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**Phenomenology, Philosophy of Mind  
and the Subject**

**Donnchadh Ó Conaill**

**Submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in Philosophy  
Durham University  
Philosophy Department  
October 2009**

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-Donnchadh O'Conaill

## Abstract

I propose to develop a phenomenologically-informed ontological model of the subject of experiences. This model will attempt to explain how it is possible for a subject to have experiences with a subjective character, which are like something for their subject. It will also address how the subject can have experiences whose subjective character plays an intentional role, making the subject aware of objects.

The subjective character of experiences and their intentionality have both been widely discussed in the philosophy of mind. However, these discussions have focused on whether or not these features can be explained in naturalistic or physicalistic terms. As a result, there has been relatively little detailed description of the subjective character of experiences. In particular, complex experiential states such as those involving a combination of different kinds of experience have been neglected in the recent literature. There has also been little discussion of how we can be aware, not just of individual objects, but of situations, and indeed how our everyday awareness of objects involves an awareness of the world as the background to all our activities.

In order to provide detailed descriptions of the subjective character and the intentionality of experiences, I shall turn to the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Husserl developed concepts and techniques for studying the subjective character of intentional experiences independently of their non-experiential aspects. I shall use these techniques to focus on the subject *qua* experiencer, and on experiences as states or episodes which are like something for the subject.

By studying the subject in this way, I shall provide a model of subjectivity, the ontological relation holding between a subject and its experiences. I shall argue that subjectivity can be explained by appealing to the temporality of experiences, the way they flow in a stream of consciousness. Every subject has a temporal structure which is the form of its particular stream of consciousness. What it is for a subject to have an experience is for that experience to pass through this temporal structure.

I shall also examine how a subject can have experiences which are objective, that is, which make the subject aware of objects as having more than the features directly presented to the subject. One view is that to explain objectivity, we must adopt a special perspective on the world, allowing us to compare how objects appear to us with how they really are. I argue that we do not need to appeal to such a special perspective. Our everyday awareness of objects and of the world is essentially structured by a sense of objectivity.

Lastly, I shall address a problem that arises for any transcendental study of the conditions for the possibility of our awareness of the world. This is the paradox of subjectivity, the problem of understanding how the one subject can be both a part of the world and that which makes sense of the entire world. I shall argue that applying phenomenological techniques can help us to understand how the one subject can answer to both of these descriptions.

This thesis will thus use phenomenological methods to develop an ontological model which can explain certain key features of the subject. In doing so, it will serve both as a contribution to the philosophy of mind, and as an illustration of what can be gained by applying phenomenological methods in this area.

## Acknowledgements

The greatest part of my thanks must go to my supervisors, Matthew Ratcliffe and Jonathan Lowe. Their criticisms and suggestions were invaluable, particularly in helping me keep the balance between appreciating the details of the various positions I touched on, while also holding the big picture in view. Without their level of expertise and support, it is highly unlikely I could have completed this project.

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## **Introduction**

In this thesis, I propose to examine what it is to be a subject of experiences. The subject has a number of different features which are of philosophical interest, but I shall focus on the two which are most characteristic. First, each subject can have conscious experiences, defined as states or episodes which have a distinctive subjective character for their subject. When I have a headache, see dark clouds in the sky, am engrossed in the plot of a novel, or feel nostalgic at remembering Cork winning the football and hurling double in 1990, I am undergoing a conscious experience. Second, subjects can be aware of various things. I can be aware of physical objects, of other persons with their own emotions and desires, of the social or cultural significance of actions or events, or of abstract objects such as mathematical equations or logical forms. I am aware of an item when I have an intentional experience which directs me towards the item and presents it to me as being some way or another: a small physical object; a person I know; a painful memory; etc.

I want to examine how it is that subjects can have experiences and be aware of things. That is, I want to provide an ontological account of the nature of the subject, one which can accommodate and explain the relation between the subject, its experiences, and its being aware of different items. In order to give this account, we must have a clear grasp of the subject, of conscious experiences, and of what it is to be aware. The problem with much of the discussion of the subject in the philosophy of mind is that it does not give us the clear understanding of these matters which we need.



## Introduction

Consider first how conscious experiences are discussed in contemporary debates. Most of the participants agree that these experiences can be characterised by their having subjective character; that is, there is something it is like for the subject of an experience to have it (Nagel 1974, 439). There is something it is like for you to sip some coffee, to have a hangover, or to stub your toe. This way of talking is usually used to pick out experiences as philosophically problematic; to distinguish them from cases of causality, functional operation or the like, which are supposedly better understood. But it tells us little about the nature of this subjective character: its structure, the different factors which can influence it, or the way the subjective characters of a particular experience can be influenced by the character of other experiences. Subjective character is usually illustrated by simple cases of perception or bodily sensations, such as the examples just given, and described by using figurative language (for example, Colin McGinn's reference to "technicolour phenomenology", in 1989, 349). This narrow range of examples and figurative language elides the more complex experiences we can undergo, and the way in which different experiences stand in structural relations to each other. I have in mind here such experiences as being humiliated by a superior in front of your colleagues at work, feeling afraid while walking home in the dark, or struggling to finish an assignment or project on time. The subjective character of these complex experiences is influenced by such factors as one's social role, emotional states, awareness of one's surroundings, and personal projects and values. It is not at all clear that the structure and complexity of these experiences can be explained by reference to simpler experiences, or by using figurative language.

Furthermore, discussions of what it is like to have experiences almost always neglect the relation between the experiences and their subject. This relation is

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essential to all conscious experience – after all, there is always something it is like *for a subject* to have an experience. But very little is usually said about the nature of the subject whom the experience is for, or the nature of the relation between the subject and its experiences. If all subjective character is for a subject, then we need to address the nature of the subject in order to clarify the nature of this character. This point is even more acute in the case of complex experiences. Consider what it is like to play a game of football. You will perceive the ball, the pitch and the other players; you will engage in bodily activity and feel various other bodily states (such as tiredness or cramp); and you will usually be emotionally engaged with the activity as well. These disparate experiential occurrences do not just occur simultaneously, but are unified and influence each others's subjective character. This is possible because they all belong to a single subject, you. If we are going to be able to give a clear picture of how we can have complex experiences, it seems we will have to be able to give an account of exactly how these experiences belong to their subject.

Second, consider contemporary discussions of awareness. The subject is aware when it has an intentional experience in which an object appears to it. There are a number of different approaches to awareness in the philosophy of mind, but most of them attempt either to explain intentionality independently of experience (Fodor 1991, 12), or to explain the intentionality of experiences separately from explaining their subjective character (McGinn 1991, 24-25). When intentionality is considered separately from experience, it is usually described using concepts such as law-governed causal covariance, functional operations, or naturally selected responsiveness to environmental stimuli. Explanations of intentionality using these notions struggle to accommodate the more complex forms of intentionality which we can enjoy. One of the key reasons they struggle is because they neglect the way in

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which we are made aware by having experiences, each with a particular subjective character. When we perceive, consciously act, have emotions, or empathise with others, we have experiences which are often complex. It is in having these experiences that we can become aware of objects as culturally significant, situations as dangerous or relaxing, or persons as friendly or hostile to us. Again, it is not clear that we can explain this kind of complex awareness by appealing to simpler forms of intentionality, or by simply yoking intentionality and experience together. We need an account which acknowledges that we have this complex awareness by having these experiences, rather than insisting that the two be studied separately.

In addition to this, we characteristically become aware of things not in isolation, nor just as in a particular situation. Rather, we become aware of them as belonging in a world which we ourselves perceive and act in. This sense of things as parts of a larger world is absent from the simple examples of intentionality which much of the philosophy of mind begins with. But if we cannot account for this sense we have of the world, we cannot hope to explain the way in which objects and persons appear to us in our everyday lives.

In order to give an account of the nature of the subject, we need to understand both the subjective character of experiences and the structure of our awareness in a more detailed fashion than is currently available in the philosophy of mind. Furthermore, we need to show how these phenomena are related to the subject. It is important to note that when I say I am studying the subject to outline its nature, I am not trying to study something separate from and somehow underlying experiences and awareness. Rather, we need to study the subject precisely as it has experiences, and as it is aware. We cannot have a proper understanding of either experiences or of awareness without understanding the role the subject plays in each

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case. And without a proper understanding of these, we will not be able to have a proper understanding of the subject itself. What is required, therefore, is a systematic account of the subject of experiences which acknowledges and accounts for how it has experiences and can be aware of things. This is what I aim to provide in what follows.

In order to provide this account, I shall deploy the techniques and findings of Husserlian phenomenology. There are a number of different types of phenomenology, but I think Husserl's is the best suited to addressing the particular problems I want to tackle. It has a clearly-defined method for studying the intentional structure of experiences. It offers accounts both of how we become aware of things, and of the relation between the subject and its own experiences. And, in Husserl's later transcendental phenomenology, it specifically addresses the sense the world has for us of being a world, a unified whole which we take for granted in our everyday lives. It is this transcendental phenomenology which I shall outline and apply to the subject of experiences. Phenomenological approaches have been used previously in the philosophy of mind, but they have often focused on the project of giving a naturalistic account of phenomenology,<sup>1</sup> or relating phenomenology to the cognitive and brain sciences,<sup>2</sup> and have rarely addressed the transcendental dimension of Husserl's thought.<sup>3</sup> I shall set the issue of naturalism to one side, and apply the methods of transcendental phenomenology in a systematic way, to outline a picture of the subject which shows how experiences and awareness fit together.

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

In the first two chapters, I shall introduce the problems in the philosophy of mind which I want to address. In chapter one, I shall outline the notion of subjective

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<sup>1</sup> See the essays collected in Petitot *et al* 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Varela 1996; Lutz and Thompson 2003.

<sup>3</sup> See the essays in Dreyfus 1982.

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character, of there being something it is like for a subject to have experiences. I shall describe how this notion has been used in the philosophy of mind, and argue that we need to have a much clearer description of subjective character, in order to properly address the issues which it gives rise to. I shall briefly describe some of the main structural features of this subjective character, and argue that we can only understand these structural features when we have a clear understanding of the relation between each subject and its experiences.

In chapter two, I shall introduce the notion of awareness, briefly outlining how it is discussed in the philosophy of mind. I shall outline in particular the approach taken by John McDowell and Hilary Putnam, which allows for a richer conception of awareness than is usually discussed in these debates. I shall argue that transcendental phenomenology can serve to complement the work of McDowell and Putnam, by providing constructive answers to questions their work raises but cannot address. This demonstrates that transcendental phenomenology, despite working from assumptions very different to those accepted in much philosophy of mind, is relevant to the concerns of contemporary philosophy.

In the next two chapters, I shall outline the phenomenological methods which I wish to apply to the problems of experience and awareness. In chapter three, I shall introduce the basic concepts of phenomenology. I shall distinguish the intentional experience from its intentional structure or noema, and distinguish both of these from the object of the experience. I shall then describe Husserl's method of bracketing the intentional object in order better to describe the noema and the experience. I shall show how we can use this technique to provide detailed descriptions of the intentional structure of experiences, which can explain our awareness of objects.

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In chapter four, I shall outline how these basic phenomenological methods can be applied to study the sense we have of the entire world. This lets us move to a genuinely transcendental phenomenology. In transcendental phenomenology, we must bracket what Husserl calls the natural attitude, the way in which we live our everyday lives. This allows us to take up a different attitude, the transcendental attitude. In this attitude, we can study the natural attitude as an intentional structure of the subject, a way in which it is open to the world as a whole as opposed to just particular objects.

Having outlined these phenomenological techniques, I shall apply them in the next two chapters to the problems outlined in chapters one and two. In chapter five, I shall provide a phenomenological study of subjectivity, the relation between the subject and its experiences. I shall argue that we can understand how a subject's experiences belong to the subject by describing their temporal form, the way they flow through a tripartite structure, from the future through the present and into the past.

In chapter six, I shall address our awareness of objects, focusing on our sense of objectivity, the sense we have that the objects we are aware of may be different from how they appear to be. I shall argue that this sense of objectivity is part of the very structure of how we perceive things. In the natural attitude, we perceive objects as having features other than those we are directly aware of. Furthermore, we perceive them as belonging to a world which contains many more objects than we can be aware of at any one moment.

Lastly, in chapter seven, I shall address a problem that arises for any transcendental study of our experience. This is the paradox of subjectivity, the problem of explaining how the same subject can be both a part of the world and the

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transcendental subject which makes sense of the entire world. I shall first outline this paradox so as to show how exactly it poses a philosophical problem. Second, I shall argue that we can understand how the one subject can be both in the world and make sense of the whole world, by considering exactly how the subject appears to itself in both the natural and the transcendental attitudes.

If this thesis is successful, I will have provided a phenomenologically-informed ontological account of the subject, which will clarify how the subject can have experiences and how it can become aware of things by having these experiences. I will also have shown that a transcendental study of the subject can overcome a particular paradox, by showing how the transcendental subject can be accommodated within the world it makes sense of. This account of the subject will not help to solve the problem of how conscious experiences arise from our brains or bodily states. Nor will it help explain how physical or biological states can be intentionally directed. If it is successful, what it will do is provide a detailed picture of the subject of experiences, and of how the subject can be aware of objects and of the whole world. How the subject so characterised fits into the world described by the natural sciences is another day's work.

## Chapter 1

### The Subjective Character of Experiences

In the first two chapters of my thesis, I shall outline the two areas in the philosophy of mind to which I shall later apply the techniques and findings of phenomenology. These areas are the subjective character of our experiences, and our awareness of objects, respectively. In this chapter, I shall introduce the notion of subjective character, what it is like for a subject to undergo experiences, and discuss how this notion has been addressed in recent work in the philosophy of mind. I shall argue that much of this work is limited by the absence of a systematic and detailed description of the subjective character of experiences. To address this problem, I shall offer descriptions of some of the key structures of the subjective character of our experiences. These descriptions suggest that to understand the subjective character of experiences, we must give an account of the relation between experiences and their subject.

In section I, I shall offer an overview of some of the most prominent ways in which the term ‘what it is like’ and its cognates are deployed. In section II, I shall distinguish between broad and narrow uses of this term, and defend the broad usage.

In section III, I shall argue that the way philosophers think about the subjective character of experiences is hamstrung by the lack of a detailed and systematic description of this character. This is the description problem. I shall argue that we must set aside discussions of naturalistic accounts of phenomenal consciousness in order to properly address this problem.

In section IV, I shall begin my description of the key features of experience by describing how we can undergo a number of different experiences at once. In



section V, I shall argue that this phenomenon is best understood as each subject's occupying an overall experiential state, which is structured in various ways. In section VI, I shall introduce some of the features of this overall state and the different factors which influence it, ranging from the intentional features of the experience to its social and cultural context.

Lastly, in section VII, I shall briefly outline a model of subjectivity designed to account for the features outlined in the preceding sections. On this account, experiences are subjective in that they are states of a particular property of the subject, its field of experiencing. I shall develop this ontological model in greater detail in chapter five.

## I.

### **Different uses of 'What it is Like'**

There are a number of different types of consciousness which are discussed in contemporary philosophy of mind.<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I shall focus on one type, phenomenal consciousness. My reason for this is that it is in discussing this type of consciousness that philosophers of mind directly consider the subject of experiences.

Phenomenal consciousness is usually characterised in terms of subjective character. In what follows, I shall be discussing states, episodes or entities with regard to this character. By 'entity', I mean a particular item which can have properties.<sup>2</sup> A state of that entity is the entity's having a particular property or standing in a particular relation, where this occurs over an extended period of time.

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<sup>1</sup> For discussions of the different types of consciousness see Güzeldere 1997, 8-11; Tye 2003, 1-11; and Lutz and Thompson 2003, 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> See Lowe 2006, 69-71. Note, however, that he says 'object' where I shall say 'entity'. My use of the term 'object' is in line with its employment by Husserl, to refer to anything which we can be aware of: entities, properties, states, relations and events (1982, 10).

An episode the entity undergoes is the same as a state, except it occurs more quickly (Kim 1993, 35). Say a white sheet of paper is blown across the room by a gust of wind: we can say that the sheet of paper is an entity, its being white is a state it is in, and its being blown is an episode (or an event) it participates in. In this thesis, I shall not discriminate very sharply between how I use the terms ‘state’ and ‘episode’ (or ‘event’). Rather, I shall use each term as it seems to fit the context. A headache lasting several hours I would call an experiential state, whereas the experience of sneezing I would term an experiential episode. I shall use the term ‘experience’ to refer to both experiential states and experiential episodes. The entity which is in the experiential state or which undergoes the experiential episode is the subject of experiences. In the course of the thesis, I shall be trying to characterise the nature of this subject in a much more detailed and systematic fashion, but for the moment we can define the subject as an individual which has experiences (states or episodes with a subjective character).

We are concerned, therefore, to examine experiences and their subjects. In particular, we are focusing on experiences and their subjects insofar as they have a subjective character (or have states or episodes with this character). The term ‘experience’ is used in different ways in the philosophy of mind, but in what follows I shall stipulate that for a state or an episode to count as being an experience, it must have a subjective character. I allow that experiences can have properties other than this character, but I want to examine them only insofar as they exhibit this characteristic. Correlatively, while a subject of experiences may have various non-experiential properties, I want to consider it only insofar as it is an entity which has experiences.

In trying to clarify the subjective character of experiences, let us begin with the term (and its cognates) most commonly associated with this character: ‘what it is like’ to have an experience.<sup>3</sup> This term has become common currency in the philosophy of mind, but it is a currency whose value is contestable and has been denied.<sup>4</sup> In order to assess how useful this term is, let us first consider the different ways it is deployed. In this section, I shall outline the different kinds of item to which the term has been applied. In section II, I shall consider whether the term can be applied to a broader or narrower range of phenomena.

**(a)**

Nagel introduces the term as follows: “the fact that an organism has conscious experience *at all* means, basically, that there is something it is like to *be* that organism” (Nagel 1974, 436). The initial reference, therefore, is to a characteristic of the organism, rather than a characteristic of any of its states.<sup>5</sup> More precisely, it is a characteristic of the conscious experience of the organism, where ‘experience’ is taken in its mass noun sense as opposed to its count noun sense (i.e., referring to the subject’s overall experiential state, as opposed to its individual experiences).<sup>6</sup> Nagel terms this “the subjective character of experience” (1974, 436).

A crucial point here is that the phrase ‘something it is like to be a subject’ is not to be understood as analogical or as necessarily pointing to a resemblance. What the phrase used in this way picks out is not something which resembles some part of

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<sup>3</sup> I shall use the terms ‘what it is like’ and ‘something it is like’ more or less interchangeably, save for grammatical differences. This follows the example of Nagel and most others who use these terms.

<sup>4</sup> Lycan 1996, 77: “the phrase ‘what it’s like’ is now worse than useless: it is positively pernicious and harmful, because nothing whatever is clarified or explained by reference to it”. See also Güzeldere 1997, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Note also that Nagel moves freely between speaking of what it is like to be a conscious organism and what it is like to be a subject. I shall use the latter terminology throughout this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> This is basically the distinction drawn by Galen Strawson (1994, 45), although there is a terminological difference: Strawson identifies ‘experience’ in its mass noun sense with the property of ‘what-it-is-likeness’, whereas Nagel regards what-it-is-likeness or subjective character as one of the properties of the subject’s experience.

one's experience, but rather "how it is for the subject himself [sic]" (Nagel 1974, 440, fn. 6). As I see it, this use of the phrase simply picks out the phenomenon of a subject's life having a subjective character. It does not entail that this character is considered as resembling anything else.

**(b)**

This is one reference of the term, but Nagel quickly introduces another: what it is like to be a particular type of subject. He first refers to "what it is like to be an *X*" (1974, 437), and then introduces the example which has become standard, what it is like to be a bat (1974, 438). The idea here is that there are different types of subjects – for example, bats, as a type of subject, can be contrasted with humans, as another type. Each type of subject will have certain characteristic features, which Nagel refers to as the constitution of the type of subject (1974, 439). For instance, bats have a particular echolocation apparatus which is their primary perceptual sense. The characteristic features of each type of subject help to influence or determine what it is like to be a subject of that type. Nagel famously suggests that it can be very difficult, even impossible, for a subject of one type to know what it is like to be a subject of another type. For example, he refers to bat sonar as being a kind of perception which is not "subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine" (1974, 438). The perceptual apparatus of the bat influences or determines what it is like to be a bat in such a way that creatures who lack this perceptual apparatus, such as humans, might never be able to know what it is like (for a bat) to be a bat.

This use of the term does explicitly bring into play issues of resemblance. I do not see how the phrase just quoted, "subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine", can be read in any way other than one of resemblance, or lack thereof.

This issue is not implied by use (a). This is one way these two uses can be distinguished; the other is the appeal in (b) to different types of subject.

(c)

A third use of the term refers to a characteristic of a subject or organism's having or undergoing a conscious experience. Nagel arguably introduces this use when he speaks of bats feeling "some versions of pain, fear, hunger and lust", and refers to these as experiences which "have in each case a specific subjective character" (1974, 439). This seems to be the most common use of the term. John Heil writes "When you consciously experience something, a particular sunrise, for instance, there is 'something it is like' for you to have just *that* experience" (2004, 521); Gilbert Harman refers to what it is like "to undergo this or that experience" (2004, 642); William Lycan speaks of "'what it is like' for the subject to be in a mental state of such-and-such a sort" (1990, 109); and John Kekes describes the subjective component of an experience as "the having of the experience" (1977, 535), "the experience of living through the experience" (1977, 536).

It is debatable whether this use of the term should be distinguished from using it to refer directly to the conscious states themselves, or characteristics of those states. For example, John Searle refers to "the what-it-is-like features of the subjective states of consciousness" (1992, 117); Galen Strawson refers to the subjective character of experiences as their "what-it-is-likeness" (1994, 45); Jonathan Lowe, speaking of there being something it is like to perceive, refers to this as the phenomenal character of the perceptual experience (1997, 118). Sydney Shoemaker hedges his bets: "What is 'like' something in this sense is an experience, sensation, or whatever, or perhaps the having of an experience or sensory state" (1996, 255). For the time being I shall assume that using the term to refer to a

conscious state and referring to a subject's having a conscious state are one and the same usage.

**(d)**

A fourth use of the term develops the third, by referring to the subjective character of particular types of experiences. To the extent that we can group different experiences together by appeal to their shared subjective or qualitative character, we can speak of what it is like to have a specific type of experience. An example would be the notion that bats can have particular kinds of experiences related to their 'sonar'-based perceptual system. More mundane examples include the types of experience we pick out by using general terms such as 'pain', 'sorrow', 'the taste of a lemon', and so on. At least one way we group sets of experiences together is by appeal to a common qualitative character, or to a commonality of qualitative character. Note that this use, like (b), involves resemblance between the subjective characters of different kinds of experience. We are familiar with the suggestion that what it is like to taste lemon is closer to what it is like to taste orange than what it is like to taste milk. Distinctions and judgements of this sort rely on the specific character of different types of experiences.

Finally, some writers explicitly use the term in more than one way, or at least as having more than one kind of reference. For example, David Chalmers writes that "a being is conscious if there is something it is like to be that being [...] Similarly, a mental state is conscious if there is something it is like to be in that mental state" (1996, 4). Zahavi and Parnas speak both of "what it 'feels' like" to have experiences, and what it is like to be a particular type of subject, for example a human or an alligator (1999, 255). And Mark Rowlands notes that the term can be linked to types of subjects, types of experience or to particular experiences (2001, 5).

So there are at least four different uses of the term ‘what it is like’ employed in contemporary philosophy of mind:

- (a) what it is like to be a conscious subject;
- (b) what it is like to be a particular type of conscious subject;
- (c) what it is like to have or undergo a conscious experience; and
- (d) what it is like to have or undergo a particular type of conscious experience.

In addition, as noted above, some writers employ the term in more than one of these ways.

(e)

These uses relate to each other in various ways, some of which are troublesome, some of which are not. Some writers, for example Nagel, move very freely between (a) and (b), but (b) is a very tricky notion. It requires a principled differentiation of types of subject, something which Nagel himself has arguably never provided, and something which he has been taken to task over. For example, do different kinds map onto different biological species, or can differences between members of the one species suffice to ground a difference between two kinds of subject?<sup>7</sup>

Other uses are related in less troublesome ways. For example, (a) and (c) are very closely linked. Indeed, the first implicitly entails the second. What it is like to be a subject must be cashed out in terms of the subject’s undergoing some of those experiences it is capable of having. The question ‘what is it like to be a bat?’ only makes sense if we can go on to ask ‘what is it like for a bat to use its sonar?’, ‘what is it like for a bat to hang upside-down?’, and so on. This is not just a matter of

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<sup>7</sup> This line of questioning is developed by Wider (1990, 490).

having to characterise the bat's experience by means of examples. Use (a) refers to something like the subject's experiential life or overall experiential state. I do not think we can make any sense of this except as being in some way made up of or incorporating individual experiences.

On the other hand, what it is like to have a particular experience (say, of using bat sonar, or of hanging upside-down) is always a matter of what it is like for a particular subject, and the subjective character of the particular experience will depend, not just on the constitution of the subject having it, but on the experiential context in which the particular experience occurs. That is, what it is like for a bat to use its sonar will partly depend on the other experiences the bat has had and is having. These will form the context for this particular experience (I shall return to the relation between individual experiences and the experiential context in sections IV-VI below).

The relation between (c) and (d) can be explicated in line with a distinction drawn by Levine, between what he terms 'subjectivity' and 'qualitative character'. Taking the example of his seeing a red diskette case, he defines subjectivity as "the phenomenon of there being something it's like for me" to see this object (Levine 2001, 7). Qualitative character is what I have been calling subjective character. It concerns 'what' exactly it is like for the subject to have a particular experience. While one can draw this distinction with any particular conscious experience, the point of introducing use (d) is precisely to focus on the specific character of the particular experience, as opposed to the general phenomenon of this character's being for a subject. After all, all conscious experiences have subjectivity, as Levine defines it, to an equal degree, but they will have very different subjective characters. Use (d) divides experiences into types depending on their particular subjective



character. Pains will share the quality of painfulness, visual experiences of red objects (in normal viewing conditions) will supposedly share the quality of reddishness, and so on.

Having distinguished these four uses, I wish to put two of them to one side for the remainder of my thesis. First, I shall refrain from use (b). This is partly because I am concerned to understand subjectivity *per se*, rather than the subjective lives of particular types of subjects. Furthermore, a constructive use of (b) would require a proper theory of types of subject, which seems like a very difficult task (see Wider 1990). Finally, (b) is usually deployed in debates concerning whether or not it is possible for subjects of one type to understand what it is like to be a subject of a very different type. I wish to avoid engaging with these debates in what follows.

Also, I shall largely be avoiding use (d). This is partly because this use focuses on the specific subjective character of particular experiences or types of experiences, whereas I am more concerned with what Levine terms subjectivity, there being something it is like for any subject to have any conscious experience. Furthermore, drawing up types of qualitative character, and even more so describing the specific character of particular experiences, are notoriously difficult tasks.<sup>8</sup> It will be impossible to avoid all talk of the specific character of particular experiences, or of types of experiences, but I shall take as much care as possible when introducing these usages.

I shall confine myself to uses (a) and (c), which, as noted above, seem to be very closely linked. In each case, what is at stake is the subjective life of any subject. Use (a) points us to the subject whose subjective life it is, while use (c) highlights the individual experiences which make up that subjective life. My primary focus in

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<sup>8</sup> See section III (e) below. See also some of the extensive literature on the transparent nature of qualitative character; for example Tye 1995, 30-31, or Rowlands 2001, 344-347.

addressing what it is like for a subject is to consider the subject's experiential life as a whole, as the context within which it has any particular experience. To understand what it is like for a subject to have any conscious experience whatsoever, we must understand the structural features of what it is like to be a conscious subject. For this reason, my primary usage shall be (a). However, we can only get a handle on these structural features by considering how a subject undergoes particular experiences, which means I shall have frequent recourse to (c).

## II.

### **Broad and Narrow Usages**

#### **(a)**

Let us next consider the different ranges across which this term is applied. For the sake of simplicity, let us assume that what it is like is a characteristic of a subject's undergoing certain conscious experiences. The question I wish to address is which experiences can be said to have this subjective character, and which will lack it. The choice of answer seems to depend on two factors: the base of examples one cites in trying to characterise what it is like to undergo a conscious experience, and the terminology one uses in trying to explicate this subjective character. The choices one makes here will incline one towards a narrower or broader attribution of subjective character.

The narrow usage will draw on a smaller range of examples, usually perceptual experiences and bodily sensations: "the unique quality of the experience we enjoy when we hear the timbre of a trumpet-blast, or drink-in the pink and orange hues of a sunset, or sniff the sweet heady smell of a rose" (Carruthers 2000, 13; see

also Rosenthal 2005, 41, 124). Often, what it is like to undergo such experiences is glossed as their feeling a certain way, their having a subjective feel or a sensory quality which is consciously available (Carruthers 2000, 13, and Tye 1995, 134). Once what it is like to undergo an experience is characterised in such terms and with such examples, the tendency (it is only a tendency, rather than an explicit assumption) is to restrict it to conscious experiences which ‘feel’ a certain way, and exclude those which do not have a subjective feel. So Carruthers argues that there can be states which are conscious but which there is nothing it is like for the subject to have them: his example is an act of thinking. While conscious acts of thinking may have a subjective feel because they occur in ‘inner speech’ or have mental imagery associated with them, this is not part of what they themselves are (Carruthers 2000, 17). As Jacob puts it, “it is not much like anything to think that 2 is an even number or that the sum of the angles of a triangle equal  $180^\circ$ ” (1998, 447).<sup>9</sup>

The broader usage will draw on a wider range of examples, and will downplay the feeling aspect of subjective character. For example, Galen Strawson characterises the experience of a conscious subject as “everything about what it is like to be that being, experientially speaking, from moment to moment as it lives its life” (1994, 3). This is obviously not intended as a definition, but rather a gesture towards the range of events and states Strawson wishes to include as experiences. These include cognitive acts and conscious acts of remembering (1994, 3-4). Furthermore, Strawson holds that we can speak of understanding-experience, the experiential aspect of our automatically taking marks or sounds as signs which express propositions (1994, 6). He distinguishes this from the auditory or visual

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<sup>9</sup> See also Tye 1995, 4, and McGinn 1991, 25 fn. 4.

experience which is involved when we are aware of these marks or sounds, and also from the mental images or associations which might accompany one's understanding of propositions or of words (1994, 8).

**(b)**

In this chapter, I want to use the term in the broader fashion. In the remainder of this section, I shall argue that there is no reason, *prima facie*, to reject the broad use. It does not follow from this that we should reject the narrow use – perhaps both uses are valid, and the difference is merely terminological, a matter of using ‘what it is like (narrow)’ and ‘what it is like (broad)’, respectively. All I want to establish for the moment is licence to proceed with the broad usage. I grant that many of the typical examples offered in the literature of states with subjective character are perceptual experiences or bodily sensations. Such states often have very vivid subjective characters, which makes them useful for illustrating the basic idea of an experience's having such a character. But we do not need to restrict ourselves to these examples.

To see this, consider the following cases: realising that you are in love with someone; a writer struggling to complete the manuscript of his or her first novel; watching a sports team you follow lose a match. I take it as obvious that in each of these cases, there is something it is like for the subject to undergo the particular experience. The particular subjective character of each of these experiences may depend upon perceptual experiences and bodily sensations, but *prima facie* they are not identical with either perceptual experiences or bodily sensations. In the first example, your experience will typically have both bodily and perceptual aspects, but the emotion you feel is quite specifically directed to a particular person, and what you love them for may be things which cannot be presented to you in sense

perception: their sense of humour, courage, intelligence, or sensitivity.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in the second example, the struggling would-be novelist will have amassed all manner of perceptual and bodily experiences relevant to the project of writing the novel, but his or her feelings are directed to the novel itself, including sections of it which he or she may have yet to write. In the third example, the case is specifically described in perceptual terms, but what you undergo in this experience cannot be reduced to an awareness of certain physical objects or their physical properties (the kind of properties which physics or one of the other natural sciences might study). The subjective character of this experience involves a particular kind of emotional comportment, which is socially mediated, requiring an awareness of a specific social and cultural context. Without the concepts of ‘team’, ‘match’ and ‘losing’, you will be unable to undergo an experience with this particular subjective character.

In each of these cases, therefore, the particular experience is directed at, and its character is partly determined by, higher-level properties of the objects of awareness (that is, properties which cannot be directly grasped in sense-perception).<sup>11</sup> I am not saying that the awareness of such higher-level properties has in each case a specific qualitative feature. Rather, my point is that one’s awareness of these higher-level properties can make a difference to what it is like to be the subject undergoing that experience. I doubt there is a single determinate experiential character common to every instance of struggling to write a novel, but anyone who is in that predicament will experience the struggle, and that experience will alter their

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<sup>10</sup> To be more precise, these are not the kind of features which a defender of the narrow interpretation will want to admit can be presented to you in sense perception. If they do admit that we can perceive such features, then their position would become much closer to the broad interpretation.

<sup>11</sup> The distinction between higher- and lower-level properties is adapted from Bayne 2009, 385-388. Bayne focuses on whether perceptual experience is influenced by higher-level properties (2009, 395; see also Siegel 2006, 482). I am claiming that the subjective character of non-perceptual experience is also sensitive to these properties.

overall experiential state.<sup>12</sup> I take it that examples of this sort provide *prima facie* evidence in favour of the legitimacy of the broader use. To deny this, one would have to either claim that the properties of, say, one's unwritten novel are in fact lower-level, or deny that the properties of the novel are in fact relevant here (one might say that it is the properties of the pieces of paper that I have written bits of the novel on which are important here). Or one could simply deny that struggling to write a novel has any impact on the character of one's experiences. None of these claims seems plausible *prima facie*.

While it might be conceded that there is something it is like in these cases which cannot be reduced to the level of sense-perception or of bodily sensation, nonetheless the following theoretical argument could be advanced against the broad usage. It might be suggested that the broad usage, though pointing to genuine phenomena, lumps them together under the one heading when in fact we are dealing with a heterogeneous set. Because the term 'what it is like for X' is so flexible and has so little content, it allows us to pick out different kinds of states, but it is a mistake to think that these states have anything more in common than that they can be referred to by means of this term and its cognates. If these states really are heterogeneous, we would be mistaken in thinking that we can theorise about them in any strict way.<sup>13</sup>

I shall be able to address this criticism properly only after conducting a detailed examination of conscious experiences. For the moment, we can note that all experiences belong to a particular kind of relation with their subject; they are states

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<sup>12</sup> Again, Strawson makes a similar point – to speak of understanding-experience is not to commit oneself to the view that a specific qualitative character accompanies every understanding-experience, let alone every experience of understanding a particular sentence (1994, 7).

<sup>13</sup> This line of criticism is similar to that offered by Wilkes against the term 'consciousness' (1988, 178-195). She canvasses several different uses of that term in support of the claim that it picks out a heterogeneous and therefore theoretically unimportant set of phenomena. A related point is developed by Hofstadter (1981, 406-414).

for their subject, states that it is like something for their subject to be in. I shall sketch an ontological model of this relation in the last section of this chapter and develop this model in more detail in chapter five. As of now, I take it that we have no decisive reason to not use the term ‘what it is like’ in a broad fashion.

### **III.**

#### **The Description Problem**

Thus far I have distinguished between the different ways in which the term ‘what it is like’ is used. In this section, I shall outline what I consider to be the major weakness these different uses share. This is the description problem. The term ‘what it is like’ and its cognates are employed, not to better describe the phenomena to which they refer, but to pick out those phenomena in order to bring them into metaphysical and scientific debates. As a result, much of the discussion of phenomenal consciousness proceeds with a very thin understanding of that which is under discussion. In order to address the description problem, I suggest that we should put to one side the issue of naturalism, the dominant framework within which most discussions of phenomenal consciousness take place.

#### **(a)**

Phenomenal consciousness is usually discussed in the philosophy of mind in the context of naturalism, physicalism or materialism.<sup>14</sup> For the sake of brevity, I

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<sup>14</sup> By naturalism, I mean the assumption that everything which exists is either the kind of thing which can be studied by the natural sciences, or is metaphysically dependent upon what these sciences study (Botterill and Carruthers 1999, 161). By physicalism, I mean the view that the only things which exist are physical entities in space and time (Lowe 2002, 2). By materialism, I mean the view that everything which exists is either a physical particle, or is made up of physical particles (Lycan 1990, 109).

shall only discuss naturalism in what follows, but what I have to say can easily be extended to physicalism and materialism.

Many theorists want to explain consciousness in the canonical terms of the natural sciences, or in terms which are compatible with these canonical terms and which are non-experiential (for instance, functional descriptions, where the functional role can be played by a physical, chemical or biological entity).<sup>15</sup> That is, they are looking for an explanans couched only in these chosen terms, which would fully account for the explanandum, phenomenal consciousness. Of course, many philosophers have challenged the possibility of this project ever succeeding. But the point I want to emphasise is that the project of naturalism provides the parameters of the debate. Most discussions of phenomenal consciousness either defend or criticise naturalistic explanations of consciousness. It is in this context that what it is like to have conscious experience is usually raised as an issue. Nagel puts forward the subjective character of experiences as that feature of them which eludes “any of the familiar, recently devised reductive analyses of the mental” (1974, 436). Rosenthal claims that “What seems difficult or intractable about sensory quality is the face it presents to consciousness – what the sensation is like for somebody who has it” (2005, 135). Papineau describes what it is like to have conscious experiences as “that aspect of consciousness that makes it so philosophically interesting” (2002, 13).

I think these debates over the possibility of naturalising phenomenal consciousness are working within a severe limitation. The limitation does not concern the merits or demerits of naturalism, but rather the restrictions that this debate imposes on how terms such as ‘what it is like’ are used. Because naturalism is the main issue in discussions of phenomenal consciousness, these terms are usually

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<sup>15</sup> There are a number of different theories as to which kind of state or property might explain phenomenal consciousness. But for any of these theories to be properly naturalist (or physicalist or materialist), they must assume that the explanans cannot itself be experiential (Levine 2001, 20-21).



deployed only within debates about the possibility of naturalistic explanations (that is, either natural-scientific explanations, or explanations by reference to properties which supervene on those studied by the natural sciences). The problem is that in this context, the need to provide a detailed description of the subjective character of experiences is sidelined. In contemporary debates, the phrase ‘what it is like’ is almost always employed to pick out a phenomenon rather than to describe it.<sup>16</sup> But without a determinate description of the subjective character of experiences, many of the debates concerning naturalism cannot be resolved one way or the other. This is the description problem.

**(b)**

This way of characterising the description problem requires that I can differentiate between picking out a phenomenon and describing it. By ‘picking out a phenomenon’, I mean any way of isolating that phenomenon as a subject-matter. We can pick out a phenomenon in various ways – by name, by description, by ostensive definition, or simply by perceiving it as the phenomenon it is. A way of picking something out is successful if it allows us to distinguish this phenomenon from others, and to track it through changes which it or we undergo. Picking out, understood in this way, includes cases of successful reference, but I do not think it is exhausted by these cases. For example, we can pick out nonexistent objects, which it is generally agreed we cannot refer to (for further examples, see Reimer 2003/2009, § 3.4).<sup>17</sup>

What I want to stress is that a way of picking out a phenomenon need not tell us anything about what that phenomenon is. We might only have a very minimal

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<sup>16</sup> The same goes for its cognates, such as ‘subjective character’, ‘qualitative character’, ‘phenomenal experience’, and so on.

<sup>17</sup> Note that I am using ‘object’ in a broad sense, meaning anything I can think about or be aware of (see 10, fn. 2 above).

understanding of what it is we are picking out, even though we may be able to pick it out and track it quite precisely. For example, suppose I ask someone what the word ‘bachelor’ means, and they tell me it is the word most commonly used in the philosophical literature on analyticity.<sup>18</sup> Now, suppose they are correct in saying this. In that case, we have a way of picking out the word ‘bachelor’ (assuming we can circumscribe ‘the philosophical literature on analyticity’). However, this clearly does not tell me the meaning of the word. One could pick out the word in this way without having any idea what it means. Indeed, one could pick out a word in a similar fashion even if the word had no clearly defined meaning. Consider how you would pick out the word, or pseudo-word, ‘teavy’, if asked to do so (see Carnap 1959, 63-64).

What is true of words and definitions is also true, I suggest, of phenomena and their descriptions. By ‘description’ I mean, not just a true statement concerning an object (such as a correct predication or a valid comparison between the object and something else). Rather, I mean a statement of the essence or nature of the object, a statement of what that object is. For example, if a concrete particular is able to undergo changes and remain the same item, talk of the essence of that particular is simply talk of that which can undergo change in this manner.<sup>19</sup> In the specific case of experiences, we can distinguish features which they have essentially (such as their subjective character) from features which they simply happen to have (such as their occurring at a particular time).

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<sup>18</sup> This example is taken from Fine (1994, 13).

<sup>19</sup> Obviously, I am waiving Leibniz’s Law as a criterion of essence here. If one wished, one could reserve the term ‘identity’ for the kinds of case where Leibniz’s Law would apply, and use the terms ‘survival’ or ‘persistence’ for cases of items surviving changes. But in that case, one can still ask what it is which is capable of surviving changes in this fashion, and that would simply be to ask what the essence of this item is.

A statement of the essence of an item would be its real definition, as opposed to the nominal definition of a word (Fine 1994, 2). A description need not state every essential feature of an object, but it must reveal something about what that object is. In the case of a word, a description might well involve defining its meaning. In the case of a physical object, a description might involve telling us something about its dimensions, makeup, causal dispositions, or location in space and time.<sup>20</sup>

This notion of a description allows us to draw a contrast between merely picking a phenomenon out and describing it. A description will often suffice to pick out a phenomenon – the problem is that the converse is not necessarily true. In cases such as the meaning of the word bachelor, the phenomenon may be picked out in a way which tells us nothing about the nature of the phenomenon, what it is. This contrast between picking a phenomenon out and describing it is somewhat rough, partly because I have as of yet said little about the notion of the essence of nature of an item (I shall return to this issue in the next chapter). However, this contrast has enough precision to allow me to outline the description problem as a limitation on much work in the philosophy of mind.

(c)

Let us return to conscious experiences. In most of the debates about naturalistic explanations of consciousness, the term ‘what it is like’ and its cognates are used to pick out a phenomenon. This phenomenon, the subjective character of consciousness, is treated either as the explanandum of a metaphysical or scientific theory, or as a counter-example to this theory. Clearly, any theoretical account or argument against a theory must use at least some description of the phenomenon.

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<sup>20</sup> I should note that my discussion of descriptions is neutral on the difference between definite or indefinite descriptions (see Ludlow 2004/2007, §§ 1, 6, 7).

However, in the philosophy of mind, relatively little space is given to characterising what the subjective character of experience is. As David Cooper puts it,

‘Being like something’, when invoked in the characterization of what it is for any experience to be conscious, is a term of art. As such, it fails to explicate a conception of conscious experience [...] rather, it gains a relevant and determinate sense in terms of such a conception (2006, 34)

What is lacking is a description, or, as Cooper puts it, a characterisation of subjective character. A great deal of contemporary work on phenomenal consciousness proceeds in this way: the explanandum is introduced, illustrated by a sort of ostensive definition and an example or two, and on this basis the theorising begins.<sup>21</sup> This offhand treatment of subjective character is typified by Chalmers, who refers to “an unarticulated ‘flash’ of experience” as supposedly characterising the very simplest forms of conscious experience (1996, 295-296). It is difficult to see how talking about ‘flashes’ of experience could help anyone get a handle on the nature of the phenomenon in question.

This cavalier treatment of the term has consequences for the metaphysical discussions in which it is employed. Take, for example, debates concerning the conceivability or the possibility of phenomenal zombies, beings which are physically or functionally identical with humans, but which lack phenomenal consciousness (Chalmers 1996, 94-99). If phenomenal zombies are possible (metaphysically, if not physically), this would present a counterexample to claims that phenomenal consciousness is metaphysically determined by certain non-phenomenal properties or states. Even if phenomenal zombies are not metaphysically possible, the fact that

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<sup>21</sup> For examples, see Carruthers 2000, 13; Tye 1995, 3-4; Rey 1991, 89.

they might be conceivable is held to have its own significance. In particular, it is suggested that the conceivability of zombies shows that phenomenal concepts and non-phenomenal concepts must be distinct from each other. This conceptual distinction, it is suggested, is the main reason why there is an explanatory gap between explanations couched in physical terms and the experiential phenomena for which they are intended to account.<sup>22</sup>

I am not interested in the details of these debates so much as their conceptual presuppositions. Clearly, in discussions of both the metaphysical possibility and the conceivability of zombies, the concept of a phenomenal zombie will play an indispensable role.<sup>23</sup> Zombies are defined in terms of their lacking something which humans have, namely phenomenal consciousness. The suggestion is that there is something it is like to be a human being, but there is nothing it is like to be a zombie. The problem is that without a clear description of what it is like to be a conscious subject or to have experiences, one will not know exactly what it is that we have but zombies lack. The term ‘what it is like’ does allow us to point to the phenomenon which we have but zombies would lack, but it does not give us a clear and detailed conception of this phenomenon. For example, it is unclear whether states with no subjective character can perform the same functions as human states of perception, emotion, or reflecting on values. If such states were impossible, then a functionally equivalent zombie would be impossible as well. But the notion of there being something it is like to perceive, be in an emotional state or reflect on what is significant gives us no clue as to the functional role of this subjective character. It is

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Levine 2001, 79: “The conceivability of zombies is thus the principle manifestation of the explanatory gap”.

<sup>23</sup> Strictly speaking, the putative concept of a phenomenal zombie (since if zombies are not conceivable, it may be that we do not have a coherent concept of one).

too minimal a description to provide a solid ground for our intuitions as to whether or not zombies are possible.

A fundamental problem with the term 'what it is like', therefore, is that whatever kind of thing it is applied to, or however broadly we take it to refer, it serves merely to pick out a phenomenon which is then theoretically discussed rather than described in detail. This is the description problem. A solution to this problem would be a description of conscious experiences as they are experienced by the subject in as clear and detailed a fashion as possible. Given the difficulties raised by the project of explaining conscious experience (not just in the philosophy of mind, but in cognitive science, neuroscience and psychology), such a description would seem very desirable indeed.

**(d)**

In order to solve the description problem, I think we must address it independently of the issue of naturalism. Discussions of naturalism are set up by reference to naturalistic, non-experiential accounts of our experiences. The description problem consists in our need to provide a description of the subjective character of experiences. This way of setting up the problem does not seem to require that this description must use only in non-experiential terms. Suppose we were able to provide a detailed, systematic description of subjective character, but that we used experiential terms in doing so. To dismiss this putative solution of the description problem on the grounds that it was non-naturalistic would be obviously mistaken. It is precisely because the success-conditions of the description problem are independent of those of the problem of consciousness that we would be better advised to keep the two problems separate. What we need to do is to set aside

debates about naturalism, and focus on trying to get as clear and detailed a view of the subjective character of experiences as possible.

I should stress that in suggesting this, I am not assuming that naturalism cannot work, nor am I assuming that the truth or falsity of naturalism cannot be decided upon. Nor indeed am I suggesting that the traditional problem of consciousness is unimportant, or is a problem only given questionable assumptions.<sup>24</sup> Setting the issue of naturalism aside is a strategic move, designed to break the impasse in current debates which results from a lack of a robust description of experiences. Therefore, my approach to phenomenal consciousness is best characterised as non-naturalistic, since I do not assume that a description or account of consciousness must conform to the strictures of naturalism. This is not the same as anti-naturalism, the assumption that no account of consciousness which conforms to these strictures is possible.

It might be objected that the success-conditions of any attempt to solve the description problem will be vague. This is correct, to the extent that providing a description of anything is itself a somewhat vague notion. But it does not follow that the description problem is therefore ill-construed. While it is difficult to state the problem in categorical terms, we can illustrate it by means of examples such as the case of phenomenal zombies discussed in the previous subsection. Examples such as this suggest that there is a genuine philosophical issue here. They also suggest that we can assess the success or failure of a proposed solution to the problem by considering how it helps to guide our ontological descriptions of experiences and of

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<sup>24</sup> See Lutz and Thompson (2003, 48). They define the hard problem of consciousness, where much of the philosophical work on phenomenal consciousness is focused, as a metaphysical issue concerning the place of consciousness in nature, based on “the dichotomous Cartesian opposition of the ‘mental’ (subjectivist consciousness) versus the ‘physical’ (objectivist nature)”. Lutz and Thompson reject both this opposition and the notions of the mental and the physical upon which they see it as based.

the subject. An ontological description of this kind is the ultimate aim of this thesis.<sup>25</sup> It is with this aim in mind that I shall take up the description problem.

(e)

In what follows, I want to describe the structural features of the subjective character of experiences. This approach is similar to Nagel's suggestion at the end of 'What it is like to be a Bat'. He speculates that what is needed is a way of thinking about conscious experiences which is not dependent on empathy or the imagination. The goal would be to devise an "objective phenomenology", a way of describing "the subjective character of experiences in a form comprehensible to beings incapable of having those experiences" (Nagel 1974, 449).<sup>26</sup> Nagel suggests that, while such descriptions might inevitably omit the specific subjective character of particular experiences, the structural features of this subjective character might be amenable to a more objective description (that is, be describable in terms that a subject who could not have experiences of that type could understand). Since I am studying the general features of the subject and subjectivity, it makes sense for me to focus on these structural features.

Before beginning my description, I must distinguish between it and a separate project, that of capturing the precise subjective character of individual experiences or of types of experiences. Nagel writes that the subjective character of experience "is not captured by any of the familiar, recently derived reductive analyses of the mental" (1974, 436). I suspect the term 'capture' serves to confuse the issue Nagel is getting at. As far as I can see, to capture the subjective character of a particular experience in this way would be to say precisely what it is like for a

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<sup>25</sup> I should add that I shall not address the issue of phenomenal zombies in this thesis, though it is possible that the account of the subject I shall provide may be of use in helping to clarify this issue.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe has suggested that Husserl's phenomenology can be seen as carrying out Nagel's project of an objective phenomenology (2002, 372). My thesis as a whole can be read as developing this suggestion in much more detail.



subject to undergo that experience. I am not at all confident that we have precise notion of what it would be to do this. We don't need to appeal to bat experience to make this point clear – I invite the reader to try to describe the taste or mint toothpaste, or the feeling of banging one's knee sharply against the corner of a table, or what it is like to enjoy the atmosphere of the film *Lost In Translation*, in a way which captures the particular character of that experience.

I am not saying that these are impossible tasks. We can certainly describe these experiences using terms which strike us as more or less apt. Much poetry and prose can be regarded as trying to capture experiences, and there is a sense in which it can succeed or fail: the reader will respond 'Yes, that's exactly what it's like' to a description of some experience. The combination of carefully chosen language (or visual imagery), empathy and imagination can allow us to understand what it is like to undergo experiences we have never had, or to better understand familiar experiences. Something similar may be achieved by other forms of expression, such as drama, cinema, or the plastic arts. But in these cases where we capture the character of an experience, a great deal of work will be done by the shared cultural, social and experiential background. The attempts to describe the bat's experiences in such general terms as 'perceptual' or 'pain' are obviously schematic, but this is partly because, as human beings, we share so little of the relevant background with bats.

I mention this only to make clear that I am not trying to offer descriptions which would aim at capturing the subjective character of experiences in this way. My descriptions shall not aim at vividness or at stimulating the imagination of the reader, but at picking out details which are characteristic of experience in general, rather than the specific character of particular experiences. Nor do I intend to draw up a full taxonomy of different types of experience, distinguished and sorted by their

subjective characters. To the extent that I shall describe the features of particular experiences or particular types of experiences, these will be treated as examples of experiences in general.

#### IV.

##### **The Unity of Experience**

In the remainder of this chapter, I shall outline some of the main structural features of the subjective character of our experiences. In particular, I shall describe the holism of this character, the way in which a number of experiences can co-exist in a subject's overall experiential state. This description will lead me to raise the issue of the relation between a subject and its own experiences. In the last section, I shall briefly outline a model of the subject-experience relation, which I shall consider in more detail in chapter five.

##### **(a)**

To begin describing the structure of the subjective character of our experiences, consider that we often experience several things at once. One can simultaneously feel tired, hear the hum of the air-conditioner, and see a red book on a brown table. I think we can describe this phenomenon either in terms of one's simultaneously having a number of different experiences, or of one's having a single experience whose subjective character has a number of different aspects. In what follows, I shall use the first description.<sup>27</sup> However, in certain cases, such as when

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<sup>27</sup> This description follows that of Husserl, who refers to the subject's having different mental processes simultaneously: "every mental process in an essentially self-enclosed concatenation of mental processes is not only considered in view of temporal succession but in view of simultaneity" (1982, 196).

one has a complex emotion, it may be more appropriate to talk of having a single experience.

Talking of having different experiences requires that we are able to distinguish between and individuate particular experiences. There are a number of different ways in which we can do this. One would be to identify a particular experience by reference to a particular neural state or pattern of activity. The experience in question would be picked out by reference to its correlation with this neural phenomenon (for example, we could designate as ‘a particular experience’ that slice of conscious life which occurs simultaneously with a particular neural phenomenon). Alternatively, one could identify an experience by reference to a particular environmental stimulus or group of stimuli which helps to bring it about.

I am more interested in experiences as undergone by the subject, and so the kinds of individuation I am interested in are those which the subject itself will be capable of making, by having the experiences or by reflecting on them. I think there are two main ways in which the subject can distinguish between and individuate its own experiences in this first-personal manner. First, we can individuate experiences in terms of their intentional directedness, that is, in terms of what objects, states or processes they make us aware of. When we speak of hearing the hum of the air-conditioner, or seeing the book on the table, we are in each case picking out a perceptual experience partly by reference to the object of perception. Or, to vary the example, I can be aware of the same object, but by means of different sense-modalities: I can both see and touch the book, and can differentiate two experiences here, as visual and tactile, respectively. In normal circumstances, my experiences of the book and the air-conditioner do not blend into each other, and nor do my tactile and visual experiences. I shall have more to say on the relation between experiences

and intentionality in section VI, but for the moment all I want to note is that we often do appeal to this link in individuating our own experiences. Note that we usually do this without having any scientific knowledge of the exact causal relation between our experiences and their perceptual objects.<sup>28</sup>

The other first-personal way I can distinguish between my own experiences is by appealing to their subjective character. This is the case with, for instance, different emotional episodes, which characteristically (though perhaps not always) have a distinctive subjective character. I am not suggesting that different emotions can be analysed in terms of, or reduced to, their subjective character, just that there is something it is like to have a feeling of anger, which is different to the subjective character of grief.

Note that we can use a combination of these different first-personal ways of distinguishing between emotions. Consider experiencing mixed emotions. When a loved one who has been battling a painful and debilitating condition passes away, you might experience a mixture of grief at the loss and relief for them, that their suffering has finally ended. Such a case could be described as a single mixed emotion, or as the simultaneous experience of two different emotions; but in either case, we can distinguish between the grief and the relief at least partly by reference to what it is like to undergo that experience or experiences.

