must appear as part of each normal conscious experience" (p. 370).

4.3 Another example of OFIP?¹⁶

Another response to what I have said thus far and in support of OFIP might go as follows: Consider a case where a person, P, is introspecting about something, say, P's philosophical beliefs and thoughts about the meaning of life. We can imagine P reflecting in such a way while sitting in a public park. During this process, a person walks by with a very striking and attractive looking shirt causing P to shift his attention to the shirt. That is, something outer has caught P's eye which has led P to have outer focal conscious awareness. Given that P had been previously focused on inner states, isn't it reasonable to say here that P has outer focal conscious awareness of the shirt while also having peripheral consciousness of P's thoughts? The idea is that the inner awareness has (perhaps temporarily) receded into the background of P's consciousness, but not disappeared altogether. This would seem to be a case of OFIP.¹⁷

My response here is twofold: First, I am inclined to dig in at this point and insist that all of P's consciousness is outer focused *at the time* in question, for many of the same reasons I have offered throughout this paper. From a phenomenological point of view, if I was in that situation and became so diverted in attention to an outer object, it is not at all clear to me that the previous focal awareness on my thoughts has merely been pushed into the background of my consciousness rather than disappearing altogether. I fail to see the motivation and evidence for the view that there is *conscious* IP, as opposed to the view that such reflective

¹⁵ For related analysis of a few other psychopathologies, see Gennaro 1996, pp. 136–142.

¹⁶ Much of the impetus behind this section resulted from some very helpful comments and questions when I presented a shorter version of this paper at the 2006 "Toward a Science of Consciousness" Conference in Tucson, Arizona. Special thanks to Pete Mandik, Robert Van Gulick, Josh Weisberg, and Uriah Kriegel.

¹⁷ Another case might be sitting on my back patio and reflecting on the nice weather when I am interrupted by one of my young children running toward the street. When I see that, I'd say that all of my consciousness becomes outer directed.

thoughts became utterly unconscious. Notice also that the case in question stipulates that the outer awareness becomes focal when I see the shirt; otherwise, we would at most have a case of IFOP, which I have already argued is plausible, and not an instance of OFIP.

Second, it is also interesting to note that this alleged example of OFIP importantly differs from the cases considered in previous sections. In the prior examples, we have been taking about the standard phenomenological cases where the content of the outer directed consciousness *matches* the content of the inner peripheral awareness. My outer directed consciousness of, say, building a bookcase is supposed to be accompanied by inner peripheral consciousness of my building the bookcase. Indeed, this is most certainly what defenders of OFIP and OFIP* have in mind, as we saw in considering Kriegel's views, and it is clearly at the heart of the self-representationalist account. However, the case described here is quite different even if one still wishes to use it in support of OFIP. In this scenario, the content of outer consciousness (the shirt) is different than the content of the alleged inner peripheral awareness (my thoughts about the meaning of life). There is no match between the two contents, which is ideally what supporters of OFIP would like to have. Thus, we could distinguish between the following:

(OFIP-MIXED) We (at least sometimes) have outer focal consciousness of *x* accompanied by inner peripheral conscious (self-) awareness of a *distinct state with content y*.

(OFIP-MATCH) We (at least sometimes) have outer focal consciousness of *x* accompanied by inner peripheral conscious (self-) awareness of *the awareness of x*.

As I noted above, OFIP-MATCH is the standard self-representationalist reading of OFIP, which I have argued is false. Now I suppose it is possible to accept OFIP-MIXED and not OFIP-MATCH, although I do not think that such a move is warranted or well motivated. Even if a stronger case could be made for OFIP-MIXED, it is clear that OFIP-MATCH would not automatically follow, though one might argue that it opens the door to taking OFIP-MATCH much more seriously.

Still one might ask: Why *can't* OFIP be true? Well, first, it is unclear what the strength of "can't" is. Perhaps it is not logically impossible, but OFIP still seems to me actually false. Second, this way of putting the question, I think, unfairly shifts the burden of proof onto the skeptic of OFIP. It seems to me that the supporter of OFIP has the burden of proof; she is making the positive and existential claim about the existence of a certain state of mind. The onus is on the supporter of OFIP and (especially) OFIP* to offer evidence and reasons for their view. Part of what I have done in this paper and elsewhere (Gennaro 2006), then, is simply to critically examine arguments that have been put forward for OFIP and OFIP*, finding them to be seriously lacking. It should not be up to the critic to show that either claim is somehow impossible. Finally, it might be urged that I should back off the *strong* claim that IP *never* accompanies OF, which follows from my rejection of OFIP. I am not inclined to do so for many of the reasons already adduced, though I am willing to concede that Smith's 2004 hybrid position is *possibly* correct and that this is not an all-or-nothing issue; that is, maybe *some* OF states are accompanied by IP, but not all. Nonetheless, to the extent that we do treat the matter as all-or-nothing, I am much more inclined to endorse the strong claim that OFIP is false. This is primarily because I am so much more certain, from a phenomenological perspective, that there are cases where our conscious attention is entirely outer directed than I am sure that there are cases where IP accompanies OF. In other words, instances of OF without IP are so much clearer to me than the very elusive and slippery notion that IP (at least sometimes) accompanies OF.

5 Concluding remarks

I have argued that OFOP, IFIP, and IFOP are true, and we have also seen that the transparency of experience can shed light on some of the reasons why. However, I have argued that OFIP and the stronger OFIP* are false. These theses are commonly associated with the so-called “self-representational approach to consciousness” and thus there is good reason to reject such a view. Once again, part of the diagnosis had to do with the transparency of experience, although many other arguments were also presented in opposition to the self-representational account. Finally, several additional attempts to support OFIP were critically examined and found wanting. An important result is that if one wishes to hold that some form of self-awareness accompanies all outer-directed conscious states, one is better off holding that such self-awareness is itself *unconscious*, as is held for example by standard higher-order theories of consciousness.

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