**(b)**

Therefore, I think we are entitled to say that each of us often has several experiences at once. Indeed, I suggest it is usually the case that each of us is undergoing, at any one time, more than one experience. What I want to focus on next

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<sup>28</sup> This is one of the reasons why I think we can distinguish between appeals to objects of intentionality and appeals to environmental stimuli. Another is that the relation of stimulator-stimulated is a causal one, whereas the same is not true of intentionality. Even though perception may supervene on causal relations between the perceptual experience and the perceptual object, it is not thereby reducible to these causal relations. I shall discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

is that, in such cases, the experiences usually do not run together willy-nilly, or blend together in an indistinguishable phenomenal mush. One can simultaneously have a variety of experiences, which are separate from each other and yet stand in relation to each other. The exact nature of this relation or relations is what interests me.

One approach to this issue is to begin with individual experiences, taken as the basic units of conscious life. Let us say that sensations are features of mental life which are defined by their subjective character (McGinn 1996, 9). The approach I am considering would take sensations so defined as the basic elements or atoms of conscious life, and attempt to reconstruct our actual lived experiences from different combinations of sensations.

But this approach faces several problems. To begin with, there is the danger that it will present a distorted view of the nature of our conscious lives. While I have argued that we can undergo different experiences simultaneously, it is a further step to claim that these different experiences exist as individual elements which are combined into my overall experiences.<sup>29</sup> This atomistic account is not entailed by the distinction between experiences I have just argued for. Furthermore, the atomistic approach goes against a central experiential phenomenon, that the individual experiences I can have are unified. To see this, note that one can perceive the objects around one as unified in a single space and time, rather than as a number of separate objects which one must judge to be in the same space and time. Recall again the example of my perceptual awareness of the different objects in the room: the air-conditioner, the book, and the table. I experience these objects of perception as belonging together. But note that, in order for me to experience them as unified in

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<sup>29</sup> To be more exact, they temporally overlap. I shall continue to be aware of the air-conditioner even if I look away from the book. But this temporal overlap entails a degree of simultaneity, which is what I am interested in.

this way, my experience of them must also be unified.<sup>30</sup> *Prima facie*, it seems untrue to my experience to describe it as being composed of discrete sensations or experiences (my seeing the screen, plus my feeling the keys under my fingers, plus my hearing the hum of the computer) which I somehow instantaneously combine into a whole. It is certainly true that I can talk of discrete experiences, but to do this I must abstract them from my overall experiential state. The analysis of experience into discrete sensations, to the extent that it is viable at all, must be preceded by a non-atomistic description of that overall experience.

Apart from this descriptive problem, there are two further theoretical problems that face any account of experience in terms of atomistic sensations. First, an analysis that begins with individual sensations seems to render mysterious the structured relations between experiences, both synchronic and diachronic. How is it that discrete ‘units’ of sensation fit together so smoothly as to make up the familiar unity of consciousness, considered both at any one time and over any period of time? Such an account, I suggest, must either presuppose a distinct structure which explains this unity of our conscious lives, or it must assume that sensations functioning together can somehow give rise to a structure. The former claim would amount to tacitly repudiating the atomistic approach under consideration. The latter claim seems, on the face of it, both circular (how can individual sensations be said to ‘function together’ in the absence of pre-existing structural relations?) and mysterious.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This point is similar to Kant’s famous defence of transcendental apperception, the unity of consciousness which he argues is required in order for mind to use concepts so as to have unified objects of representation (1998, A106-108). Whereas Kant uses a transcendental argument, I appeal directly to what experiences are like for their subject.

<sup>31</sup> In section VII below, I shall argue that the best way to think of particular experiences is as states of the experiencing subject. If this is the case, then the atomistic approach could not be correct, since states of an entity cannot function as discrete elements from which that entity can be built up.

Second, an atomistic account seems to render mysterious the relations between sensations and other aspects of our conscious life, such as its cognitive and emotional features.<sup>32</sup> How can states or processes characterised in terms of their experiential content hook up with the affective and intentional features of consciousness? Even if one supposes that certain sensations can have, say, intentional features, the exact relation between these different features remains to be explained. So to describe a subject's experiential state as a succession of combinations of discrete sensations seems both to do violence to the phenomena in question, and commits us to solving difficult theoretical problems. A different description of the experiential state might allow us to avoid these problems.

The approach I wish to pursue begins with the structural features of our experiential awareness. It can thus be thought of as an experiential holism, treating the character of one's experience at any moment not as an aggregate of sensations, but a structured whole.<sup>33</sup> Instead of trying to understand this structure in terms of the individual experiences that fit into it, the structure itself must be studied and described in order to properly understand its parts, the individual experiences.

## V.

### **The Overall Experiential State**

Consider the following situation: I am sitting in a chair in a theatre, listening to a piece of music being played by jazz group. I hear the music, but I can also hear

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<sup>32</sup> Our emotions and cognitions may themselves have non-conscious dimensions, but they undoubtedly contribute to our conscious lives, as I shall argue in the next section.

<sup>33</sup> A similar point is made by Kathleen Akins (1993, 268-269), in discussing the idea of a subject's point of view. She argues against the construal of a point of view in terms of individual sensations, instead emphasising its systematic and representational character (see also Rowlands 2001, 2). I shall take up this line of thought in chapters four and six, where I shall describe how our experiences are structured so as to give us a sense of the world as a whole.

other things (the people behind me moving or talking, perhaps). I am also visually aware of the group themselves, and there is a link here between my visual awareness and my hearing the music. If I want to concentrate on the piano part, I can help myself focus on that part of the music by visually focusing on the piano player, following the movements of their hands and their body positioning. Furthermore, I am aware of my own body's position. While listening to the music, I can take a sip of water and uncross my legs, and be aware of my doing so.

I suggest that we can characterise the situation just described as one of the experiences belonging together in an overall state of experience or of experiential awareness. We can provisionally describe this overall experiential state as follows: the experiences which help make it up can be distinguished from each other; they are experiences for the one subject; and the character of the overall state is malleable over time.

I have already outlined how the overall state of experience can at any one time contain more than one experience (or, to put it another way, more than one experience can be abstracted from the overall state at any one time). We can contrast this state with any set of experiences belonging to different subjects, because the experiences that help make up the overall state must be experiences for a single subject. This state can also be contrasted with any set of experiences grouped with reference to particular intentional objects, emotional states, social or cultural contexts, or patterns of behaviour. For example, one could speak of all the experiences that occurred at that jazz gig, or all the experiences aroused by hearing *My Funny Valentine*. In the first case, the set of experiences do not belong to a single subject; in the second, the set of experiences referred to is spread across different times and subjects.



Furthermore, the overall state can be contrasted with any diachronic set of my experiences. Take my experiences throughout the duration of the jazz gig: they will form a temporal cross-section of my stream of consciousness. The stream of consciousness and the overall experiential state are very closely related, but it is important that we are able to distinguish them. Very roughly, the overall experiential state is what it is like for me at any one moment; the stream of consciousness is the succession of these overall states which I undergo. This distinction is largely based on the temporality of my experiences, which has two dimensions. On the one hand, my experiences succeed each other in a stream: they are diachronically unified, and this forms my stream of consciousness. On the other hand, I can have a number of experiences simultaneously: these experiences are synchronically unified, and the phrase 'my overall experiential state' is just a way of referring to this unity. This phrase serves to pick out a feature of my subjective life rather than to explain anything, but that is exactly my purpose in this section. The distinction between the experiential state and the stream of consciousness is thus not intended to deny the essentially temporal nature of subjective life, merely to capture one of its dimensions.

At any particular moment, therefore, I am in an experiential state, and this state has a particular character. What it is like to be a conscious subject is to be in some experiential state or other. It is like something to be at the jazz gig, listening to the music being played. Exactly what it is like is simply the character of my experiential state at that moment.

Note that we can distinguish here between my experience of listening to the music, and my experience of being at the jazz gig. The first is a particular experience, but it is only one aspect of the overall experiential state which I am in

when listening to the music at the gig. The advantage of this distinction is that it allows us to acknowledge that any particular experience we undergo will occur within an experiential context. I shall consider the relation between experiences and their experiential context in the next section.

The overall experiential state has no fixed limits or borders. It can be focused on a single intense experience (this seems to be the case with severe pains, and orgasms) or it can be very diffuse, with little or no foregrounding of any of the various experiences one is undergoing. It can be taken up entirely by experiences of one type, or it can include experiences from a variety of types. It has typical structural features, which I shall outline presently, but one can be in an overall state even if some of these features are absent. For instance, when one is very dizzy or drunk, the world will seem to spin around you: this is not the usual way we experience the world, but there is still an overall experience here.

## **VI.**

### **Features of the Experiential State**

Following from my descriptions above, it is clear that the experiential state is not simply a featureless cluster of experiences. Rather, the overall character of the experiential state ebbs and flows along clearly determined, though not unalterable, lines.

#### **(a)**

Arguably the most important of these lines are those delineated by reference to the intentional life of the subject. The subjective character of an intentional experience is at least partly determined by the intentional features of that

experience.<sup>34</sup> As Mark Rowlands puts it, “For there to be something that it is like to have an experience is simply for the experience to reveal the world to be a certain way” (2001, 100, fn. 1).<sup>35</sup> To make this point clearer, we can distinguish between the intentional object, its mode of appearance, and the mode of presentation. Each intentional experience will present a particular object or objects to the subject of the experience. It will present this object as having certain properties or other features, such as being a certain colour or shape; these properties are the mode of appearance of the object. And the experience will have a particular mode of presentation, a way in which it reveals the object as having these properties. Rowlands claims that the subjective character of an intentional experience constitutes what I have termed its mode of presentation, the way the object is revealed as having certain features (2001, 204).<sup>36</sup> For example, consider the difference between the following two experiences: judging that an object is blue based on having measured the wavelength of the light reflected from it; and seeing it as blue. In each case, the object of awareness is the same, as is its mode of appearance, the properties it is presented as having. The difference lies in how these properties are presented. It is this difference which constitutes the difference in the subjective character of the two experiences.<sup>37</sup> Conversely, experiences sharing the same mode of presentation will have different subjective characters if they present different objects to the subject, or if they present the same object as under different modes of appearance (consider the difference

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<sup>34</sup> This claim should be distinguished from the suggestion that the subject of an intentional experience is presented with an object in virtue of the subjective character of this experience. I shall defend this suggestion in the next chapter.

<sup>35</sup> Note that saying that the subjective character of an intentional experience is determined by how the world appears to you in that experience does not entail that when one has that experience, it is the experience itself which appears to you. This point is stressed by Rowlands (2001, 179, fn. 1).

<sup>36</sup> Somewhat confusingly, Rowlands calls what I am terming the mode of appearance of an object its mode of presentation (2001, 202).

<sup>37</sup> This example follows one mentioned by McCulloch (1988, 14).

between seeing the same mountain from two different angles).<sup>38</sup> I suggest that in all intentional experiences, differences in one of the three intentional features mentioned (the object, its mode of appearance, or the mode of presentation) will at least partly determine differences in the subjective character of the experiences.<sup>39</sup>

The intentional features of our intentional experiences are themselves structured, and this helps to structure the subjective character of the overall experiential state. I shall explore the structure of intentionality in more detail in chapter three. For the moment, we can note that it is because of this intentional structure that we can distinguish between experiences by appealing to their objects, or to the modes of appearance of these objects, or to the modes of presentation of the experiences. For example, it is common to individuate experiences by reference to different sense modalities. This is possible partly because these modalities give rise to experiences which are usually distinct. In the usual case, I can distinguish my visual and olfactory experiences with little or no effort. This distinction between the sense modalities also structures the way the character of the overall experiential state changes through time. Visual experiences will succeed other visual experiences, olfactory experiences will succeed olfactory ones, and so on.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Therefore, I disagree with Rowlands when he suggests that subjective character is simply what I am terming the mode of presentation of an experience (2001, 204). I also disagree with representationalist accounts of phenomenal consciousness, which argue that the subjective character of an experience should be identified with the properties the object of the experience is presented as having. This view is put forward by Dretske (1995, 65-83), and is criticised by McIntyre (1999, 435-439) and McGinn (1997, 534).

<sup>39</sup> Unlike Rowlands, I do not assume that all experiences must be intentional. It is at least arguable that bodily sensations and moods are examples of non-intentional experiences. This is a contentious issue, which I cannot explore in detail. One suggestion here is that, while there may be non-intentional experiences, their subjective character must manifest itself by affecting or colouring the subjective character of intentional experiences. See Sartre's discussion of how a headache can affect one's experience of reading (1958, 332-335), and Zahavi's similar account of moods (2003b, 72).

<sup>40</sup> The questions of how we should differentiate the senses, and of what exactly the concept of a sense is, have been the topics of some discussion (see Gray 2005, 461-462). However, the outcome of these debates will not count against the suggestion that sense-modalities help structure the field of experience, unless it is established that sense-modalities cannot be distinguished. And even if sense-modalities do not help structure the field of experience, this would not call into question the more important claim, that the field of experience has a structure of some sort.

**(b)**

Not all factors which influence the character of the state do so by helping to individuate experiences. Some aspects of consciousness are related to the experiential state in such a way that a change to the aspect of consciousness in question often suffices to change the character of the state. Examples of these aspects include the sensitivity of subjects to their social and cultural backgrounds. Consider again the scenario of listening to a piece of music at a jazz concert. Let us say the pianist is playing a solo. What it is like to hear this piece of music will probably vary between the cases of the pianist, the members of the audience, and the other members of the band. In the case of the pianist, what it is like to hear the piece will be bound up with the act of creating it. The audience will have a more detached appreciation of the piece. The other band members will be somewhere in between, not actually creating the music but listening to it with a view to when they will start playing again, perhaps creating pieces of their own in response to what they are hearing. In each of these cases, the social role of the listener will affect what it is like to hear the piece of music.

Furthermore, consider two audience members; one of them has heard a lot of jazz, the other is a relative novice. The first may have heard solos very similar to the one being played, and may thus find it a little boring. For this audience member, this particular solo may just be a string of clichés, or an empty demonstration of a particular style. The other audience member, however, lacks this background knowledge. To them, the solo seems thrillingly original. In each case what it is like to hear the solo will be influenced by the cultural background of the subject.

Other factors which help determine the character of one's experiences include one's mood and one's emotional state. Again, music can provide examples.

Not only do musical pieces have a certain emotional ‘feel’ or atmosphere to them, but how they impact on one will partly depend on one’s own emotional state. If one is feeling depressed, one might feel alienated by the joyfulness of a particular piece.<sup>41</sup> If one is too anxious or nervous, one might not be able to concentrate properly on the music. Or, to return to the jazz example, imagine that you are a friend of the pianist in question. Your experience of the music will be emotionally weighted, in a way that the experience of the person sitting beside you is not. You might feel a joy on the completion of a particularly excellent solo that the person beside you will not share.

I referred in previous sections to the experiential context in which a subject has the experiences it has: this simply refers to the fact that what it is like to undergo a particular experience is partly determined by other experiences you are having, have had or even will have. For the moment I am looking only at examples of simultaneous or temporally overlapping experiences, but these suffice to make the point. Consider the difference between what it is like to read a book in a quiet library, and what it is like to read the same book in the same library when the building next door is being knocked down. This is one of the features of experience which counts most heavily against the possibility of the atomistic view, and in favour of experiential holism. If the character of a particular experience can be influenced by the experiential context within which it occurs, it will be very difficult to build this context out of individual experiences. To do this, it would seem necessary to isolate the character of each of these individual experiences from the context in which they occur, in order that they serve as building blocks for this

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<sup>41</sup> Obviously, this does not describe every case. I do not see emotions and moods as simply causing one to have experiences of one sort or another. Rather, they influence the character of one’s entire experiential field.

context. But this isolation from the experiential context is precisely what seems impossible, at least for some experiences.

Another factor influencing the character of one's experience, which I shall mention but not discuss in any detail, is the role of the body, or, more specifically, our embodiment. I am not just thinking here of the fact that bodily feelings (pains, tickles, itches, and so on) make up at least some of what we experience. I am thinking more of the ways in which the positioning and movement of our bodies help determine the overall character of our experience. Consider the difference between running at fifteen miles per hour and driving in a car at the same speed. It would be peculiar – at best, an abstraction – to speak of a subjective character common to both these cases, of 'what it is like to travel at fifteen miles per hour'. The two cases are very different, principally in virtue of the role of the body in each case.

Similarly, the structure of our perceptual experiences is very closely tied to our embodiment, not just because our perception proceeds by means of sensory capacities which are parts of our body, but because the way we perceive the world as a whole is structured by reference to our bodies as 'here', against which objects stand out as 'there', as 'near or far', and so on. Furthermore, our perceptual experiences are closely bound up with and structured by our capacities for action.<sup>42</sup>

(c)

The various factors I have mentioned can often work together to influence the subjective character of our experience. Consider a concrete example: a few years ago, I was struck by a severe back pain which lasted hours on end. The pain flared up while I was in the computer room at the Technische Universität in Berlin, and by the time I was walking home, I was literally bent over in agony. Obviously, what I

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<sup>42</sup> For more on how our embodiment influences our experiences, see Gallagher 2005 and Noë 2004.

was feeling was mainly just the sensation of pain, but it was exacerbated by a number of other factors: I had no idea why it had happened (I had not done anything to suddenly strain my back muscles); being in a public place I was unable to lie down, which is the only non-medical way I know of alleviating back pain, and so I had to keep going; I was trying to think of what I could do when I got home; I was extremely conscious of the bizarre figure I must have cut hobbling on the footpath; my fairly non-existent German meant I didn't feel I could ask anyone for help; and being in a foreign city with no close friends, I had no-one I felt I could turn to.

Some of these factors were just mechanical (for example, because I couldn't lie down and had to keep going, the pain was worse than it otherwise might have been), but others were more direct contributions to my overall experience. The frustration I felt at not knowing why I was in such pain, the embarrassment at having others see me in such a state, and the worry at not knowing what I could do, undoubtedly made me feel worse, in a different way to simply prolonging or intensifying the physical sensation. Rather, one might say that they added other dimensions to my experience. One might call these social or epistemic or emotional dimensions, but my point is that they affected what it was like for me to be walking through the streets of Berlin on that particular spring day.

A last feature of our experiencing, which again I shall mention but not address here in detail, is temporality. The features of one's experiencing I have described in this section are features of the experiential state one is in at any one time. But the character of this state changes over time. This sequence of changes is the stream of consciousness. It is a stream in that the character of the field changes



continuously, with no gaps between each experience.<sup>43</sup> For example, when one shuts one's eyes, it is not the case that part of your experiential state just vanishes, contrary to what is suggested by Papineau (2002, 14). What it is like to close your eyes is very different from what it would be like to suddenly lose one's vision. I shall discuss the stream of consciousness in more detail in chapter five.

## VII.

### A Model of Subjectivity

In section V, I suggested that we can understand the unity of simultaneous experiences as their belonging together in an overall experiential state. In that section and the next, I outlined some of the key features of this experiential state, arguing that it can include different experiences which we can distinguish from each other by appealing to various structures of the experiential state. I also distinguished the synchronic unity of the experiential states from the diachronic unity of the stream of consciousness. But in section V, I mentioned another feature of the experiential state, to which I now want to return: the fact that all the experiences which determine the overall character of the experiential state must be experiences for a single subject.

Consider a complex experience or set of experiences, such as occur when I am playing football. Suppose I feel frustrated because the game is not going well. The frustration I feel makes my legs feel heavier when I try to run, blurs my responses, and generally makes my tiredness feel even worse. Suppose that my teammate Keith is also feeling tired and frustrated. I am having these feelings at the same time as Keith is, but it is one particular experience of frustration which is

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<sup>43</sup> This has been contested by Dennett, who claims that "One of the most striking features about consciousness is its discontinuity" (1991, 356). For an argument against this claim, see Noë 2002.

making *me* feel more tired. When asked to identify which one, I think we must individuate it by saying it is mine. This is a familiar point, defended by Peter Strawson: “States, or experiences, one might say, owe their identity as particulars to the identity of the person whose states or experiences they are” (1959, 97).

What examples of this sort suggest is that different experiences can be parts of an overall experiential state if and only if they each belong to the one subject. Therefore, if we want to explain how experiences can belong to an overall experiential state, then we must be able to explain the subjectivity of experiences. Subjectivity is the phenomenon of experiences being like something for the subject. When we consider what it is like for me to taste coffee, we can distinguish the ‘what-it-is-likeness’ which characterises the relation between me and every one of my conscious experiences from the subjective character of this particular experience (Levine 2001, 7). Subjectivity is the ontological relation between the subject, *qua* the individual who has the experiences, and the experiences, *qua* states with a particular subjective character for their subject.

In this last section, I shall briefly sketch a model of subjectivity. This model is intended to explain the fact that a number of experiences can belong to an overall experiential state. It is intended to be a non-naturalistic explanation, serving neither as a repudiation of naturalism nor as itself a naturalistic account of subjectivity.

To introduce this model, we must distinguish between different levels of subject-hood or self-hood. On one level, the subject is a social and cultural actor, living alongside other subjects and participating in common rituals, institutions and ways of understanding. A closely related level is the narrative subject, the subject understood as having a personality that is constant over the different events and

experiences it undergoes.<sup>44</sup> The most basic level of subject-hood is what Zahavi calls the minimal subject. Here, the subject is characterised not as an actor or as having an individual personality, but as having a particular property, that of experiencing. To understand the relation between this property of the subject and the particular experiences the subject can have, it is useful to think of this property as a field of experiencing, across which particular experiences pass (2005, 132).

On my understanding, every subject has its own stream of consciousness, a succession of conscious experiences. For an experience to be part of a particular subject's stream of consciousness, it must occur in the field of experiencing of that subject. The experience or experiences occurring in one's field of experiencing at each moment constitute one's overall experiential state at that time. Subjectivity is the 'what-it-is-likeness' which characterises the relation between the subject and each of its experiences. On my account, this 'what-it-is-likeness' is explained by each experience's being a state, or part of a state, of the subject's field of experiencing. The particular subjective character of each experience is the contribution it makes to the character of the field.

To speak of a field of experiencing in which experiences can occur might suggest a view of experiences as inner objects, and perhaps of the subject as a spectator in a sort of Cartesian theatre.<sup>45</sup> But the relation between the field and the particular experiences is not one of containment. Rather, each experience is a state of that field, or contributes to the state of that field. The ontological relation here is not one of containment, but of a determinable (the character of the field) being determined one way or another; i.e., the field's having a particular character, depending on what experience is being undergone. This relation is similar to that of

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<sup>44</sup> For more on the different levels of the subject, see Gallagher and Marcel 1999, and Gallagher 2000.

<sup>45</sup> See Dennett 1991, 107-108

colour to specific shades: a coloured object must be a particular shade at any moment, though it can change its shade from moment to moment. Similarly, if I sip some coffee, swallow it and feel its aftertaste on the back of my tongue, the character of my experiential field alters at each moment. What it is like for me to taste coffee is what it is like for my experiential field to alter in this way, to be in this or that state. That is, what it is like for me to taste coffee is for a determinable structure (my field of experiencing) to be determined in a particular way.

The field of experiencing is “the abiding dimension of experiencing” (Zahavi 2005, 66) which remains while transient experiences pass through. That is, it can exist independently of any particular determinate state. However, it cannot exist independently of every one of its determinates, the particular experiences which pass through it. So you could never have the field of experiencing without any particular experience, any more than you could have a colour without its being a particular shade.

An obvious problem here is that the subject does not always have experiences. Brian O’Shaughnessy distinguishes three varieties of the kind “state of consciousness”: being awake (or conscious), being unconscious, and being asleep (1991, 138).<sup>46</sup> Unconsciousness and sleep require the absence of at least some of the perceptual and cognitive capacities which a waking subject can exercise (O’Shaughnessy 1991, 142). But what happens when all of these capacities are absent, as when the subject is unconscious or in a dreamless sleep? Since the subject in this situation would, *ex hypothesi*, have no experiences, it seems that its field of experiencing would cease to exist for as long as it remained unconscious or in a

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<sup>46</sup> Clearly, this is a different usage to my employment of ‘states of consciousness’ to refer to experiential states. I don’t see this as necessarily a problem, since O’Shaughnessy and I are deploying this phrase with regard to different aspects of consciousness: I am focusing on experiences and their subjective character, while O’Shaughnessy is discussing a subject’s being conscious as opposed to being unconscious. These different uses complement rather than contradict each other.

dreamless sleep. This may seem to entail that the minimal self, the subject characterised in terms of its having a field of experiencing, would also cease to exist for this duration. And this would raise problems for the continuity of the subject as the same before and after it lapses into unconsciousness.

This is what Barry Dainton calls the bridge problem: what makes a temporally separated stream of consciousness belong to the one subject? (1996, 25). Following Dainton, my answer is to appeal to the capacity of regaining consciousness; to wake up, or at least to begin dreaming. As long as the subject retains this capacity, we can say that it continues to exist as the same subject. When the subject is unconscious or in a dreamless sleep, it cannot exercise its capacities for perceiving, thinking and acting. But these capacities persist as long as it is possible for their subject to begin exercising them again (Dainton 1996, 27). This claim also applies to the subject's having a field of experiencing. As long as the subject can begin experiencing again, it remains a minimal self, even though its field of experiencing may not exist (as when the subject is unconscious or in a dreamless sleep).<sup>47</sup>

On this determinable-determinate account of subjective character, the particular experiences a subject undergoes are ways of being of the minimal subject; that is, ways of being a subject of experiences. What it is like for me to taste coffee, feel a headache or list stock examples of phenomenal states used in the philosophy of mind are ways in which I, *qua* minimal subject, exist. This, I suggest, is the best way to make sense of the traditional idea that our experiences are private: they are states the subject occupies, and in principle cannot be shared. Ontologically speaking, what it is like for me to taste coffee can be attributed to me and me only. It should be

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<sup>47</sup> This is comparable to the way that one will continue to have one's particular personality even when one is unconscious and this personality is not manifest.

pointed out straight away that this does not entail that no-one else can know what this is like for me. No epistemic conclusions follow from this ontological claim, and so this kind of privacy is not obviously vulnerable to Wittgensteinian concerns.<sup>48</sup>

When the subjective character of an experience is defined as a determinate state of the field of experiencing, it is clear that it must include a broad range of conscious states. It will be like something for the subject to undergo any experience which is part of its stream of consciousness. Conscious thinking, for example, finds its place here. Of all the distinctions the term ‘what it is like’ has been used to draw, the most interesting is that between states which the subject consciously undergoes (conscious experiences), and states which they do not. My thesis can partly be read as an attempt to state, as precisely as possible, what it is for a subject to consciously undergo an experience, that is, to be in a state which has a certain subjective character for them.

This model of the subjectivity of experiences is as yet only an outline. I have claimed that individual experiences belong to a subject in virtue of influencing the character of an overall state of experiencing; and I have claimed that this field of experiencing is a characteristic feature of a minimal level of subject-hood. These claims must be complemented and filled out by being placed in a more detailed account of how a subject can be said to have each of its experiences. I shall provide this account when I return to the issue of subjectivity in chapter five. I shall argue there that we can explain the subjectivity of experiences by appealing to their temporality, the way the experiences of each subject form a steady flow or a stream of consciousness. I shall outline and defend this explanation once I have introduced the phenomenological ideas and techniques to help me clarify it.

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<sup>48</sup> See Wittgenstein’s criticism of the idea of sensations as private in this epistemic sense (1958, §§ 256-263).

The subjective character of experiences is one of the two areas in the philosophy of mind which I want to address in this thesis. The other is how the subject can become aware of things by having intentional experiences of them. These issues are not completely separate, since intentional experiences must themselves have a subjective character. But the problem of awareness requires that we focus specifically on meaningful experiences, experiences which present objects as being a certain way. As I shall argue, meaningful experiences give rise to philosophical problems of their own. I shall suggest that these problems can only be solved by taking a particular approach to them. This approach is that taken by transcendental philosophy.

## Chapter 2

### Awareness and Meaning

In the first chapter I looked at subjective experience, as characterised by there being something it is like to have an experience. One of the points I made there was that what it is like for me to undergo an intentional experience is partly determined by its intentional structure: how it makes me aware of the object. In this chapter, I want to focus on our capacity to be aware of objects. I shall argue that in order to properly understand this capacity, we must characterise it in terms of a subject's making sense of the object, or having a meaningful awareness of it. I shall outline how the issue of meaningful awareness has been discussed in the philosophy of mind, and outline a phenomenological approach to it. In later chapters, I shall fill in the details of this approach.

In section I, I shall briefly outline the discussion in the philosophy of mind concerning how we can be aware of objects.

In section II, I shall outline a particular approach to this problem taken by McDowell and by Putnam, which I shall term post-functionalism. This approach will serve as a foil to my own phenomenological approach.

In section III, I shall outline anti-constructivism, the view that our ability to be aware raises no philosophical problem, and so requires no philosophical explanation. I shall argue that this view, as adopted by McDowell and Putnam, does not rule out all kinds of philosophical explanation. Certain kinds of philosophical explanation can complement rather than replace the post-functionalist approach.

In the final two sections, I shall introduce the transcendental approach, which I see as outlining the conditions for the possibility of our being meaningfully aware



of anything. In section IV, I shall suggest how we can describe our subjective awareness as such, independently of its relations to non-intentional and non-experiential phenomena. In section V, I shall introduce and defend the transcendental insight that the conditions in virtue of which the subject can be aware of anything are not the same as the conditions required for the existence of the subject. This insight allows us to establish transcendental philosophy as a mode of inquiry which is independent of other ways of studying the subject.

## I.

### **Discussion of Awareness in the Philosophy of Mind**

#### **(a)**

To characterise awareness, we must distinguish between two types of intentionality; experiential and non-experiential. Intentionality, in its barest sense, is the property of being about; being of; concerning; being directed towards; or pointing to an object or objects.<sup>1</sup> I want to focus on experiential intentionality. By experiential intentionality, I mean states or episodes which have a subjective character, which are intentional, and whose subjective character is partly determined by the intentional features of the state or episode. I argued in the previous chapter (section VI) that numerous experiences fit this description. Examples include perceptual, emotional, imaginative and cognitive experiences; hallucinations; and experiences of coping with situations using know-how.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By 'object' I mean anything which we can think about. This includes entities, states, properties and relations, regardless of whether they exist or not.

<sup>2</sup> I regard hallucinations as instances of awareness; the subject is aware of something which does not exist. I shall defend this broad use of 'awareness' in the next chapter.

Any instance of intentionality which does not help to determine the subjective character of an experience I shall term non-experiential intentionality. I shall not address non-experiential intentionality in this thesis. Therefore, I shall not be examining ‘natural meaning’: the intentionality which certain causally or nomologically linked objects or events are said to manifest (such as smoke indicating fire, or the rings in a tree indicating its age) (Crane 1995, 172-174). I shall also be setting to one side states or entities whose intentionality is produced by human activity or interpretation. These include the sentences written on a page, representational art, or specific social and cultural practices. Lastly, I shall not address the intentionality of non-experiential states of the subject, such as non-conscious beliefs or desires, nor any non-experiential intentionality which experiences themselves happen to instantiate.

In setting non-experiential intentionality to one side, I am going against the main trend in the philosophy of mind, which tries to explain the intentionality of experiences in terms of the intentionality of states describable in non-experiential terms (informational, functional or teleological states).<sup>3</sup> A common assumption in the philosophy of mind is that states can be intentional without having subjective character (Nelkin 1993, 228; Van Gulick 1995, 274-276). Based on this, it is often assumed that we can explain intentionality independently of explaining subjective character. In response to these assumptions, I don’t wish to argue that intentionality is impossible without phenomenal consciousness.<sup>4</sup> Rather, what I deny is that we can assume that the intentionality of experiences is identical to the intentionality of non-experiential states. That is, I think we have no reason to assume what McGinn terms the medium conception, the idea that conscious and non-conscious states are simply

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<sup>3</sup> For an informational theory of intentionality, see Fodor 1990. For a functional theory, see Dretske 1995. For a teleological theory, see Millikan 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Though for arguments to this effect, see Strawson 1994 208-209, and 2005, 56-64.

different media, and in theory the same message can be carried by a state of either kind without being altered (1991, 34-35). This conception ignores the way in which the subjective character of experiences can make a difference to their intentional features. For example, there is something it is like for me to perceive a kettle, and this perceptual experience presents the kettle to me as being a certain way. Here, the intentional content of my experience, its presenting the kettle to me, is dependent upon the subjective character (Lowe 1997, 118).<sup>5</sup> If I was in a state with no subjective character, then this state could not present the kettle to me. I might be related to the kettle in other ways, for example informationally. But it is only given an experience with a subjective character that the kettle can be said to appear to me (Zahavi 2003b, 79).

To be aware of something is to have an experience of it. Examples such as the way the kettle appears to me suggest that it is in virtue of having an experience with a particular subjective character that the subject is aware of something. Therefore, it would be a mistake to distinguish, in a state of awareness, an experiential component (the subjective character) and an intentional component, and to explain the second without reference to the first. States of awareness have the intentional features they have – that is, they present objects to the subject in the way that they do – at least partly in virtue of their subjective character.<sup>6</sup>

I take it as obvious that what it is to be a subject includes at least the possibility of becoming aware of different things; that is, of having perceptual,

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<sup>5</sup> Lowe focuses on perceptual experiences to motivate the claim that the intentionality of experiences is partly dependent on subjective character, as does McCulloch (1988, 13-18). But we could also consider emotional experiences, such as feeling that a particular situation is unjust (see Thomasson 2009, 210-212). In this case, the way the situation is presented to us is even more obviously bound up with what it is like to have an experience of anger or indignation.

<sup>6</sup> “That we experience the world in any way at all [...] is made possible by exactly these [i.e., qualitative] properties” (Akins 1993, 269). See also Rowlands 2001, 204-205; Zahavi 2003b, 83. Note also that while states of awareness present their objects in virtue of their subjective character, the specific character of each state will itself be partly determined by the intentional features of the state, as I argued in the previous chapter.

imaginative, cognitive, emotional or hallucinatory experiences. It may be the case that certain subjects do not or cannot enjoy these kinds of experience, but I don't think they can count as subjects if it is impossible for them to ever become aware of anything.<sup>7</sup>

One characteristic feature of awareness, therefore, is this connection with the subjective character of experience. Another is that states of awareness are meaningful. I shall offer a more detailed account of meaning in chapter three, but for the moment we can take meaning as the phenomenon of an object being presented as being some way or other. We are aware of the objects we perceive as having a certain solidity, texture or shape; we can understand the result of a certain experiment as having implications in a particular scientific field; as you read this, you are taking the marks on the page in front of you as words in English. I shall term this the object's being presented under a certain mode of appearance.<sup>8</sup>

Meaning so defined has a number of important implications, of which I shall briefly mention three. First, introducing meaning allows for a distinction between sense and reference (Frege 2003, 37-42). One object can be presented under a number of different modes of appearance. This allows, among other things, for the possibility of *a posteriori* identity claims.

Second, meaningful intentionality is intensional. This allows us to distinguish it from bare indication, as in the simplest cases of so-called 'natural meaning' where one object indicates another simply by causally co-varying with it in a suitably law-

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<sup>7</sup> For example, it is unclear whether or not late-term fetuses or neonates can be said to be aware of anything. Rather than consider such cases in detail, I merely claim that, for these beings to count as subjects, it must be possible for them to become aware, or to develop the capacity to become aware. Not all of them will actually develop this capacity.

<sup>8</sup> In saying that states of awareness are meaningful, I am not suggesting that no other states can have meaning. I see meaning as necessary but insufficient for awareness. Text, images, film and other media may all carry meaning. It may be that their being able to carry meaning is dependent on the meaningfulness of experiences, but I shall not discuss this point in what follows.

governed fashion. True causal statements or statements of law-governed relations can always be substituted for each other *salva veritate* (Crane 1995, 33). This principle does not hold for statements attributing meaning; their truth-conditions are more finely grained. Therefore, when we try to understand the meaning of, say, a text, we will have to use a degree of interpretation which is not required in understanding causal or nomological relations.

Third, the notion of meaning lets us distinguish between the object which appears and the object as it appears. This distinction is the basis for the notion of objectivity, which I shall discuss in detail in chapter six. It also allows for the possibility of error, something which again bare indication cannot accommodate. We can be subject to perceptual illusions, or misinterpret the behaviour of others, or misjudge an action. Meaning thus introduces an element of normativity - of getting things right or wrong - which so-called 'natural meaning' lacks.

**(b)**

A number of approaches to the issue of awareness are possible. We can create a taxonomy of these approaches by drawing two distinctions.

First, we can distinguish between realism and non-realism (following Haldane 1992, 671-672). By realism here, I mean any theory which takes intentional properties or capacities to be constituents of reality, independently of our ways of thinking, talking and taxonomising. Non-realism I shall use as an umbrella term for any theory which holds that intentional properties or capacities depend for their existence on our particular ways of talking or thinking. Non-realism defined in this way need not entail the denial that such properties or capacities exist. Rather, it is the denial that they exist as parts of the way the world is, independently of how we take it to be.

Second, we can distinguish between what I shall term intentionalism and non-intentionalism, respectively. I use non-intentionalism to refer to any theory which tries to explain intentional properties or capacities with reference only to properties which are not themselves intentional in nature.<sup>9</sup> As Schiffer puts it, “semantic and psychological facts are not irreducibly semantic or psychological but can be revealed to be facts statable by sentences devoid of semantic or psychological terms” (1987, 10). Intentionalism refers to any theory that accepts explanations of intentional properties which feature irreducible intentional properties.

These two distinctions yield the following taxonomy of approaches, or families of approaches:

- (i) non-intentionalistic realism;
- (ii) non-intentionalistic non-realism;
- (iii) intentionalistic realism; and
- (iv) intentionalistic non-realism.

The approaches grouped under (i) all hold that, while intentionality is a genuine property of at least some states, it is not a fundamental property of the universe, or of intentional systems of any sort. On this view, “Agents possess thoughts in virtue of their possession of particular sorts of physical characteristics” (Heil 1992, 4-5).<sup>10</sup> Non-intentionalistic realism includes both reductive and non-reductive approaches. Reductive accounts hold that intentionality is real, but that it is really something else, something non-intentional (Fodor 1987, 97). Such accounts try to explain intentionality by sentences of the form: ‘If state S has intentional content p, then condition x is necessary and sufficient for S’s having p’, where x is a

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<sup>9</sup> Or, if it accepts explanations which do refer to intentional properties, these are to be taken as provisional, and themselves explicable by reference to non-intentional properties.

<sup>10</sup> The non-intentional realist can extend this kind of claim to cover all intentional states, not just thoughts. Nor need they appeal only to physical characteristics; not all proponents of this view think that naturalistic properties are necessarily physical.

condition (or range of conditions) which is not itself intentional.<sup>11</sup> However, non-reductive non-intentionalistic accounts are also possible. Such accounts will often be couched in terms of token identity: any particular state which instantiates an intentional property must be identical with some physical state, even though the intentional property of that state need not have non-intentional necessary and sufficient conditions (Jacob 1997, 20). Fodor himself is a non-reductive naturalist, since he offers only sufficient non-intentional conditions for the instantiation of intentional properties (1990, 51).

Family (ii) denies that intentional properties are independent of our particular ways of thinking or talking. There are two well-known approaches which share this view. Instrumentalism suggests it is often useful to treat certain systems as though they had intentional properties, but this does not entail that the system actually has any such properties, independent of our treating it in this way. We sometimes speak of systems such as computers, corporations or nation-states as having mental states or wills, even though we may not take this to be literally the case, simply as a useful way of describing their behaviour. Dennett suggests that every ascription of intentional properties should be understood along these lines (1987, 15, 17-33).

The other well-known version of non-intentionalistic non-realism is eliminativism, of the sort defended by the Churchlands,<sup>12</sup> and for a time by Stich: “The predicate ‘is a belief that p’ does not express or correspond to a property” (Stich 1983, 225). On this view, our attributions of intentionality pick out no particular properties of their objects, and are best thought of as part of folk psychology: a failing theory of behaviour destined to be replaced by more sophisticated scientific accounts (Churchland 1981, 67).

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<sup>11</sup> See Crane 1995, 174; Botterill and Carruthers 1999, 162, 185-186; Jacob 1997, 21; Stich 1994, 352.

<sup>12</sup> P. S. Churchland 1986; P. M. Churchland 1981.

Family (iii) covers all those approaches which take intentionality to be an independent feature of the world, and which deny it can be explained in non-intentional terms. This was the dominant position in western philosophy until quite recently.<sup>13</sup> As we shall see, transcendental phenomenology belongs to this family of approaches.

Lastly, family (iv) ties the existence of intentional properties to our particular ways of talking and thinking, but denies that these properties can be explained by reference to non-intentional properties alone. In the next section, I shall consider this approach in more detail, outlining its development by two contemporary thinkers, John McDowell and Hilary Putnam. Having outlined this approach, I shall then use it as a foil to introduce the transcendental approach I shall defend.

## II.

### **Post-functionalism**

I shall term the version of the non-realist intentionalistic approach I wish to examine 'post-functionalism'. This is not a clearly-defined philosophical position, rather a collection of themes and assumptions which can be grouped together as a response to functionalism.

Functionalism characterises mental states as states occurring in our total functional organisation. As such, mental states can be fully characterised in functional terms, that is, as dispositions to occur given certain causes and to in turn give rise to certain effects (Lewis 1983, 100-106, 124-128; Putnam 1975, 380-383, 434-439). Functionalism is thus a theory which is intended to meet two desiderata. It

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<sup>13</sup> Famous examples of this approach include Brentano (1973, 88-89) and Wittgenstein (1961, 2.15-2.1515).



is designed to display “sensitivity to the logic of psychological explanations”, since it characterises mental states in terms of what brings them about and what they can do (Livingston 2005, 30). However, it is also intended to be fully compatible with the natural sciences, in that it characterises mental states in a way which can be fully worked out in causal terms.

Post-functionalism is my term for a different approach, one which accepts the first of these desiderata but differs from functionalism in rejecting the second. That is, we are to understand the mind and mental states in terms of capacities or abilities to do certain things, but without assuming that these capacities or abilities can be explained fully in causal or natural-scientific terms. This approach has been worked out in most detail by John McDowell and Hilary Putnam. Each has emphasised different aspects of this approach: McDowell developing it in more detail in the philosophy of mind, Putnam situating it in the context of a more general suspicion of metaphysical claims in all areas of philosophy (see Putnam 2004). Putnam was himself one of the primary architects of functionalism, but has subsequently rejected it. I am less interested in his specific reasons for doing so than in the new position he has developed in his writings in the last three decades. In this section, I shall outline four claims which both McDowell and Putnam accept, and argue that they are shared by transcendental phenomenology.

**(a)**

First, both McDowell and Putnam regard mental states as best characterised in terms of what they can do, or what we persons can do when having them. This is the most obvious way in which McDowell and Putnam can be seen as inheriting the functionalist approach. As Putnam puts it,

Mind talk ... is a way of describing the exercise of certain abilities we possess, abilities which supervene upon the activities of our brains and upon all the various transactions with the environment, but which do not have to be reductively explained using the vocabulary of physics or biology, or even the vocabulary of computer science (1994, 483).

The abilities Putnam is referring to include our “our natural cognitive relations to the world” - perceiving, imagining, expecting, and remembering (1994, 516). McDowell similarly refers to our capacities to perceive and judge, both of which can put us cognitively in touch with the world (1996, 9-12).

**(b)**

Second, post-functionalism opposes the common view that the intentionality of mental states is indirect: a matter of the subject being directly in touch only with mental representations which are linked in some other way with the putative object of awareness (see Fodor 1982, 278, and the discussion in Putnam 1994, 452-460). Both McDowell and Putnam cite Wittgenstein’s remark that when we mean (i.e., say, think or perceive) that something or other is the case, “we – and our meaning – do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean this: this-is-so”.<sup>14</sup> Correlatively, we must dispense with the conception of our sensory experiences either serving as “intermediaries between ourselves and the world”, or as necessarily proceeding by way of such intermediaries (Putnam 1994, 454; see also 504-505; McDowell 1996, 142-146). Both McDowell and Putnam, in other words, accept that direct realism is true for at least some of our thoughts and perceptions.

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<sup>14</sup>1958, § 95 (quoted in McDowell 1996, 27; Putnam 1994, 492-493).

(c)

Third, both McDowell and Putnam characterise intentional awareness as meaningful, as a phenomenon which involves our capacities to understand objects, persons and the world (Putnam 1994, 491, 510; McDowell 1996, 71). The most common naturalistic approach to awareness proceeds from the bottom up, starting with the simplest cases where it is (supposedly) possible to attribute intentionality, and emphasising the continuities between these cases and fully-fledged human capacities for thinking and perceiving (Jacob 1997, 2). Thinkers adopting this approach will take as paradigm cases the way a speedometer represents the speed of a car (Dretske 1995, 2-4, 14-18), or the reaction of male hoverflies to proximal stimuli when primed to chase after females (Millikan 1993, 218-222).

McDowell and Putnam, in contrast, proceed from the top down, taking as their paradigm cases human beings in specific social and cultural settings, capable of deploying an array of sophisticated capacities. Both of them characterise these cases as involving meaningfulness and sensitivity to meaning. For example, McDowell stresses that our exercise of our capacities to understand, to bring concepts to bear in different circumstances and in different ways, is bound up with particular “patterns in a way of living” (1996, 78). His example is the picture of ethical responsiveness drawn by Aristotle. In this picture, one acquires the ability to respond ethically to given situations by being raised in a particular tradition, into a particular ethical outlook (McDowell 1996, 80, 82). In this upbringing, one’s ethical sensibilities and practical intellect “acquire a determinate shape”, that is, are developed in a particular way (McDowell 1996, 84). Someone from a very hierarchical society might be respectful of their apparent superiors, whereas someone raised in a different society might have much stronger egalitarian impulses.

Similarly, Putnam suggests we ought to think of our understanding as an activity or a set of activities we can engage in. This set of activities is characterised, not by our discriminatory abilities, but by the conceptual capacities performances of them utilise (1994, 504-505).<sup>15</sup> We engage in these activities in specific social and cultural circumstances, and in order to understand them, we must consider them not in abstraction, but as they are actually practiced in specific situations (1994, 515).

**(d)**

Fourth, neither McDowell nor Putnam assumes that an account of intentionality must be ultimately naturalistic, in the sense in which this term is most commonly used in the philosophy of mind: as an account of mental states by reference to what is studied in the natural sciences, or what can itself be explained by reference to these sciences. I see both McDowell and Putnam as at least committed to non-naturalism, the idea that an account of intentionality need not be naturalistic in this sense (see chapter one, section three). Putnam also holds the stronger view of anti-naturalism, rejecting the idea that a naturalistic account of intentionality is possible (1988, 2-3).

To elucidate the relation between post-functionalism and the naturalistic standpoint, consider a famous distinction which McDowell takes from Sellars and adapts: the distinction between the space of reasons and the realm of law. The space of reasons is defined in terms of its elements standing to each other in relations of justification, implication or warrant (McDowell 1996, 7). The realm of law is defined by its elements being governed by natural laws (McDowell 1996, 71).<sup>16</sup> This

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<sup>15</sup> Putnam actually says “representation” where I say ‘understanding’, but from the context of his remarks (see also 1994 459, 516) it is clear we are referring to the same thing; meaningful engagement with the world. His slogan is that we can have representation, i.e. this meaningful engagement, without representations (mental items which stand between us and the objects we are engaged with) (1994, 505).

<sup>16</sup> This original distinction is drawn by Sellars (1997, § 36).

distinction is best thought of as expressing the difference between two kinds of intelligibility. We understand the elements belonging to the realm of law by showing how they stand under natural laws. We understand the elements of the space of reasons by stating their meaning and showing the rational relations they are capable of standing in (McDowell 1996, 70-71). McDowell's famous example of this difference is his distinction between providing an exculpation for one's behaviour ('I spilled your drink because the wind blew my arm') and offering a justification ('I spilled your drink because you were being rude to my sister').

McDowell argues that these are two contrasting kinds of intelligibility, and denies that we have any reason to think we must explain one wholly in terms of the other. In particular, he denies we must accept what he terms "bald naturalism", the claim that our ability to place things in the space of reasons is "capturable in terms whose fundamental role lies in displaying the position of things in nature", i.e., in the realm of law (1996, 73). Note that McDowell rejects non-reductive as well as reductive versions of this kind of naturalism. His target is any view which sees the mode of intelligibility characterised by providing reasons as ultimately a natural-scientific mode of understanding (McDowell 1996, 73).

(e)

Before addressing the differences between transcendental phenomenology and post-functionalism, it is worth highlighting what is common to both approaches. I see transcendental phenomenology sharing all four of the post-functionalist assumptions outlined above.

As regards (a), phenomenology focuses on intentional experiences, characterised in terms of what the subject can do in virtue of having those experiences. The details of how it does this I shall leave to the next chapter, in

particular section V, where I shall outline the way in which phenomenology can be thought of as a functional analysis of intentional experiences.

Regarding (b), I interpret Husserl as committed to direct realism. His position differ from McDowell's in certain respects. In particular, McDowell equates the content of one's thought or perception, what someone thinks or perceives, with the object or situation one thinks of or perceives (1996, 28). On my interpretation of Husserl, he would not accept this – he is at pains to distinguish the meaningful structure of one's experiences from the object one is thereby aware of (1982, 215-217). Again, I shall touch on this issue in the next chapter.

Third, as regards (c), phenomenology characterises intentional experiences as essentially meaningful. Again, the details of this claim must be left to the next chapter. One way in which Husserl differs from McDowell and Putnam on this score is that he does not equate meaning with concepts. All three would agree that perceptual experiences have a meaningful structure, but McDowell and Putnam would see this as conceptual content (McDowell 1996, 9-12; Putnam 1981, 54), whereas Husserl would deny that perceptual meaning can be equated with any conceptual content (1970, 127-128).

Lastly, phenomenology does not assume that we can give a naturalistic account of awareness, in the sense of ultimately explaining it by reference to the natural sciences. Indeed, at various points Husserl makes much stronger claims than this, denying outright that such an explanation could ever be possible (for example, 1989, 310-16). In what follows, I do not wish to commit myself to this anti-naturalism. It is enough for my purposes to hold non-naturalism, the view that an account of mental states does not have to be naturalistic.

### III.

#### Anti-constructivism

As well as the commonalities between my approach and post-functionalism, there are a number of differences, which will emerge in the course of the thesis. However, one of the most important differences is what makes post-functionalism an attractive foil, strategically speaking, for phenomenology. Putnam and McDowell each take their approach far enough to raise the question of how it is possible for subjects to be aware in the way that we are. But neither considers this question to be well-founded, or worthy of being answered by means of positive theories. Both argue that the question be dissolved or ignored: that once we reveal the assumptions which motivate it, the question will simply lose its grip on us (McDowell 1996, 94-95; Putnam 1988, 1-4, 109-110). It is because of this that they can both be described as advocating an anti-constructive approach to the issue of the possibility of awareness.

I want to offer precisely a constructive account of awareness, and more specifically an account of how awareness is possible. To this end, I want to apply transcendental phenomenology to the philosophy of mind. One of the main problems this project faces is that phenomenology is more or less ignored by mainstream work in the philosophy of mind. For example, a number of recent collections of papers in the philosophy of mind (Block, Flanagan and Güzeldere 1997; Chalmers 2002; Smith and Jovic 2003; Heil 2004) include no work at all from the phenomenological tradition.<sup>17</sup> When phenomenology is addressed, it is often with regard to how it can be reconciled with naturalism (Petitot *et al*, 1999). I want to show that transcendental

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<sup>17</sup> Chalmers 2002 contains a paper by Brentano, but he is usually seen a precursor to the phenomenological tradition rather than a proper member of it.

phenomenology is relevant to the philosophy of mind, not as an adjunct to naturalism, but as a form of intentionalistic realism, an account which studies intentional experiences in a systematic fashion but without assuming that this account must itself be non-intentionalistic. Matthew Ratcliffe has defended a similar claim, that phenomenology is relevant to the philosophy of mind as an alternative to naturalism, by using the work of Nagel as a “conceptual bridge” between phenomenology and the philosophy of mind (2002, 354-355). I propose to do something very similar using the work of McDowell and Putnam. I shall argue that their intentionalistic work can be complemented by a constructive philosophical account which they have no reason to rule out as irrelevant or impossible. In this way, post-functionalism can serve as a bridge between transcendental phenomenology and the philosophy of mind.

(a)

Anti-constructivism, as the name suggests, is a position which rejects the need or usefulness of philosophical explanations of a particular phenomenon. In the present context, we can assume that a philosophical explanation would be an account of the nature of our awareness of the world, and of the conditions for the possibility of our having this awareness.<sup>18</sup> In sections IV and V, I shall consider in more detail what such a constructive account would commit us to.

In response to philosophical questions which seem to call for constructive explanations, an anti-constructivist will typically seek to undermine or dissolve them rather than answer them on their own terms. In the case of awareness, McDowell insists that we should not worry over how it is possible (1996, 86). In particular, he argues against the supposed need for an account of how it is possible for beings

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<sup>18</sup> Another kind of constructive account would give reasons to believe that we can be aware of the world, or of particular objects in it. I shall not be offering this kind of account in this thesis, since I take it as obvious that we have this awareness (I briefly discuss this issue in chapter six, section I).



which we can understand by placing under natural laws to be responsive to reasons (1996, xxi, 94-95).

McDowell has a positive account of how we can be aware of the world, but it is not a philosophical explanation of the sort I am concerned with. He argues, as I outlined above, that understanding things by bringing them under natural laws is a different form of understanding to giving reasons for them. However, he also claims that not all natural entities can be fully understood simply by bringing them under natural laws. Some natural entities can be understood only by bringing them within the space of reasons, that is, by considering justifications for them or for their behaviour. Human beings are the obvious example here. While much human behaviour can be understood by appeal to natural laws, we can also behave in ways which can be understood only by considering the reasons for acting that way or making that decision. Our nature as humans includes a second nature, a set of capacities and habits acquired through our upbringing which allow us to understand and to offer justifications (McDowell 1996, 84-86). So while the space of reasons is, as McDowell argued, independent of the realm of law, it is not thereby independent of “the contingencies of our life as human beings” (1996, 83). Rather, it must be such that we can respond to rational demands when we have been brought up in the appropriate way. McDowell terms this view “naturalized platonism” (1996, 91). It can be distinguished both from a naturalism which regards justifications as a species of natural-scientific understanding, and from “rampant platonism”, where the space of reasons is thought of as “constituted independently of anything specifically human” (McDowell 1996, 77).

Naturalised platonism is neither a piece of constructive philosophy (McDowell 1996, 95), nor a promissory note towards a subsequent constructive

response (1996, 178). This is not to say that naturalised platonism marks the end of all inquiry: McDowell allows that we can continue to wonder about specific norms (1996, 95), and we can offer evolutionary accounts of human maturation as involving the acquisition of social and cultural lives. But neither of these responses provides “a constitutive account of what responsiveness to meaning is” (McDowell 1996, 124), or of “the structure within which meaning comes into view” (1996, 95). The appeal to naturalised platonism is intended, not to lay the ground for providing these accounts, but to “dislodge the assumptions that make it look difficult to find a place for meaning in the world” (McDowell 1996, 176). The correct response to questions such as ‘How is meaning possible?’ is an appropriately motivated dismissive attitude towards the question itself.

**(b)**

Putnam defends a position closely allied to McDowell’s, but takes it a step further. In subsection (a), I briefly characterised a philosophical explanation of our awareness as an account of its nature and the conditions of its possibility. Putnam argues that such accounts are not only unnecessary, but are actually impossible.

Putnam distinguishes negative and positive versions of Brentano’s thesis, the claim that intentionality is ineliminable and irreducible to physical phenomena (1988, 1-2).<sup>19</sup> The positive version takes intentionality as a primitive feature of the universe, whose essence or nature we could in theory discover. The negative version is not ontologically committed in this way, holding only that we cannot give a natural scientific account of all the different intentional phenomena. There is no scientifically describable property which they all have in common. Putnam argues

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<sup>19</sup> This distinction corresponds to that drawn in section I, between intentionalistic realism and intentionalistic non-realism.

that no scientific account of intentionality is possible, and so accepts the negative version of this thesis (Putnam 1988, 2-3, 109).

Since my position is non-naturalistic rather than anti-naturalistic, I am not committed to the negative version of Brentano's thesis, but I do accept the positive version. Putnam, however, regards the project of discovering the nature of intentional states as impossible. He argues as follows: this approach would require that we have a single notion of such terms as 'exist', 'real', 'identity' and so on (2004, 84-85). That is, we could answer questions such as what exists, or what its nature is, by having an "absolute interpretation" of these terms (Putnam 1988, 114), a single set of standards against which we can measure the claims about the world made in every kind of discourse.

But Putnam argues these terms can only be applied within particular conceptual schemes or conventions, of which we have a multitude. There is no prospect of these different schemes being reduced to a single way of thinking and talking (Putnam 1994, 483). Equally, there is no sense to asking what the world is like apart from any convention or conceptual scheme. Questions of this sort require standards which allow us to determine what is real or what exists, but these standards are provided by our conceptual schemes (Putnam 1990, 97-98). There are no such standards independent of our ways of thinking and talking. As Putnam puts it, there are no self-identifying objects, objects which intrinsically correspond to one word or thought rather than to any other (1981, 51). Talk of things having natures or essences falls into this trap: tacitly appealing to self-identifying objects and the idea that "the world, and not thinkers, sorts things into kinds" (Putnam 1981, 53). This holds for talk of the essence of intentional phenomena as well. Because there are no self-identifying objects, there can be no absolute interpretation of terms such as 'real' or

‘exists’, and so no account of essences is possible. Therefore, Putnam rejects the possibility of an account of the essence of intentionality, and with it, any hope of a constructive philosophical account of awareness.

(c)

I shall make three points against McDowell. These points are not intended to disprove anti-constructivism. Rather, I shall argue that we should not read McDowell as having shown that we ought not give a constructive account of awareness.

(i)

First, while McDowell’s position is clearly intended to oppose philosophical dogmatism, it seems to me to be vulnerable to precisely this charge. McDowell’s description of life in the space of reasons rests on assumptions which themselves need to be examined. Specifically, he formulates his position by appealing to the notion of meaning, and to our sensitivity to it (1996, 71).<sup>20</sup> Similarly, he tells us that “the dictates of reason are there anyway”, regardless of whether or not we become capable of responding to them by understanding or offering justifications (1996, 91). But this raises questions as to the ontological status of meaning and of reasons, and questions about our ability to respond to them. As I interpret him, McDowell does not want to provide a philosophical answer to these questions. As we have seen, he is careful to distinguish his account of how we acquire our second nature by an appropriate upbringing from a constructive philosophical account of the conditions for the possibility of our becoming responsive to reasons (1996, 95).

To rely on something in a philosophical or scientific account, and to knowingly refuse to subject it to philosophical or scientific examination, is a good

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<sup>20</sup> McDowell refers more frequently to our conceptual capacities and to our responsiveness to reasons than to our sensitivity to meaning. But as far as I can see, he regards our conceptual capacities and our sensitivity to meaning as coterminous, and perhaps as identical. The faculty of understanding, our “command of concepts” (1996, 4-5) is also “our capacity to recognize and bring into being the kind of intelligibility that is proper to meaning” (1996, 71).

working definition of dogmatism (Husserl 1982, 47-48). This is not necessarily a bad thing: indeed, it is actually necessary, in that every philosophical or scientific account must make certain undefended-for assumptions. Perhaps the best we can ever be expected to do is to make clear which assumptions we are making, and to try to criticise and justify all but the most intuitively obvious. The problem with McDowell's account is that it is at least questionable whether we have a very clear grasp of the nature of meaning, or of reasons, or of how it is we have access to them. McDowell uses these concepts to explain our ability to make empirical judgements, but we are entitled to ask how much this explanation really purchases for us, if it is purchased using concepts which McDowell cannot or will not explain. Note that in saying this, I am not raising sceptical doubts about our abilities to have a meaningful awareness of things, or to respond to reasons. What I am suggesting is that we do not have a particularly well-developed philosophical picture of these capacities. For McDowell to accept this, but to assert that there is no need to philosophically investigate them, seems close to dogmatism, and not of a necessary sort either.

**(ii)**

This raises a second problem with McDowell's position. While he provides cogent criticisms of certain kinds of constructive account, he offers no argument against constructivism *per se*. McDowell consistently links the impulse to provide a constructive account to the impulse to naturalize the space of reasons (1996, 95, 124, 177). This impulse he sees as characteristic of modern philosophy, which sets up and addresses various dualistic gulfs: between subject and object, thought and world, norm and nature (McDowell 1996, 93). A characteristic approach to these issues is to accept the way that each side is described in this troubling dualism, to take one of these sides as unproblematic, and to attempt to reconstruct the other side from

materials available on the first (McDowell 1996, 94). McDowell correctly distinguishes such attempts at bridge-building from his own approach, which does not accept the way the initial dualistic gulfs are established, and so sees no need for a theory which can bridge them (1996, 94-95).

However, as Crowell points out, this description does not acknowledge the possibility of a different sort of constructive approach, one which is not motivated by the demands of naturalism, but “precisely by a *reflective* interest in getting clear about how the space of meaning [...] is structured in its details” (2001, 17). The approach Crowell has in mind is transcendental phenomenology. It would be constructive in that it would offer an account of how it is possible for subjects to be sensitive to meaning and reasons. McDowell does not address this version of constructive philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, he does not address the general issue of a constructive approach to the issue of meaningful awareness. He neither outlines the range of possible approaches one might take to this issue, nor questions the very possibility of raising it. But without this kind of assessment, it seems impossible to justify a rejection of any constructive approach. The only point he could be read as advancing against a constructive approach *per se* is that a Wittgensteinian quietist alternative is possible. But there is no argument as to why we should prefer this alternative.

It might be argued that McDowell does not, strictly speaking, argue that constructive philosophy is impossible or incoherent. As he says of his own work in

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<sup>21</sup> McDowell addresses a phenomenological approach to his work in his debate with Dreyfus, who argues that we need an account of how it is possible for us to exercise our conceptual capacities (2006, 43). McDowell rejects this argument (2007, 343-349). However, Dreyfus appeals to the existential phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, which emphasises the role of embodied coping. I am arguing that it is the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl which can be used to outline the conditions for the possibility of our awareness of the world, whether this awareness is conceptual or not. This approach does not stand or fall with Dreyfus’s, even though there may be interesting links between the two.

ethics, his claims are “more negative than positive; my stance in these essays is better described as ‘anti-anti-realism’ than as ‘realism’” (1998b, viii). Similarly, his main aim in discussing awareness can be seen not as refuting all constructivist accounts, but as clearing away a certain type of constructivism. If this interpretation of his work in *Mind and World* is correct, then it would strengthen my claim that transcendental phenomenology can complement McDowell’s post-functionalism. On this interpretation, McDowell’s work serves primarily to remove one sort of constructive account of awareness, a naturalistic sort which aims to include justifications within the scope of natural-scientific modes of understanding. My work would take up where McDowell’s leaves off, by developing a very different kind of constructive account, one which makes no effort to enfold the space of reasons into the realm of law.

It is also true that McDowell himself, in the Woodbridge lectures (McDowell 1998), accepts the validity of transcendental philosophy. He describes it as the project of “showing our entitlement to conceive subjective occurrences as possessing objective purport” (i.e., as being intentionally related to their objects - 1998, 445). However, he does not, in these lectures, go on to offer a constructive transcendental account of his own.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, while transcendental philosophy has often been taken as addressing the *quaestio juris* which McDowell assigns it to (showing our entitlement to think of our experiences as having intentionality),<sup>23</sup> it need not be described in this way. I suggest that a more fruitful starting point is to assume that

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<sup>22</sup> He does defend an account of intentionality as a relation between concepts and objects, a relation which he suggests is intrinsic to conceptual episodes (1998a, 481-486). This suggestion could serve as an important element of a transcendental account. But McDowell does not go on to pick out what it is about conceptual episodes which allows them to stand in this relation. He merely gestures towards “a Kantian rehabilitation of the scholastic-Cartesian apparatus” of intentional content (1998a, 482). What McDowell lacks is a method for studying the intentional structure of experiences in isolation from their other features. This method is exactly what phenomenology can provide.

<sup>23</sup> The terminology of *quaestio juris* is adopted from Kant (1998, A84-87/B 116-119). I discuss this particular interpretation of transcendental philosophy in more detail in chapter six, section I.

we are in intentional contact with the world, and to try to outline the conditions for the possibility of this phenomenon. This project need not be addressed to any *quaestio juris*, but can proceed as part of a general philosophical inquiry into our experience of the world (Mohanty 1985, xvii).

**(iii)**

The third issue I want to raise with McDowell's anti-constructivism is that at various points he deploys arguments and observations which seem very close to constructive philosophy. I have in mind here the first two lectures in *Mind and World*, where he outlines an account of "the very possibility that judgements of experience might be grounded in a way that relates them to a reality external to thought" (1996, 5). This account is intertwined with what I shall call 'negative how-possible accounts' of our empirical awareness. These are accounts which purport to show that certain assumptions or inferences we might be tempted to make will have the effect of making our empirical awareness seem mysterious or impossible. For example, McDowell argues against what he calls the "sideways-on view", where we are invited to view our intentional experiences on one side of a barrier, and the various objects they are about on the other side, with the two sides connected by causal links (1996, 34). McDowell argues that this view cannot work, because it "cannot depict anything genuinely recognizable as an understanding of a set of concepts with empirical substance", that is, concepts which pick out objects in the world (1996, 35). He applies this kind of argument against Kant (1996, 41-42), Quine (1996, 131-135), Davidson (1996, 138-143), Peacocke (1996, 167-170) and Sellars (1998a, 487-489).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> McDowell offers a different kind of negative how-possible account against "rampant platonism" (1996, 91-92).



These negative how-possible accounts seem to draw on the same kinds of philosophical thinking which a positive how-possible account, i.e. a constructive account of how our awareness is possible, would draw on. For example, McDowell tells us that “the structure of the space of reasons has a sort of autonomy; it is not derivative from, or reflective of, truths about human beings that are capturable independently of having that structure in view” (1996, 92). He also notes at various points that conceptual capacities must be manifest in activities such as freely judging that such-and-such is the case, in order that they can be recognizable precisely as conceptual at all (1996, 11-12, 18-20, 37). And he distinguishes between an account of what it is to possess a concept, and an outline of the necessary and sufficient conditions for having a concept. His point is that the second does not exhaust the first. Even if we could specify a neurophysiological condition for a thought which was both necessary and sufficient, “the neurophysiological condition would not bear on the question what someone thinks when she [sic] thinks that something is red” (McDowell 1996, 167-168).

McDowell may insist that claims of this sort are not part of a constructive account of the space of reasons, but each of them is the kind of claim which would feature in just such an account. They concern, respectively, the nature of something (the space of reasons), the necessary conditions for something (our conceptual capacities), and the distinction between these two types of claim (what it is to possess a concept, as opposed to offering necessary and sufficient conditions for the possession of a concept<sup>25</sup>). Furthermore, none of these claims are based on empirical investigation or logical analysis. Rather, they seem to be metaphysical claims, of the same type as would be involved in offering a constructive account of the

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<sup>25</sup> As we shall see in section V below, this distinction is very similar to one which is crucial to my defence of a transcendental account of our awareness.

phenomenon of awareness. But if we are entitled to make claims of this kind in the course of providing a negative how-possible account, then it would seem possible make them as part of a positive how-possible account.

**(d)**

Turning to Putnam's arguments in favour of non-constructivism, I wish to contest two of his points. As with my criticisms of McDowell, I want to establish that Putnam has given us no compelling reason to think we cannot or should not provide a constructive account of awareness.

**(i)**

First, Putnam assumes that an account of the essence of any particular item is committed to the idea of self-identifying objects, entities which themselves pick out the terms which describe them (1981, 53). The claim that there are no self-identifying objects is essentially the claim that no representation has a necessary connection with what it represents (1981, 3). I want to argue that I can accept this claim, and still hold that an account of the essence of at least certain objects is possible. If an object has an essence, then there is a certain way it is.<sup>26</sup> If the idea of self-identifying objects has any important implication, it is surely that all correct descriptions of or statements about this object and its essence must ultimately reduce to a single way of talking; that there is some identity in the sense of all these descriptions or statements, an identity imposed by the essence of the object. However, this implication seems impossible. Sameness of reference does not entail sameness of sense. Therefore, from the fact that a particular object has an essence, it does not follow that there must be a unique way of representing or talking about this way the object is. For example, let us suppose for the sake of argument that water is

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<sup>26</sup>I shall consider the notion of essence in more detail in section V below.

essentially H<sub>2</sub>O. It does not follow from this that the meaning of the term 'water' must be equated with 'H<sub>2</sub>O', or vice-versa (Kripke 1980, 55-56). But this is what Putnam's claim about self-identifying objects would commit us to, on the assumption that water is essentially H<sub>2</sub>O. Therefore, it seems that I can reject the notion of self-identifying objects, without thereby rejecting the idea that an account of essences may be possible.

**(ii)**

Second, I wish to take issue with Putnam's suggestion that we should not try to offer accounts of the nature of particular entities. His point is that we should only take this anti-constructive approach if we accept that questions about the metaphysical status of any entity will always be conventional, in that they can be decided only by reference to our own particular standards of what exists and what does not. Against this suggestion, it should be pointed out that Putnam himself does not allow convention unfettered reign. He accepts that any discourse about what exists must obey certain laws of formal logic (Putnam 2004, 37-38). Therefore, these formal logical laws are not themselves matters of convention, of what holds within a particular conceptual scheme, since they are standards which apply to every such scheme. But clearly one must be in some conceptual scheme or other in order to state or evaluate any logical argument. This condition, that of depending on some conceptual scheme or other, is supposed to be that which makes it impossible to talk of essences which exist in all possible discourses. So there is a tension between Putnam's argument against essences and his claim that logical laws can apply across all possible discourses.

Furthermore, Putnam must accept that any discourse which hopes to refer to anything must be governed by formal conditions other than those of logic. I am

thinking here of formal ontology, which for our purposes can be understood as the structure which any object must have in order for us to be able to think about or refer to it (Husserl 1982, 21-22). An example of the kind of formal ontological structure I have in mind is that any item we can refer to must have identity conditions, conditions which must obtain in order for that item to count the same even through changes (Lowe 2006, 48-50; 75-76). If an item were to have no such conditions, it is difficult to see how we could pick it out at all. But these conditions seem to be neither internal to any particular conceptual scheme, nor a product of any particular convention governing how we refer to things. Rather, without them, the very notion of reference itself, or indeed the notion of being in a conceptual scheme, seems to lose its moorings.

In defence of his argument that reference is a conventional matter, Putnam offers a number of examples where he suggests the debate over what is 'really' the case is futile. These examples include the issue of whether ordinary physical objects such as chairs or noses can be identified with the portions of space-time they occupy or the atoms which compose them (Putnam 1988, 112); the issue of whether mereological sums can be said to 'really' exist (2004, 43); and the issue of whether points on a Euclidean plane are real parts of the plane, or idealised constructions from it (1990, 97). But even if we accept Putnam's assessment of these particular examples, we should be slow to generalise from them. For we can give counter-examples where it seems just as obvious that it is the nature of the items themselves which determine what we can and cannot say about them. Consider category errors, such as a number having parents, or a colour having an aptitude. It would be extremely counter-intuitive to think of these as cases where the attributions are impossible because of the conventions which govern our use of language, or the way

we happen to think about these items. Rather, *prima facie* it is because of the nature of colours and numbers that certain predicates cannot be applied to them. So it seems that at least some items have a nature independent of what we might say or think about them, while others are not independent in this way. To see which items are which, we must actually carry out ontological work, to see whether our ontological canons can be successfully applied in each particular case. Putnam has not given us reason to think that this project can never work. Therefore, his examples do not underwrite an *a priori* argument against the possibility of transcendental philosophy.

(e)

This discussion of McDowell and Putnam still leaves open the question of why a transcendental account is needed, or at least what use it would be. For all the criticisms of anti-constructivism I have offered, I have yet to make a positive case in favour of constructivism. It might be asked what problem a constructive account of awareness could address which post-functionalism or some other approach in the philosophy of mind could not?

The specific problem I want to address is that of the conditions for the possibility of the capacities and abilities discussed by McDowell and Putnam. They characterise these capacities in terms of meanings and our sensitivity to them, and reasons and our responsiveness to them. What I want to stress is that our having these capacities requires certain conditions of possibility, specifically that we are capable of being sensitive to different meanings, and that we are capable of entering the space of reasons. I have argued in this section that we have no compelling reason not to investigate these conditions. It seems obvious to me that, since these conditions are assumed by a philosophical account of our understanding, we would

be better off if we could give a philosophical account of these conditions in turn.<sup>27</sup>

What is needed is a substantive version of intentionalistic realism, an account which acknowledges that intentional experiences can be studied systematically, but which does not assume that a non-intentionalistic account of these experiences is possible. This is just what a transcendental account of the conditions for our awareness of the world is intended to provide.

Another way of making this point is to consider what we are left with if we detach the positive claims of post-functionalism, outlined in section II above, from the attendant anti-constructivism. We would have a number of claims about how we are aware of the world, which do not need to be part of a specifically anti-constructive approach. I argued in section II that transcendental phenomenology accepts each of these positive claims. Therefore, I think the transcendental approach should not be seen as competing with post-functionalism, but as complementing it. As Crowell argues, references to naturalised platonism and the social context of our capacities for understanding indicate the point at which transcendental phenomenology can make a contribution: by providing analyses of how we make sense of things and how worldly objects are presented to the subject as worldly (2001, 16-18). Later in the thesis, I shall offer accounts of precisely these capacities. These accounts should be seen as developing a philosophical framework within which the claims of post-functionalism are made, rather than as replacing these claims.

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<sup>27</sup> It does not follow that if we could not give an account of these conditions, then we ought to reject the claims made by post-functionalism. This would be to assume that an account of these conditions is motivated only to block scepticism. I argued in (c) above that a transcendental account need not be motivated in this way. This claim - that we can distinguish such a sceptical challenge from the kind of how-possible question I am interested in - goes against Cassam's assumption that how-possible questions only arise in response to particular obstacles to our understanding (2007, 1-2). But I think there is nothing wrong with the following line of thought: if a phenomenon is possible, it must have conditions allowing it to be possible; to ask how this phenomenon is possible is to enquire about these conditions. Cassam does not address this line of thought, much less give reasons for thinking it is ill-founded. This is exactly the line of thought which motivates my transcendental account.

**IV.****The Subjective Conditions for the Possibility of Awareness**

I assume in what follows that a constructive account of our awareness is possible. My version of this account shall be specifically transcendental. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall outline the framework a transcendental approach to awareness requires. I shall introduce the details of this approach in chapters three and four.

**(a)**

I want to characterise transcendental philosophy, not in terms of a tradition inaugurated by Kant and taken up by Husserl, but in terms of an approach to a particular set of problems. I think this problem-based characterisation is more useful in outlining a version of transcendental philosophy which can be applied to the philosophy of mind. The characterisation of transcendental philosophy in terms of problems is most clearly developed by Henry Allison. He describes the fundamental issue raised by Kant's first Critique as "whether it is possible to isolate a set of conditions of the possibility of knowledge of things [...] that can be distinguished from conditions of the possibility of the things themselves" (1983, 13). There are two distinctions being appealed to here: first, that holding between knowledge of things and the things themselves, and second, that holding between the conditions of the possibility of each. I shall address each of these distinctions in what follows. Before doing this, I want to adjust both the issue which Allison outlines, and the philosophical project in which this issue is usually raised.

I suggest we should adjust the issue Allison outlines by broadening the scope of the transcendental theme it introduces. Kant is often read as introducing the

transcendental theme specifically in relation to knowledge or to thought in general: “I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*” (1998, A11-12/B25). Husserl extends this theme to cover the intentionality of experiences in general: “transcendental phenomenology should instead make itself master of the essentially unique set of problems which mental processes offer [...] as intensive mental processes, as ‘consciousness-of’” (1982, 209-210). So Husserl suggests we should look for the conditions of the possibility, not just of knowledge or cognition, but of all kinds of intentionality.

I prefer the Husserlian formulation of the transcendental issue to Kant’s for two reasons. First, as Husserl argues, science and theoretical knowledge in general require pre-theoretical everyday living in and engagement with the world. Scientific theories are attempts to systematically explain features of the world which were encountered prior to any theorising (Husserl 1970, 109-111; Mohanty 1985, 231). Husserl’s broadening of the transcendental theme allows us to address this pre-scientific engagement with the world, as well as the systematic theories which can be developed to explain the world as it is revealed in this engagement. Second, since Kant sets out to establish the possibility of a particular “privileged representation of the world”, including Newtonian physics and Euclidean geometry, his account is vulnerable to this privileged representation being superseded (Mohanty 1985, xxiv-xxv). Because Husserl seeks to account for all intentional awareness, with no particular kind privileged to start with, his account is less vulnerable to intellectual developments (Mohanty 1985, xxv).

I also suggest that we can rethink the project within which we address the issue Allison outlines. Following from Kant, transcendental philosophy is often



regarded as addressing a *quaestio juris*. It is tasked with demonstrating that we can have genuine knowledge of the world, or that our experiences are genuinely about objects in the world. For example, McDowell characterises transcendental philosophy as seeking to “vindicate the objective purport of conceptual occurrences” (1998a, 445). But while this is one task a transcendental inquiry can be set to, it is not the only one. As Mohanty puts it,

Transcendental philosophy seeks an understanding of the broad categorical features of our experience and of the world in terms of the structure of (human) subjectivity which is taken as the ultimate underlying principle, the source of all structurings and orderings, of meanings and interpretations (1985, xvii).

If a philosopher blocks scepticism by reflecting on the structure of subjectivity, then “those arguments, in order to gain their transcendental significance, must be placed within the context of this overall project” (Mohanty 1985, xvii). More generally, one can add that we just are in intentional contact with the world. This is an obvious feature of our lives, and it can be investigated without calling it into question or demanding that we justify thinking of our experiences as genuinely intentional.

**(b)**

In what follows, I shall take transcendental philosophy to be the study of the conditions for the possibility of subjective awareness as such. This formulation points to two tasks: isolating ‘subjective awareness as such’, and describing the conditions for the possibility of this awareness. In the remainder of this section, I shall consider the first of these tasks.

To describe subjective awareness as such, we must describe it independently of any other features which experiences may have. We can start with the description of subjective character outlined in the previous chapter. The subjective character of an experience is what it is like for the subject of that experience to undergo it. Subjective character may be essential to experiences, but it does not follow that experiences will have no other properties. In particular, it is commonly held that they stand in correlations with neural events, and with patterns of bodily behaviour as well. What we want to do is to isolate the subjective character of experiences (insofar as this character plays a role in making the subject aware of something) from any other features of experiences. This kind of isolation is similar to that proposed by Galen Strawson. He distinguishes experiences as particular episodes from what he terms “experience”, the character of “what-it-is-like-ness” which all these episodes share, “the overall, indescribably complex experiential character that experiences have for those who have them as they have them” (1994, 46). This experiential character is what I am calling subjective character. The distinction between particular experiences and subjective character in general entails a further one, between subjective character considered as such, and any non-experiential properties the experiences may have, or non-experiential relations they might stand in (Strawson 1994, 45). It is subjective character considered as such which is of interest to me in what follows.

We have to be careful about how we express this point. Strawson describes subjective character as “everything about one’s experience that could possibly be just the same if one were not located in a physical world as one thinks, but were rather a Berkeleyan mind or a ‘brain in a vat’ or something even stranger” (1994,

46).<sup>28</sup> I disagree with Strawson on this point. What we have to do to study subjective awareness as such is to detach questions concerning the subjective character of experiences from questions concerning the causal or nomological relations they stand in, or the conditions they depend upon for their existence. But it does not follow that this subjective character could itself exist independently of any particular physical or metaphysical arrangement. It may turn out that one particular metaphysical arrangement is metaphysically necessary for experiences to exist, or for them to have the particular subjective character they do. A comparison here would be with studying the grammatical structure of a sentence in isolation from other features of the sentence. I take it as obvious that we can do this, and that it does not entail that a sentence can have a grammatical structure regardless of what other features it has.<sup>29</sup>

If we can isolate questions concerning the subjective character of experiences, we should be able to do the same for questions concerning the subject of experiences. Recall that in the previous chapter, I spoke of what it is like for a subject to undergo an experience, and what it is like to be a subject. To study the latter, we must consider the overall experiential state or the stream of consciousness of the subject, in isolation from its other features such as its physical makeup, biological functioning or causal relation to entities in its environment. Again, this should not be read as committing us to the idea that a subject can have a stream of experiences without also having these other features.

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<sup>28</sup> See also Horgan and Tienson 2002, 527. Strawson himself compares experience understood in this way with what is left after the procedure of transcendental bracketing used by Husserl (1998, 461). I address this view of Husserl's phenomenology in chapter four, section VII.

<sup>29</sup> This example is suggested by one given in Thomasson 2005. I shall return to this kind of example in the next chapter.

(c)

The next question is how we can isolate the subjective character of experiences in this manner. I shall take up this question in some detail in the next two chapters. Here I only want to indicate how one might proceed.

Let us begin with a commonplace distinction. In everyday experience and in scientific discourse, we can distinguish between the object as it really is, and the object as it appears to a particular observer under given conditions (Allison 1983, 8, 25). These conditions can include the psychological and physiological makeup of the observer, and the physical makeup of the situation in which the act of observing occurs (for example, the diffusion of light in the locality).

This familiar distinction can help us to draw a different distinction, which I shall term the transcendental distinction. This is when we distinguish between things as they are and as they appear to us, not under any specific conditions which can vary between particular cases of observation (for example, seeing the same object in clear daylight and in a darkened room), but any appearing of the object whatsoever. In other words, we are to consider every possible manner of appearance of any object, and distinguish these from how the very same object is in itself. The idea, very roughly, is that we can distinguish between how something appears in any situation and how it actually is.

It is important to note that the transcendental distinction is, in and of itself, only formal. It is simply the distinction between that which appears and the totality of its appearances. This distinction commits us to no particular view regarding the nature of that which appears. Nor does it commit us to any view regarding the relations between the different appearances, or between them and that which appears. All of this remains to be worked out in detailed investigations (which I shall

provide in chapter six). The distinction therefore is useful only insofar as it allows us to make clear the subject matter of transcendental study. An object can only appear to a subject who is aware of it. The totality of ways in which a particular object can appear is therefore correlated with the totality of ways in which some subject can be aware of that object. Therefore, if we can clarify the way in which objects can appear to us, we can arrive at a clearer conception of subjective awareness itself.

## V.

### **The Transcendental Insight**

As mentioned earlier, a transcendental account involves two moves: describing subjective awareness as such, and outlining the conditions for the possibility of this awareness. If we can make both of these moves, then we will be able to answer the transcendental question of how it is possible for subjects to have a meaningful awareness of the world. Let us assume that we can follow through on the suggestion of the previous section, and isolate subjective awareness as such. The next issue is how we can describe the conditions for the possibility of such awareness. In this section, I shall sketch an outline of how we might do this. I shall also argue that the project of describing these conditions is independent of other philosophical concerns. In particular, it is independent of straightforward modal considerations concerning what is necessary or sufficient for us to have states of awareness.

#### (a)

To show this independence, I must make clear arguably the key insight of transcendental philosophy. This is the claim that the conditions in virtue of which a

subject can be aware of the world must be distinguished from the conditions required for that subject to exist in the world. Following A.D. Smith, I shall term this the transcendental insight (2003, 28; see also Zahavi 2003a, 42).

Let us assume we have a spatiotemporal world of causally related, law-governed entities and events. Say that a subject, S, is an entity in this world, related in various causal and law-governed ways to other entities. S will be subject to physical stimuli of various sorts – light waves will reflect off its retinas, sound waves will reverberate in its ears, receptors on its skin will react to the wind or the surfaces it brushes against, and so on.

I think a transcendental philosopher ought to concede that the conditions just outlined would determine whether or not S has experiences, E. That is, assuming that the stimuli are in place, and that S's various faculties are working (leaving aside for the moment the question of what these faculties are), then S will undergo experiences, and so become aware of their environment. So the conditions I have outlined do determine S's experiences, in that they will determine exactly what S will experience from moment to moment. Furthermore, it may be that some of the conditions I have described must exist in order for S to have any experiences at all. These conditions, which I shall collectively term C1, will be necessary for S to have E. C1 might include other psychological states of the subject; neural or other physical states on which E supervenes; or the laws of nature without which these conditions themselves could not exist. C1 thus includes the conditions for the existence of E.

However, what the transcendental philosopher is looking for are the conditions for the possibility of our being aware. More precisely, we want to find what Allison terms the epistemic or objectivating conditions of experiences: "it is in

virtue of such conditions that our representations relate to objects” (1983, 10). The same stimuli that impact on S (light waves, sound waves, and so forth) will also impact on the rocks and plants around S. But these entities will enjoy no awareness of anything. The transcendental philosopher can ask what is that makes the difference between S and these other entities. It seems the answer must be something in the very nature of S, the kind of entity it is (Collins 1999, 9-10). But, *ex hypothesi*, S enjoys its awareness of the world in virtue of undergoing the experiences in E. When we put these two points together, we arrive at the following: the objectivating conditions for S enjoying an awareness of the world are somehow bound up with the nature of S itself as a subject of experiences (E). Let us term these objectivating conditions C2.

**(b)**

We have distinguished two sets of conditions: C1, which determine whether or not S has E, and C2, those conditions in virtue of which the experiences in E present objects to S. The question the transcendental philosopher can pose is, are the existence conditions for E the same as, or do they determine, its objectivating conditions? That is, when we have fixed C1, can we then read off C2? The transcendental insight is basically that we must answer this question in the negative: C1 does not determine C2, or, to be more specific, we cannot assume that C1 determines C2. Therefore, we must try to describe the objectivating conditions of awareness independently of describing its existence conditions. If this claim can be defended, then we have reason to believe that transcendental philosophy, as the search for objectivating conditions, is an investigation independent of any description of the non-experiential features of a subject.

In defence of the transcendental insight, consider the difference between the essence and the existence of an item. It is quite possible that neither of these terms can be defined in a non-circular fashion, but we can roughly distinguish between *what* an item is and *that* it is, the fact that it exists (Fine 1994, 2; Mohanty 1997, 7). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the essence of an item is what it is. The essential features of an item are those features which it must have in order that it counts as the same item. For example, each human being can undergo changes in their cellular makeup and remain the same human. What is essential to each human is what can undergo such changes. In the specific case of experiences, we can distinguish what they are (states with a particular subjective character) from whether or not they exist. Of course, experiences will have features other than their subjective character, but this character is essential to them in that it is necessary in order for them to count as experiences. I want to claim that the objectivating conditions of awareness pick out something essential about it, while its existence conditions do not. And this, I want to argue, would give us reason to think that we cannot read the first off from the second. This would be enough to establish that transcendental philosophy is an independent investigation.

Consider what someone who opposes the transcendental insight might say at this point. They might accept the distinction between essence and existence,<sup>30</sup> but suggest that once we have fixed the conditions for something's existing, its essence, what it is, will automatically also be determined. If this was the case, then it would seem that C1 would indeed determine C2, and my argument would fail. But in fact we have good reason to believe that the existence-conditions of an item cannot determine what that item is. Let us say that the existence-conditions of an item, *x*, are

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<sup>30</sup> Or they could deny this distinction, or perhaps accept it but question the particular model of essence I am relying upon. A defence of this model would take me too far outside the scope of this thesis. For a defence of it, see Fine 1994.



those conditions which are necessary for x to exist.<sup>31</sup> The problem is that there are a great number of conditions which are necessary in order for x to exist. In fact, any necessary truth will, *ipso facto*, be necessary for x's existence. But clearly, many or even most of these truths will have nothing to do with what x is. As Fine puts it, "it is no part of Socrates' essence that there be infinitely many prime numbers" (1994, 5). Now, clearly, some necessary truths will concern the essence of x (assuming that the essence of anything must be specified in truths which are themselves necessary). But this subsection of necessary truths can only be isolated by reference to what x itself is. Therefore, in order to determine this subsection of necessary truths, we must be clear as to what x is, its essence. And this is just what we were trying to determine in the first place.

As Fine puts it, essential truths, truths concerning the essence of a particular item, have a much finer mesh than necessary truths, because they are determined by the nature of that item, rather than whatever is necessary in general (1994, 3). And we cannot read off truths with a finer mesh from those which are coarser. That is, even when we have determined all the necessary truths, we can still inquire as to their sources. Essential truths "are true in virtue of the objects in question; the necessity has its source in those objects which are the subject of the underlying essentialist claim" (Fine 1994, 9). I take it as obvious that we cannot simply read off, from the totality of necessary truths, which truths have their source in which objects.

My opponent has a further line of argument available to them. They can point out that the necessary truths in C1 are themselves only a subsection of the totality of necessary truths. Furthermore, the truths in C1, unlike other necessary truths, are actually true of S and of E. So why, they might ask, can we not read off the truths in

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<sup>31</sup> I shall set aside sufficiency in what follows, but the point I am about to make applies to relations of that sort as well.

C2 from the truths in C1? To see that this move will not work either, consider the specifics of the situation. C1 was defined as those conditions which are necessary for S to have E. These may include psychological and neural states of the subject, and law-governed relations which determine how the subject can interact with objects in its environment.<sup>32</sup> The problem is that these conditions themselves are not, on the face of it, specified in relation to any particular subject or set of experiences. In particular, none of them would seem to be true in virtue of the identity of S, or the identity of the states making up E. For example, let us say that a particular neural state, N, is correlated with a particular experience, E1, in such a way that E1 cannot exist without N existing. So we can say that an existence-condition of E1 is that N exists. But it seems false to say that this condition (that E1 cannot exist unless N exists) is true in virtue of the identity of either N or E1. Rather, it would seem to be true in virtue of whatever modal relation (of supervenience, or perhaps realisation) holds between N and E1. And this modal relation does not itself hold in virtue of the identity of either N or E1.

Let me put the point another way. It is true of E1 that it cannot exist without N existing. But this truth does not pick out a condition in virtue of which E1 is about anything at all. But it is essential to E1 that it is about something or other. So the existence-condition of E1 is not a condition which picks out this essential feature of E1.<sup>33</sup> So the existence-condition is not true in virtue of the identity of E1 as an intentional state. Conversely, the objectivating conditions of E1 will be true in virtue of E1's identity as an intentional state; they are those conditions in virtue of which

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<sup>32</sup> Characterised in this way, these are closely related to what Allison calls psychological conditions: "some mechanism or aspect of a human cognitive apparatus that is appealed to in order to provide a genetic account of a belief or an empirical explanation of why we perceive things in a certain way" (1983, 11).

<sup>33</sup> A similar point is made by McDowell (1996, 167-168). I mentioned this earlier in the chapter, in section III (c).

E1 counts as an intentional state. If what I have said above is true, we cannot read off finely-meshed truths from coarser-grained ones. And the objectivating conditions of E1, because they are true in virtue of its identity, are more finely meshed than its existence condition, which is a necessary truth which just happens to be about E1. So we cannot read off the objectivating conditions from the existence condition.

(c)

The last topic I want to discuss in this chapter is how we can determine the objectivating conditions of our awareness (the conditions in virtue of which we can be aware of objects). In the previous section, I argued that the transcendental approach must begin with a detailed description of intentional experiences. In this section, I have argued that the objectivating conditions of our awareness are the essential features of subjective awareness as such, those features of subjective states which make them count as states of awareness. I want now to develop in a little more detail the conception of essential features which I am assuming, and then say something about how we can deduce the essential features of subjective awareness from a description of intentional experiences.

I shall not defend the basic conception of essences and essential features which I shall use, but simply outline it. My aim in this thesis is to develop a particular model of the subject, and to do this I shall work within a particular set of ontological assumptions. These assumptions form a conception which is well-known, and has been defended elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> This conception has two aspects: the different kinds of object, and the different ways in which particular objects exist. Every object (that is, anything we can be aware of) belongs to a particular category

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<sup>34</sup> In most respects, my metaphysical assumptions follow the system outlined in Lowe 2006. McDowell and certainly Putnam might not be comfortable with this ontological picture, committed as it is to essences and different kinds of objects. But I take it that the arguments in section III establish that they have not given reason to think that an ontological account of this sort is not possible.

or kind. The kind each object belongs to will determine its identity conditions, the conditions which must hold for it to be that object (Lowe 2006, 48). These are the conditions which determine whether object *x* is identical to object *y*. For example, set *x* is identical to set *y* if and only if they have all the same members, and it is often suggested that time *x* is the same as time *y* if and only if the same events happen in each (McGinn 2000, 5-6). The identity conditions for sets differ from those of times not just because sets and times are different objects, but because they are different kinds of object. The essence of an object, what that object is, includes both its belonging to a particular kind, and its being that particular member of its kind rather than any other (Lowe 2006, 207). In what follows, I shall largely ignore the second issue, what makes an object the individual object it is. I am not so much interested in distinguishing particular states of awareness from one another, as characterising what it is that makes a particular state count as a state of awareness.

I speak here of particulars. This introduces the second aspect of my metaphysical model, the different modes of existence of particular objects. We can clarify this idea by distinguishing between particulars and universals. Any particular object is an instance of one or more universals (Husserl 1982, 7; 1960, 71). A particular object can be any sort of individual item: an entity, a state, a property or an event. It will have various features, which can include properties, relations or states.<sup>35</sup> Take as an example a sheet of paper: it will have the properties of whiteness and shape; it will stand in spatial relations to every other physical item in the room; and it will exist in various states, such as being unfolded or crumpled up. A universal is an ideal, atemporal object, which relates to particulars by way of instantiation. Because it does not exist in space or time, it can have any number of instances.

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<sup>35</sup> Not every particular object can have every kind of feature. For example, I doubt that a particular property, such as being coloured red, can itself have a property. For a discussion of the precise relations between the different kinds of particular objects, see Lowe 2006, 70-72, 87-93.

Particulars, in contrast, cannot be instanced at all (Lowe 2006, 89). For example, we can distinguish the sheet of paper itself (a particular entity), whiteness in general (a universal), and the particular whiteness of this sheet of paper.<sup>36</sup> This particular whiteness is both an instance of a universal (whiteness in general) and a property of this sheet of paper. Without this sheet existing, this instance of the universal could not have existed. But without the universal, this sheet could not have had the particular property of being white. The particular whiteness of the sheet of paper is a mode of the sheet's existence, a way in which it is. It is in virtue of instantiating universals that particular objects have different modes of being.

Understanding the kind a particular object belongs to allows us to determine which universals a particular can instantiate. That is, the way in which something can exist is determined by the kind of thing it is. For example, a number cannot instantiate the property of parenthood, because the kind of thing it is (an atemporal object) precludes its having temporal properties, of which parenthood is one. For similar reasons, a parent cannot instantiate the properties of evenness or oddness. Now, because the kind an object belongs to determines which universals it can or cannot instantiate, the universals an object can instantiate serve as an index, allowing us to work out what kind of thing the object is. Metaphysical determination goes from kind of object to the way the object can be, but we can follow the reverse path to work out the essence of the object, and hence the conditions for its possibility. This is exactly what I suggest we do when trying to outline the conditions for the possibility of states of awareness.

This suggestion brings us to the issue of how we go about discovering the essential features of particular items. In most cases in everyday life we have a rough

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<sup>36</sup> This example is adopted from Smith 2007, 275.

idea of the essence of the items we are dealing with. Being able to offer a description of any item usually requires at least a minimal grasp of its identity conditions, the conditions without which it would cease to be that very item. It also usually requires some awareness of the other properties the item can or must have, in order to match one's description of it. For example, I can see the pen in front of me as being a certain colour; in being aware of it as such, I am also aware of it as spatially extended. Similarly, when I see a car travelling quickly, I grasp this event as temporally extended. In these cases, I need not be aware *that* the spatial or temporal extension is necessary.<sup>37</sup> Rather, in grasping the item as having certain features, we must also grasp it as having others, and as having a certain structure within which these features coexist. Our awareness of this structure is a rough grasp of what the item itself is.

This rough grasp of the essence of the item is the basis for our metaphysical intuitions: our understanding of the nature of the item and of the modal relations it belongs to. In considering the essential features of states of awareness, I shall mainly draw on metaphysical intuitions of this sort, basing them on careful descriptions of these states. However, Husserl does have a procedure by means of which we can sharpen our intuitions regarding the nature of objects, thus moving towards a more systematic grasp of their essences. This procedure he terms eidetic seeing or *Wesensschauung* (1982, 8; 1973, 339). The idea of 'seeing' essences might sound rather far-fetched, but I understand it simply as a way of testing our intuitions about the kind the object belongs to and the features it can have. We can sharpen our rough grasp of the essence of an object by examining the limits of the changes the object

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<sup>37</sup> My awareness can be nonconceptual, and so not propositional in form (see Dreyfus 2006, 47-48)

could possibly undergo while remaining the very item it is; that is, by considering which universals the object can and cannot instantiate.

To engage in this procedure, we begin by identifying and describing a particular object as having particular properties, standing in various relations to other objects, and so on. The next step in the procedure is to vary this object in one's imagination; to imagine that certain of its particular properties or relations were to change. For example, take a table you perceive. You can vary it in your imagination with regard to its different features – imagining it to have a different colour, or to be smaller, or to have a different shape (Husserl 1960, 70). What is interesting here is that this imaginative variation is not completely without limits. In these variations, “an invariant is necessarily retained as the necessary general form, without which an object such as this thing, as an example of its kind, would not be thinkable at all” (Husserl 1973, 341). This invariant is the kind the object belongs to. Recall that the identity conditions of a particular object, such as a set or a time, are determined by the kind of object it is. Determining the kind an object belongs to allows us to determine the conditions which must hold if it is to count as that same object. For example, we cannot imagine the table remaining the same entity if it was to turn into a pool of liquid or a cloud of gas. We can think of the procedure of imaginative variation as working out the limits of the changes a particular object can undergo before ceasing to be that object.<sup>38</sup>

This way of studying objects must be distinguished from conceptual analysis, at least where that is understood as the clarification of the meanings of words or of the relations holding between concepts. As Mohanty notes, the contraries of essential

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<sup>38</sup> This procedure cannot be applied to discover the essence of universals. We may however be able to use a similar procedure: by imaginatively varying a number of objects each of which instances a certain universal, we may be able to work out which objects this universal can and cannot be instantiated by. But this issue is not relevant to the concerns of my thesis.

truths are not self-contradictory (1985, 94). The study of essences aims at synthetic rather than analytic truths. To confuse eidetic study with conceptual analysis so characterised runs the risk of confusing the essence of something with our conception of it (Smith 2007, 254, 256).<sup>39</sup> For example, we can state the meaning of the word 'water', but this does not in itself tell us what the essence of water is. It is true that we need concepts in order to practice eidetic analysis, but it does not follow that what we are doing in eidetic analysis is analysing the concepts themselves.<sup>40</sup>

The procedure of imaginative variation should not be thought of as instantly grasping the essence of something. We are better advised to think of it as a gradual working out of the essential features of an object, by a process of testing our intuitions. The results of this process are best thought of as essentialist claims, which are open to challenge and which can be defeated (Smith 2007, 331-332; Zahavi 2003a, 39). Some of these claims will be true, and if so they will be metaphysically necessary. But we cannot assume from this that any particular essentialist claim we make is in fact an essential truth. We must always leave open the possibility of revising our essentialist claims, should they conflict with further eidetic study.

It might be objected here that this procedure of imaginative variation is redundant, given the doctrine of scientific essentialism. After all, if science can discover *a posteriori* necessities and reveal the constitution of entities, then why not let it do the job of clarifying the essences of things? In response to this, I suggest that while science can certainly help in determining the necessary features of objects, it would be a mistake to assume that every essence can be fully explained by scientific

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<sup>39</sup> I think Zahavi may be guilty of this (2003a, 38-39).

<sup>40</sup> Not only is this method of studying essences not conceptual analysis, I am not even sure that it is an *a priori* procedure. Husserl assumes that it is (1973, 340). But the procedure of imaginative variation must begin with a particular object, which we describe and then vary. If experience, including scientific investigation, can reveal aspects of the object which were hitherto hidden, then it seems this might affect the kinds of imaginative variation we can perform on the object (for a related point, see Mohanty 1985, 94). But I shall set this issue aside rather than pursue it further.



work. The standard examples of scientific essentialism concern natural kinds (see Putnam 1975, 232-234), but I am not sure that experience or types of experience count as natural kinds. For example, it is commonly assumed that natural kinds depend for their identity on the natural laws they enter into (for example, Shoemaker 1998), but it is by no means clear that, say, experiences *qua* states of awareness can be brought under natural laws. Furthermore, if what I said in chapter one about the description problem is correct, then any scientific account of awareness will require that we have a prior description of the nature of the explanandum. This description must be provided by non-scientific means, on pain of circularity. The procedure of eidetic variation may not be the only such method available, but it certainly seems capable of fulfilling this task. Therefore, we have no reason to think that we can dispense with it as a way of clarifying the nature of states of awareness.

The first two chapters have been largely expository in nature, introducing the areas in the philosophy of mind which I wish to address (the subjective character of experience, and meaningful awareness). Before embarking on detailed philosophical studies in these areas, I need to outline the kind of approach I shall take and the methods I plan to use. In the next two chapters, I shall introduce Husserl's phenomenology, which reveals hitherto overlooked problems in both these areas, and provides a method for exploring these problems.

### Chapter 3

#### Husserlian Phenomenology

In the preceding chapters, I have outlined the two problems in the philosophy of mind that I wish to address: the subjective character of our experiences, and our capacity to be aware of things, respectively. I shall next introduce those aspects of Husserl's phenomenology which will be of most use in addressing these problems.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I shall outline the basic phenomenological concepts which allow us to study the intentional structure of our experiences. In chapter four, I shall outline a specifically transcendental phenomenology, the study of how the subject has a sense of the world as a unified whole. I shall use these phenomenological concepts to describe how the subjective character of experience is structured through time, and argue that this temporal structure can explain the relation between the subject and its experiences (chapter five). In chapter six, I shall show how our experiences give us an awareness of objects as objective, as not necessarily how they appear to be.

In introducing these phenomenological ideas, I shall not attempt to provide a complete overview of Husserl's fifty-year career. I shall concentrate on the works where he developed a specifically transcendental approach,<sup>2</sup> since I think it is this version of phenomenology which is of most use in the philosophy of mind. In outlining his ideas, I shall be interpreting them in a particular way. I shall defend this interpretation with references to Husserl's works where required. The main aim of

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that my use of 'phenomenology', to refer to a particular approach (or group of approaches) to studying our experience, differs from how the word is often used in contemporary philosophy of mind, to refer to the subjective character of experiences. For example, "Visual experiences have phenomenal character, or more simply a phenomenology. The phenomenal character of a visual experience is what it is like to have that visual experience" (Siegel 2006, 484). In what follows, I shall describe this aspect of experiences as their subjective character, and use 'phenomenology' to mean a particular way in which experiences are to be studied.

<sup>2</sup> From *Ideas I* in 1913 (Husserl 1982) to the posthumously published *Crisis* (Husserl 1970).

the next two chapters, however, is not to engage in scholarly exegesis, but to draw out themes from Husserl's works which are most relevant to problems in the philosophy of mind.

In section I, I shall briefly outline the basic structure of intentionality with which Husserl worked, distinguishing between the intentional experience, the intentional content or noema of the experience, and its intentional object.

In section II, I shall outline Husserl's famous method of bracketing, which allows us to redirect our attention from the intentional objects which usually preoccupy us to the intentional experiences and their contents.

In section III, I shall introduce Husserl's account of how we can make sense of or constitute, in Husserl's terminology, the objects of our intentional experiences. I shall also outline how experiences can be joined together or synthesised so as to create an awareness of objects.

In section IV, I shall further develop this notion of constitution, outlining how for one to be aware of an object is for that object to have meaning for one.

Lastly, in section V, I shall introduce the notion of functional analysis, and argue that the study of how we constitute objects is a kind of functional analysis, studying how different experiential episodes and the different aspects of each episode work together to enable the subject to be aware of the object.

## **I.**

### **The Basic Structure of Intentional Experiences**

In the previous chapter, I clarified intentional awareness as the area I wish to study. I wish to describe our meaningful experiences, and outline how it is in virtue

of being in these states that the subject can be aware of anything.<sup>3</sup> Husserl suggests that each state of awareness can be understood by reference to a fundamental intentional structure which has three elements:

- (a) the intentional object of the experience;<sup>4</sup>
- (b) the intentional content or noema of the experience; and
- (c) the actual experience itself.

Let us consider these elements in turn.

**(a)**

The intentional object is whatever the experience is about. The term ‘object’ here is meant in a very general sense, as whatever an intentional state can be directed towards, where this includes properties, states of affairs and events as well as substances. Furthermore, for something to be an intentional object is not for it to have any particular existential status. It is merely for it to be that towards which a possible intentional state can be directed. If I think of the Fountain of Youth, then the Fountain of Youth, a nonexistent item, is the object of my consideration. The term ‘entity’ I shall reserve for individual things which actually exist. The Fountain of Youth, for example, is an object but is not an entity.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In what follows, I am concerned with meaning, and more specifically with meaningful awareness: the presentation to a subject of an object as under a certain mode of appearance. This should be distinguished from issues of reference, which in the present context concern how an experience is directed to one object or set of objects rather than another. I shall discuss the distinction between issues of meaning and of reference a little more in I (b) below.

<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, this is a necessary element of what Husserl would regard as only one species of intentionality, so-called object-intentionality, our awareness of transcendent objects. This species can be contrasted with the minimal self-awareness one has of the experiences one is undergoing, which Husserl and most phenomenologists regard as non-objectifying, not presenting experiences as objects distinct from one’s awareness of them (Zahavi 2005, 23-24, 40-44). In what follows, I shall gloss ‘object-intentionality’ as ‘intentionality’, because practically all work on this issue in the philosophy of mind takes intentionality as a directedness towards objects, and I want to outline a phenomenological model specifically to engage with these contemporary debates. I shall therefore leave our non-objectifying awareness of our own experiences to one side.

<sup>5</sup> This distinction is similar to that drawn in Smith 2003, 33-34. In addition to entities, I also allow that we can speak of particular properties, relations, events, processes and states which exist.

It is important to note that distinguishing between objects and entities in this way does not encumber me with a Meinongian ontology. The problem lies with Meinong's interpretation of intentional objects – that to be thinkable, they must have some alternative mode of existence (see Yagisawa 2005/2009, § 3.1). I disagree, holding that existence is univocal. An object either is, or it isn't. There are certainly different types of objects which exist (for example, abstract as opposed to concrete, or necessary as opposed to contingent) but *whether* or not they exist is a straightforward binary issue. There is no sense in which the Fountain of Youth exists. It is an object to the extent that we can be intentionally aware of it under a particular mode of appearance (as a fountain with life-giving waters).

**(b)**

Husserl's theory of intentionality can be distinguished from many of his predecessors's by how it accounts for our ability to be aware of nonexistent objects. As noted above, one response to this issue is Meinongian, allowing that these objects and states have some sort of 'existence', in a special, broad sense. This view seems to be motivated in large part by the assumption that something must exist in order for it to be thinkable.<sup>6</sup> Husserl rejects this assumption, and so must find another way to account for this ability. His solution is that intentional states are characterised, not by reference to the type of object they can concern, but by the medium or intentional content in virtue of which they present their object to their subject.<sup>7</sup> An intentional experience, as a consciousness 'of' something, must essentially "bear in itself 'sense'" (Husserl 1982, 207). This sense which each

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<sup>6</sup> This line of thought is outlined and criticised by Russell (1905, 491) and Quine (1953, 1-19).

<sup>7</sup> Husserl can thus be said to have propounded a medium theory of intentionality (Smith 2007, 257, 263-264). The term 'medium' can be somewhat misleading, suggesting as it does that there is always something standing between an experience and its object, so that our awareness of objects is never immediate. But this is mistaken: for Husserl, the medium is the structure of the experience which presents the subject with the object, not something which stands between the two. I shall return to the issue of the medium theory and immediacy in section V of this chapter.

experience bears is its noema (plural, noemata), the intentional content of the experience. We can initially characterise the noema as the structure or shape of the experience through which the object is presented to the object. It plays a role similar to that Fregean *Sinne* play with regard to linguistic expressions (Mohanty 1985, 16-19; Føllesdal 1982, 74-76).

The noema of each act presents the intentional object “as being and being-such” (Husserl 1970, 159), as having certain features (as under a certain mode of appearance). To think of a tree for example, usually involves being aware of it as a certain kind of organic natural entity. To think of a tree as having no properties whatsoever would not be to think of a tree, or of anything at all. In perception, similarly, we don’t perceive featureless entities; rather, we perceive things dense with properties, be they visual, spatial, aural, or otherwise. The noema can thus be said to “prescribe” the object as being one thing or another (Smith 2007, 261).<sup>8</sup>

The relation of the noema to the intentional object is a matter of some debate. On the interpretation I wish to defend, each noema is separate from but related to the intentional object. Both the separation and the relation here can be systematically understood only in functional terms, which I shall outline in more detail in section V below. For the moment, we can note some important aspects of this separation. Each noema is instantiated in an experience, whereas in the majority of cases, the intentional object is numerically different to the experience and is not instantiated in it. Furthermore, the noema and the object can each undergo changes independently

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<sup>8</sup> In chapter one, I distinguished between the mode of appearance and the mode of presentation, the way in which the object, under its mode of appearance, is presented to the subject (perceptually, remembered, in an emotional fashion, and so on). Husserl includes both modes in a broad sense of the noema, the object considered “in the How of its modes of givenness” (1982, 316). However, I think it is arguable that the mode of presentation is a property of the intentional experience itself, rather than of the noema of that experience. If I feel anger at someone, I would not say that this feeling of anger belongs to *that which* presents that person to me, the noematic structure of my experience. Rather, it is the way in which I take up the person who is so presented to me. As such, it seems to belong to the experience itself, considered as a concrete event or state (see (c) below). I shall set this issue to one side in what follows, since I do not have space to adequately address it.

of the other. As Husserl puts it, “The tree simpliciter [i.e., an intentional object] can burn up, be resolved into its chemical elements, etc. But the sense [i.e, the noema] [...] cannot burn up; it has no chemical elements, no forces, no real properties” (1982, 216; for further clarification, see Smith 2007, 268-269).

A different interpretation of the noema is that it is not separate from the intentional object. It is the very same object, but considered as it appears to the subject: the perceived object as perceived, the remembered as remembered, and so on. On this account, when we study the noema, we are actually studying the intentional object, that which we are aware of, but we are studying it only as it appears to us (Zahavi 2003a, 59). Proponents of this interpretation criticise the first interpretation as confusing an ordinary object considered in an unusual manner (the intentional object, considered in phenomenological reflection) with an unusual object which is supposedly separate to the ordinary intentional object (Zahavi 2003a, 59). They also argue that the first interpretation must take the noema as an internal representation, a mental entity which can somehow direct us to objects outside the mind. If this is correct, then the first interpretation faces the problem of explaining the relation between the noema, understood as this sort of internal mental entity, and external objects, entities in the world (Zahavi 2003a, 56, 61). This problem is a direct result of taking the noema as a mental representation, something separate from the intentional object.<sup>9</sup>

This second interpretation is certainly consistent with much of what Husserl says about the topic (see 1960, 33; 1982, 214). However, I think it struggles to accommodate examples such as my remembering a tree which has burned away. In this case, the noema presenting me with the tree is being instantiated now, whereas

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<sup>9</sup> I shall argue in section V that the medium interpretation can be defended against this charge of representationalism.

the tree ceased to exist at some point in the past. I cannot see how the same object, even considered in different ways, can have different existence conditions. This suggests that the noema cannot be identical to the intentional object. Indeed, it suggests that the noema should be considered as a different type of object than a physical object such as a tree. Specifically, the noema is an ideal, atemporal object.

In support of this claim, consider that the noema also seems to be distinct from each particular experience in which it is instantiated. The same noema can be instantiated in experiences at different times. I can think ‘Durham is a beautiful city’ now, but I can have precisely the same thought at some point in the future. While it would be incorrect to say that I would, in that case, be having precisely the same experience, the two experiences would share one and the same intentional content. Furthermore, you and I can both have experiences which instantiate exactly the same noema. You and I can both think ‘Durham is a beautiful city’, and while we will not literally share the same experience, each of us will have an experience instantiating the one noema. It is in this sense that we can speak of you and me having the same thought. Husserl’s interpretation of these points (the difference between the noema and the intentional object, and between the noema and any particular experience) is that the noema is an ideal entity, neither temporally nor spatially located in the real world. As an ideal entity, it can have any number of instantiations, but it will not be identical with any instantiation.

It might be denied that these points entail that noemata are ideal. One alternative is to argue that each noema is a physical type, of which particular occurrences are tokens. This account of sameness of meaning is plausible in some cases, but much less so in others. For example, it is unclear in what sense the written marks ‘Snow is white’ and the sounds I make when I utter these words could be



tokens of the same physical type (Mohanty 1969, 30-31). For the reasons given, and in the absence of any compelling counter-argument, I shall take the noema to be an ideal object.

Noemata are intentional, but they are not necessarily conceptual or propositional. The best example here is the perceptual noema, “the perceived exactly as it is perceived” (Mohanty 1985, 18). The difference between this noema and a conceptual noema, such as that of a judgment, is that the latter but not the former is completely expressible in language (Mohanty 1985, 18). The judgement that Durham is a beautiful city is completely expressible, in the sentence ‘Durham is a beautiful city’. This thought might have different associations for the different people who think it, or it may suggest different emotions or mental images. But these are not themselves parts of the noema of this experience of thinking; rather, they belong to (or perhaps are associated with) the concrete experience itself. In contrast, when I hear birds singing, I can describe what I hear correctly or incorrectly and in greater or lesser detail, but none of these descriptions will exhaust the exact nature of what I hear, as I hear it. This is not to say that the perceptual noema contains aspects which are ineffable, but simply that no description of this noema will precisely translate its meaningful content (whereas a complete translation is possible in the case of judgements). Cases like this illustrate why it is so difficult to capture the subjective character of perceptual experiences (as I discussed in chapter one). Therefore, we should not think of the noema as necessarily conceptual. Nor does the intentionality of every experience reduce to that found in thinking or cognition (Smith 2007, 264-265).

Before moving on from noema, I want to briefly address the distinction between meaning and reference; that is, between an experience’s presenting an

object to the subject, and the subject being directed to one particular object. I see the role of the noema as helping to explain how meaningful awareness is possible, rather than how intentional experiences pick out a particular object or set of objects. In a number of cases (such as demonstratives and natural kinds) we have good reason to think that reference is fixed through some sort of real relation between the subject and its object (Putnam 1975, 223-227). If we accept that the reference of, say, a proper name is fixed even partly by a causal relation, then I think we must accept that the various experiences we have which feature this name (such as wondering where John is, or how tall Aristotle was) are not directed to their object solely in virtue of their respective noemata (see McIntyre 1982, 219-231).

However, the question I am interested in is “How does *this* act intend that object?” (Mohanty 1985, 22). In other words, what is it about this act which allows it to present an object to its subject? I suggest we have good reason to think that we can answer this question by appealing to the noema of the act. On occasion I have spoken of an experience presenting an object to a subject; on other occasions, I have spoken of an experience being directed to the object. I shall reserve the first phrasing for issues of meaning, and the second for issues of reference or the picking out of an object.<sup>10</sup>

I should also add that while I want to consider meaning independently of reference, the two cannot be completely separated in the case of intentional experiences at least. Any experience of an object will present that object under a certain mode of appearance. Reference, or at least the directedness of intentional

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<sup>10</sup> Something like this distinction is drawn by Horgan and Tienson, who contrast reference with what they term intentional directedness (which is what I call the presentation of the object). Like me, they regard this presentation as requiring no real relation between the experience and what it is intentionally directed towards (2002, 528-529). Mohanty himself thinks that noemata can fix reference (1985, 23-24). I think my comments here point to how we can salvage much of what is useful in Mohanty’s account, while acknowledging an irreducible causal factor in at least some forms of reference.

experiences, must involve a meaningful awareness of the object we are directed to, even if this meaningful awareness cannot itself fix the reference. So while the noema may not suffice to fix what an experience is directed towards, it is a necessary aspect of explaining this directedness, as well as accounting for its meaningfulness.<sup>11</sup>

(c)

Lastly, the experience itself is the conscious episode that the subject undergoes, in which the object is presented to it. It is a state or episode in the subject's life, extended through time and related in causal and metaphysical ways to various states and events (for example, neural activity in the subject's brain). In this way, it differs from the ideal noema, which may be instantiated in any number of experiences. Similarly, while a noema can be said to be shared by two or more subjects, each individual experience can, strictly speaking, be had by a single subject only. The experience, as a real event, may or may not stand in some kind of real relation (for example, one of causality) with its object. What a Husserlian account stresses is that the intentional relation that holds between the experience and its object cannot be identified with any such real relation (though it may require some such real relation). Rather, the experience presents an object in virtue of being shaped by its noema.

The relation between an experience and its noema is, in terms of formal ontology, best characterised as one of instantiation. This is the relation which holds between a concrete particular and a universal. Each intentional experience is a concrete particular which instantiates an ideal noema. Without the instantiation of

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<sup>11</sup> Something like this point has been developed in theories which claim that a mixture of causal and descriptive factors are required to fix reference (Devitt 1981, 130; Evans 1985, 18-24). I am in sympathy with such theories, though I would add that the noema is not exhausted by its descriptive content. Actions such as drinking a cup of tea or planning a night out are meaningful experiences with noematic structures, but in each case the noema involves more than a description of some event or state of affairs.

the noema, the object cannot be presented to the subject in this experience (1982, 217). The instantiation of the noema is a property of the experience itself. Without this particular experience, this particular instantiation of the noema could not exist.

The noetic aspect or noesis (plural, noeses) of a particular experience is that part of the experience in virtue of which the experience can instantiate its noema. Noeses are thus the “sense-bestowing” aspects of the experience, the aspects which give the experience its meaning (i.e., its noematic content) (Husserl 1982, 205). What makes an experience count as intentional is that it is structured by a relation between its noeses and a noema. Each of these aspects of the experience is necessary for it to be intentional, and together they are sufficient. Each noema is intentional, but it is not, in and of itself, sufficient for awareness, since ideal entities are not themselves aware of anything. The noeses are aspects of subjective states, and so allow for awareness, since only subjects can be aware. But a subjective state can be intentional only if it presents an object in virtue of the noema it instantiates.

Therefore, to think of an experience as intentional is to think of it as the correlation of “a temporal occurrence [i.e., the noeses of the particular experience] and an atemporal ideal entity [i.e., the noema]” (Mohanty 1997, 42). This relation between noeses and noema at least partly determines the subjective character of an intentional experience. As Zahavi puts it, “‘what it is like’ is exactly a question of how something appears to me, that is, it is a question of how it is given to and experienced by me” (2005, 122). I suggested in chapter two that a subject becomes aware of an object in virtue of the subjective character of an experience. If we can give an account of the relation between the noeses of the experience and its noema – in particular, if we can make clear how the noeses can serve to instantiate the noema

– then we will have a much better idea of how exactly the subjective character of an experience serves to make the subject aware of the object.

To make clear how noeses function to instantiate the noema in each intentional experience, we must conduct a detailed phenomenological study of the relation between the two. This I shall provide in sections III and IV, after I have introduced the technique by means of which we can conduct this study.

## II.

### **Bracketing**

It is relatively easy to draw the distinctions outlined above, and to get an idea of the basic intentional structure of experiences. But I want to explore the subjective character of intentional experiences in more detail. To do this, I need to study the relation between noemata and noeses independently of other aspects of experiences (following the argument outlined in chapter two, section IV). In order to do this, I shall make use of the phenomenological technique which Husserl refers to as the epoché or bracketing.

The best way of introducing the notion of bracketing is to consider what one does when attempting to doubt something, in the sense of believing it to be false. Say that one has been told something the veracity of which one doubts: that one's uncle is a spy for a foreign power. A necessary condition in attempting to doubt this claim is to not assume its veracity. That is, one cannot attempt to doubt a proposition (that one's uncle is a spy) while simultaneously taking that proposition to be true. In order to attempt to doubt the proposition, one "necessarily effects a certain annulment of positing" the state of affairs which that proposition claims is the case (Husserl 1982,

58). That is, one does not put any weight on the positing of this state of affairs; one does not engage with it as a state of affairs which one accepts to be the case. This annulment does not itself require that one believe the proposition to be false; nor is it a denial that the proposition is true. It may well be necessary for these moves, but it is not identical with either of them. This annulment or suspension of the positing of that state of affairs is what Husserl means by bracketing.

Some commentators draw a parallel between bracketing in this sense and the placing of a linguistic act (for example, an assertion, command, or question) in quotation marks. In the latter case, the linguistic act retains both its sense and its character as an assertion, command or question, but it has been taken out of action, so that “it can be studied as a piece of language rather than believed, followed, answered” (Thomasson 2005, 124). Similarly, to bracket one’s belief that the Eiffel tower is in Paris is not to change the character of that belief (it was, and remains, a belief), but to put it out of action. Both its force (i.e., its nature as a belief) and its content (what it posits) are retained, but it is no longer “part of our living interaction with the world” (Thomasson 2005, 125). Likewise, to bracket a desire for *x* is not to stop desiring that object or state of affairs, but to suspend your commitment to acquiring this object or bringing this state of affairs about, in order to consider this commitment *as* a desire.

In discussions of phenomenology, the technique of bracketing is almost always discussed in the context of the phenomenological or transcendental bracketing, when one tries to put out of action one’s positing of the entire world and everything in it. I shall consider this deployment of the technique in the next chapter, but it is important to see that it is a technique which can be used in many other contexts. For example, it can be deployed with regard to particular mental states,

such as a belief or set of beliefs. This kind of use characterises what Husserl calls phenomenological psychology, “a purely descriptive psychology of consciousness” (1960, 32). One example of this kind of psychology in action might be the drawing up of precise classifications of particular types of conscious experience. Examining what it is like to feel sexual desire as opposed to brotherly love requires that you suspend your commitment to the object of your desire or affection and reflect on the experience itself as one kind of commitment or another.<sup>12</sup>

Something very like this bracketing technique is also used in other disciplines, though it is rarely described as such. For example, if one wishes to study the sociological basis of a religion, one will effectively ‘bracket’ its claims about the divine, life after death and so on. One will not assume them to be true, but neither will one assume that they are false. Instead, one will study them as *claims* to truth, in the context of the society in which they arise and are accepted or rejected. A similar procedure can be seen at work in the sociological study of science, or any other system of beliefs which can be studied as claims to truth.<sup>13</sup>

In what follows, I shall use the technique of bracketing to gain a better understanding of the intentional structure of our conscious states. The problem with trying to develop a detailed conception of this structure is that most of our experiences are directed at objects other than our own experiences: at things and persons in the world, for instance. We can reflect with great facility on our own experiences, but this is rarely the kind of systematic, methodologically grounded

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<sup>12</sup> For a study of emotions which to a certain degree takes this approach, see Helm 2009, 253-254.

<sup>13</sup> Thomasson, in proposing her ‘cognitive transformation’ theory of reflection on representations as such, speaks of such a transformation as widely used in the discussion of “the content of failed theories” (2005, 129). But even successful theories can be bracketed and studied simply as claiming something about the world. Indeed, thinking of a claim purely as a claim to truth is simply to bracket the issue of their success or failure altogether. For an example of this approach, see Harry Collins’s study of both scientific and parapsychological practices, which “requires the self-conscious innocence which goes along with the suspension of everyday certainties” (1992, 3).

reflection that my project requires. The technique of bracketing and refocusing our attention is one way of overcoming this problem. In particular, this technique allows us to consider the relations between noeses and noemata, filling in the details of the model sketched in section I. I shall argue in the next chapter that a fully developed philosophical study of our intentional capacities must address our awareness of any object as belonging to the wider world. To study this awareness, we must carry out a specifically transcendental bracketing, suspending our positing of the world in order to study the structure of this positing. But for the moment, we can confine our attention to experiences of particular objects.

### **III.**

#### **Synthesis and Constitution**

In the remainder of this chapter, I shall put the technique of bracketing to use to fill in the details of the intentional structure sketched in section I. While staying within this structure, we can say a lot more about how the parts work together to allow the subject to be aware. In particular, I want to outline how the noema can be instantiated in the experience in such a way as to present the object to the subject.

The paradigm cases Husserl deals with are what he terms conscious acts: particular thoughts, perceptions or emotional states directed towards particular objects (1982, 68-72). One can see a tree, think of one's mother, remember hearing a particular piece of music, and so on.<sup>14</sup> In each case, we can bracket the positing of

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<sup>14</sup> Searle criticises this notion of a mental act as confusing a specific sub-set of mental states, those that one does (such as doing arithmetic in your head) with those one is simply in, such as fearing or hoping (1983, 3). This distinction is roughly equivalent to one which I shall consider at the end of this section, between voluntary activity and activity which does not require the volition of the subject. In what follows, I shall use the terms 'act' and 'state' more or less interchangeably in referring to intentional experiences.



the object and attempt to describe what it is about these acts that makes them *intentional*. This requires two correlated types of analysis. The study of the intentional content of the act is termed noematic analysis by Husserl. This consists of descriptions of various intentional objects as they appear to the subject when it undergoes conscious experiences. Correlated with this, we have noetic analysis, the study of the conscious act as an act, with its particular mode of presentation (an emotion, judgement, perception, and so on). This analysis is particularly concerned with how different phases of an act, and different acts which concern the one object, are unified in the manner peculiar to conscious experiences.

**(a)**

One way of entering into noematic analysis is by considering the temporality of our awareness of objects. The temporality of conscious experience is a complicated issue, which I shall examine in more detail in chapter five. In the present context, I only want to indicate the familiar phenomenon of being aware over a period of time of the one object, as is common when you think of or perceive something. Very often, we will be aware of the object itself as persisting through time. But it is also true that our engaging or being concerned with the object can, indeed must, extend through time. In such cases, the subject will undergo a succession of experiential episodes, each of which is directed towards an object which remains the same object throughout this process (Sokolowski 1964, 533). Furthermore, the subject can grasp the object as being the same throughout this succession. Husserl describes such cases as our being aware of the object as identical through a “passing flow of ‘multiplicities’”, that is, the multiplicity of phases of the perceptual experience (1960, 40).

The temporal nature of consciousness demonstrates an aspect of awareness which was touched on in section I. The object of awareness is presented as transcendent to (that is, beyond) any particular state of consciousness directed towards it. For example, I glance at a poster on the wall, and walk over to examine it more closely. Let us bracket the positing of the poster and consider my awareness of the poster as a sequence of experiential episodes. Each of these episodes may present a different aspect of the poster – as I walk closer to it, I can read the smaller type, or perhaps I will touch the paper. Note that there is no one-to-one mapping between these episodes and their object: all these episodes are directed towards the one object, which is presented in them as the same throughout the sequence of episodes. Furthermore, there is no one-to-one mapping between the different noemata which present an object, and the object itself. This is a product of the intensionality of noemata. One can be aware of the Eiffel Tower as a large steel building of a certain shape in Paris, or as a tower named after Gustave Eiffel. Each of these noemata presents their subject with the same object.

What is more interesting is how these different noemata can relate to each other. Say one had not been aware whom the Eiffel Tower is named after, and then learns this. In this case, one will be aware of the same object, and aware of it *as* the same, but one will be aware of a new feature of it. One will have an experience with a new noema, one which combines two other noemata (the Eiffel tower presented as a large steel building in Paris, and the Eiffel Tower presented as a tower named after Gustave Eiffel).

**(b)**

In considering how conscious experiences can unite with each other in this manner, we move to noetic analysis. Husserl refers to “The sort of combination

uniting consciousness with consciousness” in the manner just outlined as synthesis (1960, 39). The syntheses of different acts of consciousness with one another are not to be understood as causal relations or associations of the kind discussed by Hume (1978, 10-13); nor are the different acts in question “an incoherent sequence of subjective process”, bound together merely by temporal succession (Husserl 1960, 39). Syntheses are those relations between conscious states in virtue of which an identical object is given to consciousness, that is, is understood by the subject as an identical object (Smith 2003, 67). Therefore, a clarification of synthesis as the combination of different acts with one another can help clarify the very notion of conscious intentionality, of what it is to be conscious of something (Husserl 1960, 41).

Consider one’s perception of a coffee mug. Again, bracket the positing of the mug itself, and focus on one’s perceptual experiences. First, note that one can perceive the mug in a variety of ways. One can look at it from different angles, pick it up to feel its weight, examine its texture with one’s fingertips, and so on. Now, as one perceives the mug in this variety of ways, one directs a number of different conscious acts towards it. These acts form a succession: for example, when one looks at the mug from different angles, there will be a sequence of perspectives one will take. Of course, the exact order of the perspectives can be varied at will, but that there must be a sequence cannot be varied; one cannot look at the mug from every side simultaneously.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Wayne Martin suggests that this may be just a contingent fact about our perceptual system, and that a being with the appropriate physiological makeup (his example is a conscious being “embodied in a kind of fog”) might be able to see all at once every side of an entity such as a mug (2005, 210). But even in this case the mug would still have other features which would not be presented to the foggy being, such as the sides which would appear if one were to crack the mug in two. To perceive all such sides of the mug at once would seem to require breaking it into its component parts, at which point it would be doubtful if the situation would still one of a being perceiving the mug itself.

So we have a succession of perceptual episodes, each of which is directed to the one object. The very fact that they present the one object, understood as such, means that they form a unity; they are connected by a noematic unity, a unity of sense. Each of these episodes is structured by a noema, and some of them will instantiate the same noema. But even if the noemata differ between experiential episodes, they will still be unified precisely as different appearances of the one entity, the mug. For example, one might look at the mug and think that it has a certain solidity and weight; but on picking it up, one may be surprised to find that it is lighter and more fragile than one had expected. In such a case, one's sense of the mug will change, as one discovers something new about it. But one is aware that it is the same mug. The different senses at play in the sequence of perceptual acts – the mug as heavy and solid, and the mug as light and fragile – are unified in an overall sense one has of the mug as the same throughout this sequence of experiences. Without such an overall sense, one could not realise that one had been mistaken about a particular object.

These perceptions of the mug share “a connectedness that makes the unity of one consciousness, in which the unity of an intentional objectivity, as ‘the same’ objectivity belonging to multiple modes of appearance, becomes ‘constituted’” (Husserl 1960, 41-42). In other words, when a number of experiential episodes are synthesised in the manner just described, the subject of these episodes is made aware of an object, and understands it precisely as the one object. It may be considered under different modes of appearance, and one's consideration of it may be mistaken, but one is still aware of it as the same thing. This awareness of an intentional object as the same is what Husserl means by ‘constitution’. Without it, we could not be consciously aware of the world as consisting of ordered, discrete things.

Consciousness constitutes objects in that the combination of different acts of consciousness creates the sense of the object as identical.

This use of the word ‘constitution’ must of course be distinguished from the more usual metaphysical employment. Acts of consciousness certainly do not constitute their object in the way that, say, atoms constitute a molecule: they are not component parts of it. Rather, they ‘constitute’ it by bringing different senses together and unifying them as different appearances of the one object. It is “the noetic multiplicities of consciousness and their synthetic unity, by virtue of which alone, and as their essentially necessary unitary doing, we have one intentional object, and always this definite one, continuously meant” (Husserl 1960, 47). In different places in this thesis, I shall use both senses of the word ‘constitute’ and its cognates. The context should make clear which sense is intended, and in cases of possible confusion I shall clarify which sense I am using.

Different acts which present an object as identical require a unity of synthesis, an actual unifying of the respective noemata of the acts. This synthetic unity is what yields to the subject the sense it has of the object as being what it is. Of course, a subject can be aware of an object in two ways, and not be aware that it is the same object. But it is essential for any intentional experience that its noema is capable of being supplemented or corrected through a synthesis with other experiences, whose noemata are different but which overlap with the first to a degree sufficient to allow a synthesis. This kind of ‘overlapping’ is not simply compatibility, if by that we mean not standing in logical contradiction. Rather, it necessarily requires that the respective noemata are capable of being synthesised together in a new awareness of their respective objects as being one and the same. An example of this is what happens when I look at the coffee mug from different

angles, or look at it and pick it up. Even when I realise that it is different to how I had previously thought (for example, that it is light rather than heavy), the realisation that I was wrong about this very object requires a synthesis of the noema of the experiences which presented the mug as being light, and the noema of those in which I realise that it is in fact heavy. It is an essential feature of any intentional awareness that it is possible for it to be corrected by further intentional experiences which reveal different features of its object (Husserl 1960, 57-58). And this possibility is in turn based on the essential possibility of synthesis between different experiences, to produce a constitution or re-constitution of their object.

Synthesis also requires that the relation between the noeses and their noemata is an active one. By this, I mean that the noeses are constantly synthesising and re-synthesising the noemata, as the subject's stream of consciousness passes forward. We should distinguish this kind of activity from voluntary activity, something one brings about through exercises of the will, as when one makes a judgement or explores a situation. Voluntary activity presupposes a prior awareness of the matters to be judged or the situations to be explored (Husserl 1973, 71-72). But this prior awareness itself requires that the situation be constituted, so that it is available to be explored or judged. This prior constitution requires a continuous synthesis, an activity which does not itself require volition. Rather, one's experiences knit together and achieve the requisite unity of their own accord.

Our typical awareness of everyday objects is thus both active and passive (Husserl 1973, 108). It is passive in that it does not require the subject to voluntarily direct proceedings, but it is active in that every time we constitute or make sense of an object, this is an achievement, something which our experiences have to bring about. Intentional awareness allows us to be open to the world, but this openness is

itself the result of continuous processes in which sense can be made of the world. Without the successful following-through of these processes, our openness to the world would be merely formal. There might be nothing to prevent us being directed towards the world, but we would lack the capacity to actually engage with it.

#### IV.

#### **Meaning and Horizons**

I referred earlier to the noema as the sense the subject has of something, or the meaning the thing has for the subject. This is not to be understood as a figure of speech. Husserl thinks that, in a quite literal way, we understand the meaning of things in virtue of being aware of them. The meaning of an object here is not the significance that it can have if it is interpreted as a symbol or a sign; that, for Husserl, is a secondary kind of meaning. To be meaningfully aware of an object is to understand it, to grasp it as under some mode of appearance. Clearly, constitution, in Husserl's sense, is necessary for the subject to be aware of any object. To constitute an object is to understand it, to be aware of it as being some way or other (Mohanty 1969, 44).

The term 'understanding' might be a little misleading here, in that it is often used in a normative fashion, as when one can be said to properly understand or to fail to understand something. Furthermore, at the end of the previous section, I referred to "the successful following-through" of synthetic processes, and claimed that without their being successfully executed, the subject could have no awareness. It might seem from this as though I am considering only certain kinds of awareness, those in which we properly understand or grasp the true nature of the objects.

This, however, would be mistaken. It is important to see that a synthesis can be successfully executed even in a case where the subject remains confused about the nature of the object, or where we would normally be inclined to say that it does not properly understand the object in question. To be aware of something but fail to properly understand it, in this sense, is still an intentional awareness of the object, and as such it requires that one has constituted the object. A student who has only the most rudimentary grasp of, say, the theory of evolution, has still managed to constitute it, and thereby understands it, although to a very limited degree. To get something wrong is itself an intentional achievement. To lack any understanding of an object would be to lack any intentional awareness of it whatsoever.

We still require a more detailed account of the nature of constitution and meaning. Husserl's position can be summed up as follows: for an object to have meaning for a subject is for the object to be presented to the subject, but never fully given. To explicate this position, let us consider three key features of intentionality:

- (a) the distinction between an intuitive giving or grasping of an object and a merely intentional awareness of it;
- (b) the way these two different aspects of intentionality work together to make up our awareness of the one object; and
- (c) the essential structuring of the merely intentional aspects of any intentional experience.

**(a)**

The first characteristic of intentionality to consider is what Husserl terms its "intending-beyond-itself" (Husserl 1960, 46). Every intentional act will present some feature of its object, but it will also point beyond these to others features of the object which are not presented "explicitly" in that experience (Husserl 1960, 46).



The distinction being drawn here, between what is meant explicitly and what is ‘intended-beyond’, is the distinction between two species of intentionality which I shall term intuition and mere intention, respectively.<sup>16</sup> By ‘intuition’, I do not mean a feeling of certainty which might accompany some of one’s experiences. Rather, I mean a property of what Husserl sometimes refers to as a “presentive act” (Husserl 1982, 6), a state in which the object is given directly as itself to the subject. Intuitive states, so understood, can be contrasted with conscious states which are “‘empty’, expectant, indirect, non-presentive” (Husserl 1960, 57). These I shall term merely intentional states. An example of the difference between intuitive and merely intentional states is the difference between perceiving an object and remembering the same object or having an expectation of it before you have perceived it (Husserl 1982, 6). Merely intentional awareness will present you with an object as having certain features. But the object is not given to you directly when you are aware of it in this fashion.

Note that Husserl describes merely intentional awareness as ‘empty’ and ‘expectant’. This kind of awareness is expectant in that it points beyond what is intuitively given at any moment; it is empty in that it is relatively indeterminate. Consider again the difference between perceiving something and having an expectation before you perceive it; between, say, touching the underside of the table, as opposed to wondering what it would feel like to touch it. In wondering what the table feels like, you are aware of it as having a texture, but you won’t know how rough or smooth it is. When you run your fingers across it, your awareness is determinate; you are presented with the exact texture the table has. This is not to say that your perception can never be wrong. A determinate awareness can be mistaken.

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<sup>16</sup> These are two species of the property intentionality, rather than two species of intentional state. As we shall see, the one intentional state can in fact have both the property of intuition and of mere intention.

However, it is a clear awareness, in that it presents the object and its features in a precise rather than vague fashion. In this way, intuitive states can serve to correct our merely intentional awareness, by clarifying the features an object has or does not have. We have various expectations about things, which intuitions can fulfil or confound (see Husserl 1960, 57-62; Mohanty 1985, 87-92).

While the example of intuition offered above was the perception of a physical object, Husserl claims that other entities can be intuited as well. His examples include the intuition of mathematical equations (“ $a + 1 = 1 + a$ ”) and certain categorical claims (“A judgement cannot be coloured” - both these examples are from Husserl 1982, 39). There is an obvious sense in which one can clearly understand the statement ‘a judgement cannot be coloured’, and equally there is an obvious sense in which one can fail to clearly understand it. The intuition of the statement is simply the difference between these two cases.<sup>17</sup>

**(b)**

Having distinguished between intuitions and mere intentions, the next step is to outline how they can work together in one’s awareness of objects. Husserl argues that for an object to be meaningful requires that it be constituted by an intentional act which is at least partly merely intentional. That is, no intentional state is completely intuitive.

Husserl’s standard example is his analysis of the perception of physical objects. Let us suppose one perceives a mug: there is a picture on one side, the rest is blank. Within this act of perception, one can make a distinction between one’s awareness of the particular side of the mug one is seeing at any one instant, and the

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<sup>17</sup> The metaphysical intuitions discussed in the previous chapter (section V) are a subspecies of Husserl’s general notion of intuition. When one has a metaphysical intuition of something, one grasps an essential or necessary feature of it. The truth-claims based on such intuitions are not thereby indefeasible or immune to revision, any more than truth-claims about one’s surroundings based on perceptual experience are immune in this fashion.

other sides of the mug, which one cannot see at that particular instant. At any instant, one will see the mug itself, but one will not see every side of it. This distinction is precisely between an intuitive grasp of the mug (seeing the side that one can, at that instant, see) and a non-intuitive, expectant grasp. Suppose you are looking at the mug from a perspective such that the picture is hidden from you. If you are familiar with this mug, you will have the expectation that, were you to turn the mug around or move behind it, you would then see the picture. At this moment, you are aware of the picture non-intuitively; you know it is there, but you do not perceive it directly. When you turn the mug, you perceive the picture directly. Your previous non-intuitive awareness of the picture will be synthesised with the new intuitive awareness of it, confirming your expectation.

Thus the mug, as a physical and cultural object, is constituted by the interplay of intuitive and non-intuitive acts. The really striking claim is that it is necessary that this constitution involves at least some non-intuitive aspects, in order that the object can be presented to the subject at all. Again, note that I am thinking here of an object presented as transcendent, as beyond one's experiences, standing over against them (as a *Gegenstand*).<sup>18</sup> The claim is that non-intuitive, 'empty' acts of consciousness are necessary for an object to appear as transcendent. "Intentionality", A.D. Smith summarises, "resides precisely in the presence of empty, unfulfilled components in experience" (2003, 71). Something that was present to consciousness in a purely intuitive fashion could not be a transcendent object of awareness. It would not be present *to* consciousness, but "merely be present *in* 'consciousness', as a wholly meaningless 'piece' of subjectivity" (Smith 2003, 81).

Even intuitive acts have non-intuitive aspects. Husserl notes that

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<sup>18</sup> This is Husserl's term for 'object' (see 1982, 388). It literally means 'stand against'.

the individual thing in perception has meaning only through an open horizon of ‘possible perceptions’, insofar as what is actually perceived ‘points’ to a systematic multiplicity of all possible perceptual exhibitings belonging to it harmoniously (1970, 162).

That is, we perceive objects from one perspective at a time, but we perceive them precisely as having other aspects which we cannot, at that very moment, perceive directly. These aspects are meant – they are aspects of the object grasped in perception – but they are not themselves perceived.

Correlatively, any merely intentional act is essentially connected with possible intuitive acts. Any state of consciousness is either itself an intuition, or can in principle be converted into one via the appropriate synthesis (Husserl 1960, 58).<sup>19</sup> “Any ‘empty’, merely symbolic thinking has the content that it does only in virtue of its inherent relation to a possible experience in which the relevant object is itself given ‘in person’”, that is, in intuition (Smith 2003, 103). Therefore, meaningfulness requires both a degree of determinateness (without which the act could not be said to present any particular object at all) and a certain indeterminateness, the ‘intending-beyond-itself’ without which the act would not make sense of the object.

(c)

The third feature of intentionality I want to discuss is the structure which characterises this ‘intending-beyond-itself’. Every meaningful act has a certain indeterminateness, but “the indeterminateness necessarily signifies a

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<sup>19</sup> I say ‘in principle’ because in practice it is impossible to convert certain intentional acts into intuitions: thoughts regarding the past, for example, or scientific theories concerning unperceivable objects. But in these cases, our cognitions must still be related to acts of perception which serve as their ultimate ground (as for example with induction from particular cases). See Husserl 1970, 127-128.

determinableness which has a rigorously prescribed style” (Husserl 1982, 94). The example Husserl gives is of perception: the indeterminateness

points ahead to possible perceptual multiplicities which, merging continuously into one another, join together to make up the unity of one perception in which the continuously enduring physical thing is always showing some new ‘sides’ (or else an ‘old side’ as returning) (1982, 94).

The other intentional acts which can present the same object must grasp it precisely as a physical object. Some of these other acts are intuitions – that is, if you see a house from one side, you see it as the kind of thing that can be seen from another side. But the possible intuitions which can present this object are perceptual in nature (or judgements based on perceptions). The sense of the object in question (the house understood as a physical, spatial entity) prescribes the style in which it can be grasped. An ideal object, such as Pythagoras’ theorem, cannot be perceived. Unlike a house, it cannot literally present itself from different angles.

To make clearer this talk of a prescribed style, let us consider the notion of horizons. We can start with noemata. The horizon of a noema is the sense it gives the subject of further aspects of the object, aspects of this same object which are not themselves presented in this particular experience. These further aspects of the object are said to be “appresented” to the subject, given in a non-direct, merely intentional fashion (Husserl 1960, 109). For example, when I see a mug, I am aware of the sides I cannot see; they are appresented to me in my perceptual experience.

The horizons of a noema correlate with the noetic horizons of the experience itself. Each experience opens up the possibility of further states of consciousness which may present the same object. These further states are the noetic horizons of

the experience. In both the noematic and noetic cases, the horizons are indeterminate, since the further aspects of the object cannot be themselves presented without further conscious acts. However, this indeterminateness has a determinate structure, which prescribes the kind of further acts which can be directed towards the object. This structure is what determines the prescribed style mentioned above. To intend an object is to grasp it, but also to leave open further aspects of the object and of other objects in its field: “This leaving open, prior to further determinings (which perhaps never take place) is a moment [i.e., a part] included in the given consciousness itself; it is precisely what makes up the ‘horizon’” (Husserl 1960, 45).

An awareness of any transcendent object will have horizons of two kinds, inner and outer. Take the case of perceiving a mug. As stated before, your perception will have intuitive aspects (you will see a certain side of the mug, or touch a certain part of it). It will also have non-intuitive aspects: for example, you will have certain expectations about what the other side of the mug, is like. Your awareness of these other sides is relatively indeterminate, compared to your grasp of the sides which are directly perceived. This indeterminate awareness of the other features of the mug forms the inner horizon of the mug as it appears to you. These further aspects of the object can be explored if one shifts one’s attention to them, just as one can explore what lies beyond an actual horizon by walking towards it. However, when one intuitively grasps these further aspects of the mug, they will in turn present a horizon of new further aspects, and so on *ad infinitum*.

The outer horizon of any object is the set of things which are not further aspects of the object itself, but which are implicated by any understanding of that object. Again, perception is the basic model here. A physical object will be perceived as having a position in space, relative to other physical objects. To perceive a

physical object is to be able, in principle, to move beyond it to explore further physical objects. These further objects are the outer horizon of the object one perceives. More generally, the outer horizon is the field of objects of a particular type, to which the object currently being perceived or thought of belongs (Husserl 1970, 162). In principle, one can explore this field by shifting one's attention away from the object that concerns one at the moment. The outer horizons of any object one deals with in one's everyday life are themselves situated in a further horizon, a world-horizon, which includes all the objects one could possibly perceive (Husserl 1970, 162). In transcendental phenomenology, as I shall outline in the next chapter, one examines precisely this world-horizon, the sense one has of the world as a world.

When we make clear the role of horizons, we can see that any meaningful awareness is essentially holistic. One can make sense of anything only in an experience which is essentially linked to possible other experiences through its horizons. An act with no essential connection to any other acts cannot, on this account, be said to be meaningful at all. It would be a mere blip in consciousness, an occurrence which, because it does not connect with any other acts, could not possibly contribute to the subject's understanding of anything. Correlatively, conscious life "is not just a whole made up of 'data' of consciousness and therefore 'analyzable' (in an extremely broad sense, divisible) merely into its self-sufficient and non-self-sufficient *elements*" (Husserl 1960, 46). Therefore, any study of conscious experience as intentional must be a holistic study. We can study individual states, but they count as meaningful only insofar as they are related to other possible intentional states. Therefore, it seems impossible to isolate fundamental units of consciousness

or understanding from which the whole experiential structure could be built up, as would be attempted in the atomistic approach I considered in chapter one.<sup>20</sup>

V.

### Functional Analysis

To consider experiences in terms of synthesis and constitution is to consider them in functional terms (Husserl 1982, 207). Constitution is an activity we perform (see section III above), one that we can do more or less successfully depending on the specific context. Constitutional analysis studies precisely how we perform this activity, and the conditions for the possibility of our doing so (Husserl 1982, 209-210). In other words, it studies how our subjective states, and each element of each state, function to give us an intentional awareness of various objects.<sup>21</sup> In this section, I shall outline more precisely how constitutional analysis can be understood as a kind of functional account. I shall then give reasons for thinking that we ought to adopt this way of thinking about constitution.

(a)

The kind of function I have in mind is that which is introduced to answer questions such as ‘How does this system work?’<sup>22</sup> Given a complex system, which

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<sup>20</sup> This kind of holism should be distinguished from that discussed by Fodor and Lepore. They define holism by, among other things, the claim that semantic properties such as ‘having intentional content’ are atomic, and so cannot be possessed by anything unless there is at least one other thing which possesses that property (1992, 1-2). This issue seems to me to be orthogonal to the kind of holism I have outlined above. Perhaps it might have been the case that the world only ever contained a single state with intentional content. What my account of meaning holism entails is that this state’s having intentional content is a matter of its being essentially connected to other possible intentional states.

<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Kant’s account of empirical knowledge can be understood in functional terms – for example, see Brooks 2004, 6.

<sup>22</sup> This kind of function, which is sometimes known as an ‘analytic’ function (Jacob 1997, 107 fn. 2), can be contrasted with etiological functions, which are typically introduced to answer questions such as ‘Why does this item exist?’ (Wright 1973, 160). Etiological functions are common in biological or



has a certain capacity or ability we wish to explain, the function of each of its elements is the capacity of each element. When added together, these functions can account for the capacity of the system as a whole. The classic example is a production line. The machine or worker at each point on the line will have a particular ability, and when this ability is exercised, then that element is performing its function. When all the elements perform their function, then the system as a whole can exercise its ability (Cummins 1975, 759-760). Note that we can distinguish between the element which performs the function and the function itself. This distinction is crucial for any functional account, since it allows us to explain the ability of the system as a whole by appealing, not to the nature of its parts, but to what the parts are doing. Similarly, constitutional analysis asks how a subject can be consciously aware of a wide variety of objects, structured into a world and available for further inspection. It treats particular experiences or properties of those experiences as themselves having particular capacities.<sup>23</sup> When each experience takes its place in the overall structured stream of consciousness, it serves to make the subject aware of a particular object.

Take a feeling of anger you have for a particular person, whom you are aware of as ‘the man who took the last free parking space’. First, we can distinguish this experience itself, the feeling of anger, from the person it concerns. Second, we can distinguish this experience from the other possible experiences you could have of this person. You might at a later date come to regard him with fondness, love, contempt, and so on. Third, we can distinguish the particular mode of appearance

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teleological accounts of meaning (see Papineau 1987, 63-81; Millikan 1993, 85-97). Constitutional analysis should not be thought of as addressing this kind of question.

<sup>23</sup> A particular experience may well have a number of different kinds of capacity. But since I am concerned only to provide a constitutional analysis, I shall consider only an experience’s capacity for presenting an object, and for being synthesised with other experiences which can also present this object.

under which this man is given to you from the other possible modes of appearance under which he might be given to you. For example, in a later experience he may be presented as ‘the man visiting his daughter in hospital’.

These distinctions are crucial for my proposed functional account because they show that we can distinguish the actual experience itself, including the specific noema it instantiates, from the constitutive role it fulfils. The role in question can be glossed initially as ‘making you aware of a particular person’. The experience of anger can fulfil this role in virtue of instantiating its particular noematic content. But any experience which presents this person to you can be said to fulfil that role, even if it presents the person as under a different mode of appearance, or in a different mode of presentation. In this way we can distinguish the constitutive role from any of the particular experiences which can fulfil it.

Recall what was said in section IV about the essential possibility of a synthesis between any two experiences which present the one object. Even if the experiences present the one object in very different ways, it will still be possible for their respective noemata to be brought together in a new experience, which will either conjoin the first two noemata, or partly cancel one of them in the case of a correction. This essential possibility lets us clarify the relation between intentional experiences and the functional roles they play. An experience cannot fulfil a particular functional role unless it is possible for its noema to be synthesised with the noemata of any other experience which is capable of fulfilling this role. It is in virtue of this essential possibility of synthesis that we can think of the functional role in question as being specifically a constitutive one.

The terminology of functions carries a certain risk because the notions of analytic function and functional descriptions have become associated with a

particular doctrine in the philosophy of mind, functionalism. Most functionalist theories in the philosophy of mind agree that talk of functions is essentially causal talk. This can be talk either of causes simpliciter or dispositions to behave in a certain way in response to particular conditions (Cummins 1975, 757-758). This understanding of functions as standing in for causal or dispositional descriptions seems to commit one to a naturalistic metaphysics. This may or may not be considered a good thing, but it would certainly undermine my attempts to avoid the issue of whether or not conscious states can be explained in naturalistic terms.

However, the notion of function need not be used in this naturalistic way. Describing states in terms of their constitutive function is neither itself a causal account, nor does it entail a reduction to causal or dispositional accounts. The difference lies in the kind of capacity I am trying to explain, the capacity of the subject to be intentionally aware of the world and of particular things in it. This capacity, or set of capacities, is not a theoretical posit, but a datum which any theory of the subject will have to explain. It is, I suggest, neither itself a causal-dispositional capacity, nor one which must be reducible to causal-dispositional terms in order to be intelligible.<sup>24</sup> We each have the capacity to read novels, feel empathy, play games, plan holidays. The availability or lack of a reductive account of these capacities in no way makes ascriptions of them less than legitimate.

**(b)**

The functional characterisation of constitutional analysis is important for two reasons.

First, it lets us state precisely both the distinction and the relation between that which is constituted (the object of consciousness) and that which constitutes (the

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<sup>24</sup> I am not thereby committed to saying it *cannot* be reduced.

intentional experience and its noema). Husserl, particularly in his most stridently transcendental works such as *Ideas I* and *Cartesian Meditations*, describes this in such terms as the “most radical of all ontological distinctions” (Husserl 1982, 171; see also 110-111). The problem with this ontological interpretation of the difference between that which constitutes and that which is constituted is that it seems quite possible for us to take particular intentional experiences as objects, when we reflect upon them. However plausible a deep ontological distinction between the constituted and the constituting might be, it seems quite implausible to suggest that a state can cross this ontological divide, can literally go from being one kind of thing to being another, simply in virtue of being reflected upon. We need an account of the distinction which allows us to make sense of the transition from being that which constitutes to being the constituted, a distinction which Husserl himself insists is essentially possible for each and every experience (Husserl 1982, 178).

The functional account of constitution allows us to do just this. That which constitutes is functionally defined as whatever it is in virtue of which the subject can be aware of a particular intentional object. The constituted, conversely, is whatever this object is. I have assumed that only conscious experiences can fulfil the constituting role. But this role itself is not an ontological designation, only a functional one. This is important because it means that the correlative role, that of the constituted, is not an ontological designation either. Because the constituted is defined functionally, it is not confined to any particular category of thing. It covers whatever we can think about or be intentionally directed towards.

Because this distinction is functionally rather than ontologically specified, there is nothing in principle to stop the same object from at one time filling the constituting role, and at another time the constituted. This is precisely what happens

in phenomenological reflection. At time T1, the subject perceives a train passing by. This perception is an intentional experience, with its own noema N1. At time T2, the subject reflects on this perception. This reflection is a second intentional experience, which has its own noema, N2, and whose object is the perceptual experience and N1. Therefore, the experience the subject underwent at T1 can be that which constitutes or that which is constituted, depending on which functional role it occupies.<sup>25</sup> The functional distinction here is similar to that between a linguistic act in use and in quotation marks. In the latter case, the linguistic act will retain its character as an assertion, command or question, but it does not perform the function it can serve when not in quotation marks: “it can be studied as a piece of language rather than believed, followed, answered” (Thomasson 2005, 124). I shall return to this functional distinction in the next chapter, when I shall consider how it can help us to understand the relation between the transcendental subject and the transcendent world.

The second advantage a functional account has is that it allows us to characterise precisely the way in which intentional experiences can be said to have meaning, or to be meaningful. In particular, it allows us to bypass a problem which seems to face any representationalist account. By representationalism, I mean any theory which takes the subject to be in an intentional mental state if and only if it stands in the right relation to a mental object which has a particular meaning (Stich and Warfield 1994, 3; Fodor 1994, 21-23). In other words, mental states have intentionality in virtue of possessing mental symbols. One of the problems such an

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<sup>25</sup> This functional distinction allows us to make sense of the distinction between the noema and the object mentioned above in section I. The noema, when instantiated in an experience which is functioning to constitute (as when N1 is instantiated at T1), is distinct from the constituted object. But this very noema can itself become the object of a further, reflective experience (as happens to N1 at T2). Note also that at least some states can be simultaneously both that which constitutes and that which is constituted, as when I think about the very thought I am having just now.

account faces is that no object can have only one meaning. The very same image or sign can mean a number of things, depending on how it is taken by its users (Goldberg 1983, 198-199). Therefore, the image or sign cannot, in and of itself, have definite truth conditions or even relatively determinate intentional content, and so cannot itself *be* a meaning or the content of a mental state. But to explain the meaningfulness of a mental state by appealing to an interpretation of a sign or image is, of course, to appeal to a meaningful state or act (the act of interpreting the sign). This act of interpretation cannot itself be explained by appealing to a sign or an image, on pain of either a seemingly vicious regress (since this sign or image must itself be interpreted) or the positing of an un-interpreted object (which just raises the initial problem again).<sup>26</sup> To account for the possibility of interpretation, we need a kind of meaningfulness which is not itself a matter of an interpretation.

The functional approach allows for an account of meaningful experiences which can avoid this problem, by appealing to functioning noemata. When a subject is having a particular intentional experience, the noema of that experience is not (in most cases) an object for the subject. Rather, it functions to present to the subject whatever the object of the subject's intentional awareness is. The noema can itself become an object for the subject, but only if the subject has a separate reflective experience.<sup>27</sup> When it is functioning, that is, playing its constituting role, then the noema is not itself constituted. Therefore, the noema is not a representation in the sense used above, an object which *has* a particular meaning, like a sign or a picture. Rather, it *is* itself a meaning, one which can be instantiated in different experiences. Take an experience of hearing traffic outside the window, remembering an event from your childhood, or thinking of which examples to use to illustrate a

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<sup>26</sup> This argument has been made by, among others, Putnam (1988, 54; 1981, 17-20).

<sup>27</sup> Or if the experience is of itself, as when I think about the very thought I am having just now. In this case, we can still draw a functional distinction between the experience as constituting and constituted.

phenomenological point. In each case, the experience has its noema or meaning, a way in which its object appears; but this way of appearing is not itself one of the features of the object which appears to you (McIntyre 1999, 433). You do not need to interpret the noema, to take it in one way or another as you must do with a sign or a picture. Rather, you have the experience, which is shaped by the meaning in such a way that you are presented with the object of experience. The noema is a fully transparent medium, which can only itself become an object if we reflect on the experience in a particular way. In this way, phenomenology can explain intentionality in a way which avoids the problem of representationalism.<sup>28</sup>

In this chapter, I have set out the intentional structures which determine how objects of awareness are presented to us. It is in virtue of having experiences with a subjective character structured by the noesis-noema relation that these objects appear to us. However, I have not yet addressed how the objects which appear to us are presented precisely as parts of a world to which we ourselves also belong. It is in addressing this aspect of our awareness that phenomenological analysis can become a fully transcendental study, and thus fulfil the transcendental project outlined in chapter two. It is to this issue I now turn.

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<sup>28</sup> It is true that Husserl himself used the term *Repräsentation* in the *Logical Investigations* (1984, 621). However, unlike Roy (1999, 131), I do not see this as an important point of agreement with representationalism, since Husserl is using the term in a different way to its employment by Fodor. For evidence of this, see his rejection of symbolic theories of perception (1982, 92-93, 218-219).

## Chapter 4

### Phenomenology as Transcendental Philosophy

In the previous chapter, I introduced the basic phenomenological method of bracketing and the model of conscious awareness Husserl outlined by applying this method. This discussion took place largely at the level of individual conscious episodes and their noematic structures, outlining how these can work together to constitute intentional objects of various kinds. However, understanding the structure of conscious awareness at this level is not sufficient to yield an account of the subject's awareness of the world as a whole. This issue requires a move from phenomenological analyses of the sort outlined in the previous chapter to a specifically transcendental phenomenology.

In section I, I shall present a description the surrounding world, the world as it appears to us in our everyday lives. In section II, I shall argue that the world appears in this way only in virtue of the subject's being open to the world in a particular way. This is the natural attitude; the attitude in which we live our everyday lives. In section III, I shall outline how we can apply the method of bracketing and redirecting attention, as outlined in the previous chapter, to the natural attitude.

In section IV, I shall describe the transcendental attitude; the way in which we can take the natural attitude as an object rather than living in it. In the transcendental attitude, we can study the sense the world has for us, and the sense of worldliness that the objects of everyday experiences have.

In section V, I shall introduce the principle of methodological detachment. This principle allows us to clarify how we go about studying transcendental



subjectivity, while also clarifying what this procedure does and does not commit us to.

In the last two sections I shall examine how we should interpret transcendental subjectivity. In section VI, I shall outline the notion of absolute idealism; the claim that the transcendental subject exists independently of the existence of the world, and that the world depends for its existence on the subject. I shall argue against this claim, both as an interpretation of what Husserl says and as a viable philosophical position.

In section VII, I shall outline my own interpretation of transcendental subjectivity, which I shall call methodological idealism. This is a position characterised by the assumptions it makes concerning our awareness of objects, rather than by any particular metaphysical claim about the relation between these objects and our awareness of them.

## I.

### **The Surrounding World**

In everyday life, we are aware of ourselves as in a world spread out in space and time, a world filled with physical objects which we can perceive and understand in a variety of ways: as familiar or unfamiliar, as valuable or useless, as natural or artificial, as animate or inanimate, or simply as there (Husserl 1982, 51). This is the surrounding world, the world as it appears to us and with which we engage in the course of our daily lives (Husserl 1989, 195).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By referring to the surrounding world, I do not mean to suggest that it is a separate realm of being to that studied in the natural sciences. Rather, it is one and the same world in each case, but one which we can be aware of in different ways. I shall return to this point in section IV.

The world of our everyday experience is structured in a number of different ways. It is spatiotemporally organized, filled with objects that have more or less determinate positions relative to each other in space and time, and which are often capable of exerting causal force on each other. This should not be taken to imply that the world as we experience it is the world as described by physics. Physics describes the world considered purely in terms of spatiotemporal, causal and nomological relations, whereas in our everyday lives the world is full of objects with values and practical uses, and with other people who are our friends or enemies, familiar to us or strangers (Husserl 1982, 53). These aspects of objects have no place in physics, but without them the world would not be the way we take for granted in our everyday lives. The one object, a pen, can appear to me as spatially located, with weight and solidity, but also as writing blotchily or clearly, as beautifully designed in an art deco style, as belonging to my brother, and so on.

The way the surrounding world is presented to me is structured by reference to me, as the subject to which the world appears. It is ‘on hand’ for me, there for me to explore and to live in, as a member of it (Husserl 1989, 195). I am spatiotemporally located in it; I can exert force on other things in the world, and they can exert force on me; I encounter objects which have value for me.<sup>2</sup> However, the surrounding world is not just a world for me, but also exists for other subjects. It appears to me as “the universal horizon, common to all men [sic], of actually existing things” (Husserl 1970, 164). I am not simply aware of the existence of other subjects. I am aware that they are aware of me, and that we are jointly aware of particular features of our shared environment. This allows us to pursue shared projects, have goals and values in common, and so on.

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<sup>2</sup> I shall examine how the appearance of the surrounding world is structured around the subject in much more detail in chapter six.

None of this is particularly contentious. Few philosophers seriously doubt that things appear to us as spread out in space and time, shot through with values, and present to subjects other than me. What exercises philosophers is whether or not these appearances correspond to how the world really is: whether we can speak of a single world; the metaphysical status of space, time and the objects they contain; whether values are real or projections of our minds; and so on.

Transcendental phenomenology, like these metaphysical enquiries, begins with the surrounding world, but concerns itself with a very different set of questions. Instead of asking whether and how the world as it appears compares with whatever the reality might be, it enquires into the conditions of the world's appearing to us at all. The nature of the world 'as it is itself' remains a proper issue for philosophical questioning, but it is one which the transcendental phenomenologist must set aside.

## II.

### **The Natural Attitude**

The transcendental task is to clarify the nature of the world's appearing to us, and the first step is to recognize that this appearing is not merely a matter of the world's existing, or even a matter of our existing in it. Rather, the world appears to us in our quotidian lives in the distinctive way it does because we are open to it in a particular way.

This particular kind of openness to the world is what Husserl calls the natural attitude. This attitude is defined by my sense of being in my surrounding world. As long as I presume the world to exist and be available for me to explore, I am in the natural attitude, and *vice-versa* (Husserl 1982, 52). The presumption that the world

exists and will continue to exist for me in this fashion is the “general positing which characterizes the natural attitude” (Husserl 1982, 53).

Here I must say something about Husserl’s notion of an attitude.<sup>3</sup> We can introduce this notion by contrasting it with the conception of an intentional experience outlined in the previous chapter. An intentional experience is directed towards an object; it presents this object to the subject under a certain mode of appearance, as having certain features; and it opens up horizons of possible further experiences, which can be directed to other features of the object, or to other objects in its particular field of objects.

An attitude is not a particular experience, nor a set of experiences. Rather, it is a way in which the subject is open to a particular field of objects so that it is capable of having experiences of these objects as under a certain mode of appearance. The attitude in which the subject has a particular experience can be thought of as the intentional frame within which this experience and its horizons are opened up. Attitudes are defined in terms of what the subject can or cannot do while in them. They open particular fields to be explored and particular activities one can pursue in those fields. This characterization has two aspects: that for which the attitude allows, and that which it excludes. It is in this way that attitudes frame our awareness. Each one allows for a set of possible activities relating to some particular field of objects, and in doing so it excludes all other possible activities. That is, for the subject to engage in these activities would require it to enter into a new attitude.

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<sup>3</sup> I should note that by ‘attitude’ I don’t mean anything like the propositional attitudes discussed in the philosophy of mind. Furthermore, as will become clear, ‘attitude’ in my technical sense bears only a limited similarity to the common meaning of the word. My discussion of attitudes expands and adds more detail to Husserl’s treatment of them, while trying to remain consistent with what he says. In particular, I have taken what he says about the natural and the arithmetical attitudes in *Ideas I* (1982, 51-57) and extrapolated a general account of attitudes from it.

For example, consider your ability to do arithmetic. You exercise this ability in various actions you can perform, actions which in each case will be intentional, directed to the particular numbers or equations you are dealing with. One way of thinking of this ability would be in terms of dispositions to perform certain actions (for example, to write '27' when confronted with '3 x 9 ='). But a purely dispositional account will omit the specifically intentional nature of this exercise, the fact that one does not just scribble a mark on paper, but performs an arithmetical action. The arithmetical attitude opens up the world of numbers and other mathematical objects, "precisely as the Object-field of arithmetical busiedness" (Husserl 1982, 54). The attitude is the intentional structure of your ability to perform these kinds of action. As such, it is not separate from your ability, but is rather the meaningful aspect of the ability, that aspect which makes the difference between you scribbling a mark on a page and your actually doing arithmetic.<sup>4</sup> Of course, in our everyday lives we don't have consciously to make a decision to adopt this attitude in order to calculate. This is because we have mastered the capacity to do arithmetic to the degree that we can deploy it seamlessly. But this capacity had to be acquired initially. This involves one's learning to experience a particular field of objects, learning how to manipulate them, and eventually mastering these skills to the point where one can slip into this attitude without giving it any thought at all. But when one initially tries to do arithmetic, it often requires hard work; it is a new way of

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<sup>4</sup> Attitudes would therefore not figure in a psychological explanation of how we acquire our capacities. They belong in a philosophical account of the conditions for the possibility of having these capacities at all. Note also how this notion of an attitude links up with the post-functionalist view outlined in chapter two, where mental states were characterised in terms of what they do, or what one can do when in them. For example, we can compare this notion with Putnam's suggestion that "mind talk" is "a way of describing the exercise of certain abilities we possess" (1994, 483). I regard an attitude as the structure of this kind of ability.

thinking, a new frame of mind one has to learn how to adopt. The arithmetical attitude is precisely this frame of mind, without which one could not calculate at all.

The point of appealing to the notion of an attitude is to emphasise that when subjects are aware of or can engage with objects, they are never simply open to the objects in an unstructured way, but are exercising particular capacities. The natural attitude is the particular way one is open to the world in one's everyday life. This life is not a series of events which happen to a passive subject. Rather, it is a continuous exercise of a capacity, or an interlinked set of capacities. Take an activity as common as reading a novel; it will typically involve the seamless co-ordination of perception, imagination, empathy, and the ability to follow and be engaged by a narrative. Our everyday life features hundreds of performances of a similar complexity. Furthermore, they are all undertaken by the subject as activities in one particular life, as belonging to a sequence of events which the subject can make sense of as a whole, and to some degree steer. These performances all have their place in the subject's ongoing awareness of and engagement with its surrounding world. The natural attitude is the intentional structure of this capacity, the structure which allows us to be open to the world in this particular way.<sup>5</sup>

It is worth mentioning that this is not the only way in which we can be open to the world. For example, Husserl distinguishes the natural attitude from the naturalistic attitude, in which we take the world exclusively as the domain of the natural sciences. The world appears in the natural attitude as "comprised not of mere things but of use-Objects [...] works of art, literary products", and so on (Husserl 1989, 191). In the naturalistic attitude, the same objects appear, but as devoid of

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<sup>5</sup> As such, the natural attitude can be thought of as the subject's capacity to perform and co-ordinate numerous other capacities, such as the capacity to do arithmetic or read a novel (Husserl 1982, 55). We can speak of a single natural attitude unifying these other capacities because the other capacities are all deployed in the course of our lives in the surrounding world. The natural attitude is the intentional structure of my living in this world.

cultural or social significance, usefulness, artistic merit, or moral worth. We are to consider them solely as spatiotemporal entities governed by natural laws (Husserl 1989, 193). The difference between the natural and the naturalistic attitudes demonstrates how different attitudes are precisely different ways of being open to the world.<sup>6</sup>

Since most of us spend most of our waking lives in the natural attitude, we hardly ever pay attention to it, or even think of it as a particular attitude. The terminology of taking a particular attitude towards the world might be a little misleading here. We do not, in the usual run of events, consciously decide to take the natural attitude. Rather, it is an attitude we adopt, as it were, naturally. The world is just ‘there’ for us, unquestionably present (Husserl 1970, 150). It is ‘pregiven’ (1970, 148), in that it is present to us before we embark on any particular project, begin any particular activity, even think any particular thought or have any particular experience of any object in it. This pre-giveness is not incidental to the natural attitude, but is precisely what makes it the mode of everyday life. Our activities, projects, and experiences of worldly objects make sense only against the backdrop of our awareness of the world as that which is already there, as a space within which we can manoeuvre and co-ordinate our activities. That is, we constitute or make sense of the world precisely as this pre-given background to our everyday lives.

Husserl wants to study precisely this way of being open to the world, a way which is so familiar we rarely recognise it as a particular attitude, let alone as something worthy of philosophical investigation. The obvious challenge here is how we can study this mode of awareness: “How can the pre-giveness of the life-world become a universal subject of investigation in its own right?” (Husserl 1970, 148).

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of attitude as I have interpreted it thus develops a suggestion made by Crowell (2001, 18), that the capacity which McDowell speaks of, of our being open to the world, is not monolithic. Rather, this capacity can be clarified by phenomenological work.

With this question, we direct ourselves for the first time towards a genuinely transcendental phenomenology.

### III.

#### **Transcendental Bracketing**

In the natural attitude, particular objects appear to us, but they do so only against the backdrop of the world we take for granted (Husserl 1982, 52). For example, you might hear noises which you take to be music, but on listening more carefully you realise it is the sound of wind blowing through a crack in the shelter at a bus-stop. In this case, the appearing of the music was illusory, given the way the world is. In our everyday living, we correct for errors like this against the pregiven background of the world. But I want to study the structure of appearing in general, including the way the world appears as the pregiven background to our awareness of particular objects. To study anything requires focusing on it, bringing it to the foreground of our awareness. But when an object is foregrounded, it cannot serve as its own background. Therefore, to study the pre-givenness of the world, we must refrain from taking it as a pregiven background.

In the previous chapter, I outlined Husserl's technique for bracketing the intentional object. This lets us consider how the subject constitutes or makes sense of the object through having meaningful experiences of it, so that the object appears to the subject as having particular features. This technique can be applied to any claim, theory, project or activity. Husserl suggests that we apply it to the natural attitude.

We put out of action the general positing which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude; we parenthesize everything which that positing encompasses with respect to



being: thus the whole natural world which is continually ‘there for us’, ‘on hand’, and which will always remain there according to consciousness as an ‘actuality’ even if we choose to parenthesize it (1982, 61).

Note that the bracketing is not to be applied to each of one’s beliefs about spatiotemporal objects or states of affairs in turn. Rather, one is to put out of action, “with one blow, the total performance running through the whole of natural world-life” (Husserl 1970, 150). This ‘performance’ is precisely the natural attitude we take towards the whole surrounding world, taking it to be there and available for us to explore. In the transcendental bracketing, we abstain from this attitude.

As long as we bracket the natural attitude, we must forbid ourselves from asking “questions which rest upon the ground of the world at hand”, that is, questions whose very framing is directed towards objects or situations which are to be considered within the world of the natural attitude (Husserl 1970, 152). The questions ruled out include those concerning whether particular objects exist, whether or in what way they are valuable for us, or how we might understand their nature. So, for example, to question whether or not the properties discussed in chemistry and biology can be reduced to those discussed in physics, or whether or not conscious states can be identified with states of the brain or the body, is to assume the surrounding world as the background within which the states and properties in question are situated. Even to deny the existence of something - for example, to say ‘There is no such thing as phlogiston’ - is a denial which is posed against the background of this world, since it is the denial that there is any such thing as phlogiston *in this world* (put another way, it is equivalent to the claim that ‘The world is such that it does not contain phlogiston’). Such questions can arise in the natural attitude, and are intelligible and legitimate there, but they cannot be raised as

long as this attitude is being bracketed. The point of bracketing the natural attitude is that we do not trouble ourselves about the nature or existence of mundane objects, objects which are thought of as belonging to the spatiotemporal universe.<sup>7</sup>

As Husserl himself often stressed, there is an obvious similarity between the transcendental bracketing and Descartes' procedure of universal doubt (Husserl 1960, 18-21). But the differences between these procedures are, in my opinion, more important. The aim of Descartes' sceptical procedure is to arrive at an indubitable truth, one immune to this very procedure. The aim of the phenomenological bracketing, as I see it, is to allow us to adopt a transcendental standpoint, an awareness of our awareness of the world. On my interpretation, it is not essential to this project that the judgments we make from this standpoint be indubitable, or indeed that they be any more justified than our judgments about the world itself.<sup>8</sup>

This point is developed by J.N. Mohanty, in contrasting the transcendental projects of Kant and Husserl. Kant is concerned with our knowledge of the world, and more particularly with our natural-scientific and mathematical knowledge. In contrast, Husserl wants to study any intentional awareness of the world, be it theoretical or practical, scientific or everyday, true or mistaken (Mohanty 1985, 231). The phenomenological approach can thus acknowledge the plurality of ways in which we make sense of the world, and indeed the ways in which we fail to do so. Poetry, religion, taking part in internet chatrooms, playing five-a-side football – all are activities in which we are aware of the world, and all can be studied

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<sup>7</sup> On this definition phlogiston is a kind of mundane object, in that if it had existed it would have been a spatiotemporal object. Objects which can be thought of in ways which do not present them as belonging to the spatiotemporal universe are not mundane. These objects include numbers and universals (see Husserl 1982, 54).

<sup>8</sup> "The Cartesian quest for apodicticity is largely extrinsic to phenomenology as the study of (essential) structures of consciousness" (Smith 1973, 357). I am not denying that Husserl had a foundationalist programme, but it is open to question whether we can ever achieve knowledge which is apodictic, beyond all possible doubt (Husserl 1960, 15-16). For arguments against the possibility of apodictic knowledge concerning any transcendent object, see Levin 1970.

phenomenologically. Furthermore, because transcendental phenomenology brackets all consideration of how the world is, it can remain neutral with regard to any particular scientific theory. Because of this, it will not have to be revised because of major changes in our scientific beliefs (Mohanty 1985, xxv). Therefore, I think we have good grounds on which to distinguish the use of transcendental bracketing, and the transcendental project more generally, from any purely epistemic project, or even from the Kantian project of outlining the conditions for the possibility of knowledge.

Before moving on to outline the transcendental attitude, I want to address briefly a problem which the method of transcendental bracketing poses. In suspending acceptance of the everyday world, it seems I must also suspend belief in the existence of other persons.<sup>9</sup> This seems to raise a problem which we might call the danger of transcendental solipsism. There are in fact two separate issues here. The first is the theoretical problem of how the transcendental subject can make sense of other subjects, and of the world as intersubjectively available. This is an extremely difficult issue, which I shall not have space to address in this thesis.<sup>10</sup> However, there is no reason to think that this problem can never be overcome. Therefore, what I shall say in this thesis is not automatically invalidated by my not addressing this problem.

The second problem is a more practical one. If I suspend my belief in the existence of others, then how can my transcendental reflection be anything more than a solipsistic study of my own experiences? This solipsism is not metaphysical, in that I am not assuming that I am the only person who exists. Nor am I assuming

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<sup>9</sup> And indeed, belief in my own existence *qua* person in the everyday world (see below, and chapter seven).

<sup>10</sup> In my last two chapters, I shall discuss our sense of objectivity and the paradox of subjectivity, the problem caused by relating the transcendental subject to the empirical subject. A discussion of the problem of intersubjectivity would require that we can resolve both of these issues and a lot more besides. For discussion of the transcendental problem of intersubjectivity, see Husserl's fifth meditation (1960, 89-151).

that I am the only subject of which I can have knowledge. Nevertheless, there seems to be a danger of a methodological solipsism, since the only experiences I am permitting myself to refer to are my own.<sup>11</sup> If this is the case, one might ask how the conclusions I reach can be justified with regard to anyone else's experiences.

This objection is based on a correct premise, in that, at least at the beginning of transcendental reflection, I can refer only to my own experiences (Husserl 1960, 30). However, we can hope to avoid being trapped in a methodological solipsism in two ways. One would be to develop a more adequate account of transcendental intersubjectivity. This would allow us to make use of the experiences of others, for example in considering cases of joint awareness. This line of thought can only be pursued if we can resolve the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity, which I have already said I shall not address in what follows. However, there is a second way in which we can hope to avoid this solipsism. Transcendental phenomenology is not just the study of particular experiences: rather, it studies them in order to outline their essential characteristics, the characteristics in virtue of which they count *as* experiences. These characteristics will therefore hold for all experiences, regardless of whom they belong to, or whether or not they have been bracketed by the reflecting phenomenologist. The study of essences, of what must be the case for a state to count as an experience or as a state of awareness, cuts across issues of existence and non-existence. Therefore, I do not think we have reason to believe that methodological solipsism poses an insoluble problem for the transcendental project.

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<sup>11</sup> This form of methodological solipsism is similar to that outlined by Jerry Fodor, but there are important differences as well. In Fodor's version, psychological states are individuated regardless of how they correspond to the world (1986, 250). Similarly, in the phenomenological version, experiences are not individuated by reference to what is actually the case in the world, since all such reference is bracketed. However, Fodor's version assumes that psychology can study only the syntactical, i.e. non-semantic properties of these states (1982, 283). But Fodor includes meaning as a semantic property, and meaning is precisely what the transcendental phenomenologist wants to study.

**IV.****The Transcendental Attitude and the World as Phenomenon**

By bracketing the natural attitude, we break the spell it held over us. But this is just the first step in the transcendental inquiry. Next, we must engage in a thoroughgoing reflection on how the world is pre-given to us. To do this, we adopt a new attitude; the transcendental attitude. This is a stance we take, not towards the world itself, but towards the natural attitude (Husserl 1970, 151).<sup>12</sup> As such, it is essentially a second-order attitude, a reflection on how the world appears when the subject is in the natural attitude. Therefore, it can only be taken up if the subject was in the natural attitude beforehand. A being who was not already aware of the world could not assume a genuinely transcendental standpoint.

**(a)**

By effecting the transcendental bracketing, we acquire our “pure living, with all the pure subjective processes making this up, and everything meant in them, purely as meant in them: the universe of ‘phenomena’” (Husserl 1960, 20). That is, we are to consider the world precisely as a phenomenon, as it appears to us and is correlated with our subjective processes and activities in the natural attitude.

The world that appears to us in the natural attitude has the sense of being transcendent. The distinction between the transcendent and the transcendental is a species of the generic distinction between the constituted and the constituting which I outlined in the previous chapter. Transcendental phenomenology takes up a specific sub-set of issues within the constituted-constituting relation. These are issues

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<sup>12</sup> Having said this, the natural attitude can be understood only insofar as it opens up the world to us. Therefore, while questions about the nature of the world must be excluded from the transcendental attitude, the sense of the world is precisely what we aim to study in this attitude. I shall return to this point in chapters six and seven.

pertaining to the subject's constituting or making sense of their surrounding world as a world, a unified spatiotemporal whole. We can investigate other non-transcendental acts of constitution, when we consider how individual objects are constituted. For example, we could practice a phenomenologically informed psychology, investigating how the subject makes sense of particular objects or fields of objects it encounters. However, such a study would proceed in the natural attitude, and so would assume the sense of the pre-given world as the background within which a particular feature of this world, e.g. our ability to be aware of particular things, would be examined (Ströker 1987, 103).

Transcendence, in Husserl's sense, is the way an object is given to the subject as something which does not itself belong in transcendental subjectivity. To make this clear, let us begin with a particular experiential episode, considered purely as an experience. Considering it in this way, we are bracketing reference to any causal relations or any relations of metaphysical dependence the experience might have.<sup>13</sup> Say this episode is a visual experience of a mug. Relative to this particular experience, the object itself (the mug) is transcendent. I am aware of the object precisely *as* something else, as something other than this experience. And not just that: I am aware of it as other than *any* experience I might direct towards it. The sense the object has for me in my perceiving of it is precisely as a *Gegenstand*, something standing over against my awareness of it (Husserl 1982, 86-9; 1960, 26).

When we adopt the transcendental attitude and take up the sense of the world as a whole, we find it exhibits the same sense of transcendence, of being something other than any of my experiences. In every experience I have of it, the world has the sense of being there prior to my experience, and of being more than I can focus on in

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<sup>13</sup> The experience would be metaphysically dependent if it supervened upon or was realised by, for example, a brain state. See Chalmers 1996, 32-42 on supervenience; for a discussion of realisation, see Levine 2001, 13-14.

any one experience. I can never arrive at an experience in which the world would seem to be finally exhausted, to be nothing else but what I am focusing on at that moment. In this sense, the world is inexhaustible.

**(b)**

The sense the world has for me is not just transcendence (which, after all, is a sense that any particular worldly object can have for me). It also has a sense of mundanity, a sense of being precisely a *world* for me (Mohanty 1985, 234). It would be a mistake to explain this sense in terms of the actual world being a collection of entities, events, states and so on, where each of these has the sense for me of being a transcendent object, and the sense I have of the world is the aggregate of all the senses of these objects. Whether or not the world itself is a collection of entities and so on is a metaphysical issue. Following Husserl, we are concerned here only with the sense we have of this world, how it appears to us. And I suggest it does not appear to us, in our everyday lives, as a collection at all. Rather, while we are aware of different collections of things, depending on what we are doing at any moment, the world is present to us as an inexhaustible horizon, standing behind every such collection. For example, the objects we perceive at any one moment, “the momentary field of perception, always has the character for us of a sector ‘of’ the world, the universe of things for possible perceptions”, the horizon of all our possible worldly activities (Husserl 1970, 162).

The phrase ‘universe of things for possible perceptions’ might sound like another way of saying ‘the collection of all perceivable items’, but this is misleading. Once again, note that what is at issue here is not whether we can think of the world itself as such a collection (or, more generally, the collection of things we can be intentionally aware of). Rather, the issue is how the world appears to us in our

everyday thinking and perceiving of things in it. Husserl's point is that, in any experience within the natural attitude, the world will always be present as a background of further things to be perceived. Regardless of whether the natural world is an exhaustible collection of items or not, it appears to us in the natural attitude as an inexhaustible horizon, a field of objects available for exploration.<sup>14</sup>

The transcendental attitude thus allows us, for the first time, to study the background to all our natural life; the sense we have of the world. However, one still might question whether it is possible to adopt this attitude. I shall consider two possible ways in which this criticism might be motivated, and argue against both, the first in the remainder of this section, the second in the section that follows.

(c)

The first challenge can be put as follows: the transcendental attitude involves bracketing the positing of the natural world, the background to all our natural living, in order to study it. All intentional awareness has a figure-background structure, in that anything we are intentionally aware of has external horizons, which together form a background of other items against which the object of our attention stands out (Husserl 1970, 165-168). But the pregivenness of the world is the background to our natural, everyday lives. If we want to study this, then we must focus our attention on it. But it might be objected that there is nothing to serve as the background against which this pregivenness can stand out as the figure. The suggestion is that while the subject may be able to bracket such specialised attitudes as the arithmetical or the naturalistic attitudes, the natural attitude is the one attitude the subject can never fully step outside of. This, I believe, is what Merleau-Ponty is driving at in *Phenomenology of Perception*: "The most important lesson which the reduction

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<sup>14</sup> I shall develop this characterisation of the sense we have of the world in chapter six.



teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction [...] there is no thought which embraces all our thought" (1962, xiv).<sup>15</sup>

This is a genuine worry, and its premises are either drawn from or consistent with Husserl's methods and discoveries. One possible response might be to deny that experiences in the transcendental attitude must be structured in the same figure-background way that characterises experiences in other attitudes. But this response seems *ad hoc*. It also creates the additional difficulty of removing the transcendental attitude from a general model of attitudes which otherwise works well, and that we have good reason to retain.

Another option might be to deny that when adopt the transcendental attitude we are focusing on the pre-givenness of the world. That is, in the transcendental attitude we reflect on our awareness of particular objects or object-fields, rather than our awareness of the world. On this suggestion, the sense we have of the world would still function as the background to the items we are focusing on, but we would be related to that background in a different way. But again, this response doesn't seem satisfactory. It would seem to deny the possibility of our considering exactly how the world as a whole manifests itself to us. But the aim of the entire project of transcendental phenomenological reflection was to be able to do this. It is precisely this background, ever-present in everyday life but never studied in it, which is the prize. Any solution to the problem which denies us this is really not a solution at all, but an acceptance that the problem cannot be solved.

I think the problem can be solved. Consider how we would study a different attitude, say the arithmetical attitude I discussed in section II. We could not study this attitude by adopting it, since by adopting it we would be directed not to this

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<sup>15</sup> Note that 'reduction' here is a term used by Husserl and others to refer to the process of bracketing the natural attitude and taking up the transcendental attitude. It is not to be confused with reduction in the more usual philosophical sense.

mode of thought, but to the field of objects it opens up (numbers, mathematical formulae, and so on). To study it as a mode of thought, we would have to bracket all reference to mathematical objects, and consider instead the various experiences we can have of these objects.

Now, each of these experiences will present its own object, the particular number or equation or mathematical system it is concerned with. And each of these objects will be presented as a figure against the background of the overall field of arithmetical objects. To study the arithmetical attitude, we bracket all these experiences, and take them (rather than the numbers, equations etc.) as our objects. When we do this, the background against which they stand out will not be the overall field of arithmetical objects, but the field of possible arithmetical experiences. Of course, this field of possible arithmetical experiences is co-ordinate with the field of arithmetical objects. One cannot grasp the field of possible arithmetical experiences as such unless one is able to grasp arithmetical objects as such. So, one cannot reflect upon the mathematical attitude unless one is capable of actually adopting it. But this result is hardly surprising, since reflection is by its very nature a dependent, second-order awareness.

The same holds true of transcendental reflection, reflection on the natural attitude. To take as our object of study the entire natural attitude and its sense of the world, we must adopt a transcendental attitude. In the transcendental attitude, the objects of our experience are the particular experiences and experience-structures which we can have in the natural attitude. The background against which these particular natural-attitude experiences can stand out is the field of possible experiences which we can have when in the natural attitude. With this field of possible natural-attitude experiences as a background, we can take any particular

experience as the object of our attention. Furthermore, against this background we can study the sense we have of the world, its very pre-givenness and mundanity. This sense is common to all natural-attitude experiences, as outlined in sections II and IV. Therefore, it can be studied as a feature they all share (Husserl 1970, 163).

It may be objected here that the natural attitude cannot be bracketed because it is presupposed by all the other attitudes. I think the premise of this argument is correct, in that it does not seem possible that a being which was not already in the natural attitude could adopt, say, the arithmetical attitude. Every specialised mode of thought or awareness one can develop depends on one's having a pre-theoretical awareness of the world. But it does not follow from this that the natural attitude cannot be bracketed. As long as one is concerned only with objects which do not appear as belonging to the surrounding world, then it seems possible for one to suspend the positing of that world. This holds true even though this positing was necessary for one to adopt any other attitude in the first place.

## V.

### **Methodological Detachment**

The challenge just discussed was one springing from within the phenomenological approach itself, and was based on the suggestion that it might be impossible to both use the phenomenological method and adopt the transcendental attitude. The second challenge is based on non-phenomenological grounds. Specifically, the worry is that the phenomenologist cannot, in fact, study the way the world appears to the subject in isolation from issues concerning the nature of the world.

(a)

Suppose that our awareness of the world, or way the world appears to us, is necessarily linked to aspects of the subject or of the world which have been bracketed. In that case, it would seem that we cannot study our awareness of the world without knowing something about the nature of the world. But this would seem to undermine the independence of transcendental phenomenology from the study of other aspects of the subject and of the world. In support of the premise of this argument, the critic can appeal to recent work in semantics, which suggests that in a number of cases, meaning and reference must be explained in specifically relational terms (that is, we must think of them as holding, in these cases at least, in virtue of some real relation between two existing entities or states). The best-known cases involve demonstrative thoughts, which seem to require the presence of an actual object or place (Baldwin 1998, 31-32); singular thoughts, concerning a unique entity whose identity is not conceived of as determined *a priori* (Baldwin 1998, 33); and thoughts about natural kinds, such as the cases where Putnam's Twin-Earth argument is thought to be relevant (Baldwin 1988, 33-34; see Putnam 1975, 223-234). In each of these cases, there is an existential requirement on the particular kind of thought.<sup>16</sup>

This requirement appears to conflict with the transcendental requirement that we not make any assumptions about the world. The critic can argue that we cannot have certain thoughts without specific relations holding between ourselves and actual objects in the world. So we cannot reflect on these thoughts as such without grasping them as existentially dependent in this way. But to grasp a subjective episode as dependent on an object or state of affairs in the natural world is, it seems, to go

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<sup>16</sup> This interpretation of these cases can be contested (see Searle 1983, 197-230; Fodor 1986, 253-262) but for the purposes of this chapter I assume it to be correct.

beyond what the transcendental attitude permits. Therefore, we cannot hope to give a complete account of our meaningful grasp of the world from the transcendental standpoint alone.<sup>17</sup>

**(b)**

Against this challenge, I want to defend what I shall refer to as the Principle of Methodological Detachment:

we can examine meaningful subjective episodes with regard to their meaningfulness, independently of examining or making any assumptions concerning their specific causal or metaphysical bases.

The meaningfulness of a subjective episode is the correlation between the noematic structure and the noetic aspects of the episode; that is, between the ideal intentional structure in virtue of which the object appears to the subject, and those aspects of the concrete episode which serve to instantiate this ideal structure. The causal basis of a subjective episode is the set of states of affairs or of events which together cause it to occur. The metaphysical basis of a subjective episode is whatever the episode metaphysically depends upon, or whatever non-causal way in which it might be realised (see 159, fn. 13). The Principle of Methodological Detachment itself concerns different descriptions or theories of subjective episodes. It holds that we can describe and theorise about the meaningful aspects of subjective states while not providing any particular theory of that which they causally and/or metaphysically depend upon (assuming that they are dependent in either or both these ways).

The first thing to note is that this claim is pitched at the methodological rather than the metaphysical level. It is the claim that we can detach one set of

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<sup>17</sup> I should clarify that the argument presented by Baldwin is not that the transcendental study of awareness cannot fix reference in the cases mentioned, but that it cannot fix their meaning. The suggestion is that in the cases just mentioned, because the transcendental philosopher has bracketed the objects of awareness, they must thereby bracket the states of awareness of these objects as well (Baldwin 1998, 31, 33).

questions or issues from another. We can pose and investigate questions concerning the meaningful structure of experiences without addressing their causal or metaphysical bases. This must be carefully distinguished from any metaphysical claim, for example the claim that the experiential and meaningful character of these episodes is itself independent of their causal or metaphysical bases.<sup>18</sup> To refrain from discussing the causal or metaphysical bases of a given experience is not to deny that the experience has such bases.

Furthermore, note that we can distinguish two explanatory projects with regard to subjective episodes. The first project would be an account of the overall nature of these episodes. This project would necessarily include an account of the metaphysical underpinnings of the episodes (assuming these episodes had such underpinnings). It would also include a causal account, or at the very least an account of how it is possible for such an episode to stand in a causal relation with other events and states. The second project would be to study the meaningfulness of these states, independently of studying their other aspects. The Principle of Methodological Detachment is the claim that we can undertake this second project without having to undertake the first. I shall now defend this principle against Baldwin's arguments.

(c)

Any phenomenological study, whether transcendental or not, involves the technique of bracketing. When we clearly demarcate the limitations that this technique imposes on us, we can see how the principle of methodological detachment can be brought into play.

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<sup>18</sup> In chapter two, section IV, I made the same point when discussing Galen Strawson's suggestion that we could isolate the subjective character of an experience from any other aspects of that experience.

Recall that, in performing the transcendental bracketing, we are to refrain from posing questions concerning the nature or existence of any worldly entities. One set of questions thus put out of consideration are those concerning space: what it is (for example, whether it is a relation between physical objects, or an absolute); its precise dimensions; and so on. In the transcendental attitude, we neither pose these questions, nor make any assumptions regarding these issues. This, on the face of it, seems to preclude any reference to space at all, and this is just how Baldwin describes the attempt to reach the transcendental standpoint: “a philosopher who tries to conceive what thoughts he [sic] might have were he not located in space” (1998, 32). However, another interpretation of Husserl’s position is available. On this alternative account, the transcendental attitude does not require one to imagine what it would be like for one were one not located in space. Rather, one is to consider one’s thoughts and perceptions without referring either to their actual objects or to the physical space within which these objects are located. One need not bracket thoughts or perceptions concerning spatial entities; what one must bracket are issues regarding the success of these states in presenting actual spatial entities. One can still refer to spatial objects and to space as it appears to one. Therefore, contrary to Baldwin’s suggestion, one is not required to remove “all thoughts about an objective world and one’s place within it” from the purview of the transcendental attitude (1998, 35; see also 42). On the contrary, one adopts this attitude in order to study precisely the sense one has of an objective world, and of one’s place within it.<sup>19</sup> When we remove this premise from Baldwin’s argument, then his conclusion that the transcendental attitude can encompass very few intentional states does not follow.

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<sup>19</sup> I shall consider how we do this in chapter six.

More generally, to bracket something or other does not entail assuming that it might not exist, or that it is conceivable that it might not exist. This kind of sceptical doubt, it is true, does require the procedure of bracketing, but the reverse does not hold. The bracketing is neither a modal claim nor a claim concerning conceivability; furthermore, it does not entail either of these kinds of claim. It involves ignoring something or some issue, and I take it that we are capable of ignoring something we know very well to be the case. For example, in perception the world appears as spread out around us, as structured into ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘near’ and ‘far’, relative to our own position. In the transcendental attitude we can study the way the world appears to us from a particular location. And part of the noematic content of our perceptual experiences is that their objects are presented as relative to the subject of the experiences. I don’t just see a neon light; I see it as in front of me, above me, to the right of the wall, and so on. To consider this light as it appears to me is not to assume that the light itself is or is not actually there. Rather, it is to set aside questions concerning the light itself, to ignore it. This suggests that we can grasp meaningful states as such without having anything in particular to say about their other aspects, such as their causal or metaphysical bases. And this is just what the Principle of Methodological Detachment claims.<sup>20</sup>

## VI.

### **Transcendental Subjectivity**

As I mentioned in section IV, the very sense of mundaneity the world has for us is correlated with transcendental subjectivity. In this section I shall examine how

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<sup>20</sup> It does not follow from this that we could fix the *reference* of any meaningful state without bringing in causal or metaphysical links to actual objects in the world. But the Principle of Methodological Detachment concerns our study of meaning, not of reference.



subjective experiences function to give us this sense of the world as a world. This examination will apply the functional analysis of constitution outlined in the previous chapter to the way the subject constitutes the entire world.

**(a)**

To begin this analysis, consider the following claim: “Anything belonging to the world, and spatiotemporal being, exists for me – that is to say, is accepted by me – in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, value it, desire it, or the like” (Husserl 1960, 21). The crucial phrase here is that the world ‘exists for me’. Husserl’s point is that the world, and anything in it, can appear for one (that is, can be a phenomenon) only insofar as one is aware of it or grasps it *as* a phenomenon. I do not take Husserl to be claiming here that the world in itself exists only insofar as one is aware of it (I shall examine this issue in more detail in (b) below). His point, as I read it, is that the world appears to me only because of the functioning of my subjective processes and states of awareness, perception and so on. Put this way, Husserl’s claim might seem to be trivial, even tautological: is he not claiming that one is aware of the world only insofar as one is aware of it? However, this is not his conclusion, but the starting point for a phenomenological analysis of the subject’s awareness of the world. Such an analysis aims at revealing exactly what it is to be aware of anything, an account of which, Husserl suggests, philosophers have historically failed to provide.

The functioning of subjectivity which is revealed in the transcendental attitude is transcendental subjectivity.

The objective world, the world that exists for me [...] this world, with all its objects [...] derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, from me

myself, from me as the transcendental ego, the ego who comes to the fore only with transcendental-phenomenological epoché [i.e., bracketing] (Husserl 1960, 26).

Again, this is not a claim that the world itself exists only insofar as I exist and am aware of it. Rather, it is a claim that the world *as it exists for me*, as it appears to me, has the sense of being the existing world that it is only insofar as I am aware of it. A.D. Smith refers to this claim as the ‘transcendental insight’ (2003, 28).<sup>21</sup> This insight is ‘transcendental’ in that it refers to the conditions for the possibility of objects having the sense of belonging to a world. Subjectivity is transcendental insofar as it is presupposed by (because it constitutes) the very sense the world has for the subject (Mohanty 1985, 231). The world as phenomenon “gets its whole sense, universal and specific [...] exclusively from such cogitations”, that is, intentional experiences (Husserl 1960, 21).

To speak of subjectivity as transcendental in a phenomenological context is to speak of subjective episodes as fulfilling a particular set of constitutive roles, those of making the subject aware of the world as such. I introduced the notion of a constitutive role in the previous chapter, as the role of making the subject aware of a particular object. A particular experience can be said to fulfil a constitutive role insofar as, in virtue of having that experience, the subject is aware of the object. The set of transcendental roles is a subset of the total set of constitutive roles. Transcendental roles are those which are fulfilled when the world is presented to the subject; that is, when the subject is aware of objects precisely as belonging to the world (Husserl 1970, 162).

It would be a mistake to think that the world is presented by a separate experience, one which you have in tandem with your experience of a particular

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<sup>21</sup> I discussed this claim in chapter two, section V.

object and which presents the world in addition to the object. Nor would it be correct to say that the world is presented by means of a separate noema, a world-sense which co-exists in one's experience with the sense one has of the particular object one is focusing on. Rather, the object and the world it belongs to are co-presented in one and the same experience. The very same noema which presents the object I perceive will present it as occupying a certain point in space and time, such that one can always perceive other objects beyond it. The world of the natural attitude is the ultimate external horizon of all possible objects that one can be aware of in that attitude. The transcendental roles concern the syntheses which tie every object into the world in this fashion. Transcendental subjectivity is the name for the array of subjective experiences which fulfil these roles. What is special about this particular set of roles is that they are necessary for any particular awareness in the natural attitude, since any such awareness requires an awareness of the background of the world against which some particular object of awareness will stand out. As such, the fulfilment of these roles is the condition for the possibility of being aware of any object as belonging to surrounding world.

**(b)**

This is what makes transcendental subjectivity specifically transcendental, but Husserl also describes his position as transcendental idealism. We must be very careful here, as it is possible to interpret Husserl's claims in a way which makes them quite implausible. I have just claimed that subjectivity is transcendental in virtue of its fulfilling the specific set of transcendental roles, those which, when fulfilled, allow the subject to be aware of the entire natural world. The distinction between the transcendental and the transcendent is thus a functional one, rather than a distinction between two sets of entities.

In the previous two sections, I argued that we can isolate the transcendental functioning of subjectivity, in that we can study it independent of making particular assumptions about its relations with anything else. These relations need not be understood as contingent; they may be necessary, and may even be essential to the very subjective episodes we wish to study. For example, the relation in question may be one of identity (surely an essential relation, if any is). That is, when I say we can study subjective episodes independently of their relations with anything else, ‘anything else’ covers even the very same subjective episodes, considered under a different description. Even if it turns out that some form of identity theory is correct (that subjective episodes are literally the same as, say, episodes of information processing the organism undergoes), we could still set to one side this other description, and concern ourselves only with those episodes understood as functioning transcendently.

To make this claim clearer, let us consider it in relation to an opposing interpretation. Famously, in § 49 of *Ideas I*, Husserl suggests that experiential consciousness could survive the annihilation of the physical world. He does concede that such an event would modify the character of the experiences, but it would not annihilate them as well. He concludes that no transcendent being is necessary for the being of consciousness itself (Husserl 1982, 110; see also 1960, 25, 30). This claim can be conjoined with another, which is even stronger: all transcendent being depends upon the existence of consciousness (1982, 110, 171; 1960, 21). The resultant picture, of consciousness as having absolute being, and transcendent reality as having a merely secondary existence, dependent upon the realm of transcendental subjectivity, is certainly one obvious way of understanding Husserl’s remarks here. This metaphysical picture is absolute idealism (Smith 2003, 179).

I want to argue that Husserl's phenomenological method does not commit us to or justify absolute idealism. In defence of this claim, I can point to the functionalist account of transcendental subjectivity, which draws the distinction between the transcendental and the transcendent in functional rather than ontological terms. Of course, this interpretation is not the only one available. However, I am less interested in clarifying Husserl's exact position than in working out a defensible and useful version of transcendental phenomenology, one which is recognisably Husserlian but which avoids what I take to be certain errors. The functionalist account, if it is coherent, will serve this purpose.

Furthermore, I think we have good reason to forego absolute idealism, since it flouts the very transcendental method by means of which it is supposedly justified. In particular, absolute idealism involves the claim that the world itself, the world that appears in the natural attitude, is dependent for its existence on the subject who is aware of it. Such a claim seems to be about the very nature of the world itself, but the transcendental bracketing required that we forego making any claims at all about the nature of the world (as I argued in section III).

A.D. Smith presents a Husserlian defence of absolute idealism, by arguing that physical facts supervene upon intentional experience (2003, 183-187). One of Smith's premises is the claim that physical entities can exist "only if certain experiential facts hold" (186). The 'experiential fact' he appeals to is that for a physical entity to exist, it must in principle be experienceable by a subject. I am willing to accept this premise. However, it does not entail that physical entities depend for their existence on the existence of either subjects or of experiences. Indeed, this premise could hold even in a world with no subjects and no experience, since it only entails that those physical entities which exist can in principle be

experienced, not that subjects capable of experiencing them must exist as well. I do not think that any genuine version of absolute idealism can allow that physical entities could exist even if no subjects existed. Therefore, I do not think Smith's argument works as a defence of absolute idealism.

## VII.

### **Methodological Idealism**

Absolute idealism should therefore be rejected in favour of a more modest proposal, which I shall term methodological idealism.<sup>22</sup> In this section, I shall outline this position. Methodological idealism is my term for what Husserl calls "an explication of my ego as subject of every possible cognition" (1960, 86). I see methodological idealism as being the conjunction of three claims.

- (i) We can examine meaningful subjective episodes independently of examining, or making any assumptions concerning, their specific causal or metaphysical bases.
- (ii) The subject can have a meaningful awareness of the world, not in virtue of the nature of the world, but in virtue of the meaningful subjective states the subject can enter.
- (iii) These subjective states are meaningful in virtue of their ideal noematic content.

These claims together make up a distinctive position: a methodologically defined transcendental form of idealism. Claim (i), the Principle of Methodological

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<sup>22</sup> As far as I know, this phrase was first used by Ricoeur (1967, 36). He does not give it the precise meaning I am giving it in this thesis, but in both cases we are opposing methodological to what Ricoeur terms "doctrinal" idealism, the suggestion that the world is nothing but appearances for the subject.

Detachment, sets out the specifically methodological basis of this position. Claim (ii) is what makes this position transcendental. As I mentioned in chapter two, the key challenge of transcendental philosophy “is whether it is possible to isolate a set of conditions of the possibility of knowledge of things [...] that can be distinguished from conditions of the possibility of the things themselves” (Allison 1983, 13). This positive answer is given by claim (ii) above. Claim (iii) is what makes this position a form of idealism: the conditions for the possibility of awareness are features of subjective states themselves, rather than features of the objects of awareness. Together, these claims constitute a specifically phenomenological version of the transcendental approach introduced in chapter two.

**(a)**

To clarify methodological idealism, we can contrast it with two other positions. It should be clear that none of claims (i)-(iii), taken separately or together, commits us either to absolute idealism or to either of the two conjuncts which make up that position. Absolute idealism is a position concerning the existence of transcendent objects and their existential relation to transcendental being. Methodological idealism has nothing to say about either of these topics. Claim (i) is, as we have seen, a methodological principle. Claims (ii) and (iii) concern the subject’s awareness of transcendent objects, rather than the nature or existence-conditions of those objects. It would be a *non sequitur* to infer absolute idealism from methodological idealism. And I have argued above that, if we have to choose between the two, we would be unwise to opt for the absolute idealism.

Next, consider a second alternative position to methodological idealism. According to this position, we can detach subjective episodes, considered just as having subjective character, from any *particular* way the world might be (that is,

from any particular way it might be arranged and composed). This claim is weaker than absolute idealism, in that it does not claim that consciousness could exist even in the absence of any transcendent world. But it does hold that, given that there is a transcendent world, consciousness will exist regardless of what kind of transcendent world it is. A slightly stronger version of this claim would be that the very same subjective episodes, again considered only in terms of their experiential nature, could exist regardless of whatever way the transcendent world is. As I mentioned in chapter two, a view of this sort is advanced by Galen Strawson. He describes subjective character as “everything about one’s experience that could possibly be just the same if one were not located in a physical world as one thinks, but were rather a Berkeleyan mind or a ‘brain in a vat’ or something even stranger” (1994, 46). Let us term this the claim that experience is metaphysically independent from the exact nature of the world.

Methodological idealism does not entail the metaphysical independence of subjectivity. What methodological idealism requires us to do is to detach questions concerning the experiential character and meaningfulness of subjective episodes from questions concerning their causal or metaphysical bases. As I argued in chapter two, it would be a mistake to think that this requires us to be able to detach the actual experiences themselves from any particular metaphysical arrangement. The metaphysical implications of methodological idealism are therefore more modest than either absolute idealism or metaphysical independence. This modesty is deliberate. The purpose of the transcendental bracketing, which allows for methodological idealism, is precisely to set aside questions concerning the metaphysical relations between experiences and the world.



**(b)**

There is another way of trying to draw an ontological conclusion from methodological idealism. This starts with claim (i), the distinction between experiential episodes understood solely as regards their intentional function, and the same states and processes understood in non-intentional, non-experiential terms. This distinction is more or less the one Husserl himself draws when he characterises the transcendental region as one of “pure consciousness”, consciousness characterised only in terms of its being conscious awareness (Husserl, 1982, 65-6). All other ways of characterising conscious experiences are to be put to one side for the purposes of phenomenological study. We have already seen how Husserl was keen to give this distinction an ontological reading. This is a move I am reluctant to make. Contrary to Husserl’s oft-stated view (for example 1960, 21), I do not see the transcendental bracketing as allowing us to say that pure consciousness (subjectivity understood as transcendental) is a region of being ontologically distinct from the natural world.

One way of motivating the claim that there is an ontological distinction here might be as follows: when we perform the transcendental bracketing, we forbid ourselves from referring to the world itself, but we disclose an entire region of being, namely subjective intentional episodes considered only as such. Husserl terms this the phenomenological residuum, a region of being “which in its own absolute essence, is not touched by the phenomenological exclusion” (1982, 65). Now, since we are able to refer to this transcendental region of being even after we have foregone reference to the natural world, this might be taken to show that we are dealing with two ontologically separate regions.

Furthermore, it seems that any position that denies that there is an ontological distinction between the transcendent and the transcendental is thereby committed to saying that the transcendental subject is, in fact, a part of the world. But if methodological idealism is committed to this claim, it appears to be an inconsistent position. It both holds that the subject is part of the natural realm, and that the subject performs the transcendental role of making sense of this entire realm. This problem is more or less the paradox of subjectivity, the tension that results when we take the same subject to be both a part of the world and that which constitutes the entire world (Husserl 1970, 178). I shall address the paradox in detail in chapter seven, where I shall show how we can understand how the one subject can answer to both these descriptions. For the moment, my response to the challenge shall be more modest. I shall merely argue that it does not produce a contradiction.

Consider again the procedure of transcendental bracketing. In performing this procedure, we prevent ourselves from asking questions or making claims about the nature of the objects which appear to us when we are in the natural attitude. That is, we turn our attention away from the world *which* appears in order to examine the world *as* it appears. The key point here is this procedure is purely methodological; it is a device for studying a particular subject-matter (the world as it appears), rather than a metaphysical claim about this subject-matter. The bracketing requires us to forego all claims about the world itself, the world which appears. But the suggestion that the world *as* it appears is ontologically distinct from the world *which* appears is just such a claim about the world itself. Strictly speaking, therefore, the claim that there is an ontological distinction here is un-phenomenological. We cannot assume that the subject could exist independently of the world itself; nor can we assume, while using the method of bracketing, that the subject could not exist without the

world. To justify either of these claims, we would have to use a different method of philosophical inquiry.

Having introduced the ideas and techniques of Husserlian phenomenology, I am now in a position to return to the two areas of the philosophy of mind I outlined in the first two chapters. These are the subjective character of experiences, and the subject's ability to be aware of objects and of the world. In the next two chapters, I shall address each of these areas in a specifically phenomenological fashion.

## Chapter 5

### The Subjectivity of Experiences

In chapters one and two, I outlined the problems I wish to address; the structure of the subjective character of experiences, and the conditions for the possibility of awareness, respectively. I then introduced the phenomenological method of bracketing and adopting the transcendental attitude, and the concepts of noema, noesis, synthesis and constitution. Using these methods and concepts, I shall address the problems outlined earlier. In chapter six, I shall consider our awareness of the world as objective, that is, as going beyond how it appears to the subject. In this chapter, I want to focus on a problem which arose from my discussion of the subjective character of experiences in chapter one.

In that chapter (section VIII), I argued that the subjective character of each of my experiences can be thought of as a state of a structured field of experiencing. I suggested that this field is an aspect of myself, that aspect which makes me a subject of experiences. For this model to work, we must be able to give a more detailed account of subjectivity, the ontological relation between a subject and its experiences. In this chapter, I shall try to explain the subjectivity of experiences. I shall argue that an experience belongs to a subject if the subject undergoes or lives through it. To live through an experience is for the experience to pass through the subject's structure of inner time. If I can give an account of how experiences pass through inner time – that is, if I can give an account of the temporality of experiences – then I can explain the subjectivity of experiences.

In section I, I shall briefly assess contemporary discussions of subjectivity, and introduce the key features of subjectivity which my account must try to explain.

In section II, I shall describe the temporality of conscious experiences. In section III, I introduce Husserl's theory of this temporality. In section IV, I shall further develop Husserl's theory, in the context of replying to some criticisms of his account which have been put forward by Barry Dainton. In section V, I shall argue that we can explain how a subject can live through an experience by appealing to the temporality of the experience. Lastly, in section VI I shall argue that what it is for an experience to be subjective is for its subject to live through it in the manner described. I shall also argue that this account of subjectivity can explain the features outlined in section I.

## **I.**

### **Subjectivity**

#### **(a)**

By 'subjectivity' I mean the way in which conscious experiences belong to the subject whose experiences they are. More precisely, it is the way an experience, *qua* an episode with a particular subjective character, belongs to the subject who has this experience and for which there is something it is like to have this experience. The issue of subjectivity I am concerned with is, therefore, an ontological one.

The term 'subjectivity' is often used in an epistemic sense, to refer to the way certain modes of knowledge or understanding depend on a particular subject or group of subjects. For example, a judgement could be considered relatively subjective if its truth or falsity can be settled only by reference to "certain attitudes, feelings, and points of view of the makers and hearers of the judgments" (Searle

1995, 8). Since I am concerned with subjectivity as an ontological relation, I shall not address this epistemic sense in what follows.<sup>1</sup>

A second epistemic sense of ‘subjectivity’, which is closer to my concerns, is the knowledge a subject has of its own states, in particular of its own experiences as it undergoes them. This knowledge, it is suggested, has a unique immediacy, and cannot be had by anyone else. Something like this account is suggested by Zahavi when he claims that it is the way in which we are immediately aware of our experiences by virtue of having them which makes them subjective (2005, 122).

I accept that there is a unique epistemic relation between subjects and their own experiences.<sup>2</sup> However, I mention this epistemic relation only to put it to one side in what follows. For one thing, this relation raises issues which are extremely complicated and highly contested.<sup>3</sup> More importantly, even if it is accepted that there is a special epistemic relation here, this relation must itself be explained by an account of the ontological subject-experience relation. It is the latter relation which I am concerned with in what follows. Contrary to Zahavi, I would explain our first-personal awareness of our conscious experiences by appealing to the subjectivity of these experiences, the ontological relation holding between them and their subject.

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<sup>1</sup> I shall briefly discuss the epistemic notion of subjectivity and the correlative epistemic notion of objectivity in the next chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, each of us is aware of our own experiences in virtue of having them, and this awareness is unmediated. Unlike my awareness of the experiences of others, I can be aware of my own experiences without being aware of any of my corporeal features (Shoemaker 1984, 69; Husserl 1960, 109-111). Furthermore, we must consider the phenomenon of immunity to error through misidentification. When one judges that one has or had an experience, and this judgement is based on one’s undergoing or having undergone the experience, then one cannot grasp the experience correctly and misidentify the person who had the experience. This immunity from this specific kind of error is not present in cases where one is making judgments about the experiences or states of someone else (Shoemaker 1968, 558-561). I see this phenomenon as based on the way in which subjects have their own experiences. A similar explanation of this phenomenon is offered by Longuenesse (2008, 15-17).

<sup>3</sup> For example, I would not want to claim that a subject’s experiences are private, in the sense that only the subject can really know if it has these experiences or not (the sense of privacy criticised by Wittgenstein at 1958, §§ 246-263). Nor would I want to claim that there are facts about what it is like to have those experiences which only the subject of those experiences can have knowledge of (Lycan 1990, 125).

And crucially, I do not need to make any assumptions about the epistemic relation in order to offer an ontological account.

**(b)**

The issue of subjectivity, defined in this way, has not been widely discussed in the philosophy of mind. When subjectivity is mooted, it is usually taken up as an epistemic issue. For example, critics of naturalism often suggest that only the individual subject or other subjects of the same kind can have access to facts about what it is like to undergo experiences (Nagel 1974, 442). The standard naturalist response to this claim is to concede an asymmetry of phenomenal concepts or modes of access to facts about the subjective character of experience, but to deny that the facts themselves are thereby accessible only to particular subjects.<sup>4</sup> What subjectivity is thought to mark here is one particular mode of access to these facts, rather than a particular class of facts or entities.<sup>5</sup>

When the ontological relation between experiences and subjects is broached, it is usually discussed in general ontological terms. One option is to follow Kim. On his account, experiences are events in which the substance (the constitutive object of the event, the object to which the event happens) is the subject of experiences. The constitutive property of the event is the experiential property exemplified: the property of being painful, of tasting something sour, or of feeling drowsy. That is, an experience belongs to a subject just in case the subject exemplifies an experiential property at a particular time (Kim 1993, 35). A second option, outlined by Davidson, is to take events as ontologically basic particulars, not constituted from more basic component parts such as substances or properties (2001, 179-180). Tye suggests that we can understand experiences as events characterised in this way. This view can

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<sup>4</sup> See Loar 1997, 601-605; Van Gulick 1997, 562-563.

<sup>5</sup> See Sturgeon 1994, 230; Moore 1997, 51; Block 2002, 397-398.

accommodate the necessary ownership of experiences by their subjects, if we conceptually analyse events as sudden changes in a substance, which in the case of experiences would be the subject (Tye 1995, 91).

A third line of thought is the suggestion by Peter Strawson that we can ascribe experiences to subjects only on the basis of their being persons, to whom we can ascribe both states of consciousness and other characteristics which do not involve consciousness (1959, 101-102). On this view, the concept of a person is primitive. Rather than trying to understand a person as a compound of a subject of experiences and a corporeal entity which is the subject's body, we can only understand the concept of a subject on the basis of understanding the concept of a person (Strawson 1959, 102-103).

I do not want to suggest that none of these options is correct, only that none are specific enough to answer the question of subjectivity. The accounts offered by Kim and Davidson treat one's having experiences in a manner identical to one's having a left hand, or swinging one's arm as one walks. Strawson correctly notes that there is a crucial relation between having experiences and having other properties, but this does not in itself clarify the relation between experiences and their subjects. What none of these accounts addresses is the peculiar intimacy of my relation with my own experiences. Each experience has a subjective character, which must be a character for the subject of that experience. There is something it is like *for me* to taste a whiskey with an earthy flavour, or to experience a nagging doubt. It seems very implausible to say that there could be a conscious experience which, in the sense I'm speaking of, is for no-one. Recall Levine's definition of subjectivity as "the phenomenon of there being something it's like *for me*" to perceive an object



(2001, 7). It is the way in which my experiences are for me which none of the above accounts seems capable of explaining.

What is needed, therefore, is a substantive account of the ontological relation between subjects and their experience. This account must be able to explain what makes my experiences mine and your experiences yours, and what makes there be something it is like for each subject to have its experiences. In what follows, I shall try to develop such an account.

(c)

In the remainder of this section, I shall briefly outline four key features of subjectivity. This outline is descriptive in nature, and will not attempt to explain any of the features mentioned. In sections III and IV, I shall assemble the materials I need to explain these features. The explanation itself will be presented in sections V and VI.

First, each conscious experience belongs to some subject or other. It seems very odd to think that there could be, say, a headache, or a feeling of pride, or an orgasm, which does not belong to anyone in particular (Nagel 1986, 30). My point is not that this idea is a contradiction in terms. Rather, I suggest that to speak of an experience which belongs to no-one involves a category error, of the same sort as speaking of a physical entity with no spatial properties, or a non-organic entity being a parent. Part of what I wish to provide in this chapter is an account of subjectivity which lets us see why this is so. Briefly, my argument shall be that conscious experiences are nothing but states of the subject, determinates of a determinable. As such, they essentially belong to their subject.

The second feature of subjectivity I want to mention is that each experience can belong to only one subject (Strawson 1959, 97; Kim 1993, 48). This claim may

not seem to fit our everyday way of thinking. We speak of ‘sharing experiences’, and understand what is meant by references to ‘the mood of the crowd’ or ‘the mood in the room’, as opposed to the moods of the persons making up the crowd or in the room. This way of speaking is, I suggest, misleading if taken literally. Again, a full defence of this assumption will have to wait until I have outlined a more detailed ontological picture of subjectivity. In rough outline, the argument is that since conscious experiences are states of the subject, they can no more be shared than any other instance of a mode of being. Shared experiences and common moods are important phenomena and worthy of study, but they do not involve subjects actually sharing particular experiential episodes.

The third feature of subjectivity was mentioned at the end of the previous subsection. It is the peculiar intimacy of my relation with my experiences, the fact that there is something it is like for me to be in them. It is this feature which suggests that we cannot explain the way I have my experiences merely by appealing to a general ontological theory of the relation between events and substances, such as that provided by Kim or Davidson.

The final feature of subjectivity I wish to mention is its passivity. This point must be made carefully. It may seem obvious that we can contrast an experience of voluntary activity with experiences where the will is not exercised. For example, it seems clear there is a qualitative difference between what it is like for me to lift my arm, and what it is like for me to have someone else lift my arm without any volition from me. Likewise, we are all familiar with the difference between thinking through a problem and being struck by a thought. I do not wish to deny these differences. What I am claiming is essentially passive are not experiences themselves, but the way the subject undergoes them. That is, undergoing experiences is not something

we choose to do. We can choose to undergo particular experiences, or to forgo others, but we do not make a decision in order to have experiences at all. Experiences may be chosen, and to that extent active, but experiencing, our undergoing of experiences, happens to us, and is essentially passive. What the subject can do is choose to refrain from undergoing experiences at all, by plunging itself into unconsciousness or a dreamless sleep, or by choosing to die.

In order to explain these features of subjectivity, I shall appeal to the temporality of consciousness. Husserl's theory of this temporality is an account of what it is for a subject to undergo its experiences. For an experience to be subjective simply is for a subject to undergo it. Therefore, Husserl's theory of the temporality of experience can be used to account for the subjectivity of experiences, and can account for each of the features of subjectivity I have just outlined.

## **II.**

### **The Temporality of Experience**

In this section, I shall describe some of the main features of this temporality, taking as my guide Husserl's work in this area. In the following section, I shall outline the theory Husserl advances to account for these features.

#### **(a)**

Husserl begins his investigations in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* by distinguishing between what he terms "objective time" and "subjective time-consciousness". The former is "world-time", the temporality of entities, events and processes themselves, their actual persistence, change and occurrence (1964, 23). Objective time is singular, in that any object or event which

belongs to the world has its particular temporal position within it (1964, 22, 26). I am not concerned to advance a theory of objective time, so I am content to say that it is the relevant aspect of space-time that physics studies. Subjective time-consciousness is “the phenomenological content of lived experiences of time”, that is, our awareness of the duration and change of objects which themselves are in objective time (Husserl 1964, 22).

Since each subject is part of the natural world, our own experiences themselves occur in the world, and therefore have their place in objective temporality. For example, when I eat my dinner this evening, my experience of tasting the first bite of food will occur at a particular point in objective time, after my experience of picking up my knife and fork, and before my experience of swallowing this mouthful of food. However, what I deny is that this kind of temporal position exhausts the temporality of subjective experiences. As well as their place in objective time, each experience has its place in subjective temporality, a form of temporality which differs from that of the objective world.

In studying the temporality of experiences, I suggest we exercise the transcendental bracketing and set aside all assumptions and questions predicated on how the world is itself. Part of this bracketing involves setting aside questions concerning the temporality of our experiences, considered in the frame of objective time. In what follows, when I refer to subjective time-consciousness or the temporality of consciousness, I will be referring only to the stream of conscious experiences considered from within the transcendental attitude.

**(b)**

A notable feature of time-consciousness is that we can grasp successive instants as forming a unified whole, a single event unfolding through time. For this

to be possible, we must be aware, not just of what is happening at any particular instant, but of those instants which have elapsed. In grasping a succession as such, “a ‘now’ appears and, in unity therewith, a ‘past’” (Husserl 1964, 36). The standard example here is our ability to hear a piece of music as extended through time. This awareness would be impossible if we were aware only of the note playing now, without any awareness of those which have just been heard (Husserl 1964, 41). This point was famously made by Kant: an experience of a succession requires not just a mere succession of experiences, but a unified awareness of each succeeding instant as belonging to the whole (1998, A103). Note that we cannot simply appeal here to the unity of the instances as forming a single event in objective time. What is at stake is that we are aware of a single event as such. This requires that there be a unity in our awareness of this event.

It would be incorrect to describe this awareness by saying that we hear every note of the piece all at once, as though played simultaneously. We hear the piece of music as unified, but precisely as extended through time. And while some notes may bleed into the next, or reverberate after being played, hearing this is a very different experience, and certainly is not required for our awareness of the piece as a whole (on the contrary, it may interfere with our ability to perceive certain aspects of the piece) (Husserl 1964, 41, 53). Nor does it seem that we construct the piece by means of combining what we hear with what we have heard, by way of memory. This suggestion suffers from the same problem as the parallel idea that, in perceiving a three-dimensional solid object, we infer its other sides on the basis of what is visually available at any instant. In neither case does this description seem to fit our experience. We don't need to infer the other sides. Rather, we grasp the object, in perceiving it, precisely *as* three-dimensional, with other sides that we can see (Noë

2002, 8-9). Similarly, when I hear the opening bars of ‘Psycho Killer’, I am aware of it, in perceiving it, *as* extended through time, and indeed, as being that particular piece of music.

(c)

I have been speaking of ‘instants’ in our perception of temporally extended objects. It is important to note a certain ambiguity in this term. I suggested that, in listening to a piece of music, at any one instant one will hear a particular tone. This description is true as far as it goes, but it is limited in a number of respects. For one thing, one can hear several tones at once, either in a chord or a dischord; for another, some pieces of music contain moments of silence. But most importantly in the present context, any individual tone will itself have an extension in time, so we can legitimately say that at any instant, one is actually hearing one particular phase of this tone. To hear the whole enduring tone is therefore only partly a matter of aural perception at any instant, and must itself involve a unity of consciousness across time (Husserl 1964, 43).

This ambiguity suggests we must understand the notion of what we perceive at any instant as relative to the particular context of discussion. In certain contexts we can speak correctly of perceiving the whole piece of music, in other contexts of perceiving only a particular tone from it, and in still others we can be said to perceive only a “punctual phase” of a single tone (Husserl 1964, 60-1). This ambiguity should not worry us unduly, as long as we are careful to acknowledge it. Indeed, as we shall see in the next section, it suggests something fundamental about the structure of time-consciousness. We must distinguish between our concrete ‘living present’, which is a temporally extended awareness, and an ideal,

extensionless point, the abstract ‘now-point’ that this living present must pass through. I shall return to this distinction in the next section.

**(d)**

In light of what I have outlined so far, let us consider a concrete example of time-consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Say you are reading a book, and you move your hand to cover the page you are reading. We can describe this episode in terms of three phases: first, you can see the words on the page in front of you; next, you can see your hand moving across the page, obscuring more and more of the words; lastly, your hand has obscured all the words. These phases are three experiential episodes or occurrences in subjective time-consciousness. By undergoing them, you are aware of the changes in the objects themselves, that is, of the temporal succession which occurs in objective time.

Next, consider the final experiential phase, when your hand has obscured the words on the page. Compare this visual image with a photograph of the same scene, of a hand which is clearly obscuring a page of a book. In both cases, the hand will be visible, as will some part of the page behind it, most of which will however be obscured by the hand.<sup>7</sup> But the way this scene is presented to you differs in each case. In the experiential episode, the hand will be constituted as obscuring those words which you had been reading a moment before. This will not be the case in the photograph – at most, it will present the page as having words which, were one in the position the photograph were taken from, one could examine. In each case, the page (and perhaps the words on it) are appresented, that is, co-presented along with what is actually visible (Husserl 1960, 122). The difference between the two cases

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<sup>6</sup> The example is from Dainton 2000, 156. I shall consider Dainton’s own discussion of it in section V.

<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of the comparison, I am ignoring kinesthesia. It could be that someone else’s hand has moved across the page – in that case, one’s kinesthesia would be irrelevant to what one is aware of.

lies in the mode of appresentation. In both cases, one may be aware of the words as being present in the spatial background, even though not visible at that moment because of the way the scene is arranged. But in the perceptual case, they are appresented as being part of one's "temporal background" (Husserl 1964, 78), what one was looking at in the moments prior to the final phase. That is, in this phase one is aware of the hand as obscuring the very words one was reading a moment before. The experiential phases don't just succeed each other, but are connected into one conscious experience by a particular kind of synthesis (Husserl 1960, 41-42).

This description does not clarify the nature of this temporal background, nor of the synthesis which constitutes it, but for the moment all I wish to do is to show that this background exists, and to distinguish it from other temporal aspects of experience. In particular, Husserl stresses the difference between this kind of awareness – the appresentation of the words as what one was looking at before – and the kind of awareness which characterises acts of memory or recollection. Recollection is a particular kind of experience which the subject can undergo, volitionally or otherwise. Our awareness of the temporal background is a feature of the genus experiencing, regardless of the species. Indeed, when we recollect a past event, the very experience of remembering this event is itself structured temporally, with its own temporal background. When I remember listening to a piece of music, this experience has its own temporal extension, and I am aware of each note that I recollect against the background of the other notes which I had heard before it (Husserl 1964, 57-8). I take it that in order for us to be aware of a temporally extended object or event, our awareness of it at any moment must be fitted into a temporal background. Whatever theory of the temporality of consciousness we advance must be able to account for this requirement.



In speaking of the temporal background of one's perceptual awareness, I have been referring to one's awareness of what one had just perceived. But there is another dimension to this background awareness. In any perceptual experience, you are not only aware of what you had just perceived, you also have an expectation about what it is you will perceive next. In the case of your hand moving across the page, you may intend to move your hand away after a moment and resume reading. In that case, your expectation will be that you will perceive your hand moving away, and the words becoming visible again.

This might seem like a mysterious ability to see into the future, but when we clarify its nature we can see there is nothing unusual about it. First, it is not to be confused with making a prediction about what will happen, or imagining a scenario which might play out in the future. These are particular acts directed towards future objects, whereas this background awareness I am trying to describe is something that, to a greater or lesser degree, is involved in all our experiencing. It is not an exclusively cognitive feature, an intellectual apprehension of what might be to come. It structures our experience of bodily action, of perceiving, of being in emotional states and of empathising with others. As such, it differs from the usual meaning of the word 'expectation'.

Second, this expectation is rarely a definite expectation that one particular event will occur. More often, it is the vague awareness of the kinds of experiences one might at any one moment be about to have. In the case of extended acts, such as moving one's hand or looking around the room, it involves an expectation of what will happen, but this expectation is rarely determinate. For all that, it is essential to our awareness of undertaking an action. When we act, the future is not a *tabula rasa*; rather, we hope to achieve something, and this is rarely a blind hoping, without any

expectation that it will happen. We usually act in the expectation that we will succeed.

Third, this expectation can be wrong. Indeed, it is in cases where it is wrong that it reveals itself to us more clearly. Consider listening to a piece of music, and noticing a discord. When this happens, we often do not need to infer that something unusual or wrong has occurred: we simply hear the wrong note, as wrong. Now, what must be the case for this awareness to be possible? We must have an awareness of those tones which had been played previously. But we must also have had an expectation, stemming from this perceptual background, of what was to come. It is against this background of expectation that the discord stands out. Without this background, we could have noticed that something had gone wrong by comparing the discordant tone or chord with the tones which preceded it; but this would have required an act of comparison, and an inference that something had gone wrong. But, at least some of the time, we don't need to do this.

Another example of this kind of expectation is when...

The previous sentence is experienced as 'not ending properly'. This experience is precisely that of your realising that the sentence is not going to turn out as you had expected it to. As with the example of seeing the three-dimensional object (in (b) above), this 'expectation' does not require an inference: you, the reader, did not see the words 'Another example of this kind of expectation' and infer that the sentence would have a particular ending.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the very state of awareness that constitutes reading includes a host of implicit expectations, among them that

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<sup>8</sup> At any rate, there is no conscious inference here. It is arguable that an unconscious inference might have occurred. However, we should not postulate this unless we assume that the kinds of expectations which occur in cases such as reading and hearing music can only be explained by a process of inference. I don't think we have reason to assume this. On the contrary, when we carefully describe the structure of our actual awareness, we can see that the expectations are built in at the conscious level, in our perceptual experiences themselves.

sentences will ‘end properly’. The precise expectations included in our states of awareness are at least partly a matter of the social and cultural context. For example, in reading an academic treatise such as this thesis, you will expect to read sentences written in relatively formal English, addressing philosophical topics, and (hopefully) demonstrating a certain level of logical consistency. I doubt you would have these expectations if you were reading a poem or the instructions booklet for a computer. But you would still have expectations in these cases as well.

In using the phrase ‘temporal background’, I am consciously setting up an analogy between the awareness of space and the awareness of time, one which Husserl himself developed (1964, 78-79). I can distinguish the spatial relations physical objects have between themselves from the spatial relations which they have in appearing to me, as here or over there, near or far.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, we can distinguish between the temporal objects we are aware of (events succeeding each other, entities with duration) and the form of our awareness of them, their appearing as nearer or further away in time from a now-point, their occurring in the past or the future. This temporal perspective is an essential part of our temporal awareness, just as spatial perspective is essential to our perception of spatial objects.

(e)

So far, I have been considering the temporality of particular experiential episodes. Let us now consider the temporality of the entire stream of consciousness. In (b) and (d) above, I described how we can be aware of events over time. Temporality is a feature of every experience we undergo. But it also unifies experiences over time. All the experiences I have and can have form part of a stream of consciousness, a succession of experiential episodes with its own particular unity.

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, I can be perceptually aware of objects as appearing relative to other subjects. But this awareness is always dependent on my being aware of both the objects and the other subjects, relative to me.

What is most interesting about this unity is its particular form, which is continuous. This is what is meant when we speak of a stream of consciousness, as opposed to a collection of experiences unified in any other way. To say that a particular set of experiential episodes is essentially unified, even to say that it is unified in virtue of belonging to a particular subject, does not capture the form of this unity. This form is the flowing character of our experiences (Husserl 1960, 41). When one has an experience, it is succeeded by another without any gap in your experiencing. There is always something it is like for you, unless one loses consciousness completely (more of which below). For example, it is not the case that when one closes off a particular sensory apparatus, part of your experiential state just vanishes. There is something it is like for you when you shut your eyes, contrary to what is suggested by Papineau (2002, 14). This flowing character is simply the temporality of consciousness itself (Smith 2003, 88-89), the temporality of one's experiences considered as a whole. Each experience takes its place in the stream, as succeeding other experiences and itself being succeeded in turn.<sup>10</sup> The temporality of consciousness is essentially the particular form of unity this stream has.

The idea that our experiences flow in a stream has been contested by Galen Strawson. He suggests that the "fundamental experience of consciousness is one of repeated returns into consciousness from a state of complete, if momentary, unconsciousness" (1997, 422). As a phenomenological description, I think this is mistaken. I think Strawson confuses our experience of moving from one process of thinking or acting to another, which does often proceed in a stop-start manner, with

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<sup>10</sup> Talk of flowing experiences and a stream of consciousness does not commit me to any particular model of objective time. The metaphor of flowing suggests that there is a self-standing dimension through which our experiences flow, and this might be thought to imply something like the B-theory of time (Le Poidevin 2007, 8). While I shall take up the idea of a self-standing dimension in the next section, this dimension is not to be understood as a dimension of objective time itself, but of our experience of that time.

our overall experiential state, which slips seamlessly from one such process to the next. Moving from one thought-process to another can be thought of as turbulence within the stream, rather than the stream ceasing to flow and then re-starting (Tye 2003, 105-108). Indeed, when people do blank out, or slip into a brief state of unconsciousness, this is often a jarring occurrence, and phenomenologically very different to our experience of jumping from one thought-process to another.

There are a number of points this description of the stream of consciousness leaves unclear, of which I shall mention two. First, it should be noted that experiences need not simply succeed each other: they can overlap or occur simultaneously.<sup>11</sup> But as my experiences, each of them has a place in my overall stream. Second, while there are no gaps in my experience as long as I am conscious, there will be times when I will have no experiences whatsoever (that is, when I am completely unconscious). I discussed this point in chapter one, where I suggested that this need not be a problem as long as the unconscious subject retains the capacity to regain consciousness. In total unconsciousness, the subject will not be in a position to exercise any of its mental capacities, but it will still be a subject of experiences as long as it is capable of undergoing experiences again. Should it lose this capability, it would no longer count as a subject; at least, not a living one.

### **III.**

#### **Husserl's Theory of Time-Consciousness**

Given that we can experience temporally extended objects, our awareness of them must be more than a succession of experiences. It must incorporate an

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<sup>11</sup> See chapter one, sections VI, VII.

awareness of preceding parts of the extended object, as having been experienced in the past. Husserl's three-part structure of time-consciousness is a response to this demand. To clarify this account, we must draw two kinds of distinction: between the structure of time-consciousness and the actual stream of experiences which flow through it; and between the three different parts of this structure.

The structure is that formal feature of the subject which explains the flowing character of one's experiences. It can be thought of as the formal shape which all experiences one undergoes must assume, in order for one to undergo them. The stream of experiences is the set of concrete experiential episodes which pass through this structure. While we can distinguish between the structure and the actual stream, I suggest that we cannot separate them. It is essential for any experience that it has its place in the flowing stream, and Husserl's theory provides an account of why it should have the form it does.

I interpret Husserl's account of time-consciousness as involving a number of theoretical posits. In the previous section, I described how, in order to grasp a temporally extended object or event as such, we must have a temporal background. This, I take it, is a piece of description rather than a theory. Husserl's formal structure I see as a theoretical response to descriptions of this kind. More precisely, I regard it as a functional theory, in the sense I introduced in chapter three. The three parts of the structure are each introduced as being that which allows us to have a particular capacity which we have. The relevant capacities are those described in the preceding section: our ability to grasp objects and events as temporally extended, as having temporal backgrounds both in the past and in the future.

The truth of any functional theory is always underdetermined by the capacities it tries to explain. It is possible, therefore, that other theories could be

formulated to explain the temporality of consciousness. However, Husserl's theory can accommodate the relatively detailed phenomenological description of temporality which I offered in the preceding section. This gives it a high degree of plausibility. Furthermore, when seen in light of Husserl's overall phenomenological work, it counts as the most detailed and systematic theory available. These factors provide strong *prima facie* evidence in its favour.

Husserl's theory includes three different parts of one's time-consciousness: the retentive part, the protentive part, and the punctual lived present. Let us consider each of these in turn.

Retention is the awareness we have of past experiences as past, as having just been lived through, as constituting our temporal background. When we hear a piece of music, "the unity of retentive consciousness still 'holds' the expired tones themselves in consciousness and continuously establishes the unity of consciousness with reference to the homogenous temporal object" (Husserl 1964, 60). Retentive consciousness is the awareness, now, of these tones precisely as what, back then, I was actually perceiving (Husserl 1964, 50-1).<sup>12</sup>

The second aspect of the structure is protention, which is roughly the equivalent of retention, except directed towards the future rather than the past. Protention is thus that aspect of time-consciousness which provides expectations of what we will perceive and do. It can be thought of as functioning to hold the future in place, so that our immediate experience can move into it. Of course, the future is never fully held in place: protention only reaches a short distance into it, is often relatively indeterminate, and can be mistaken. But in everyday experience, the future is never a completely blank slate to us. If it were, if we had no expectations at all

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<sup>12</sup> Again, retention can be contrasted with remembering: the latter is a particular species of awareness, whereas the former is a structure of the genus awareness.

regarding what was to come, we would be incapable of performing even the most basic actions, such as reaching out to pick up a cup of coffee, or typing a sentence on a keyboard. To be more precise, we might be able to do these things, but we couldn't be said to do them intentionally – they would be mere behaviour, more akin to reflexes like blinking or nervous tics than actions structured by intentional awareness.

The third aspect of time-consciousness is the lived present, the 'now-point' of the structure of time-consciousness. This is not extended in time at all: it "is necessarily and remains something punctual, *a persisting form for ever new material*" (Husserl 1982, 195).

In introducing this punctual lived present, we must therefore draw a distinction between it and any concrete lived present, which we can understand as the 'now-phase' of any experience we undergo. As we saw in the preceding section, any such now-phase is an awareness of a temporally extended object. As such, it is itself temporally extended as well. Therefore, it essentially involves retentional and protentional aspects, as well as the punctual lived present. Any concrete lived present is not a point but a process, the continual modifying of what is experienced 'at this very moment', the "primal impression" (Husserl 1964, 50) into 'what has just been experienced', that is, what we are aware of in retention (Smith 2003, 90). This concrete present is what William James referred to as the specious present (1901, 609-610). Husserl's model does not permit a concrete experience which we can undergo, but which has no temporal extension. The punctual now-point is no more an experience or an experiential phase than a geometrical point without spatial extension is, or could be said to occupy, a portion of space (see also James 1901, 608).



The three-part structure relates to the actual stream of experiences in the following way: it is an immutable formal structure, through which particular experiences pass. The stream of experiences is the succession of experiences passing through this structure. In this way, we can distinguish the temporal form of consciousness, its temporality, from the experiences which provide the ‘matter’. The temporal form persists: the experiences which are subject to it pass away through it.<sup>13</sup> Of course, there is a sense in which the stream of experiences as a whole does not pass away, at least not as long as the subject is conscious. But it is a stream (as opposed to some other sort of aggregation) insofar as its members, the particular experiences, do pass away, and are succeeded by others.

This leaves open the issue of how far protention and retention extend. Granted that we are aware of some past experiences as having just been lived through, for how long into the past from the now-point do we have this awareness? We can confidently say that we retain an awareness of what we experienced, say, two seconds ago:<sup>14</sup> but do we similarly retain an awareness of what we experienced a minute ago? Or an hour ago? Similarly, how far into the future does protention extend? Husserl does not, as far as I know, address these issues directly, and I am not sure if his theory contains the resources to place definite limits on the extension of protention and retention. But he does observe that the “originary temporal field [i.e., the temporally extended concrete present] is obviously circumscribed exactly like a perceptual [i.e., spatial] one” (1964, 52). Since the extent of how much of the space around us we can perceive at any one moment is limited, not by the phenomenological structure of perceptual experience, but by our physical makeup and situation in the environment, so it may well be that the limitations on the extent

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<sup>13</sup> This distinction is what Zahavi is getting at when he contrasts transitory experiences with the “abiding dimension of experiencing” (2005, 16).

<sup>14</sup> Of course, in retention we are not usually aware of it *as* having transpired two seconds ago.

of retention and protention are provided by our physical constitution. This would not be a problem for phenomenology, but would merely indicate a limit to the scope of what it can explain.

#### IV.

#### **Challenges to Husserl's Theory**

Husserl's theory is well-known, but it has not received a great deal of discussion in the recent literature, perhaps partly because the issue of the temporality of consciousness has not itself been widely discussed recently. One recent treatment of this theory which I shall consider is offered by Barry Dainton, in his *Stream of Consciousness* (2000). Here, in the course of developing his own account of the temporality of consciousness, he offers a number of criticisms of Husserl's theory. I shall not discuss his own positive theory, but I shall address his criticisms, which can be outlined and discussed independently of the specifics of Dainton's own model.<sup>15</sup>

Dainton raises four specific points. The first three concern tensions between what Husserl's theory says and what we know our own experience of time to be like. The last is the suggestion that Husserl's theory does not explain what it sets out to account for.

First, since the primal impression is punctual, "whatever direct awareness we have of phenomenal duration and continuity is located in the retentive matrix" (Dainton 2000, 155). But Dainton sees this as entailing that our awareness of change

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<sup>15</sup> On a more general note, I have not had time to properly read Dainton's *The Phenomenal Self*, which addresses the basic theme of this thesis – what it is to be a subject of experiences – but from a neo-Lockean perspective (2008, xii). It may well be a fruitful future project to compare this approach to my own in a more detailed and systematic way than I can manage here.

is not as direct as our awareness of colour, and this he describes as “phenomenologically suspect” (2000, 155).

Second, there is the problem of what Dainton calls “lingering contents”. Husserl describes experiential phases as dying or fading away as they sink from the now-point into retentional awareness (1964, 52-53). This aspect of his theory, Dainton suggests, would lead us to expect that we experience what we perceive as fading into the past, as the perceptual phase slips into retention, before fading out completely. But this is contrary to experience. When I look around the room, as soon as something leaves my visual field, it drops out of sight at once. Experiential contents “depart from immediate experience cleanly, leaving no residue” (Dainton 2000, 157).

Third, Dainton presents what he terms the “clogging problem”. On Husserl’s model, each perceptual phase slips through the now-point into retentional awareness. But each phase, even as it slips into retention, includes its own retentional phases, as that which I was aware of when I was having this perceptual phase (1964, 51). This would suggest that any individual perceptual phase will include an awareness, not just of what is being perceived at that moment, but a series of retentional awarenesses, each of which in turn contains their own retentional phases. The perceptual experience becomes even more cluttered if we also factor in protention. Dainton argues that this theory contradicts our experience: “It is manifestly obvious that in the perception of a single tone, our consciousness is remarkably *clear*: all we are aware of is the tone itself as an enduring item” (2000, 158). Such a clear experience surely has no room for the various retentional and protentional phases that Husserl’s theory proscribes.

Lastly, Dainton questions the explanatory adequacy of Husserl's theory. He acknowledges that Husserl has a keen grasp of the problems that time-consciousness raises, but denies that positing retentional awareness does anything to deal with them. In particular, he argues that while Husserl distinguishes retention from other forms of awareness, he does not explain what it is, nor how it can accomplish the function Husserl sees it as fulfilling (that of presenting past objects or events as past). Husserl's explanation is thus more verbal than real (Dainton 2000, 155-156).

I shall begin by responding to the last problem, and then consider the other three. The suggestion that Husserl's theory of retentional awareness lacks sufficient detail has a certain plausibility when applied to the lectures of time-consciousness from 1904-1910,<sup>16</sup> which have been my primary reference so far in outlining his theory. In this work, while Husserl clearly distinguishes retention from other kinds of awareness, he says less about precisely what retention is. However, if we read this material on time-consciousness in light of Husserl's discussions of intentional awareness in general, we can understand retention as a particular species of synthesis. This, I suggest, can make clearer how it can discharge the task Husserl sets for it.

In chapter three I outlined a model of the relations between noeses and noemata, based on the connected operations of synthesis and constitution. The suggestion was that all conscious intentional awareness is characterised by a particular unity between conscious experiences or experiential phases, a synthesis which allows these experiences to constitute a unified noematic sense of the object or objects they are concerned with. This unity of conscious states allows the subject to grasp particular objects as identical, even though they may appear in different

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<sup>16</sup> Husserl 1964.

ways (for example, from different perspectives), or undergo changes (Husserl 1960, 39-40).

Next, let us consider spatial perception. In perceiving physical objects, I am always implicated as present in the same situation in which the perceptual objects are given. When I see a physical object, I cannot help but see as near to me or far away, as here or over there, as above me or below, as to my left or my right.<sup>17</sup> This presentation of spatial objects as relative to me has its analogue in temporal awareness. Just as I perceive spatial objects as nearer or further away, so too in perceiving temporal objects I perceive them as now, past or about to happen, depending on where they stand in relation to the now-point. In listening to a piece of music, I am conscious of the tone playing at any one moment, but also conscious of what has just gone before, and of what I expect to come. All this, just as in the example of spatial awareness, is grasped in a synthesis.<sup>18</sup>

Once we realise that what is involved in temporal awareness operates along similar principles to what occurs in spatial awareness, the former becomes less mysterious. Just as in spatial awareness we can grasp an object as one and the same while we walk away from it, so too in temporal awareness I can be aware of things or events as the same even though they recede from being ‘perceived now’ into being ‘that which I perceived a moment ago’. This is a matter of two syntheses, which lock together: a synthesis of the “extra-temporal determinations” of the object, and a synthesis of its temporal position, “being-now, having-been, and so on”

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<sup>17</sup> I shall explore this point in more detail in chapter six. I am ignoring here all mediated visual perception of objects, for example when I see something on television. This form of perception is more complicated, though many of the same basic structures regarding spatial awareness apply here also.

<sup>18</sup> Although Husserl does not use the term ‘synthesis’ in the lectures on time-consciousness, this is quite clearly what he is getting at when he speaks of the temporal object as being presented by way of “a continuity of apprehension [...] which is governed by the identity of sense” (1964, 89).

(Husserl 1964, 87).<sup>19</sup> These syntheses lock together in that they present the object as one and the same, but they do not collapse into each other. In particular, changes in the second kind of synthesis do not entail changes in the first, and it is for this reason that I can be aware of the very same object as being what I was perceiving a moment ago (Husserl 1964, 87, 89). This digression suggests that Husserl's theory of retention can be buttressed by reference to his general theory of synthesis. Of course, it is still open to the critic to take issue with the explanatory power of this general theory, but I am content to let matters rest on what I said in chapter three.

Let me turn to Dainton's other three problems. First, our awareness of change is, on Husserl's account, temporally extended. But I don't see this as being a problem, since in Husserl's theory each experience of awareness is temporally extended to some degree. The punctual now-point is an ideal form of temporality, and every experiential episode which passes through it must have retentional and protentional aspects as well. Therefore, even our grasp of colour is temporally extended. It may take very little time, but then again the same thing can be said for our grasp of at least some changes. But we grasp neither change nor colour immediately, if by that we mean without any time elapsing at all.

Second, there is the problem of lingering contents. First, note that Husserl himself clearly didn't think that his theory required him to think of retentions as lingering in my present awareness: "the retentional 'content' is, in the primordial sense [i.e., what is perceived now], no content at all"; "The retentional sound is not actually present but 'primarily remembered' precisely in the now" (Husserl 1964, 53). So it seems that Husserl would agree with Dainton that, after I have snapped my

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<sup>19</sup> The 'extra-temporal determinations' of the object include its position in objective time (Husserl 1964, 90).

fingers, “The snap-sound does not linger on in my immediate awareness” (2000, 156).

We can see why Husserl is able to interpret his theory in this way when we factor in the points I made in responding to Dainton’s theoretical criticism. The content of retentional awareness does not, on this account, linger in awareness; what we were just aware of does not ‘fade out of view’, as it were. Rather, the retentions hold what I am aware of at present in place against a background of what I have just perceived. Dainton introduces the example of my hand moving over the page I am reading as a counterexample to Husserl: the words, he writes, “vanish without trace beneath my hand” (2000, 156). On Husserl’s theory, shouldn’t they be lingering on in some ghostly quasi-visible way? Well, no – as I observed in section III, in this scenario, I will be aware of my hand as covering the page I was reading just a moment ago. That awareness is the work the retentions are performing. When we understand retention as simply the form of synthesis which allows for this temporal background, it seems to me that the problem of lingering contents is defanged.

A similar point applies to Dainton’s third problem, that of clogging. I fully accept that our awareness of a particular tone is clear. It is not as though it is competing for experiential space with everything else we might be aware of (at least, it doesn’t have to compete in this way). But this clear awareness is not *simple*: it is structured, and always occurs in the context of an overall awareness of my situation, and of the world in general. This context does not render my awareness of any specific object, such as a tone, unclear. On the contrary, it provides the necessary background against which I can be aware of precisely this tone. I can hear a particular tone as the first note Bill Evans plays on ‘Night and Day’ only if I can hear

it against Philly Joe Jones's intro. Without the appropriate temporal background, this would be impossible.

I conclude that Dainton's criticisms can be answered by a sufficiently detailed account of Husserl's theory. This does not, of course show that Husserl's theory is correct, or that Dainton's is not, but it does suggest that the former is more robust than it might seem, and should be taken seriously.

## V.

### **Living Through Experiences**

So far, I have described the temporality of experiences, and outlined and defended Husserl's theory of this temporality. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall consider the philosophical significance of this theory for the question of subjectivity, the ontological relation between a subject and its experiences. In this section, I shall outline a theory of what it is for a subject to undergo an experience, with reference to the theory of temporality just outlined. In the last section, I shall argue that if we accept this account, then we will have provided an account of subjectivity.

At various points thus far, I have spoken of the subject undergoing experiences. We have an intuitive idea of what this relation is, but in order to place philosophical weight on it, we need to clarify its nature. We can do this by appealing to the structure of temporality outlined and defended in the preceding two sections.

First, for a subject to actually undergo or have an experience is for that experience to pass through the punctual present, the ideal now-point. An experience which does not actually pass through this point is not one I can be said to have



undergone. Let us say I am in my kitchen and I notice a cup tipping over the edge of the worktop. I may anticipate it falling to the floor and smashing to pieces with a loud crack. But my housemate has noticed what was happening, and they grab the cup before it falls. In this case, while I did undergo the experience of anticipating the cup smashing, I did not actually undergo the experience of perceiving this event.

Second, any experience a subject undergoes will flow through the entire temporal structure of consciousness, from the past through the present into the future. The subject undergoes its experiences when they are 'lived through', when they pass from being merely protended, through the punctual now and into a retentional awareness (Smith 2003, 96). No experience comes out of nowhere, in the sense of bearing no relation whatsoever to those which precede it: every experience I actually undergo is offered as one of the possibilities I am aware of in protention. Experiences can of course be more or less unexpected, but even the most unexpected occurrences will always cohere to some minimal degree with their temporal background. Nor do any of my experiences vanish completely from my awareness when they slip past the now-point. They are to some degree held in retention, even if I focus my attention on something very different.

A third point to note is that this temporal structure, being formal, remains after any particular experience has passed through it. While each individual experience is transitory, the form of temporality abides (Zahavi 2005, 66). Putting these three points together, we arrive at the following overall description: a subject has an experience when it lives through it, that is, when the experience passes through each part of the three-part temporal structure, a structure which remains after any individual experience has passed through it, to be succeeded by another, and so

on. The stream of consciousness is simply the entirety of the experiences which pass through this formal structure.

Note that the subject lives through its experiences in the opposite direction to the flow of the stream of experiences: the subject lives ‘forward’, so to speak, from the past into the future, whereas the experiences themselves flow in the opposite direction, from the future into the past. This shouldn’t be seen as a problem, since these descriptions are different ways of talking about one and the same process. For a subject to undergo a sequence of experiences, to live through them, just is for the experiences to move through the subject’s present into their past.

## **VI.**

### **A Theory of Subjectivity**

#### **(a)**

My suggestion is that subjectivity just is the continuous process of living through experiences. I am not advancing this account as an analysis of the term ‘subjectivity’ in its present usage, but as an ontological theory which seeks to explain what it is for a subject to have experiences. My claim is that living through an experience is the particular way in which an experience can be said to belong to the subject (Husserl 1982, 133).

This theory involves the following steps:

- (i) for an experience to stand in the relation of subjectivity with a subject just is for that subject to undergo the experience;
- (ii) for a subject to undergo an experience is for it to live through that experience, in the manner outlined in the previous section;

- (iii) therefore, the subjectivity of a subject's experiences is the way it lives through them.

If I can establish (i) and (ii), then (iii) will follow as a matter of course. Let us first consider (i). We are concerned to identify the particular relation holding between a subject and their experiences. Of course, subjects can be related to their experiences in a number of different ways. For example, experiences ontologically depend on their subject, just as any state of a substance depends on the substance of which it is a state. And, as noted in section I, it seems plausible that a special epistemic relation holds between subjects and their experiences.

However, we are looking for an ontological relation holding between the subject *qua* subject, and its experiences *qua* experiences. I suggest that the obvious way is to appeal to the subject's having or undergoing its experiences. To see this, contrast the way a subject has its experiences with the way it has its other properties (such as its height, or its non-experiential capacities), or the way it can be in non-experiential states (such as having certain unconscious beliefs). Both the experiences and the non-experiential abilities and properties are existentially dependent on the subject. If I was to cease to exist, my ability to, say, hum 'Stardust' would also disappear. But there is an asymmetry here between the experiences and the other properties or states: for a subject to have its experiences (i.e., for the experiences to belong to the subject) just is for the subject to undergo them. It seems extremely counterintuitive to think of an experience as belonging to me, as being my experience, even though I have not undergone it. In what sense could an experience which I have not undergone be considered a state I am or have been in?

These considerations strongly suggest that subjectivity simply is the undergoing of experiences, i.e. claim (i). My next claim is (ii): what it is for a subject

to undergo an experience is for it to live through that experience, in the manner outlined in the previous section. Each subject has a capacity to undergo experiences, which I suggest can be explained by its having a tripartite temporal structure. So if I can outline a model of what it is for a subject to have this temporal structure, we can use that to explain the subjectivity of its experiences.

This strategy requires that I can explain the relation between the temporal structure and the subject. Put another way: what is it which makes a particular temporal structure *mine*? My answer is simply that it is a feature of me, of the subject I am. I have assumed throughout this thesis that what it is to be a subject includes having the capacity to undergo experiences. The temporal structure is that feature of the subject in virtue of which it has this capacity. To make this clear, I must bring the relation between the subject and its temporal structure under a general ontological characterisation. We can then explain the relation between the subject and its experiences by appealing to the relation between the subject and its temporal structure.

The general ontological characterisation I have in mind was outlined briefly in chapter one. It is as follows: a subject has the property of experiencing, just as an object might have the property of being coloured.<sup>20</sup> A property is not a part or constituent of a substance, but a mode of being, a particular way in which the substance exists (Lowe 2006, 14). The property of experiencing is a mode of being of a subject. It belongs to the subject in the same way that any property belongs to any substance. This property of experiencing can be thought of as a persisting field of experiencing, through which experiences pass. This field is not identical with any particular experience or set of experiences, nor is it constituted by any aggregate of

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<sup>20</sup> Therefore, experiencing is monadic, or non-relational. However, it does not follow that experiences are themselves non-relational.

them. However, it cannot exist in the absence of, or in separation from, all experiences (Zahavi 2005, 132). It is a determinable, of which the particular experiences which pass through it are determinates.

The temporal structure is the form of this field of experiencing. What makes my temporal structure mine is that it structures one of my modes of being, namely my experiencing. It is because experiences pass through my temporal structure that they can be said to be mine. The experiential properties instantiated when I undergo various experiences are properties of me, ways of being; specifically, they are ways of being an experiencer. I can be in these experiential states in virtue of having a field of experiencing, which these states are determinate states of. Again, we can draw an analogy with colour. An object's colour is a property of that object, its way of being, specifically, its way of being coloured (Lowe 2006, 14). An object can in principle be coloured in different ways. It will have a particular colour in virtue of being a coloured object: the particular colour is a determinate state of the determinable, coloured object.

Zahavi terms this field of experiencing the "minimal self" (2005, 106). I used this term in the first chapter, but in a slightly different way; to denote the subject to which the field of experiencing belongs, rather than as itself being this field. In other words, I take the field as a mode of being of the minimal subject, rather than as an entity in its own right. Zahavi mentions that on his conception of the minimal subject we can just as well speak of the 'subjectivity of experience' as the 'subject of experience'. He understands the latter phrase as suggesting that "the self is something that exists apart from, or above, the experience, and for that reason, is something that might be encountered in separation from the experience" (2005, 126), this suggestion being one which Zahavi rejects. I agree with the thrust of this point,

but I would add two comments to it. First, the field of experiencing can exist in separation from any *particular* experience. What cannot happen is that it could exist separately from any experience whatsoever. Second, as discussed in chapter one, I want to say that the subject can survive losing consciousness; that the very same subject can drift into a dreamless sleep or a coma and later awake from it. But the field of experiencing cannot survive this change, since it cannot exist apart from any experience whatsoever. Therefore, I think it is better to characterise the field as a mode of being of the subject, one which is sometimes inoperative even though the subject itself continues to exist.

Anything counts as a subject if it is capable of undergoing experiences. On this minimal characterisation, a being can be a subject regardless of whether or not it is rational, has any capacity for action or perception, or can have thoughts about itself. Of course, we will need to subsequently distinguish various other kinds of subject, with reference to these criteria (see Zahavi 2005, 129). The advantage of the notion of the minimal subject is that it captures one intuition we have, namely that if a being can undergo experiences (say of pleasure or pain) then in an important sense it is different to all those beings which cannot. It doesn't seem a terribly controversial description to say that, unlike those beings which cannot undergo experiences, it is a subject of experiences.

It may be objected that these definitions are circular, in that I am defining subjectivity by reference to what a subject can do, and defining one kind of subject (the minimal subject) by reference to its ability to have subjective states. I accept that I have defined subjects as being at least capable of having experiences, whatever else is true of them. And I have defined subjectivity as the ontological relation between subjects and their experiences. But in this chapter, I have gone on to offer a

particular model of what subjectivity is: a state is subjective if it can flow through the temporal structure in the manner just outlined. And this model does not include the concept of a subject. The model itself makes no assumptions about what kind of being is capable of instantiating it. So we can characterise subjectivity independently of any reference to being a subject, and then use this model of subjectivity to characterise the minimal subject.

**(b)**

Having stated this theory of subjectivity, let me lastly consider how it fares with the four features outlined in section I. These were, respectively, that subjectivity is a necessary feature of experiences; that each experience stands in the relation of subjectivity to one subject only; that it is like something for a subject to have its experiences; and that subjectivity is essentially passive. My suggestion is that we can explain the presence of each of these features by appealing to a subject's living through its experiences.

First, each experience must belong to a stream of consciousness, and a stream of consciousness is simply the form of the temporality of experiencing, the way experiences flow through time. But for experiences to flow through time is, if my account is correct, for them to pass through the three-part temporal structure, which is what happens when a subject lives through its experience. So on my account of subjectivity, we would expect it to be a necessary feature of every experience.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This claim is denied by Sartre. He argues that when I undergo an experience, it is given to me anonymously. That is, the subject is not given in each of its experiences as the "proprietor" of that experience (2004, 45). I think this is true at least some of time. But from this thesis of anonymity, one cannot infer the claim of non-ownership, that this experience belongs to no subject (specifically, no transcendental subject). The subject is not necessarily given to itself or implicated in its own experiences, but it is necessarily present, since the experiences are nothing but states of the subject. When I think 'Lima is the capital of Peru', I am not *ipso facto* presented to myself as the subject thinking this, but nevertheless it is me who is thinking this, and therefore this episode of thinking must belong to a subject.

Second, a particular experiential episode is, on my account, a particular mode of being or trope of a particular subject, a way in which that subject is an experiencer. It makes no more sense to say that such a particular mode could be shared by more than one experiencer, than it does to say that any other particular mode of being of any substance could be shared, or could migrate from one substance to the next. If we accept this as a general rule for all particular properties (that it is metaphysically impossible for them to be shared or to migrate), and if we accept my account of subjectivity, then it follows that each experience can be had by one subject only.

Third, each experience is not just a state the subject is in. As I outlined in chapter one section VII, it is a state the subject is in *qua* experiencer, that is, as an individual one of whose modes of being is a field of experiencing. As we have seen, the three-part temporal structure is the form of this field. Any experience which passes through this structure - that is, which the subject lives through - must *ipso facto* pass across this field. The subjective character of an experience is the state of this field when the subject is living through that experience.<sup>22</sup> But this character is also what the experience is like for the subject who has it. So the reason this character must be for the subject is that the field whose state is determined by this character is a mode of being of that very subject. Therefore, this model of subjectivity can explain why there must be something it is like for the subject to have an experience.

Lastly, on my account part of what it is to be a subject is to have a tripartite temporal structure, through which experiences can flow if conditions are correct. The

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<sup>22</sup> Strictly speaking, the state of the field is the subjective character of all the experiences the subject is living through at that moment. The subjective character of each experience can be thought of as its contribution to the overall state of the field when the subject is living through that experience.



subject has no choice in this matter.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, it is clear that once the structure is in place and the conditions are correct (i.e., the subject is not in a dreamless sleep or unconscious), then the capacity to have experiences will be exercised. Therefore, the exercise of the capacity does not require that the subject make a decision to do so. This is precisely the passivity of experiences I outlined in section I.

The model of subjectivity defended in this chapter provides an account of how exactly the subject is present in each of its experiences so that the character of each experience is for it. This model is therefore a phenomenologically-informed response to the problem of the subjective character of experiences, which I introduced in chapter one. In the next chapter, I shall provide a phenomenologically-informed response to the problem raised in chapter two, concerning the conditions for the possibility of the subject's awareness of objects and of the world.

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<sup>23</sup> Indeed, if we assume that one of the conditions for a being's having the ability to exercise choice is that it is a subject, it would follow that the subject *could not* have a choice in this matter. But this point is stronger than I need to argue for.

## Chapter 6

### The Natural Attitude and Objectivity

In the previous chapter, I offered a model of the ontological relation between the subject *qua* experiencer and its experiences *qua* states or episodes with a particular subjective character. In this chapter, I want to consider the relation between the subjective character of our experiences and our awareness of objects and of the world. One of the most important features of our awareness is objectivity, the contrast between the way things appear to be and the way they actually are (McDowell 1998b, 175). We are familiar with the idea that things might be different from the way they appear to us. In this chapter, I want to consider how we can make sense of objects appearing to us as objective, as being possibly different to how they seem to be.

In section I, I shall introduce the problem of objectivity. I shall distinguish it from a closely related issue, the question of what justifies us in thinking that our subjective states can be about or directed towards anything at all.

In section II, I shall introduce the notion of having a perspective. I shall distinguish between what I shall term internal and external perspectives. This distinction allows us to understand how one can ‘step back’ from an initial point of view or conception of something, to consider why it appears as it does from that initial point of view or in that initial conception.

In section III, I shall introduce the notion of an absolutely external perspective, a perspective which is dependent on no local point of view or conception of the world. I shall use this to define externalism, the view that we can explain the objective purport of our subjective states only by appealing to a special

mode of access we have to reality, namely the absolutely external perspective. In opposition to this, my own position is a version of internalism, the claim that we can make sense of objectivity simply by reflecting on the natural attitude. We can do this without resorting to any special mode of access to reality as it is in itself, but rather by taking up the transcendental attitude, which can be thought of as a special mode of access not to reality but to the natural attitude itself.

In the following two sections, I shall outline aspects of the natural attitude which are key to my argument. In section IV, I shall outline the sense I have of the world as extending beyond what I can be aware of at any particular moment. In section V, I shall outline the sense I have of the unity of this world.

Lastly, in section VI, I shall argue that the sense we have of the world when in the natural attitude amounts to a sense of objectivity. Therefore, we do not need to take up externalism in order to explain this sense of objectivity.

## **I.**

### **The Problem of Objectivity**

#### **(a)**

In chapter two, section IV, I introduced the distinction between the way something appears to be, and the way it really is. To make this distinction is to have a concept of objectivity. Objectivity is central, not just to philosophy, but to science and indeed to everyday life. In what follows, I shall assume that our subjective states can be directed at objective items, items which may be different to how they appear to be. Subjective states which are directed in this way can be said to have objective purport.

The notion of objectivity I shall assume in this chapter is rather minimal. For one thing, it does not commit me to realism, the view that neither the way things are nor their existence depends on how they appear to be.<sup>1</sup> It may be that realism requires objectivity, but the reverse entailment may not hold. In what follows, we will see that our experience of the world does indeed seem to bring a commitment to some form of realism. But this issue cannot be decided simply by assuming that our subjective states have objective purport.

Second, this notion of objectivity commits me only to the view that appearances and reality are distinct. It does not follow from this distinction that they can never match up, or that in practice there must always be some difference between them. The distinction merely allows for the possibility of such a difference. That is, it does not commit me to the claim that appearances are misleading, only that they might be.

Third, this notion of objectivity does not commit me to any particular way in which we can come to know how things really are, as opposed to how they appear to be. As we shall see in section III below, one could instead opt for an approach which tries to explain objectivity by appealing to a special, usually scientific mode of access to the world. The distinction between this approach and my own will be important for the argument in this chapter. But for the moment, all I wish to note is that I am not committed to any particular mode of access to the way things really are, in contrast to how things appear to be.

A point following from this is that the notion of objectivity I am assuming is quite thin. Indeed, it is a formal distinction; it simply involves distinguishing the

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<sup>1</sup> There is the danger of a semantic confusion here. The notion of objectivity I am assuming contrasts how an object appears with how it actually is, or how it is 'in reality'. This use of the term 'reality' is simply meant as a contrast with appearances, and should be distinguished from any claim of realism, the idea that certain objects exist independently of how they appear to be. In assuming that the world is objective, I am not ipso facto assuming that it is ontologically independent of us.

appearances of something from that which appears. I am not yet offering any determinate notion of that which appears. This will become important later on, when the challenge for me will be to move from this thin conception of objectivity to a more determinate distinction between that which appears and its appearances.

Objectivity can be made a philosophical issue in a number of different ways, but in this chapter I want to focus on just one. This is the issue of how it is that our experiences can be said to be of an objective world. That is, how is it that we can make sense of the world we are aware of as being distinct from how it appears to us? Correlatively, it is the issue of how we can understand our experiences as having objective purport.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I shall refer to this as the problem of objectivity.

**(b)**

Before addressing this problem, we must distinguish it from another issue with which it is easily confused. This is a *quaestio juris*, the problem of establishing that our mental states really do have the objective purport which they seem to possess. The *quaestio juris* is introduced by Kant in opposition to discussions of *quaestionem facti*, matters of fact. He uses this distinction to demarcate the justification of pure *a priori* concepts from explanations of how we come to possess them (1998, A84-87/B116-119). Specifically, Kant asks “how subjective conditions of thinking should have objective validity, i.e., yield conditions of the possibility of all cognition of objects” (A89-90/B122).

The *quaestio juris* can take at least two forms: it can be presented as an epistemological challenge, or more generally as a challenge to objective purport. One way of presenting the epistemological version would be to begin with our

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<sup>2</sup> These are two different ways of putting the one problem. We cannot understand the notion of objective purport without already having the notion of the objects as being distinct from how they appear to be. Conversely, we cannot understand the way things really are as one side of the distinction which constitutes objectivity, unless we grant that those things can actually appear to us.

experiences as subjective episodes, and from there attempt to “work out into a justified confidence that there is an objective world” (McDowell 1996, 110; see also Husserl 1960, 82-3). The sceptical challenge is that this cannot be done, since I can never know that the experience I am enjoying is a genuine awareness of the world and not either illusory or hallucinatory (McDowell 1996, 112). The version which challenges objective purport can be put in a similar way. Given a mere succession of subjective episodes, how can we be justified thinking, not just that they might be states of knowledge, but that they relate to anything beyond themselves at all?<sup>3</sup>

McDowell himself does not try to answer challenges of this sort, but rather tries to show “how it might be intellectually respectable to ignore them” (1996, 113). In this chapter, I shall adopt the same attitude. I am not going to try to justify the claim that our subjective states have objective purport, or that they can constitute knowledge of their objects. I shall not go so far as McDowell does when he claims that these issues can be dissolved. But I shall provide two reasons for thinking that these issues are not pressing, and for justifying my decision to set them aside in what follows.

Let us consider how the traditional theory of knowledge sets up the *quaestio juris*. I am invited to juxtapose my own subjective states with everything beyond them, and ask how I can claim to know anything beyond the former. This, Husserl notes (1960, 83), is the familiar Cartesian problem, the one Descartes brings himself to at the end of the second *Meditation* (1968, 112-114). Indeed, it will appear for any philosophical view which conceives of our subjective experiences, not as in direct

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<sup>3</sup> McDowell usually addresses the epistemic version, but sometimes acknowledges this more thorough-going scepticism which questions the very intentionality of our experiences. For instance, he writes of “an inchoately felt threat that a way of thinking we find ourselves falling into leaves minds simply out of touch with the rest of reality, not just questionably capable of getting to know about it” (1996, xiii; see also 1998a, 445). Putnam’s discussion of the brain in a vat scenario also addresses this issue (1981, 6-17).

contact with objects in the world, but as “emissaries that either tell the truth or lie” (McDowell 1996, 143). If we adopt this conception of experiences, then of course we face the problem of how to swear these emissaries to truthfulness (Davidson 1986, 312). After all, it seems impossible to hold them up against the real world to compare them with how things actually are. This is precisely the traditional epistemological predicament which McDowell and I both want to set aside.

In response to this epistemological predicament, I shall make two brief moves. These are not intended to dissolve the problem, but to show that it is not one which I *need* to provide a detailed answer to. The first response is that the initial description on which the predicament relies is misleading. In chapter three, I outlined a phenomenological account of our experiences as structured by their noemata, which present their subject with an object or objects. When this structure is taken into account, we must reformulate the *quaestio juris* as how I, starting from experiences which present me with particular objects in the world, can claim to acquire knowledge about those objects. This reformulation does not dissolve the epistemological problem, but it reveals it to be less daunting than it had previously appeared. Our experiences can put us in touch with the objects in the world; the question now is how we can assure ourselves that we have that particular form of contact with these objects which constitutes knowledge. A certain amount of phenomenological work has already been done on how one experience can provide support for another, or cancel it out (see Husserl 1960, 57-64). Therefore, we have *prima facie* reason to think that this version of the *quaestio juris* can be met.

Second, if the sceptic’s challenge is that we have no way of knowing whether or not our subjective states have any objective purport at all, then the challenge involves an incoherent description. In order to pose the question of whether or not

our subjective states can put us in touch with anything beyond them, we must already have some conception of a world beyond these states, with which my states may or may not match up. As Husserl puts it, “the validity of world-apperception has already been presupposed, has already entered into the sense assumed in asking the question – whereas the answer alone ought to show the rightness of accepting anything as Objectively valid” (1960, 83). The very conditions for posing the question ensure that at least some of our subjective states already have genuine objective purport. Therefore, if the sceptical challenge takes this extreme form, it can be safely ignored. If it takes the weaker, epistemological form, then my first response has given us reason to think the challenge is not insurmountable.<sup>4</sup>

(c)

Thus I think we are entitled to focus on the problem of objectivity without worrying about these sceptical challenges. Even when we have put the latter issue to one side – specifically, when we have accepted *that* our subjective states can have objective purport – we can still ask *how* they have this. What is it about our subjective states in virtue of which they have this feature?

This is a question of which McDowell does not approve. *Mind and World* addresses the issue of how our minds are directed towards the empirical world (1996 xiii, xx-xxi). However, McDowell does not accept that there is a real philosophical issue here. He wishes to dissolve the problem, by showing that the terms in which it is drawn up are misleading and unnecessary (1996, xxi, 94-95).

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, the sceptic may want to refine their challenge. They may question the phenomenological description of subjective experiences as structured by noemata, or they may insist that we must start from a conception of experiences as mere events in the physical or material world. In response to these suggestions, I would refer back to the phenomenological descriptions undertaken in chapters three and four. I believe these descriptions put the onus on the sceptic to show why we cannot or should not use such descriptions as the starting point in evaluating the truth or the objective purport of our intentional states.



I think this anti-constructive approach to this issue is ultimately unsatisfying. As I mentioned in chapter two, I agree with many of what I termed McDowell's negative how-possible accounts. These are the arguments he makes against various conceptions of intentionality, on the ground that they make the very possibility of objective purport mysterious. Among the accounts he rejects are those which see our experiences as emissaries or intermediaries between subjects and the world. McDowell is rightly suspicious of such a conception, on the grounds that it too easily manufactures a synthetic philosophical mystery, the traditional *quaestio juris* I have just addressed.

However, while negative how-possible accounts ought to be an important part of our response to the issue of intentionality, I see no reason to think that they exhaust the permitted philosophical moves. It seems entirely appropriate to propose a constructive account of how it is that our subjective states have their objective purport. Such an account would not compete with McDowell's own, but would rather complement it, by filling in the details of how exactly it is that we are open to the world, to use McDowell's phrase (1996, 29, 111-112).<sup>5</sup> He suggests that perceptual impressions, languages, cultures and conceptual schemes can figure as constitutive of this openness (1996, 155).<sup>6</sup> But there seems to be no good reason to stop there. One can ask how these episodes and structures play the role McDowell sees for them, without lapsing into either scepticism about whether they can do so (which would be to return to the *quaestio juris*) or into a naturalistic constructive philosophy which McDowell is also keen to reject (1996, 94-95).

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<sup>5</sup> This way of putting the relation between transcendental phenomenology and McDowell's work is stated by Crowell (2001, 16-19).

<sup>6</sup> He even leaves open the possibility that a constituting transcendental consciousness might also play a similar role (1996, fn. 31). This, of course, is exactly the suggestion I wish to exploit.

**II.****Internal and External Perspectives**

To get a clearer idea of the options available to us in addressing the problem of objectivity, I shall outline the relation between objectivity and the notion of having a perspective. This shall allow me to introduce a particular solution to the problem of the sense of objectivity, a solution which I shall term externalism. The body of this chapter will consist of an argument against externalism.

**(a)**

Perspective is most commonly thought of as a feature of visual perception, as when you see a house from a particular angle. In this case, we can distinguish three relevant features: the perspective itself; the object on which you have your perspective (the house); and the point of view from which you have your perspective, your spatial location relative to the house.<sup>7</sup> A visual perspective is always intentional, a perspective on something or other (some entity, set of entities, or situation). It always presents its object in a limited fashion: seeing a house from one angle occludes certain aspects of the house. The precise way it is limited depends on the point of view of the subject, its location relative to the object. It is this relative location which determines the exact angle from which you will see the house, and this angle determines what can be seen and what is occluded.

The notion of a perspective can be used in various metaphorical ways, both in philosophy and more generally. These uses extend the notion from visual perception to encompass a variety of intentional states: other modes of perception, judgements,

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<sup>7</sup> I am distinguishing here between a point of view and the perspective which one can have from it. In this, I follow McDowell (1998b, 117 fn. 8). Others, such as Williams (1978, 243), use the terms 'point of view' and 'perspective' interchangeably. I think this is largely a terminological issue; in any case, when I shall extend the notion of perspective I shall replace talk of having a point of view with having a particular frame of reference.

and various modes of engaging with things. This extension requires corresponding extensions, both of the class of things one can be said to have a perspective on, and the point of view from which one can have a perspective. In the most extended use, one can be said to have a perspective on any kind of intentional object. For example, we can speak of having a perspective on a novel, on the characters depicted in the novel, and on the process of writing the novel. In each case, the perspective will be an intentional awareness which presents the subject-matter in a limited fashion. For example, you can have a Freudian, feminist or poststructuralist perspective on the novel. Each of these perspectives will present certain features of the novel as significant while occluding others.

This extension of the notion of a perspective requires us to extend the notion of having a point of view, from spatial location to the many other ways in which a person can be said to be located. A “location in the broadest possible sense”, one which would correspond to the broad notion of perspective just outlined, includes “points in space, points in time, frames of reference, historical and cultural contexts, different roles in personal relationships [...] and the sensory apparatuses of different species” (Moore 1997, 6). In what follows, I shall refer to this extended notion of ‘location’ as the frame of reference of the perspective. Every perspective must be had from within a frame of reference, which determines exactly how its presentation of the object is limited. In the case of visual perception, the frame of reference was your location relative to the house. In the case of scientific judgements, the frame of reference will be the background of theoretical assumptions and well-established data against which the subject-matter is to be judged. Similarly, Moore offers the example of a judgement that a particular individual is beautiful. This judgement may be true or false, but it will count as such only within a particular cultural context, and

in particular by the standards of beauty which hold in that cultural context. The frame of reference here is “a position of (cultural) involvement with what is being judged”, that is, the beauty of the individual in question (Moore 1997, 5). From a different position of involvement (that is, against different standards of beauty) the same judgement might be false.

It may seem like I am committing myself here to the view that all truth-claims are relative, but this is not quite the case. To be more precise, we must distinguish two versions of ‘relative to’. Any truth-claim must be relative to some set of standards, in that without any standards at all it is difficult to see how a given statement could count as a truth-claim.<sup>8</sup> Without a standard for a person’s being hungry or an object’s being long, the statements ‘I am hungry’ and ‘the road is long’ could have no truth-value. I take it that no-one will contest that truth is relative in this way. But we can distinguish substantive and trivial versions of this relativity. The substantive version is illustrated by the example of beauty. Different societies will have different standards of beauty, so the truth or falsity of the judgement that so-and-so is beautiful will vary depending on which particular frame of reference you are in (that is, which standards you are applying). In cases of substantive relativity, the standards are particular to a given cultural or social context, so the truths they govern can only be stated or grasped from within that framework.

In contrast, the relativity is trivial if the standards are not particular in this way. In such cases, the truth-claims will require standards, and so must be expressed within some framework or other, but they can be expressed regardless of any particular framework. For example, the truth-claims of mathematics will require standards by which they can be adjudicated, but it does not follow that these

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<sup>8</sup> For example, see Putnam 1990, 96-97. I discussed his interpretation of this point in chapter two, section III.

standards are particular to any culture or society. So while all truth-claims must be relative in that they require some standards, not all of them are relative in the more substantive way of depending on standards which can be applied only within a particular culture or society.

I introduced the notion of an attitude in chapter four. This can be thought of as a particular kind of frame of reference. Each attitude is a way in which the subject can be comported towards the world. It will open up certain possible intentional states, but close off others. For example, consider the difference between the natural and the naturalistic attitudes (Husserl 1989, 190-196). In the naturalistic attitude I can consider objects in the world around me purely as entities composed from physical particles, whose properties and behaviour can be explained by the relevant scientific laws. But in order to consider these objects as minimalist or overwrought, as playful or grumpy or disinterested, I would have to switch to the natural attitude. The range of intentional states each attitude opens can be thought of as a range of perspectives on their objects, perspectives whose limitations are determined by the limits of that attitude.

**(b)**

Having outlined an extended notion of perspective and the correlative notion of a frame of reference, we can next distinguish between what I shall term internal and external perspectives. A perspective is internal relative to the frame of reference which determines how limited its presentation of the object is.

The notion of an external perspective I want to outline is a little more complicated. This is because there are two ways in which a perspective can fail to be internal to a given frame of reference. To illustrate this, consider an example. Say I have a view of a house from point of view A. You have a view of the house from

another point of view, B. Let us assume that my view of the house is such that I cannot see point B, where you are located. Likewise, your view occludes point A (for example, we could be looking at the house from opposite sides). Each of our perspectives is internal to its frame of reference, the location of A and B respectively relative to the house. Furthermore, my view of the house is not internal to your frame of reference, and vice versa. Let us describe this by saying that each perspective is excluded from the frame of reference of the other.

Next, consider what happens if you take up a different point of view, C. Again, your new perspective is not internal to my frame of reference. However, from C, you have a view not only of the house, but also of A, my own point of view. The relation between A and C thus introduces an important aspect which was not present in the contrast between the perspectives we had from A and from B. For one thing, from C you can see, not just aspects of the house which are not visible from A, but also the relation between A and the house. We can readily imagine the benefits this procedure might have. For example, from A it might seem that one wall of the house was painted darker than the others, but from C, you can see that the darkness is a shadow cast by an adjacent building. It would have been impossible to see this from either A or B. A and B are simply alternative points of view on the one house; C is a point of view on both the house and A. So moving to C allows for a particular kind of perceptual and cognitive progress relative to A, which B does not.<sup>9</sup>

Let us say that the perspective you have from C is external to the frame of reference A. For a perspective to be external to a given frame of reference, it must fulfil three conditions:

- (i) it must not be internal to that frame of reference;

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to suggest that all cognitive or perceptual progress occurs in this way. What I have in mind is the kind of progress towards a more objective perspective, which I shall discuss presently.

- (ii) it must be a perspective on a set of objects which includes the objects of the internal perspective;
- (iii) it must be a perspective on a set of objects which includes the frame of reference it is external to.

In this way, we can distinguish between a perspective's being internal to, external to, and excluded by a given frame of reference. A perspective which is merely excluded by a given frame of reference fulfils (i) and (ii), but not (iii). Of course, both excluded and external perspectives will themselves be internal relative to some other frame of reference.

One advantage of the distinction between internal and external perspectives is that it allows us to make sense of the idea that we can have more or less objective perspectives. Clearly, this is a different use of 'objective' to the one I have been hitherto employing. Objectivity in my initial use is the distinction between appearances and that which appears. A state has objective purport if it is directed towards an object which can be distinguished from how it appears to be. Clearly, objective purport cannot admit of degrees – a state either has it or it does not. But we can speak of intentional states as being more or less objective, of involving a more objective view or conception of things. This is not a difference in the nature of the objects the intentional states are directed towards.<sup>10</sup> Rather, we can move from a perspective which is internal to a very limited frame of reference to ones which are internal to progressively less limited frames of reference. This allows us to capture a second, epistemic notion of objectivity. On this account, a view or conception is more objective if it is more broadly encompassing and lets us understand why things

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<sup>10</sup> In certain passages, Nagel has a tendency to speak as though the world itself was more or less objective: "We may think of reality as a set of concentric spheres, progressively revealed as we detach gradually from the contingencies of the self" (1986, 5).

appeared to us as they did from within the initial frame of reference. The discussion of viewing the house from different positions is an example of this.

A more sophisticated example is a common explanation of how we progress from perceiving the world to forming a theory of how the world is which is capable of explaining why we perceive things as we do. We begin with our perceptions of the world, and observe the causal and other physical relations they have with objects in our environment and with our bodies (Nagel 1986, 14). We next try to form a determinate conception of these physical relations and the physical properties underlying them, properties which can exist even in the absence of any perception. This conception is supposed to exclude all the secondary qualities, how things taste, their texture, colours and so on, leaving us with a conception of the world which refers only to the primary qualities (Nagel 1986, 14; see also Williams 1978, 241-242). In theory, we can explain why things appear to us as they do by appealing to the underlying physical properties and relations. For example, I can explain why a stick looks bent in water by reference to the refraction of light. Here, an internal perspective (my seeing the stick in the water) is explained by appealing to an external perspective, which involves scientific knowledge of the relation between my visual perception and the object of my perception.<sup>11</sup>

What I want to focus on in this explanation is not its treatment of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, nor how we can explain perception in scientific terms. Rather, what interests me is its overall shape, the idea of moving from a more internal to a more external perspective. In the next section, I shall outline one particular use of this movement which is of particular interest.

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<sup>11</sup> Another example of the same kind of intellectual progress is the move from a Newtonian conception of the universe to the model of special and general relativity (Nagel 1986, 76-77; Moore 1997, 29).



**III.****The Absolutely External Perspective**

Given that we can move to a progressively more external frame of reference, it is natural to ask what the limits to this progress might be. Consider a situation's being amusing. While a judgement to this effect can be true or false, it also seems plausible that "amusingness cannot belong to a description of things as they are in themselves" (McDowell 1998b, 118). That is, the description of the situation as amusing is true only insofar as the situation appears to subjects who are in a particular, parochial frame of reference, one which has standards governing the predication of 'amusing' to situations.<sup>12</sup> In order to describe the situation as it is in itself, we would have to step out of this particular frame of reference. But how far can we take this kind of movement?

**(a)**

One influential answer has been provided by Bernard Williams. We can aim at a perspective which would allow us to describe the world using only "concepts which are not peculiarly ours, and not peculiarly relative to our experience" (1978, 244). Some of our concepts are parochial in that they can be applied to the world only from within a frame of reference which only humans or subjects like us can occupy. What Williams suggests we ought to aim for is a perspective which is internal to no parochial frame of reference, that is, internal to no frame of reference which only certain types of subjects can occupy. Of course, this perspective would use concepts which we humans would be able to understand, but it would use no

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'parochial' is used by McDowell (1998b, 117). Williams uses the predicate 'local', and at one point refers to internal perspectives as a "local idiosyncrasy" (1978, 212).

concepts which *only* humans could understand.<sup>13</sup> That is, from this perspective, the world would no longer appear ‘to us’, as opposed to anyone else. This perspective would be independent not of thought in general, “but of all that is arbitrary and individual in thought” (Peirce 1958, 82). It would produce a conception or conceptions of the world as it really is, corrected of any parochial features we are tempted to see there.

This perspective would not be internal to any parochial frame of reference. As we have seen, there are two ways in which a perspective can be not internal to a particular frame of reference: it could be merely excluded, or it could be external. Williams wants a perspective which can “relate the various [parochial] points of view comprehensibly to each other and to the material world” (1978, 245). This is clearly a demand for a perspective which is not just excluded by any parochial point of view, but which is external to all of them. I shall term this the absolutely external perspective.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of finding an absolutely external perspective is based on, and indeed is one way of working out, the distinction between reality and appearance (McDowell 1998b, 117). As Williams puts it,

The idea of the world as it really is involves at least a contrast with that of the world *as it seems to us*: where that contrast implies, not that our conception of the world is totally unrelated to reality, but that it has features which are peculiar to us (1978, 241).

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<sup>13</sup> Or, indeed, which only beings of any particular kind would be able to understand. An exception to this might be that any being capable of using these concepts would have to have a certain level of intelligence. But that apart, the idea is that no specific physiological, perceptual, cognitive or cultural difference would be relevant to one’s ability to use these concepts.

<sup>14</sup> This perspective is what Williams terms the “absolute conception of reality” (1978, 65). This is more or less the same as the view from nowhere, “a complete description of the world from no particular point of view” (Nagel 1986, 54), and the God’s Eye View of the universe (Putnam 1990, 5).

The absolutely external perspective would offer a determinate conception of the way the world is, as opposed to how it appears to be. We can readily apply this line of thinking to the notion of objectivity. As I introduced it, objectivity is a thin notion, a nominal distinction between that which appears and how it appears. But if we can arrive at a more determinate conception of that which appears, then we can achieve a more determinate notion of objectivity itself.

**(b)**

When we connect the absolutely external perspective to the problem of objectivity, one solution to the problem quickly becomes clear. This solution, externalism, is what I wish to argue against.

Williams introduces the absolutely external perspective in the context of a discussion of knowledge, and more precisely the conditions for thinking of our mental states as states of knowledge. But the problem he raises is very specific: it concerns the *objectivity* of any purported state of knowledge. It is because he raises this particular problem that we can apply his arguments to states other than states of knowledge.

Following Williams, we can begin by assuming that knowledge (at least, empirical knowledge) concerns “a reality which exists independently of that knowledge, and indeed [...] independently of any thought or experience” (Williams 1978, 64).<sup>15</sup> In order to be able to think of a state as knowledge of this sort of reality, we must be able to form an “adequate conception of the reality which is there ‘anyway’, the object of any representation which is knowledge” (1978, 65). That is,

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<sup>15</sup>In discussing knowledge, I do not intend to commit myself to any particular epistemic theory. But I take it that the kind of knowledge Williams has in mind at least involves true representations, where by ‘representation’ Williams means beliefs about the world and the experiences of the world which the beliefs are based upon (1978, 64).

we must be able to distinguish the mental state we have, the representation which is meant to count as knowledge, from the object which it is representation of.

Note that Williams is taking that which appears, as opposed to how it appears to be, to be ontologically independent of our awareness of it. But it does not follow from this that the problem Williams is raising for knowledge is a problem of realism, as opposed to a problem of objectivity. I say this because the specific problem Williams raises is how we can have an understanding of this reality, independently of how it appears to us. The contrast which makes this a problem isn't between ontological dependence and independence, but between appearances and that which appears.

Crucially, the picture Williams is demanding requires that we have an *adequate* conception of the reality in question. It is only with an adequate conception that we can compare our various representations with how their objects really are. If we characterise that which appears in an empty way, as 'whatever it is that these states of knowledge are about', then we no longer have a picture in which our representations can match or fail to match up against reality. Rather, the concept of reality "slips out of the picture, leaving us only with a variety of possible representations to be measured against each other, with nothing [i.e., with no conception of reality itself] to mediate between them" (Williams 1978, 65). In this case, we would not be comparing representations with a conception of reality, but only with other representations. But we cannot understand our mental states as states of objective knowledge unless we can understand them as related to a determinate conception of an independent reality. This conception of our mental states requires that we can assume an absolutely external perspective. Therefore, the notion of an

absolutely external perspective is “implicit in our idea of knowledge” (Williams 1978, 211).

Although Williams raises this issue specifically in the case of knowledge, it seems it can equally well be raised for all intentional states. For instance, it seems entirely possible to enquire as to the intentional directedness of false empirical beliefs; to ask how it is possible for a false belief to concern a reality which exists “independently of any thought or experience”.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that the notion of an absolutely external perspective is implicit in our very notion of objective purport, to the extent that we can have anything more than an empty understanding of this notion.

Williams argues that physics provides the determinate, non-parochial conception of reality which we need to show how states of knowledge can be objective. I am not interested in the details of Williams’s physicalism, nor whether it can be made to do all the work he demands of it.<sup>17</sup> Rather, I am concerned with the shape of his solution, and in particular with the appeal to an absolutely external perspective. In other contexts, theological claims or a priori metaphysics might be held to provide the kind of external perspective we need. What is of interest to me is the use to which this perspective is put.

Williams argues that we can explain the objectivity of states of knowledge only by appealing to an absolutely external perspective. And I have suggested that one can extend this claim to refer to all intentional states. I shall term this position – that it is only by appealing to the absolutely external perspective that we can account

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<sup>16</sup> This point is also made by Stroud (2000, 23-24).

<sup>17</sup> For an argument that Williams’ physicalism is unlikely to achieve what he wants it to, see McDowell 1998b, 122-126.

for the objectivity of any awareness we have of the world – the externalist view.<sup>18</sup> Externalism is not a position which is widely discussed, apart from work by Williams (and, in a critical spirit, Nagel, Putnam and McDowell). However, I think something like it features as a background assumption to a great deal of work in the philosophy of mind. Any theory which tries to provide a naturalistic account of intentionality, where the natural sciences are thought to provide an account of the way the world really is as opposed to how it appears to us, is working with a model very close to externalism. The attraction of this view lies partly in the idea of finding a vantage point from which the true nature of our awareness of the world can be revealed by scientific work. As such, it fits smoothly with the naturalistic tendencies of much contemporary philosophy.

We can call ‘internalist’ any view which denies the externalist claim. In what follows, I wish to defend a version of internalism. One of the defining features of transcendental idealism is the idea that “there is no ‘external’ vantage point outside or beyond the world as we experience it, from which we can describe or explain things as they are apart from our epistemic relations to them” (Baldner 1996, 334).<sup>19</sup> Baldner is here describing Kant’s position, and he is not using my specific concept of an external perspective, but what he says expresses my position, more or less. I should add that, on the Husserlian model of transcendental idealism, it is possible for us to take up attitudes to the world other than the natural attitude. For example, we can take up the naturalistic attitude. This attitude, however, is itself a modification of

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<sup>18</sup> Obviously, this should not be confused with the kind of externalism which features in debates about semantics and reference (for example, see Putnam 1975, 223-227).

<sup>19</sup> It is worth pointing out, as Baldner himself does, that a similar claim is made by Putnam (for example, see Putnam 1981, 60-61). It is also implicit in McDowell’s criticisms of the sideways-on view (1996, 33-35). The rejection of externalism, in the sense of appealing to an absolutely external perspective, is another feature common to both post-functionalism and transcendental phenomenology.

the natural attitude, and I don't think it would count as external to the natural attitude in my sense of 'external'.

One way to defend internalism would be to begin with arguments against externalism, designed to demonstrate the truth of a claim like Baldner's above. For example, McDowell's discussion of the sideways-on view, which I mentioned in chapter two, could probably be brought to bear here.<sup>20</sup> However, I want to provide a positive account of how it is that our subjective states can concern an objective world. In particular, I want to show how we can achieve a determinate conception of objectivity without appealing to the absolutely external perspective. This will require more than arguments against externalism. I shall try to show that one particular perspective we enjoy, which is not an absolutely external perspective, is already structured by a sense of objectivity. To understand our subjective states as having objective purport, all we need do is reflect upon this perspective.

(c)

As I have introduced it, externalism can be seen as posing the following challenge: either we accept that we can have a determinate notion of objectivity, in which case we must accept externalism; or we do not accept externalism, in which case we must give up any hope of a determinate notion of objectivity. I want to defend an internalism which allows for a determinate notion of objectivity. To do this, I must meet the challenge addressed by externalism.

First, I assume that we already have a non-determinate, empty conception of objectivity, the notion introduced in section I. I shall argue that when we examine

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<sup>20</sup> I have in mind the argument outlined at McDowell 1996, 33-35. This argument could be applied to externalism as follows: if it is accepted that the absolutely external perspective characterises the world solely in terms of causal or nomological relations, then it is hard to see how it could refer to any states as mental (that is, as occupying the space of reasons, for example by potentially standing in relations of justification). Of course, the externalist might reject McDowell's assumption that the space of reasons cannot be accommodated within the realm of law, or some other naturalistic schema (for example, see MacDonald 2006, 224-233).

how things appear to us, we find that the ways they appear from moment to moment are correlated with a sense of the other ways in which they could appear to us. This sense structures our perception of objects in the world, and our awareness of the world as a whole. It is precisely a sense of the objectivity of the items we perceive. This is not merely an empty sense, a sense of ‘that which I am perceiving’; rather, it gives me a determinate sense of what the item itself is. This sense of objectivity is what allows us to understand our perceptions as having objective purport, without having to appeal to an absolutely external perspective.

The argument will therefore run as follows:

1. we can draw a non-determinate distinction between everything which appears and the total network of appearances (the transcendental distinction introduced in chapter two);
2. anything which can appear is correlated with an element or elements in the total network of appearances;
3. within the total network of appearances, we can draw a further distinction, between how things appear to be in any particular instance, and our sense of the objectivity of those things;
4. therefore, any item which can appear is correlated with a sense a subject can have of the objectivity of that item;
5. to have a sense of the objectivity of an item is to understand that item as being objective, as something distinct from its appearances;
6. therefore, we can understand the difference between the appearance of any item which can appear, and its reality beyond any particular appearance;
7. premises 1-6 involve no appeal to an absolutely external perspective;



C. therefore we can provide a determinate picture of the objective purport of subjective states, without appealing to an absolutely external perspective.

Let us consider these premises in turn.

1: this is the distinction between the world as that which appears to us and the totality of ways in which it can appear to be. I drew this distinction in chapter two, and assume it to be valid in what follows. Importantly, this is a non-determinate distinction. The notion of ‘the world as that which appears to us’ has for the moment only the content, ‘what it is we are aware of’. This, of course, is the kind of ‘empty’ conception of reality as opposed to appearance which Williams sees as inadequate. So I am not begging the question against the externalist in assuming this transcendental distinction.

2: given the distinction drawn in premise 1, if  $x$  is an item which can appear to us, then it must correlate with at least one element in the total network of appearances. The reverse also holds; any element of the total network of appearances must be an appearance of some appearing object or other.<sup>21</sup> Again, I take this premise for granted in what follows.

3: in the transcendental attitude, we are no longer concerned with how things actually are, but only with how they appear to be. But within this attitude, we can distinguish between how particular items appear to be at a particular moment, and how those same items appear to be when considered in other contexts. This distinction is not one between appearances and reality. Rather, it is between two kinds of appearance: a particular appearance of an item, and the totality of other ways in which it is possible for that item to appear to me. This ‘totality of other ways it is possible for the item to appear’ is the sense I have of the objectivity of the item.

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<sup>21</sup> The correlation between these two networks is not one-to-one. Specifically, the one object can appear in a number of different ways.

That is, it is my understanding of the item as being objective, as being something other than a particular appearance. Nor is this sense of objectivity an empty one, of ‘that which appears’. Rather, it is determined by how I actually perceive the item to be. This is the kind of determinate sense of the item which appears that we are looking for.

I shall not take this premise for granted. Rather, I shall try to demonstrate it by phenomenological analyses.

4: premises 1 and 2 together amount to the claim that any item which can appear must be correlated with some appearance or other. Premise 3 adds that any particular appearance must be correlated with a sense of objectivity of the item which appears. Together, these claims yield premise 4: any item which can appear is correlated with a sense a subject can have of the objectivity of that item. That is, the distinction drawn in premise 3 maps onto the distinction drawn in premise 1. If I can establish 3, I shall take 4 as given.

5: clearly, the sense we can have of an item as objective, as something more than any particular appearance, should not be confused with the item itself as something distinct from its appearances. But the former is precisely how we can understand the latter. That is, to have a sense of the objectivity of an item, as outlined in premise 3, is to understand that item as objective, as something other than any appearance.<sup>22</sup> I take this as given.

6: our subjective states can be structured by a sense of the objectivity of the items towards which they are directed. To be structured by this sense of objectivity is to have objective purport. Therefore, to understand our subjective states along the lines laid out in premises 4 and 5 is to understand them as having objective purport.

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<sup>22</sup> Remember that the question I am concerned to answer is how it is that our subjective states have objective purport. I argued in section I that the *quaestio juris*, the question of how it is that we know our states have this purport, can be set aside.

Again, I assume that this premise follows from the others, if they have been established.

The weight of this argument rests on premise 3. If I can establish this premise, then I think the above argument will work against externalism, as I will have outlined a determinate internalist account of objectivity. Therefore, the rest of this chapter will be devoted to giving reasons for accepting this premise. To this end, I shall examine the natural attitude, the way in which we are aware of the world in our everyday lives. The natural attitude serves as the frame of reference for all of our everyday perceptions, actions, projects and cognitions. The perspectives we can have within this frame of reference would count as internal, relative to the absolutely external perspective. This is because when we are in the natural attitude, the world appears to us as shot through with values, as filled with situations we find challenging or which provide opportunities for us to advance our projects. These values and use-conditions are often particular to specific cultures or societies, as in the examples of beauty and amusingness mentioned earlier.

I shall argue that when we are in the natural attitude, we have a sense of the world as objective, that is, as distinct from how it appears to us. Furthermore, we can understand ourselves as having this sense of objectivity without having to assume an absolutely external perspective. Instead of trying to achieve a special perspective on the world, we can study our ordinary perspective, which we have in the natural attitude. To do this, we take up the transcendental attitude. Clearly, the perspective we can have in the transcendental attitude is not internal to the natural attitude. But nor is it an absolutely external perspective. It involves considering the world, not as it is independently of how it appears to us, but only insofar as it can possibly appear.

In what follows, I shall outline a transcendental analysis of the natural attitude. I shall try to show that it involves awareness of the world both as extending beyond what is immediately given at any particular moment, and as a unified whole. In the last section, I shall argue that this awareness of the world as both a wider reality and a unified whole amounts to a sense of objectivity.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the natural attitude itself allows us to make sense of our awareness as an awareness of an objective world.

#### IV.

##### **Awareness of the World as a Wider Reality**

###### **(a)**

Let us begin with the case of perception, and recall what was outlined in chapter three. I perceive objects from particular angles, as situated relative to me in space, and as having certain features which are directly presented to me. I also perceive them as transcendent, that is, as having features other than those which are directly presented to me. For example, I perceive this mug as having a side opposite to the one I am currently looking at. This awareness of the other side is not an inference or a conjecture on my part. It is an awareness I have in virtue of perceiving the mug; I grasp it precisely as having more than the side I am currently seeing.

My awareness of this other side isn't entirely determinate, but nor is it entirely empty. The side of the cup I can see, which I have a determinate awareness

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<sup>23</sup> Another aspect of objectivity, one which I do not have space to address properly, is that it opens the possibility of error: objective awareness is an awareness which might be misleading or inaccurate. To have a sense of the world as objective requires that one be aware that one might be wrong about at least certain aspects of the world. Though I will not specifically address the possibility of error in what follows, this should not be taken as suggesting that my account cannot accommodate it. For some suggestions as to how a phenomenological account can explain the possibility of error, see Husserl 1960, 57-64.

of, suggests which kind of features the other side will have: that it will be smooth, white, hard, and curved.<sup>24</sup> This awareness of the features of the other sides of the mug is part of the inner horizon of my perceiving the mug. I can directly perceive these other sides if I change position, or move the mug. My perception of the mug is structured by an awareness of these possibilities for further perceptions and action.

Furthermore, I perceive each object as part of a situation, a particular set of objects arrayed in space relative to each other. My awareness of these other objects forms the outer horizon of my perception. I am not just aware of these other objects as located in space, but as objects I can turn my attention to if I so wish, and which afford me various possibilities for proceeding. That is, I am aware of the field of objects against which I perceive any particular object as precisely a space for possible action (Husserl 1989, 196-197).

I now want to argue that the way the entire world appears to me when I am in the natural attitude is structured by a distinction similar to that I have just outlined. This is the distinction between what is immediately available to me at any one moment, and what is not immediately available but is implicated in my awareness of that which is.

**(b)**

In any perceiving, we can distinguish between the objects I perceive at any one moment, and the situation in which I find these objects. Consider my awareness of the room I am in. At any one moment, I will perceive some object or field of objects in the room. However, the room contains many objects which I do not

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<sup>24</sup> I will be aware of these other features, but I will not grasp them with the kind of detail that my perceiving them directly would give me. The difference between my awareness of the side I can see and my awareness of the other side is not only a matter of determinate and indeterminate awareness, but I think the degree of determinacy is a necessary factor in this difference. See chapter three, section IV.

perceive at any one moment, such as the wall behind me, or those sections of the floor underneath the table which I do not at this moment have my feet upon.

So we do not want to say that I perceive everything in the room.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, it is a central tenet of phenomenology that I can be aware of the objects in the room which I do not currently perceive. Furthermore, this awareness is not (or need not) be a judgement to the effect that the room has various items of such-and-such a type in it, or my remembering that I perceived these items a moment ago. Rather, it is a structure of awareness which accompanies and shapes my perceptual awareness (and indeed awareness of any kind). Husserl refers to this structure of awareness as apperception or appresentation. My perceptual awareness has various horizons; the items which are implicated in these horizons are appresented to me (Husserl 1960, 122). For example, I am aware of the walls and ceiling I am looking at as extending beyond what I can currently see, and indeed continuing behind me.

My perceptual and apperceptual awareness is synthesised to constitute my sense of the room as my situation. Here, 'situation' means the spatiotemporal array which includes myself, the objects which I am perceiving, and other objects which I do not perceive but which are appresented to me as belonging to the same spatiotemporal array. In this synthesis, the situation is given as relative to me: I am the focal point for the appearances of objects as nearer or further away, to the left or right, higher or lower (Husserl 1989, 166). Furthermore, the objects included in this situation are appresented as 'on hand' for me (Husserl 1989, 195). That is, they are available to be perceived should I turn my attention to them: "other actual objects are there for me as determinate, as more or less well known, without themselves being

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<sup>25</sup> Or, if we do, then this is a different sense of perception to that in which I, say, perceive the keys I am typing on, or the music I am listening to.

perceived” (Husserl 1982, 51). I currently perceive the mug, but I can look around the room, or extend my hand to touch the underside of the table, or listen closely to pick out the hum of the computer from the background noise. I can exercise my perceptual abilities in this way without having to move to a different spatiotemporal location. The objects which make up my situation are those which are given as on hand for me in this way.

(c)

The next step is to note that the horizons of my perception extend beyond my situation, the field of objects which I perceive or which are appresented as being on hand for me. I am aware of this field of objects as itself belonging to a broader field. It is given to me as “a sector ‘of’ the world, of the universe of things for possible perceptions” (Husserl 1970, 162). That is, at any one moment I am not aware only of what I am perceiving, nor only what is on hand for me. I am aware of all this as part of a greater whole, extending beyond my current situation.

This awareness is suggested by the very term ‘horizon’. Consider your awareness of what is most commonly referred to as the horizon, the line at which the sky appears to meet the land or the sea. When you look at the horizon, you cannot see beyond it, at least not without changing your spatial location. In that sense, it marks a limit to your perceptual abilities. However, you will not grasp this horizon as the limit of your perceptual abilities, full stop. Should you move, you can reveal things which, at the moment, lie hidden beyond your view.<sup>26</sup> This very concealment is itself manifest in the way you perceive the landscape.

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<sup>26</sup> Again, it would be false to our experience to say that we infer that there is something beyond our view. Our awareness that the horizon conceals further objects is part of our perceptual abilities. It is one which we may need to learn as infants, but it would be false to say that it relies on any non-perceptual supplementation, by way of judgements or inferences from past experiences.

This homely example is close to what Husserl means by the notion of a universe of things for possible perceptions. This universe includes not just what I can perceive in my current situation, but what I could perceive were I to move into a different situation: “the objectivities which *could* subsequently present themselves, or which, under given circumstances *would* present themselves”, were I to alter my spatiotemporal location (Husserl 1989, 205). The universe of things for possible perceptions is what I called in chapter three the surrounding world of the subject.

It is important that we distinguish the surrounding world from the universe as studied by the natural sciences. As Husserl puts it,

the actual surrounding world of any person whatsoever is not physical reality pure and simple and without qualification, but instead it is the surrounding world only to the extent he [sic] ‘knows’ of it, insofar as he grasps it by apperception and positing or is conscious of it in the horizon of his existence as co-given and offered to his grasp (1989, 195).

If a subject is ignorant of physics, then various items in the physical world will not show up in that subject’s surrounding world, at least not under their correct scientific descriptions (1989, 195-196). I suggest that the surrounding world, the universe of things for possible perception, is the same universe which the natural sciences investigate, but presented in a very different attitude.<sup>27</sup> Both attitudes, the natural and the naturalistic, reveal a universe which is spatiotemporally extended and

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<sup>27</sup> It might be objected here that the world as conceived of by the natural sciences includes items which I could never perceive, such as sub-atomic particles and black holes. I think these items are tied into the perceivable world by being conceived of as included in the same expanse of space and time as those items which we can perceive. This is not to say that they have the same spatial and temporal features as the ordinary objects of perception, just that they help to make up the same spatiotemporal universe as those ordinary objects. We become aware of these unperceivable items by extending our cognitive powers beyond what we can actually perceive, but not beyond the universe whose primary mode of presentation is perceptual (for more on this, see Putnam 1994, 502-507).



filled with discrete entities, which stand in causal and nomological relations with each other. But in the natural attitude, the world appears to us “precisely as our surroundings and not as ‘objective’ nature, the way it is for natural science” (Husserl 1989, 192). The way the world appears to me in the natural attitude cannot be divorced from my life as a person, my particular projects and goals, the values I find in things, and my intersubjective life with other persons.<sup>28</sup> In the naturalistic attitude, all of these features are bracketed, the better to understand the traffic of the world in purely law-governed terms.

Within this surrounding world, we can distinguish what I shall refer to respectively as its core and its periphery. The core of my surrounding world is what I earlier termed my situation, the array of objects which I can perceive or which are given as ‘on hand’ for me (Husserl 1989, 196). The periphery includes everything else; it is the universe of objects for possible perception, everything I could possibly observe or interact with. I am aware of items and situations in my periphery as objects of possible perception or action, but which are not immediately available for me as long as I remain in my present situation. This leaves open the issue of precisely what kind of awareness I have of these items and situations. I shall address this issue in the next section.

## V.

### **Awareness of the World as a Unified Whole**

In the previous section, I argued that I am aware of objects as belonging to a wider world. But this claim leaves open whether the world which each object is

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<sup>28</sup> I am using ‘person’ here simply to refer to a subject who has a particular social and cultural life, with projects they hope to complete and values which structure their actions. This does not commit me to any further thesis concerning the nature of persons.

grasped as belonging to is grasped in each case as the same world. If not, then the objectivity of awareness would seem to be fragmentary, a matter of grasping only different groups of objects rather than different aspects of reality itself. In that case, the externalist would be justified in claiming that the objectivity we have in the natural attitude is only parochial, since reality itself is not included in our picture. To close off this criticism, we must show how the perceiving subject “understands what the experiences takes in (or at least seems to take in) as part of a wider reality, a reality that is all embraceable in thought but not all available to this experience” (McDowell 1996, 32). This wider reality must be grasped as unified, in order for our awareness of it to have the required objectivity.

In this section, I shall argue that in the natural attitude, we are aware of the world as a single unified whole. Note that we are operating with the transcendental distinction between that which appears and the network of appearances. Therefore, this appearing-as-unified is not a matter of the world’s actually being unified, ontologically speaking. This notion of ontological unity can be developed by, for example, the claim that truth is univocal (Lowe 2006, 177), or that the world consists of states of affairs, and must therefore have a structure (Wittgenstein 2001, §1; McDowell 1998b, 178). But the fact that one is aware of a world which is itself ontologically unified does not entail that one is aware of it *as* unified. What I shall try to show is that, in the natural attitude, we can be aware of the world precisely *as* unified, rather than just being aware of disparate elements without understanding them as parts of a single whole.

(a)

Let us begin by recapitulating the basic idea of understanding something as unified. I introduced Husserl’s notion of constitution in chapter three. A subject

constitutes an object precisely by being aware of it as a single entity, event, state or whatever.<sup>29</sup> The object itself may have numerous properties, or stand in numerous different relations. Furthermore, the subject may be aware of it as having numerous features, as when I perceive a tree and take in its trunk, branches, leaves, and movement in the wind. The point is that I grasp it as a single entity, a unified array of elements. By way of contrast, consider my experience of seeing my glasses case, the cap of a USB stick, and a pen, all on the table in front of me. I can perceive these all at once, but I do not grasp them as parts of a single thing. Rather, they are disparate elements of my perceptual field, united only by their spatial proximity.<sup>30</sup>

An object is constituted only if it is presented to the subject by a unified noema. That is, the subject must have a subjective episode or a series of episodes which are structured by a single noematic structure, one which reveals the object as one and the same. It is in virtue of undergoing these experiences that the subject can be aware of the object as unified. This point is made most clearly by considering extended sequences of awareness. For example, I can walk around the tree, seeing it, smelling it, hearing the wind in the leaves, running my fingers over its bark. I can be aware, throughout this sequence, of the tree as the same object of my awareness. For this to be the case, this sequence of experiences I undergo must share a common noematic structure.

This unified noema is itself the product of a synthesis of the noematic aspects of the different experiential episodes in the sequence. That is, I do not undergo a

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<sup>29</sup> In what follows, I shall use ‘object’ in my broad sense, as anything which can be thought of.

<sup>30</sup> Obviously, there are genuine ontological issues concerning our standards for determining what counts as a unified object as opposed to a collection of disparate elements (see Putnam 1994, 450-452). Husserl conducted extensive work on mereology, in for example the third *Logical Investigation* (2001, 3-45). However, I am concerned with the appearance of objects. In particular, I am claiming that there is a difference between something’s appearing as a single entity, and a collection of disparate elements appearing as disparate. I take it examples such as the above are enough to establish that there is a difference here.

series of experiences, each of which happen to have the same (or even a similar) noema. Rather, the noema of each episode is tied together with the noemata of the others in the sequence, so that I am aware of the object I am now touching as precisely the same thing I was seeing a second ago. Were it not for this synthesis, while I could be aware at each moment of the same object, I would not be aware of it *as* the same object.

**(b)**

So far I have summarised ideas first presented in chapter three. I want to now argue that the same kind of account is true of my awareness of the world as unified. That is, my various experiences of different objects and situations are unified by a synthesis which reveals them as elements of the one world.

To establish this point, let us return to the distinction between the core and the periphery of my surrounding world. The core of this world consists of those objects which I perceive, or which are given as on hand for me. The periphery includes all the other objects I am aware of, and which I could perceive were I to move from my present situation. What I want to argue is that the periphery of my surrounding world is my sense of world as a unified whole, a whole which remains the same despite changes in the specific elements which I perceive.

First, note that the distinction between the core and the periphery of my surrounding world is structural. That is, this distinction remains in place no matter where I go or what I do. My concrete situation, the core of my surrounding world, can change as I move around and find different ways of involving myself with the world (Husserl 1989, 204-205). Right now, a room in a building on New Elvet is the core of my surrounding world, the particular situation in which I find myself. This

morning, my situation was Gilesgate Road. But in each case, I was aware of my immediate surrounding as one section of a wider world.

Next, let us consider exactly how I am aware of my situation as just one sector of a wider world. As I outlined it in the previous section, the periphery of my surrounding world is a horizon which extends beyond my current situation. This horizon has a complex relationship to my awareness of my situation. On the one hand, the periphery of my surrounding world is not determined by my particular situation. It is “*an open horizon* encompassing the objectivities which *could* subsequently present themselves, or which, under given circumstances *would* present themselves” (Husserl 1989, 205). Because it is open in this way, this horizon can remain the same through changes in my particular situation. My sense of the world as a wider reality was the same when I was on Gilesgate Road this morning as it is now, when I am in a room in a building on New Elvet.

But on the other hand, my horizon is not completely open, in such a way that it affords me no determinate sense of the world. On the contrary, I am aware of the world precisely as a spatiotemporal expanse, spreading out from this particular situation, containing other situations in which I could find myself, situations which would have particular values and present me with challenges and opportunities.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, one’s sense of the world can certainly be altered. A religious conversion, a personal tragedy, encounters with powerful artworks, coming to understand a scientific or philosophical truth; all can be said to alter one’s sense of the world, enriching or impoverishing it, making the world more or less intelligible.

So the sense I have of the world as a universe of things for possible perceptions can both survive changes in my particular situation, and can be altered.

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<sup>31</sup> This awareness is not completely determinate. I will have very little idea what many of these situations would be like, how many of them there are, and so on. My point is simply that this awareness is not completely empty: it is not equivalent to ‘whatever is the case’.

This, I suggest, is a close analogue with the sense I can have of a particular item as a unified object, as outlined in (a) above. When I grasp an object as identical, I understand it as unified even though it has disparate features. Furthermore, I can learn more about this object, and in doing so I can change or revise the sense I have of it. But my sense of it as the same object can survive these changes. Similarly, my sense of the world as the universe of things for possible perceptions can be altered, but it continues to be a sense of the world as the same world. I can change my situation, and thus encounter new features of the world, but all the time I will be aware of these as new features of precisely one and the same world.

So I have a sense of the world as the same, regardless of the particular situation I find myself in. Take any two intentional experiences I have in the natural attitude, E1 and E2, each presenting a different object. Let us assume that I am aware of these objects in such a way that there is no synthesis between my awareness of them – the objects are presented as in each case completely different, as standing in no causal or law-governed relations with each other.<sup>32</sup> However, these two experiences must at least be unified by a world-synthesis. That is, in E1, the object I perceive will be presented as an element of the same world which includes the object of E2, and vice-versa. This world-synthesis applies to any experiences I can have while in the natural attitude. It produces a noematic unity, my sense of a single world as a spatio-temporal expanse containing all objects of possible perception. Therefore, in the natural attitude, I am aware of the world as a single unified whole.

It is important to note that this *sense* I have of the world as unified is not to be confused with any particular *theory* of the world I may have. This sense can be

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<sup>32</sup> Of course, E1 and E2 will also be synthesised in subjective time, as episodes in the one stream of consciousness. But I am concerned in this example with objective synthesis, the joining together of different experiences to form a unified awareness of some object or group of objects. It is this latter kind of synthesis which, *ex hypothesi*, does not occur between E1 and E2.

shared by individuals who have very different scientific or philosophical beliefs about the nature of the world, or even by individuals who have no such theory. As I mentioned above, changes in one's beliefs may well alter one's sense of what the world is like, by enriching or determining it to a greater or lesser degree. But such changes will always be changes with respect to the same world. What is crucial to note is that they can be understood as such. That is, when we change our beliefs about the world, we can understand them as different beliefs which concern the same world. This requires that we have a sense of the world as the same before and after we changed our beliefs about it. The sense of the world as the same is provided by our awareness of the universe of things for possible perceptions.<sup>33</sup>

## VI.

### **The Sense of Objectivity**

In this last section, I shall bring the phenomenological descriptions outlined in the previous two sections to bear on my argument in defence of internalism. I shall also defend this argument against a possible line of externalist criticism.

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<sup>33</sup>Another aspect of our awareness which is relevant to our sense of objectivity is that, in the natural attitude, we are aware of the world as intersubjectively available. In this attitude I am aware of objects as open to other subjects to perceive, think about or act towards. Furthermore, I can be aware of these other subjects themselves, and they can be aware of me. This awareness of others and other perspectives suggests a distinction between how things appear to me and how they can appear to others, and this certainly seems to suggest objectivity. It is debateable whether a sense of objectivity is required for a sense of the world as intersubjectively available, or vice-versa, or whether there is a mutual dependence here. I would argue that a sense of objectivity is necessary for a sense of intersubjectivity, since without objectivity I do not think one could make sense of the idea of a subject separate to oneself. However, intersubjectivity can clearly deepen and enrich one's sense of the world. For example, by understanding scientific discoveries, reading works of literature, or simply by empathising with others, one can develop one's awareness of the world in many directions which might otherwise have been unavailable. I shall not develop these points in detail, but they have been discussed by Husserl himself, most famously in the fifth *Cartesian Meditation* (1960, 89-151), and by numerous works in the secondary literature (for example, Carr 1991, 122-152, and 1987; Schutz 1975).

(a)

Let us return to the argument in favour of internalism offered at section III (c) above. This argument was introduced in response to a dilemma posed by externalism: either we can explain our determinate notion of objectivity by appealing to an absolutely external perspective, or, if we deny the possibility of such a perspective, we must renounce any determinate notion of objectivity. In response to this dilemma, I suggested that when we consider our awareness of the world, we see that it is structured by a determinate sense of objectivity. If this suggestion is correct, then we can understand the world as objective without having to appeal to an absolutely external perspective. All we would need to do is to properly understand our everyday perspective on the world, the one we have in the natural attitude.

The success of this argument depends on whether or not our awareness of the world does have the sense of objectivity I am claiming for it. In sections IV and V, I outlined how, in the natural attitude, we have a sense of the world as extending beyond what we are directly aware of, and as a unified whole. Clearly, this sense of the world as a wider whole can be contrasted with the sense we have of individual objects as elements of that world. And this contrast is not an empty, merely nominal one, between the objects and ‘that to which they belong’. In the natural attitude, we have a definite sense of the nature of the world, as a spatiotemporal expanse containing various situations in which we could find ourselves were we to move from our present location.

This certainly seems like a relatively determinate sense of objectivity. Unlike the transcendental distinction which we began with, it is not a purely formal distinction between appearances and that which appears. However, unlike externalism it does not acquire its content by reference to a particular conception of



reality, such as physics. Rather, it allows us to distinguish appearances and reality by comparing our determinate awareness of the world in a specific situation (the world as it appears in this situation) with our relatively indeterminate awareness of the world as extending beyond this situation.

Externalism postulates a special mode of access to reality independently of how it appears to us, a mode of access which allows us to look behind appearances and compare them with reality itself. Transcendental phenomenology can be thought of as a special mode of access to the way the world appears to us, independently of how it actually is. It is in studying the structure of appearances themselves that we can come to understand our sense of objectivity, by seeing how it is built into these very appearances.

**(b)**

Let us lastly consider a possible criticism of this argument. The critic could begin by accepting that what I have outlined is a genuine structure of our perceiving and of our natural life in general. This structure does allow us to distinguish the way things appear to us in particular contexts from the way in which they can appear in other contexts. But, the critic will continue, all this gives us is a distinction between any particular appearance and a range of other, possible appearances. What we wanted to explain was objectivity, the distinction between appearances and that which appears, which is *ex hypothesi* something other than its various possible appearances. But it seems mysterious how a distinction within the total network of appearances could help explain the distinction between this entire network and anything outside it.

In other words, all I have done is to describe a structure of our perceiving. But this does not give me the contrast between appearances and a determinate

conception of reality which I needed. Recall Williams' description of ersatz objectivity: the notion of reality "slips out of the picture, leaving us only with a variety of possible representations to be measured against each other, with nothing to mediate between them" (1978, 65). This pseudo-objectivity is akin to the pseudo-impartiality of Police Officer Muggins making sure Officer Jones is doing his job, and Officer Jones similarly overseeing Officer Muggins. All we have on my transcendental picture, Williams might suggest, are differences between appearances, rather than a genuine sense of reality as opposed to appearances.

I accept the premise of this objection: all I have drawn is a distinction within the total network of appearances. So I accept that I am in something like the scenario Williams describes, with only representations (on my terminology, appearances) to compare with other representations. In the transcendental approach, all we have to go on are appearances. Or, more specifically, all we have to go on is the world as it appears to us. This terminological correction is important. In the argument in defence of internalism, the second premise was the claim that any appearance must be correlated with an object which appears, and vice-versa (section III above). This claim is obvious, but it matters when we assess the above line of criticism. Specifically, while any particular item is different to the total network of ways it could appear, there must be a correlation between the item and the network of appearances.

Let us suppose my account places me in the scenario where representations would be "measured against each other, with nothing to mediate between them". The criticism is that we thereby have an inadequate sense of objectivity, because we would have nothing to mediate between the different representations. I take it that the reason for thinking that there is nothing to mediate between the different

representations is because all we have to compare a particular representation with is an array of other representations. But we can characterise each representation (or appearance) as the-world-as-it-appears-to-us. The scenario can then be re-described as follows: the world as it appears to us in one way is to be compared with the world as it appears to us in other ways. And now the lack of something to mediate between the appearances seems irrelevant, since each appearance itself involves the world.

It is this point – that the world is itself involved or implicated in the way it appears to us – which guides my transcendental approach to the issue of objectivity. The whole project of finding a special standpoint from which to connect appearances to reality is unnecessary, because the world is already implicated in its appearances. The phenomenological studies in sections IV and V outlined the structures of awareness which make this possible. When these structures are presented clearly, it becomes evident that we have a sense of objectivity without having to appeal to the notion of an absolutely external perspective. Therefore, we can reject externalism, while still retaining our sense of the world as greater than what I am aware of.

In the thesis so far, I have been concerned with two areas in the philosophy of mind: the subjective character of experiences, and the subject's meaningful awareness of objects and of the world. I have applied the ideas and techniques of transcendental phenomenology to each of these issues. However, transcendental phenomenology brings with it problems of its own. In particular, anyone using this approach must address the relation between the subject that takes up the transcendental attitude, and the subject who in everyday life finds itself in the natural world. It is not obvious that we have a unified understanding of the subject who answers to both of these descriptions. In the last chapter, I shall outline and defend just such a unified understanding of the subject.

## Chapter 7

### The Paradox of Subjectivity

In the previous two chapters, I have applied phenomenological methods to two areas in the philosophy of mind. First, I investigated the ontological relation between subjects and their own experiences, arriving at the model of subjectivity outlined in chapter five. Second, I investigated the way in which the world appears to the subject, developing an account in chapter six of how the natural attitude is structured by a sense of objectivity.

In this last chapter, I want to bring together these lines of investigation, into the nature of the subject and our awareness of the world. More precisely, I want to investigate how it is possible to understand ourselves both as subjects in a world, and as subjects who can make sense of the world. More precisely still, I want to investigate how this is possible once we allow that the way we are aware of the world has a transcendental dimension.

This problem is based on the juxtaposition of two positions, ontological realism and transcendental idealism. Both positions concern the relation of the subject to the world. I want to argue that we can hold both positions, but to show this I must first clarify precisely why it is that this seems problematic. On my interpretation, the paradox of subjectivity is a way of bringing these two positions together in such a way as to make them appear incompatible. The paradox arises when we juxtapose the subject as belonging in the world with the subject as functioning transcendently to constitute the entire world (Husserl 1970, 181). The issue this juxtaposition raises is that of understanding how it is possible: how the one entity can be both these things at once. This question is therefore ultimately

ontological, a matter of understanding the nature of this entity, of how it can have both these features. But in order to clarify the nature of this challenge, and to outline a possible solution, we must proceed by way of phenomenological descriptions of the subject as it appears in the natural and transcendental attitudes.

In section I, I shall introduce the version of realism I am committing myself to, and briefly recap the notion of transcendental idealism I wish to defend. I shall also contrast the paradox, a problem which involves juxtaposing these positions, with the more usual ways in which the subject is regarded as a philosophical problem.

In section II, I shall outline the paradox, distinguishing between different ways in which Husserl expresses it. I shall also outline what would count as a resolution of the paradox, as opposed to any attempt to dissolve it.

My response to the paradox will involve two steps. In section III, I shall distinguish ontological relations from transcendental relations. When we have made this distinction, it will become clear that ontological realism and transcendental idealism are describing different kinds of relation between the subject and the world.

In section IV, I shall outline the different ways in which the subject is revealed in the natural and the transcendental attitudes. I shall then argue that we can show how it is possible for these different experiences of oneself to be synthesised across these two attitudes. If this account is correct, it counts as a resolution of the paradox. This is because it retains the assumptions on which the paradox is based, while showing that they do not generate an absurdity. I shall also argue that this method of resolving the paradox can be used to resolve a very similar problem which Nagel outlines in *The View from Nowhere*.

**I.****Realism and Transcendental Idealism**

It would be a mistake to assume that we can arrive at a philosophical problem simply by juxtaposing subjectivity and objectivity. The temptation might be to say something like: my experiences are subjective; the world is objective; how can something subjective exist in an objective world? This would gloss over exactly how it is that something subjective and something objective are or are not compatible. More particularly, it would too quickly assume that we have a single understanding of both 'subjective' and of 'objective'.

Thus far, I have considered the subject and subjectivity in specifically transcendental and phenomenological terms. I suggest that when we consider the subject in this way, the problem that seems most challenging is not to do with objectivity per se, but rather with realism. The problem is that transcendental phenomenology both seems to be consistent with realism, and seems to undermine it. To see why this is so, we first need to make clear what kind of realism is at stake, and then consider how exactly transcendental phenomenology might be incompatible with it.

**(a)**

There are a number of different versions of realism to be found in the literature. In what follows I shall assume a position which I shall term 'ontological realism' (or 'realism', for short). This position can be expressed in four claims:

- (i) the world exists independently of the existence of any subject, or how it (the world) is understood by any subject;

- (ii) the nature of the world does not depend on either the existence of any subject, or on how it is understood by any subject;
- (iii) subjects are themselves parts of the world;
- (iv) as parts of the world, subjects are dependent for their existence on the existence of the world.

By 'the world' here, I am referring to the spatiotemporal array of entities and states which is posited in the natural attitude (Husserl 1982, 56-57). In this attitude, certain features of the world, such as the value objects have for us, may well depend on our existence or on how we understand them. Claim (i) is that the world as a whole is not dependent in this way, even if certain aspects or parts of it are.

Claims (i) and (iv) rely on the correlative notions of existential dependence and independence. I shall return to these notions in more detail in section III below. For the moment, claim (i) can be read as saying that the world could exist even if no subject had existed, or if no subject had understood the world in one particular way or another. Likewise, claim (iv) is the claim that had the world not existed, no subject could have existed. Claim (ii) assumes that the world has a particular nature, a particular way of being, in the sense I introduced in chapter two. Again, the claim is that it would have had this nature regardless of whether or not any subjects existed, or whether or not they understood the world in any particular way.

Claim (iii), that subjects are parts of the world, does not commit me to any specific mereological position. All I mean by this claim is that subjects exist in objective space and time, can be located relative to other spatiotemporal entities, and stand in causal and other nomological relations with these entities. These nomological relations need not be specified in detail here, but some of them will involve ontological dependence. That is, there are certain features of the world

without which the subject could not exist. These include the existence of cells which make up my body, and atoms which make up these cells.<sup>1</sup> Because the subject is dependent in this way on certain features of the world, it could not exist without these features being instantiated in the world. This is why the subject depends for its existence on the world, as claimed at (iv).<sup>2</sup>

This is a fairly minimal version of realism. It is neither committed to nor denies the naturalistic view that what is real is ultimately to be discovered by work in the natural sciences. It may turn out that some or all of reality cannot be accommodated within any scientific theory. However, such a result would not disprove the version of realism I shall be assuming in what follows.

Ontological realism is assumed in most contemporary philosophy, particularly in the philosophy of mind. The majority of debates in that field (concerning phenomenal consciousness, intentionality, mental causation, personal identity and the location of mental states) take place against the background of realism, at least in the relatively minimal sense I have outlined. One of the goals of my thesis is to argue that transcendental phenomenology is relevant to the philosophy of mind, and that philosophers in this discipline can learn from phenomenological work. This makes it desirable for me to show that transcendental phenomenology is compatible with realism. If I cannot do this, it will be very difficult to convince philosophers already committed to realism that transcendental phenomenology has anything to offer them apart from a curious form of idealism.

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<sup>1</sup> I am not saying that I could not exist without the particular cells which currently make up my body, but rather that I could not exist without some collection of cells to make up my body. The same holds for the relation between cells and the atoms which make them up.

<sup>2</sup> Note that none of the foregoing is intended as a defence of ontological realism. In what follows, I shall take the truth of (i) to (iv) for granted.



Of course, one could argue against the assumption of realism, but I want to avoid this. Apart from the issue of whether there are any viable arguments against it,<sup>3</sup> to reject realism would be to go against the strong sense we have, in the natural attitude, that the world is not dependent on us. To reject this sense would entail a large-scale revision of our sense of the world, which goes against the grain of the phenomenological approach (Mohanty 1985, 233-234).

**(b)**

I outlined transcendental idealism in chapter four. In order for me to be aware of objects in the natural attitude, I must have a sense of them as belonging to the world. I make sense of the world in this way through a process of transcendental constitution. In this way, my awareness of particular objects and situations is underpinned by my transcendental functioning.

The paradox of subjectivity involves a tension between realism and transcendental idealism. The challenge it raises is that of showing how the one subject can be both a part of the world and that which constitutes the entire world.<sup>4</sup> However, this is not the only way in which the subject presents a philosophical problem. Before considering the paradox in more detail, it is worth our while distinguishing it from a more common way in which the subject is put at issue. In contemporary philosophy of mind, the subject is often considered as a challenge to naturalism. When one assumes naturalism, the subject will be conceived of as

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<sup>3</sup> For a brief discussion which defends a version of realism similar to my own, see Searle 1995, 149-176.

<sup>4</sup> I should note that while the transcendental subject constitutes the entire world, it must constitute it as equally belonging to other subjects. This requires that it constitutes each of these other subjects as themselves both in the world and as transcendental. And this gives rise to a peculiarly transcendental problem of intersubjectivity, namely the problem of how one subject can constitute as part of the world a being which itself constitutes the entire world, including the first subject. This problem is closely related to the paradox of subjectivity, and Husserl discusses the two problems together at 1970, 182-186. I shall not have space to address this problem of intersubjectivity in what follows, although I think that the position I shall take on the paradox does have implications for this other problem. See also 256, fn.33 above.

something the natural sciences study, or as dependent on what they study.<sup>5</sup> We are thus invited to explain the various features of the subject and subjective life by reference to the natural sciences. The problem is that the subject has a number of features which we find difficult to fit into the naturalistic picture:

Given our objective understanding of physical reality, the question arises, how does such an arrangement of basic physical materials, complex as it is, give rise not only to the remarkable physical capacities of the organism but also to a being with a mind, a point of view, a wide range of subjective experiences and mental capacities (Nagel 1986, 29).

Given a conception of the world as explicable in terms of the natural sciences, we are faced with a number of issues. These issues include the problem of providing a naturalistic account of phenomenal consciousness (which I mentioned in chapter one), and the problem of providing a naturalistic account of intentionality (which I mentioned in chapter two). In each case, the precise challenge facing the naturalist account is different, but the structure of the challenge is the same: how can this property, which is characteristically an aspect of the subject's life, be fitted into a naturalistic account of the world?

This problem can be distinguished from the paradox of subjectivity in two ways. First the paradox can become an issue at all only within a specifically transcendental framework (I shall develop this point presently). This framework is hardly even considered in contemporary philosophy of mind, let alone used to generate a problem about the subject. Second, the paradox involves contrasting transcendental idealism with realism. It does not require that we make the further

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<sup>5</sup> In what follows, I shall set eliminativism to one side.

assumption that naturalism is correct, so that the transcendental functioning of the subject is to be explained by reference to the discoveries of the natural sciences. If one were to make this further assumption, then this might generate a different problem, which might deserve to be called a second paradox. But I shall not assume the validity of naturalism in what follows. Nor shall I assume that it is false; rather, following the strategy outlined in chapters one and two, I shall set the issue of naturalism aside.

## II.

### The Paradox

The paradox is a deceptively simple problem. Within the two sections of the *Crisis* which address it directly,<sup>6</sup> we can distinguish two different ways of expressing the one problem. We must distinguish these different ways of putting the problem, in order to clarify the nature of the challenge it poses.

#### (a)

The first way of expressing the paradox is introduced in § 53 of the *Crisis*, titled “The paradox of human subjectivity: being a subject for the world and at the same time being an object in the world” (1970, 178). Husserl develops this way of expressing the problem by asking “How can a component part of the world, its human subjectivity, constitute the whole world?” (1970, 179). How, in other words, can a part of a constituted whole be that which carry out this process of constitution? “The subjective part of the world swallows up, so to speak, the whole world and thus itself too. What an absurdity!” (1970, 180).

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<sup>6</sup> 1970, §§ 53, 54. The paradox crops up in other places in Husserl’s writings from *Ideas I* onward. In what follows, I shall refer to some of these other passages, but I shall tend to relate them back to the discussion in the *Crisis*, since this is where Husserl most explicitly engages with the problem.

This certainly sounds peculiar, but we must sharpen our understanding of the problem before we can address it philosophically. This way of expressing the paradox involves juxtaposing two views (the subject as a part of the world, and as the transcendental subject for the world) which are supposed to lead to an absurdity. But it does not seem absurd, on the face of it, to suppose that something can be both constituted, and that which carries out the process of constitution. We are dealing here with Husserl's notion of constitution as 'making sense of'. It does not seem absurd to me to think of someone's making sense of themselves and of the world they belong to, which is the most obvious reading of the paradox on this first statement of it.

This initial way of expressing the paradox does have the advantage of presenting us with the two views whose juxtaposition leads to a problem. In this way, it makes clear where the root of the paradox lies. However, it does not clarify the precise philosophical challenge this paradox poses. To bring this challenge into focus, we will have to tease out the notions of transcendental idealism within which the paradox is framed.

**(b)**

We can begin to explicate the paradox by first asking exactly how the subject can be said to be "a subject for the world" (Husserl 1970, 178). Clearly, this does not simply mean being a subject who is aware of the world. After all, in the natural attitude, I am aware of myself as a human being, located at a certain point in space and time, in a certain physical environment and cultural and social setting. That is, I constitute myself as the empirical subject. But my being 'a subject for the world' is meant to be contrasted with my being an empirical subject.

When I take up the transcendental attitude, I take the entire world of the natural attitude as a phenomenon, as something which is considered only insofar as it appears to me. In this attitude, I do not take the existence of objects in the world for granted, and interact with them on this basis. Rather, I inquire into their modes of givenness, the precise way they are related to their correlative intentional experiences.

Given these two different ways of relating to the world, a paradox can be developed. In the transcendental attitude, one of the phenomena which I consider only insofar as it is presented to me is none other than myself as a human being in the world (Husserl 1970, 183). But in the transcendental attitude, I am not merely a phenomenon. I am the subject in this attitude, to whom various phenomena (including my natural self) appear. As the subject of this attitude, I have no specifically human attributes, since all of these are to be found in the world as phenomenon (Husserl 1970, 183). So the move from the natural to the transcendental attitude reveals two modes or levels of subjecthood: the empirical subject, who is a piece of the world, and the transcendental subject, who is grasped in this attitude precisely as “not a piece of the world” (Husserl 1960, 25). The contrast here is between my being aware of myself as part of the world (a world which I take as a phenomenon when I am in the transcendental attitude) and my being aware of myself as in some way outside or beyond the world, as that to which it appears.

This way of expressing the paradox is an improvement on that outlined in (a) above, in that it spells out an apparent mutual exclusion between the subject as phenomenon and the subject as that to which all phenomena appear. This exclusion is introduced earlier in the *Crisis*, when Husserl writes that the transcendental subject,

deprived of its worldly character through the epochē, in whose functioning *cogitationes* [i.e., transcendental functioning] the world has all the ontic meaning it can ever have for him [sic], cannot possibly turn up as subject matter in the world, since everything that is of the world derives its meaning precisely from these functions (1970, 82).<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the empirical subject shows up as part of the world phenomenon. But the transcendental subject cannot show up in this phenomenon, because to do so would be for it to abandon its transcendental functioning. This interpretation of the paradox has been developed by David Carr (1999, 114-119) and by Debabrata Sinha (1969, 82-83). Something very like this way of expressing the paradox is also suggested by McDowell, in discussing Kant's transcendental idealism. A "full-blown transcendental idealism", he writes, serves to reassure us "that we cannot be fundamentally wrong about the world we think about, since it is constituted by us" (1996, 159). McDowell, as we have seen, is suspicious of the very project of reassuring ourselves that we are not fundamentally wrong about the world. This is what I referred to in the previous chapter as the *quaestio juris*, which he is keen to move away from. But he also has a more specific criticism of the Kantian picture he describes. He sees it as assuming a harmony between mind and world, a fitting together of our intentional capabilities and the way things are. McDowell does not question this harmony; indeed, he clearly accepts it. Rather, he contests what he sees as the Kantian explanation of this harmony.

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<sup>7</sup> In this passage Husserl is referring to the subject which Descartes distinguishes from the body. But Husserl understands this subject as the transcendental subject. He criticises Descartes for not realising this, and for continuing to treat the subject as part of the objective world (1970, 82; 1960, 23-25).

[T]he constituting of this harmony between world and mind is supposed to be a transcendental operation of mind: not, of course, the empirical mind, which is in constituted harmony with the world, but an off-stage transcendental mind (McDowell 1996, 159).

We can certainly see a suggestion of something like the paradox in the idea of an ‘off-stage’ transcendental subject knitting the empirical subject and the world together. The paradox here would be how the one subject can be both ‘on-stage’ and ‘off-stage’ simultaneously; both engaging with the world, and also working behind the scenes to set up the very possibility of this engagement. If we accept that the transcendental subject must always stay off-stage, then we face the issue of how it can be identified with a subject which can appear ‘on-stage’, that is, in the midst of the world.

While McDowell outlines a paradox in his discussion of Kant, a problem very close to it is described by another contemporary philosopher, Thomas Nagel, as stemming from his own ideas. In particular, it arises from the distinction he draws between what he terms the subjective and objective points of view on the world.<sup>8</sup> The subjective point of view is the standpoint each of us has on the world from within it, as an individual in a particular time and place with a particular physiological makeup and cultural background (Nagel 1986, 5). The objective point of view is reached by taking the ‘stepping back’ procedure outlined in the previous chapter (section II) and pushing it to its limit. This leads to an “impersonal standpoint”, one purged of everything specific about me: I am to consider “the world as a whole, as if from nowhere”, with myself *qua* particular human subject as merely

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<sup>8</sup> This distinction is based on the epistemic notion of objectivity discussed in chapter six, section II.

one item “in those oceans of space and time” (Nagel 1986, 61).<sup>9</sup> The problem this produces for Nagel is that, from the objective standpoint, I seem completely detached from this human person (in my case, Donnchadh Ó Conaill). How can *I*, the subject of the objective point of view, be *this* particular individual? My connection to him seems arbitrary – he is just one of the countless persons in the world I survey, and there seems to be no reason why I should be identical with him, or indeed with any particular person. This sense of detachment from oneself is one of the main features Nagel’s problem shares with the paradox of subjectivity; the other is that this sense of detachment is arrived at by taking a different attitude or standpoint to one’s everyday perspective.

Nagel correctly notes that this sense of detachment does not show that the subject occupying the objective point of view is not identical with the subject of the subjective perspective (1986, 61-62). However, he suggests that this sense of detachment shows that there is something about me which is not determined by my subjective point of view. The thought ‘I am Donnchadh Ó Conaill’ can express this point. We take the ‘I’ to refer to me *qua* the subject of the objective point of view, and ‘Donnchadh Ó Conaill’ to refer to one of the many persons in the world, each of whom has their own subjective point of view (Nagel 1986, 64). Understood in this way, the claim ‘I am Donnchadh Ó Conaill’ is not trivial.

However, while Nagel distinguishes these different aspects of the self, he is unable to give an account of how they can be reconciled. He suggests “The content of the thought that I am TN [i.e., Thomas Nagel] can be understood once the objective conception closes over itself by locating the subject that forms it at a particular point in the world that it encompasses” (1986, 65). This is correct at one

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<sup>9</sup> Nagel himself compares the subject understood as occupying the objective point of view with Husserl’s transcendental subject (1986, 62, fn. 3).



level, in that this is how the thought ‘I am TN’ (or ‘I am Donnchadh Ó Conaill’) clearly must be understood. But Nagel does not explain *how* the objective subject can locate itself as one of the persons in the world it surveys. That is, even if the subject in the objective point of view can pick out the particular person it is identical with, how is it meant to understand itself, not just as related in some way to this person, but as identical with them? How could *I*, a subject of an objective point of view, a subject with no personal features, be identical with this particular person? What we are missing is an account of the conditions for the possibility of this judgement of identification. I think Nagel’s own account cannot provide us with the tools to overcome this problem. What is required, I suggest, is a phenomenological account of how I can take a different perspective or attitude to that of my everyday living, and yet still make sense of myself as identical with the person who occupies this everyday perspective. At the end of this chapter, I shall argue that the account which I think can resolve the paradox of subjectivity can also help to resolve Nagel’s closely related problem.

(c)

The second way of expressing the paradox more clearly indicates why it is such a problem, since it gives us a reason to think that the transcendental and empirical subjects cannot be identical. If we cannot show that this reason is in fact misplaced, then the entire edifice of Husserlian transcendental idealism is threatened.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> I should also note that in what follows, I shall not be taking the paradox as a sceptical challenge, the challenge of showing that the transcendental and empirical subjects really are one and the same. Rather, I shall address the issue of how it is possible that they could be identical. I shall not, therefore, be offering arguments in favour of their identity, but assuming this as a given. This is the approach adopted by Carr (1999, 135). As far as I can see, Husserl adopts it as well, in that he never offers an argument to show that the two subjects are really one and the same.

In considering how to respond to the paradox, we should first ask what would count as a resolution. As I have outlined it, the issue is that we have two seemingly incompatible characterisations of the one subject. In any such case, we can make one of five possible responses. First, one or the other of the characterisations might turn out to be false. In this case, the incompatibility would not be a problem at all, any more than the incompatibility of any pair of true and false statements. Second, both characterisations might turn out to be false, and their incompatibility would thus be of academic interest only. Third, it might turn out that the characterisations are each of a different object, and so their apparent incompatibility would not be a genuine contradiction. Fourth, both characterisations might turn out to be of the one object and to both be true. In this case, their incompatibility must be revealed as merely apparent by other means.

The fifth possible response is that we simply accept the paradox as an insurmountable feature, either of things themselves or of our thinking about things. This is the approach taken by Carr (1999, 9, 136-137; see also Sinha 1969, 87). However, I find this response unconvincing. We should only ever tolerate paradoxes as a last resort, and I do not think Carr shows that this is where the paradox of subjectivity leaves us. His account is largely historical, tracing the development of the paradox through the transcendental tradition. He does not devote much time to critically assessing the prospects for a resolution of the paradox, or arguing in detail against any suggestions as to how we might address it. Therefore, I do not think he has established or even given *prima facie* reason to believe that we ought to simply accept it as an insoluble problem.

Discounting this option, let us consider the other four possible responses to the paradox. The first response would require us to give up either our

characterisation of the subject as a part of the world, or our characterisation of the subject as functioning transcendently to make sense of the whole world. Taking the first of these options would seem to commit us to some sort of traditional idealism. The human self would be revealed as an illusion, and the true subject would not be a part of the world at all. I don't see any reason to opt for such a radical revision of what experience presents us with. Nor do I see any reason to reject the very idea of the transcendental subject.<sup>11</sup> I have argued in defence of this idea in earlier chapters, and will not reiterate these points here. Therefore, I think we have good *prima facie* reasons to reject the first possible response to the paradox. If rejecting either of the assumptions on which the paradox is based is not particularly palatable, then *a fortiori* the second possible response, that both characterisations are false, should be rejected as well.

The third possible response is to accept that the two characterisations are mutually exclusive, but to argue that they refer to different subjects.<sup>12</sup> In that case, there would seem to be no more problem than we face when considering how any two different items can have incompatible statements truly asserted of them. Every true statement is relative to its subject-matter in this way (a form of relativity which is completely harmless). However, this is not a response which I find particularly attractive. For one thing, it brings with it problems of its own, most obviously the nature of the relation between the two selves (Malcolm 1988, 153-158). Furthermore, as I shall argue in section IV, this response seems to disregard the

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, one might take the paradox itself as precisely such a reason. But if I can resolve it, or at least point the way towards a resolution, this will no longer have much force as a reason.

<sup>12</sup> Herman Philipse suggests Husserl actually makes this response to the paradox (1995, 284-285). However, this reading is based on the assumption that Husserl embraces absolute idealism (as discussed in chapter four). I disagree with this interpretation of Husserl's own position, and in any case I do not think this response to the paradox has much chance of success.

phenomenological evidence which suggests that the subjects of the two attitudes really are one and the same.

This leaves the fourth option: that both characterisations are true, that they are characterisations of the same subject, and that their incompatibility is only apparent. The first thing to note is that if I can show this, then it would count as a genuine resolution of the paradox. By this, I mean it would accept the premises upon which the paradox is established, but show that they do not generate a contradiction. None of the first three responses I have canvassed would count as a genuine resolution of the paradox, but would rather dissolve it, by rejecting one or more of the assumptions it is based upon. I think we have *prima facie* evidence in favour of accepting each of these assumptions. Therefore, a resolution of the paradox is highly desirable.

In pursuit of a resolution, I shall argue that the apparent incompatibility between the assumptions is perspectival, an inevitable consequence of the subject taking two different attitudes towards the world and itself. Since this apparent incompatibility is perspectival, it follows that it is possible for the one subject to be both empirical and transcendental. This is ultimately an ontological conclusion, but will have to be arrived at by phenomenological descriptions of how the subject is disclosed in the natural and the transcendental attitudes.

There is a danger that in seeking to resolve the paradox in this way, all I will do is restate it in a disguised form. This is a persistent danger with any attempt to resolve a philosophical paradox, and cannot, as far as I can see, be forestalled by a priori arguments. Rather, I shall rest my case on the details of the phenomenological descriptions I shall provide.

**III.****Ontological and Transcendental Relations**

My response to the paradox shall involve two stages. The first, which I shall outline in this section, involves arguing that there is no contradiction involved in asserting both ontological realism and transcendental idealism. To show this, I shall distinguish ontological and transcendental relations. Since they are different kinds of relation, they cannot be used to generate a straightforward contradiction, in the manner which the paradox might at first glance seem to give rise to.

That there seems to be a contradiction here can be supported by the following line of thought: as an empirical entity, the subject is part of a greater whole, and cannot be that upon which the whole (i.e., the world) depends; but as a transcendental subject, the subject is precisely that upon which the whole world depends; therefore, the same subject cannot be both empirical and transcendental. If this line of thought is correct, then the paradox is necessarily a contradiction.

**(a)**

To see that this line of thought is mistaken, we must contrast ontological and transcendental relations. By ‘ontological relations’, I mean the relations that hold between objects regarding their existence or their nature.<sup>13</sup> In particular, I want to focus on relations of ontological dependence, which we can divide into two classes, respectively existential and essential dependence. These two classes may not exhaust the class of ontological relations, but they are the crucial relations to consider in assessing whether or not the paradox is a contradiction.

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<sup>13</sup> In what follows, I shall take ‘object’ in my usual broad sense, as referring to entities, states, properties, events or processes.

Let us say that entity A can only exist given the existence of entity B. In that case, A is existentially dependent on B. This is not a kind of causal dependence. A will be causally dependent on B only given certain other conditions, which are usually taken to include certain laws of nature. But the existential dependence of one natural item on another is not (or at least, not always) a matter of the two items standing under a natural law. For example, the particular whiteness of this sheet of paper would not exist if this sheet of paper did not itself exist, but this has nothing to do with any natural law; it is a matter of this particular whiteness being a property or a mode of being of this particular sheet of paper (as discussed in chapter two, section V). The relation of existential dependence in this case holds between the particular property and the sheet *qua* bearer of that property. But neither properties as such nor their bearers as such are the kind of things which show up in natural laws.

Existential dependence is weaker than strict identity. It includes constitution, understood in the non-Husserlian sense as one entity being formed from, though not being identical to, others, as when a cloud is composed of rain-drops (Lowe 2006, 50-51). It also includes realisation, when one process or event occurs only given the occurrence of others. Again, there may be no strict identity here, since the one type of higher-level process may be realised by a number of different kinds of lower-level processes. The ontology of functional processes such as digestion can be seen as exemplifying this kind of relation (Tye 1995, 41). The activities of certain of my internal organs do not cause me to digest my food; rather, the process of digestion is realised in these activities.

The second kind of ontological dependence I want to consider is essential dependence. A is essentially dependent on B if A's nature, the particular item that is it, depends either on B's nature or B's existence. For example, the assassination of

Julius Cesar counts as that very event only if it is Cesar himself who is killed. Note that this event depends both on the identity of Cesar himself, and on his existence. Obviously, Cesar cannot be killed if he does not exist. And someone else being assassinated, even if it occurred at that very time and place, would not have been the same event (Lowe 2005, § 4).

**(b)**

Transcendental relations are those which hold between the sense of the world as a whole and the subject who makes sense of it. More specifically, they hold between the sense of the world and the transcendental functioning of the subject. Transcendental relations are a subset of constitutional relations, the class of relations holding between a subject and any object it makes sense of.<sup>14</sup>

Transcendental relations can be contrasted with ontological relations in two ways.<sup>15</sup> First, any two or more objects whatsoever can in principle stand in some ontological relation or other. In theory, any two entities, events, states or properties might turn out to be ontologically related to each other. However, while any object whatsoever can occupy one side of a transcendental relation, the other side must always be occupied by a specific kind of object: a transcendental subject. It is impossible for a genuine transcendental relation to hold between two objects, neither of which is a transcendental subject.

To make this point clear, we can distinguish two claims. The first is the claim that, in a transcendental relation, a subject must be one of the relata. This claim is correct because a transcendental relation concerns awareness of the world as such,

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<sup>14</sup> I introduced constitution in chapter three, and transcendental constitution in chapter four.

<sup>15</sup> Strictly speaking, transcendental relations are themselves a subspecies of ontological relations. The sense the world has for a particular subject is ontologically dependent (both essentially and existentially) on the transcendental functioning of that subject. However, it shall be more convenient for me to speak of transcendental relations as a different kind of relation. In any case, they can be distinguished from other ontological relations, as the following should make clear.

and subjects are the only entities which can be aware of anything. This is not true by definition, but I take it to be essentially true, given the nature of awareness as an intentional experience of something. The second claim is that what it is to be a specifically *transcendental* subject is to stand in a transcendental relation in this way. This claim is true by definition. A subject is defined as transcendental if and only if it is standing in this sort of relation. So it is necessary to have a subject as one of the relata in a transcendental relation, and that subject will ipso facto be a transcendental subject.

The second and more important contrast between transcendental and ontological relations is that transcendental relations do not directly concern the nature or existence of objects, but their sense. An object is transcendently related to a subject if that subject makes sense of it as a part of the world. If I take the object in front of me to be a bottle of water, sitting on the table within my present reach, and as integrated into the world, then I am transcendently related to the bottle. Conversely, the sense the bottle has for me is transcendently dependent upon me. But it does not follow that the bottle itself is either existentially or essentially dependent upon me, or upon my being aware of it. Most of the objects I make sense of are not presented to me as depending, either for their existence or their nature, on my being aware of them. We have numerous examples where items can be transcendently but not ontologically dependent on me. And I do not think we have any reason to think that the case of the world as a whole is any different.

Having drawn this distinction, we can quickly see the mistake in the line of thought outlined at the start of this section, which suggested that ontological realism and transcendental idealism are contradictory. The subject, as an entity in the natural world, is existentially dependent on other natural entities, processes and indeed on



the structure of the natural world. For example, a universe without gravity would almost certainly be devoid of organic life and of any non-organic arrangements of matter which might suffice for subjectivity to arise.<sup>16</sup> Whether the subject is essentially dependent on anything else in the natural world is more difficult to ascertain. But it certainly seems that the world itself is neither essentially nor existentially dependent on us. I cannot see how a causally ordered spatiotemporal expanse of objects depends either for its existence or its nature as this kind of order on anything about me.<sup>17</sup>

The sense I have of the world is dependent upon my transcendental functioning, in that without this functioning, the world would make no sense to me; I would have no awareness of it at all. But it does not follow that the world would cease to exist. Nor does it follow that I do not depend for my existence on the existence of the world. I conclude that there is no necessary contradiction between transcendental idealism and an ontological realism which holds that the existence and the nature of the world do not depend on how any subject takes the world to be.

#### IV.

#### **The Natural and Transcendental Attitudes**

The above argument leaves unresolved the exact relation between ontological realism and transcendental idealism. In this section, I want to consider the subject as it appears in the natural and in the transcendental attitudes, and show how it is

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<sup>16</sup> I am assuming here that panpsychism is false. Even if this is contested, I take it as obvious that the kind of sophisticated subjective lives we live would be impossible in such a universe.

<sup>17</sup> Of course, a Kantian transcendental idealist would suggest that the world is only a spatiotemporal causal order to the extent that it is perceivable by a human subject. I cannot pursue this matter in detail, but I would suggest that this kind of view is in tension with Husserl's commitments to direct realism and to the possibility of any object of awareness being given in an intuitive fashion (see 1960, 84-87).

possible for the subjects revealed in each to be identical. As I mentioned in section II, I am not trying to justify the claim that these subjects are one and the same. Rather, I am trying to show how it is possible that a subject which answers to one description could be identical to one which answers to another.

To show that this is possible, I must defend two claims: that the transcendental subject must constitute itself as an empirical subject; and that when it does so, it must obscure its transcendental functioning. These points together would allow me to conclude that the empirical subject is the transcendental subject, but constituted in such a way that its transcendental functioning can never show up without a change of attitude. If I can show this, then it would count as a genuine resolution of the paradox, following the criteria laid out at II(c) above. It would retain the basic premises the paradox is drawn from, but align them in such a way that they would no longer generate a seeming absurdity.

The approach I am taking requires phenomenological work, but towards an ontological end, that of showing that the one subject can answer to each of the two ways of referring to it. In addressing this aim by way of phenomenological work, I am following the way I outlined the problem in II(b). I argued there that the sharpest way of expressing the paradox was to contrast the subject appearing as part of the world-phenomenon with the subject as that to which the world-phenomenon appears. In order to meet this challenge, we must examine these different ways in which the subject can be aware of itself.

**(a)**

Clearly, this approach requires that I look closely at the natural and the transcendental attitudes, and at the relations between them. To resolve the paradox, we require a synthesis which would hold across the two attitudes (Carr 1999, 9).

We must first consider how in general a synthesis across different attitudes might be possible. A synthesis is a joining together of different experiential episodes to form an awareness of an object or situation as unified.<sup>18</sup> Two or more experiential episodes can be synthesised only if they share, to some degree at least, a common noematic structure. I say ‘to some degree’ because two episodes can be synthesised even if their noematic content differs. For example, when I judge that a person I see crossing the road is someone I know, and then look more closely and realise I was wrong, a synthesis occurs between the first and the second, revised judgement. The second judgement will have a form such as ‘That person, who I thought was so-and-so, I now recognise to not be so-and-so’. This synthesis requires that there is sufficient overlap between the noematic structures for them to be conjoined as an awareness of the one object. The overlap here would be whatever noematic structure allows me to pick out and track ‘that person’ as the object of both experiences.

An attitude is a structure of a subject which opens up a particular field of objects to the subject. In each attitude, the field is opened up as under a certain mode of appearance. The objects in this field are presented as having certain features, standing in certain relations, and so on. Each attitude, in opening its particular field, opens a correlative range of the possible experiences one can have of objects in that field. However, no attitude is completely open. Each, in opening up certain possible experiences, will exclude other experiences as well. To open up these other, excluded experiences, the subject would have to switch to a different attitude.

When we juxtapose the operation of synthesis with the structure of an attitude, we face the following problem: how is it possible for there to be a synthesis of experiences in different attitudes? Let us say we have two experiences, E1 and E2.

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<sup>18</sup> This paragraph recapitulates ground covered in chapter three, section III. The next recapitulates ground covered in chapter four, section II.

E1 occurs in attitude A1, E2 in attitude A2. The range of experiences with which E1 can be synthesised is opened up within A1; likewise for E2 and A2. But A1 and A2 are different attitudes, so each excludes a range of experiences. Therefore, E1 cannot be synthesised with any experiences outside A1; likewise with E2 and A2. If it turns out that E1 can be synthesised with E2, how is this possible? In other words, what determines which experiences are opened up in a given attitude, and which are excluded?

In response to this problem, let us consider an example of how a subject can consciously shift its attitude concerning the one object or field of objects. In the naturalistic attitude, we consider the world as containing objects only insofar as they are “themes of the relevant natural sciences” (Husserl 1989, 192). In this attitude, the experiential life of each person features as “merely a stratum of real occurrences in the Body”, that is, the organism (1989, 184). In this attitude, we cannot acknowledge our personal lives: our values, our recognising things as useful or dangerous, our recognising other people as friends or strangers, and so on (Husserl 1989, 191).

What happens when I shift from this attitude to the natural attitude? It is not just that I think of the one object, first in one way and then in another. Rather, I consciously adjust my comportment towards it, while all the time aware of it as the one object. The same object which I previously regarded as an organism, “a physical thing with sensing surfaces, sense organs, etc” (Husserl 1989, 185) I now regard as a friend or colleague, as handsome or dowdy, as irritable or in a cheerful mood.

This is certainly a synthesis, and it is one which spans the two attitudes, naturalistic and natural. This synthesis is possible because both attitudes concern the same field of objects; or rather, the field of objects each concerns overlaps, since each opens up the world of spatiotemporal objects. Not only that, each attitude opens

up this field precisely *as* spatiotemporal. Each attitude comports the subject towards an array of entities which are presented as extended in space and time. The two attitudes differ in terms of the other properties they allow to be assigned to the objects. In the natural attitude, I am aware of the world as filled with things which have social or cultural significance for me and for others. In the naturalistic attitude, all of this is bracketed. We can track the one object as the same before and after we switch attitudes because of the overlap in the properties of the objects that each attitude opens up. So each attitude opens experiences whose noemata (which present these objects as having these properties) overlap with the noemata of experiences in the other attitude.

**(b)**

The example of the natural and naturalistic attitudes shows how a synthesis across attitudes is possible. The next task is to see how a synthesis between the transcendental and the natural attitudes might be possible. In particular, we want a synthesis of how I experience myself in both attitudes. To show that this is possible, we must examine my experiences of myself in each attitude.

In the transcendental attitude, the subject actually constitutes itself in two ways. One of these is the way introduced in section II: in the transcendental attitude, I take the entire world as a phenomenon, and this world includes myself as an empirical subject. So in the transcendental attitude, I constitute myself as an empirical subject. What is more interesting is that in the transcendental attitude, the subject can also constitute itself as a transcendental subject. There are two main features of this constitution which I want to remark upon. In the transcendental attitude, I constitute my experiences as a stream flowing through time, and as intentionally structured.

The constitution of experiences in time follows the structure laid out in chapter five. Each experience I live through passes through the three-part temporal structure of protention, the punctual now-point and retention. Furthermore, I am aware of each experience I undergo as temporally extended. Indeed, if I was not aware of them as filling a certain section of internal time, I could not be aware of undergoing them at all (Sokolowski 1964, 539). Each experience is given to me by a synthesis of a manifold of temporal phases, where each phase is a part of the stream of consciousness which occupies one of the positions in the temporal structure (Sokolowski 1964, 537; Husserl 1964, 117). Say I reflect on a perceptual experience I am undergoing. I will be aware of it as unfolding through the now-point, but as extending into the past and as opening up possible future experiences. These phases are synthesised together to constitute my unified, temporally extended perceptual experience.

Furthermore, the experiences which I undergo are not just constituted as temporally extended, but also as intentionally structured. When I reflect on my perceptual experience, I am aware of it as revealing a particular object or situation. In the transcendental attitude, I bracket the actual object of the experience, but its noema is still available. Inspecting it, I can see that this perceptual experience comes out of previous experiences, both perceptual and otherwise, and it opens up horizons of possible further experiences. Not only am I aware of the experience as temporally extended, I can also grasp it as synthesised with other experiences. The patterns of synthesis are correlated with the noemata of the various experiences, and are ultimately correlated with the world as a phenomenon.

Husserl suggests other ways in which the transcendental subject constitutes itself. For example, I can be aware of myself as a substrate of habitualities, of

tendencies to do one thing rather than other, tendencies which accrue during my conscious life. It is in this way that I can be aware of myself, even in the transcendental attitude, as having a particular personality (Husserl 1960, 66-67). But I do not need to refer to these other ways of self-constitution to show that the transcendental subject does in fact constitute itself as transcendental. Indeed, it must constitute itself in this attitude, in order for transcendental reflection to be possible at all. Reflection, like any other form of investigation or judging, is essentially reactive, in that it depends on some prior awareness of whatever it is we are investigating (Husserl 1989, 224-225).

(c)

Let us next consider how I constitute myself in the natural attitude. In this attitude, I am aware of the world and of myself as both in and engaged with the world. Most importantly for our purposes in this chapter, I am not aware of myself as a mere object, a thing which can stand in causal relations or carry a cultural significance but which has no personal life of its own.

To see that this is so, consider first my awareness of my surroundings. Looking around this room, I am aware of it not just as a spatio-temporal array of objects, but as affording me various possibilities for action, as containing things which are valuable to me or which might impede my projects. The room as it appears to me is shot through with values, both positive and negative. These values are not free-floating, but are anchored in my particular cultural and social situation and my particular projects. What I want to argue is that this awareness of the room involves me constituting myself precisely as someone who themselves constitutes, who makes sense of other things and other people. To see this, consider as examples of self-constitution my experiences of perceiving and acting. In perceiving my

surroundings, I become aware of various entities, events and states of affairs. But these objects are presented to me precisely as located relative to my position in space: as near or far, as to my left or right, as above or below me. My awareness of these objects as relative to my position discloses my own presence in the situation.

But this disclosure goes further than simply presenting me as in the same situation. I am also presented as the perceiver, as the subject who is enjoying this awareness of these objects. Consider my looking at a tree, walking over to it, running my hand up and down its trunk. Throughout this sequence of episodes, I will be aware of the tree, and of my experiences of it. But I am also myself disclosed in the same sequence of experiences. Even if we allow that I am at no point the object of my experiences, I am still intimated to myself in all of them as the subject engaged in this perceiving. One simple way of making this point is as follows: the correct expression of the sequence of episodes we are considering would not be just: ‘a tree is visible... now the same tree is being touched’. Rather, the correct expression would be something like ‘I see a tree... now I walk towards it... now I touch the tree’.

This point is also substantially true of action. Consider a simple physical action such as reaching out and taking hold of a mug to take a drink. Without committing myself to any particular theory of action, I shall assume that this particular action involves at least the following: an awareness of the mug on the table; a notion of how I want the world to be; and an awareness of what I am doing as connected to both of these.<sup>19</sup> It is the last aspect of my awareness which is of

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<sup>19</sup> I see these assumptions only as among the minimal conditions necessary to distinguish actions from bodily movements which would not count as actions, such as a muscular spasm or a reflex. These assumptions do not commit me to a classical belief-desire model for the explanation of actions. In particular, I need not have explicitly thought of what I wanted to do and considered my different options before settling on moving my arm. Rather, the possibility of justification is built into the action. As McDowell puts it, “rationality is *in* action ... not behind action, in the guise of a maxim” (2007, 351 fn. 13).



interest to me here. As with perception, I am disclosed not just as present in the situation, but as engaged with it, as trying to alter it in some way. As with the example of perceiving the tree, I am often not the object of the action. But whatever its object, the experience of my acting discloses me, precisely as an actor.

Both in perceiving and acting, my engagement is intentionally structured and so involves my making sense of objects or of my situation. This might seem a peculiar description of acting, but I am taking the notion of ‘making sense of things’ in a broad sense, as my being intentionally aware of things. Both action and perception involve my being intentionally aware of my situation, and both involve my being aware of myself precisely as so engaged. But for me to be aware of my own making sense of things is for me to constitute myself as constituting.

To recap, in the previous subsection and in this one, I have outlined three different ways in which I constitute myself:

1. in the natural attitude, I constitute myself as an empirical subject;
2. in the transcendental attitude, I constitute myself as an empirical subject;
3. in the transcendental attitude, I constitute myself as a transcendental subject.

We must now consider how it is possible for me to synthesise these three different kinds of self-experience.

**(d)**

In (b) and (c), I have considered how I am aware of myself within the transcendental and the natural attitudes, respectively. But a solution to the paradox requires that we make sense of my understanding myself as the same subject across these two attitudes. My suggestion is that when we juxtapose the self-constitution

involved in the natural and the transcendental attitudes, respectively, we can understand how I can grasp myself as the same in each case.

Let us start with 1, my constitution of myself in the natural attitude. Consider again my perceiving the tree. In the natural attitude, I will be aware of the tree, but in such a way that I myself, as the perceiving subject, am also disclosed. Now let us switch to the transcendental attitude. Here, the existence of the tree, and of myself as a natural entity, are both bracketed. What I am left with is precisely the experience I had before, the perceiving of the tree. This experience, with its particular noematic content, is not itself bracketed. It is available for me as an object in the transcendental attitude. This is 2 above: the constitution of myself as an empirical subject, as part of the world-phenomenon.

Let us call my experience of the tree E(i). In switching to the transcendental attitude, I am no longer taking the tree as my object; rather, I am reflecting on my experience of the tree, that is, reflecting on E(i). So I have a different experience, E(ii), which takes as its object E(i) and its noematic structure (the tree as it appears).

But this means that I must constitute E(i), that is, make sense of it as a feature of the world. This I do by having a reflective experience, namely E(ii). But now note that I can become aware of my own transcendental functioning. That is, I can make E(ii) itself into an object of a further experience, E(iii). In having E(iii), I become aware of my own constitution of the world-phenomenon itself. So we can distinguish the following:

E(i) – an experience, in the natural attitude, whose object is a tree;

E(ii) – an experience, in the transcendental attitude, whose object is E(i), i.e., whose object is my awareness of the tree;

E(iii) – an experience, in the transcendental attitude, whose object is E(ii), i.e., whose object is the way I transcendently constitute E(i).

The distinctions between E(i), E(ii) and E(iii) map precisely onto the distinctions between 1, 2 and 3. In E(i), I constitute myself, in the natural attitude, as an empirical subject (i.e., 1). In E(ii), I constitute myself as an empirical subject, but this time in the transcendental attitude (i.e., 2). And in E(iii), I constitute myself as a transcendental subject (i.e., 3).

The challenge posed at the end of the previous subsection was how we could find a way to synthesise 1, 2 and 3. If what I have said so far in this subsection is correct, then we can do this if we can find a way to synthesise E(i), E(ii) and E(iii). I now want to argue that we can synthesise these three experiences.

When we consider these three experiences, we find significant overlaps in their respective noematic structures. In all three, the subject is constituted as living through experiences, which pass through subjective temporality and which have noematic structures. So in each of E(i), E(ii) and E(iii), the subject is constituted as constituting, as making sense of things.

Furthermore, while the objects of these three experiences differ, their noematic structures must overlap. E(i) discloses the subject in relation to a tree. It does this in virtue of having a noematic structure, which will at least include the sense ‘this tree as it appears to me’. Next, E(ii) constitutes this very experience, E(i). But part of what it is to constitute E(i) is to constitute its noematic structure, which includes ‘this tree as it appears to me’. Lastly, E(iii) constitutes E(ii). Again, this requires that it constitute E(ii)’s noematic structure, which is ‘this experience [i.e., E(i)] of this tree as it appears to me’. So the same sense of the tree will crop up, in different ways, in the noematic content of all three experiences.

But if the noematic structures of the three experiences overlap in this way, this can explain how it is possible for these experiences to be synthesised. Recall that a synthesis of two experiences need not require that their noematic structure be identical. Nor need the experiences have an identical object. Rather, a synthesis requires that the subject grasps the various objects of their awareness as together making sense, as forming a compatible whole. If experiences produce incompatibilities (if, for example, my judgements contradict the evidence of my senses) then this incompatibility must itself be resolvable in a further, corrective synthesis.

In the case of our three experiences, E(i)-E(iii), the objects constituted as belonging together are a tree, my experience of it, and my experience of my experience. So it is not just one object which is constituted, but a number of different objects, which are however, constituted as mutually compatible. None of the experiences involves cancelling out one or more of the others, as happens when I revise my judgements. Rather, the synthesis reveals different levels of my awareness, levels which are synthesised precisely by being indexed to the one tree.

The crucial point to note is that these levels of awareness occur in different attitudes. E(i) occurs in the natural attitude, E(ii) and E(iii) both occur in the transcendental attitude. What the synthesis of these experiences shows is how it is possible for the transcendental subject to constitute itself in a different, non-transcendental attitude. That is, the subject revealed to me in the natural attitude is none other than the transcendental subject, constituting itself as mundane. “[T]he natural, objective world-life is only a particular mode of the transcendental life which forever constitutes the world” (Husserl 1970, 175).

We can understand how the two subjects are really one and the same by referring to the awareness they share of particular objects and situations in the world. This accords with something Carr says. He points out that the transcendental subject is characterised “exclusively in terms of intentionality” (1999, 91; see also 134). Once we have described its intentional functioning, there is very little left to say about it. By contrast, the empirical subject is a part of the world, relating to other spatiotemporal items in a causal fashion. But it also can have an intentional awareness of these items (Carr 1999, 91). The significance of this point, which I don’t think Carr fully appreciates, is that it allows for precisely the sort of synthesis across the natural and transcendental attitudes which he suggests is impossible (1999, 9). It is precisely because both attitudes reveal the subject as intentionally aware that we can understand it as the same subject. In other words, it is by synthesising the objects which are revealed to the subject in the different attitudes, that I can synthesise my awareness in these different attitudes of the one subject, myself.

(e)

This leaves two pertinent issues unresolved. First, why should the transcendental subject constitute itself as empirical at all? And second, why is it that the subject cannot constitute itself *as* transcendental, when it is in the natural attitude?

In answer to the first question, I would say that the transcendental subject must constitute itself as empirical in order to be a concrete individual. Each transcendental subject has a stream of conscious experiences, flowing through its temporal structure. But these experiences must have determinate phenomenal content. And it is hard to see where this content could come from, if not from the life

of the subject in the natural attitude. In this attitude, the subject perceives, acts, remembers, undergoes emotions, makes plans, judges, hypothesises, and so on. If the subject could not have these experiences, it seems very doubtful to me whether it could have any determinate awareness of the world.

Another way of putting this point is to say that the transcendental subject exists only insofar as it can make sense of the world. Again, note Carr's point that this subject is characterised "exclusively in terms of intentionality" (1999, 91). But in order for the transcendental subject to be capable of making sense of the world, it must have determinate experiences of the world. And these experiences are provided by the perceptions, actions and so on of the empirical subject. The transcendental subject must, therefore, co-constitute both the world and themselves as an empirical subject, perceiving and acting in the world. Without one, they cannot have the other, and vice-versa.

The second question is why the subject cannot constitute itself as transcendental while in the natural attitude. On my account, the difference between the empirical and transcendental subjects is perspectival. That is, the transcendental subject does show up in the natural attitude, but not *as* transcendental. In this attitude, its own transcendental functioning is obscured. In the natural attitude, the subject

lives in 'infatuation', so to speak, with the poles of unity [i.e., the objects of awareness] without being aware of the constituting multiplicities belonging essentially to them – for this, precisely, would require a complete reorientation and reflection (Husserl 1970, 176; see also 1960, 99-100).

This should not strike us as mysterious. In the natural attitude, the subject is concerned primarily with objects in the world, rather than with how it can make sense of these objects. It is aware of its own experiences to the extent that this helps it better cope with the challenges the world throws up. But the transcendental functioning of the subject is not itself a problem or a challenge which faces the subject in its everyday life. Rather, it is this functioning which allows me to be aware of all these quotidian problems, which include scientific and philosophical issues concerning the nature of the world, the best way to know the world, and so on.

One interpretation of the way the transcendental subject is obscured is that it cannot belong to the world which it constitutes. But this inference is mistaken. In particular, it makes the mistake of inferring an ontological distinction from a merely functional one. Recall the distinction drawn in chapter three between the constituted and the constituting. I argued there that this distinction was functional, a matter of the role each of the items referred to was playing. One upshot of this interpretation is that the one item can function both as that which constitutes and that which is constituted. This would be impossible if the distinction was ontological; if the constituted and the constituting were different items, belonging to different ontological categories.

If I am correct in this, then the subject is transcendental insofar as it functions to constitute the world as a world. As empirical, it is constituted as part of this world. But from the fact that the transcendental subject does not show up as transcendental in the world, it does not follow that it is not a part of the world. The empirical subject does show up in the world. What my account in (d) above shows is how it is possible for the empirical subject to be the transcendental subject, disguised as a mere part of the world even as it carries out its world-constituting task.

(f)

Lastly, let us briefly consider how my resolution of the paradox might be applied to Nagel's problem. Recall that this problem is how, from the objective point of view, I can identify myself with one particular person, and so overcome the sense of detachment I feel when considering Donnchadh Ó Conaill from this perspective. To solve this problem, we need to provide the conditions for the possibility of this judgement. While this problem is not identical with the paradox of subjectivity, I think that the resolution to the paradox I have offered can also help here. In particular, I see Nagel's problem as concerning the conditions for the possibility of a particular synthesis, a synthesis of my awareness of myself as the subject in the objective point of view and my awareness of myself from this point of view as one of the many persons in the world. In this section, I have outlined a way in which we can make sense of a synthesis between two attitudes, the natural and the transcendental. I suggest we can offer a similar account with regard to Nagel's problem.

In the case of the paradox, we were considering the relation between my self-awareness in the natural and the transcendental attitudes. I took as an example my experience of a tree, E(i), and then considered how I can reflect on this experience when I take the transcendental attitude. This process gave me E(ii) and then, reflecting on that, E(iii). By comparing these three experiences, we can see how they share a noematic structure. It is by sharing this noematic structure that it is possible for them to be synthesised, and so present the one subject considered in different ways.

In addressing Nagel's problem, we are considering the relation between the subject who occupies the objective point of view and the subject who appears from



this point of view as one of the many persons in the world. So the two experiences to be synthesised are my awareness of myself *qua* subject of the objective point of view, and my awareness, from this point of view, of one of the persons in the world as being me. Nagel correctly points out that the first of these experiences, my awareness of myself as occupying the objective point of view, is essentially indexical, in that it is expressed by a proposition which must use an indexical term (such as ‘I’ or ‘the subject of this conception of the world’) (1986, 64). What is crucial to note is that something similar is true of my awareness, from this point of view, of Donnchadh Ó Conaill. While I can be aware of Donnchadh Ó Conaill in ways which do not involve indexicals, it must be possible for me to have an indexical awareness of him. This is not just because he has a subjective point of view – after all, from the objective point of view, every person I am aware of has their own subjective point of view. But of all these persons appearing to me from the objective point of view, Donnchadh Ó Conaill is the only one whose subjective point of view I can share. This is because he is the only person through whom I can act or perceive through, to use Nagel’s own, perhaps unfortunate, terminology.<sup>20</sup> In (c) above, I argued that to consciously act or perceive involves disclosing oneself as the subject who is acting or perceiving. In the example I discussed, the correct expression of my experience of perceiving a tree is something like ‘I now see the tree... now I am touching it...’. And these are essentially indexical expressions. From the objective point of view, Donnchadh Ó Conaill appears to me as the one subject who is disclosed along with me (*qua* the subject occupying the objective

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<sup>20</sup> “I ordinarily view the world from a certain vantage point, using the eyes, the person, the daily life of TN as a kind of window” (Nagel 1986, 61). This terminology is unfortunate in that it suggests that the subject *qua* occupier of the objective point of view is a separate being to the subject in the world (a point made by Malcolm in 1988, 154-158).

point of view) whenever I act or perceive. As long as this is the case, I can identify myself with him.

For example, suppose that in the objective point of view I have an experience of Donnchadh Ó Conaill seeing something. Call the experience I have from the objective point of view  $E(iv)$ , and the perceptual experience Donnchadh Ó Conaill has  $E(v)$ .  $E(iv)$  is not identical to  $E(v)$ , but it must be possible for me, from the objective point of view, to take  $E(v)$  as one of my experiences. For example, if I wonder about a certain object, which was what Donnchadh Ó Conaill saw when he had  $E(v)$ , it must be possible for me to say ‘I saw that it was such-and-such’. That is, it must be possible for me to express  $E(v)$  not just as ‘I am aware of Donnchadh Ó Conaill seeing such-and-such’, but ‘I am aware of myself seeing such-and-such’. This would be to judge, from the objective point of view, that I am the same subject as Donnchadh Ó Conaill. It is the shared indexicality of my experiences and those of Donnchadh Ó Conaill which allows for the possibility of this judgement. Indeed, the point can be put in a stronger way: from the objective point of view, whichever person in the world I happen to share indexical experiences with *must* be me.<sup>21</sup>

This problem provides an example of the advantages which a phenomenological approach can afford in dealing with certain issues in the philosophy of mind. Nagel is aware that there must be a connection between the subjects of the two points of view, and that I can only reach the objective point of view by abstracting from my subjective point of view. What he lacks are the

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<sup>21</sup> Nagel may be correct to suggest that it is possible for me, *qua* occupier of the objective point of view, to switch from being located ‘in’ Donnchadh Ó Conaill to being connected to another person. But he is incorrect to conclude that I could possibly not be anyone, in the sense of not being connected in this way to any person at all (he suggests this at 1986, 63). There is a difference between saying that the objective self can be independent of any particular person, and saying that this self can be independent of any person at all. The first of these claims does not entail the second. Again, this is similar to a point I made above concerning the paradox. The transcendental subject must constitute itself as empirical in order to have a determinate sense of the world. Similarly, the objective self must be connected with some person or other, in order for its objective conception of the world to have any determinate content.

concepts which would allow him to formulate the problem clearly, and the means of showing how it is possible for the subject in the objective point of view to identify itself with a particular person. The concepts of attitude and synthesis allow us to outline the problem in a way which makes it phenomenologically clear. Given this phenomenological analysis of the problem, we can then see how a synthesis between these two attitudes, and thus the judgement that I am Donnchadh Ó Conaill, is possible. Phenomenology can help us both better to understand Nagel's problem, and, as a consequence, to resolve it.

## Conclusion

In the Introduction, I described my project as aiming to give an account of what it is to be a subject. I suggested that such an account would require showing how the subject can have experiences, and can be aware of things in virtue of having experiences. Both the subjective character of experiences and their intentional properties have been studied in the philosophy of mind, and numerous theories have been put forward to explain each of them. However, neither of these properties has been described in the kind of detail required to provide a systematic picture of the subject of experiences. I set myself the task of providing just such a systematic and detailed description of both experiences and awareness, and an account of how they are related.

I began with the subjective character of experience, describing how it can be complex, structured and influenced by many factors. I argued that we can explain these features by regarding individual experiences as states of a field of experiencing, within which a number of experiences can co-exist in a structured manner. This field of experiencing is a property of the subject, “an abiding dimension of experiencing” (Zahavi 2005, 66). This picture requires a more detailed account of subjectivity, the ontological relation between experiences and the subject they are for. In response to this demand, I outlined a model of this relation in chapter five. This model accounted for the way in which experiences belong to their subject by appealing to their temporal form. Experiences must pass through a tripartite temporal structure (protention, the now-point, and retention), which is the form of the field of experiencing. For an experience to pass through this structure is for it to belong to that subject.

## Conclusion

With regard to awareness, I emphasised that it involves the subject having a meaningful experience of the object or objects it is aware of. The postfunctionalist work of McDowell and Putnam acknowledges the role of meaning, but does not attempt to provide an account of how subjects are capable of making sense of objects in this way. I suggested that transcendental phenomenology could complement post-functionalism by providing just this kind of constructive account. Phenomenology allows us to study the subjective character of our intentional experiences in isolation from their objects or their relations with other non-experiential states. Applying the techniques of phenomenology, we can show how the subjective character of our experiences presents us with the objects we are aware of. The aspect of our awareness I focused on was objectivity, the sense we have that objects can differ from how they appear to us. I argued that when we study how objects appear to us, we can discover a sense of objectivity structuring our awareness of them. The subjective character of our intentional experiences presents us with an objective world.

Transcendental phenomenology requires that we step out of our natural attitude, the way in which we normally engage with the world. Rather than living in this attitude, we are to take it as the object of study. This procedure gives rise to the paradox of subjectivity, the difference that seems to arise between the subject as engaged in the world and the subject as a transcendental spectator on this very engagement. If we could not solve this paradox, the very coherence of the transcendental approach would be threatened. I argued that the subject is aware of itself when it is in each of the natural and the transcendental attitudes. These two modes of self-awareness provides the basis for a synthesis across the attitudes, allowing the subject to recognise itself as the same in both.

## Conclusion

I noted in the Introduction that my project would not touch on the debates which take up most space in the philosophy of mind, concerning whether or not phenomenal consciousness and intentionality can be naturalistically explained. I deliberately set both of these discussions aside, to explore a different issue: what it is to be a subject of experiences. Without a proper understanding of this, it is arguable that the project of naturalising experiences and intentionality will never succeed, since it will lack a clear understanding of what is to be explained. Apart from that possible use, the account of the subject I have offered will hopefully have its own value as a modest contribution to metaphysics. It also provides an example of how we can use phenomenological techniques to better understand different features of experience and thus to outline an integrated picture of the subject of experiences. This suggests that transcendental phenomenology, despite its unusual methods and sometimes alien terminology, has an important contribution to make to the philosophy of mind, as a specialised way of studying experience and intentionality.

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