

1 Experience

I want to consider the claim that the subject cannot in the present moment of awareness take itself as it is in the present moment of awareness as the object of its awareness. In the first two sections I'll set out some assumptions.

First, I'll assume that materialism is true. By 'materialism', though, I mean real or realistic materialism, i.e. materialism that is wholly realist about the *experiential-qualitative character* or *what-it's-likeness* of our conscious mental goings on—I'll call this 'experience'—and accordingly takes it to be wholly physical. When real materialists say that experience—colour-experience, pain-experience—is wholly physical, they're not saying that it's somehow less than we know it to be in having it. That wouldn't be real materialism, realistic materialism, because it would involve the denial of something that obviously exists. Rather, they're saying that the physical must be something more than it's ordinarily supposed to be—given that it's ordinarily supposed to be something entirely non-experiential—precisely because experience (what-it's-likeness considered specifically as such) is itself wholly physical.

Experience is necessarily experience-*for*—experience for someone or something. I intend this only in the sense in which it's necessarily true, and without commitment to any particular account of the metaphysical nature of the someone-or-something. To claim that experience is necessarily experience-*for*, necessarily experience-*for-someone-or-something*, is to claim that it's necessarily experience on the part of a subject of experience. Again I intend this only in the sense in which it's a necessary truth, and certainly without any commitment to the idea that subjects of experience are persisting things. Some say one can't infer the existence of a subject of experience from the existence of experience, only the existence of subjectivity, but I understand the notion of the subject in a maximally ontologically non-committal way—in such a way that the presence of subjectivity is already sufficient for the presence of a subject, so that 'there is subjectivity, but there isn't a subject' can't possibly be true.¹

Consider pain, a regrettably familiar case of experience. It is, essentially, a feeling, and a feeling is just that, a *feeling*, i.e. a feel-ing, a being-felt; and a feel-ing or being-felt can't possibly exist without there being a feel-er. Again I'm only interested in the sense in which this is a necessary truth. The noun 'feeler' doesn't import any metaphysical commitment additional to the noun 'feeling'. It simply draws one's attention to the full import of 'feeling'. The sense in which it's necessarily true that there's a feeling and hence a feeler of pain if there is pain is the sense in which it's necessarily true that there's a subject of experience if there is experience and, hence, subjectivity. These truths are available prior to any particular metaphysics of object or property or substance or accident or process or event or state. (Descartes is very clear about this in his *Second Meditation*.)

* §§5-8 of this paper develop ideas in Strawson 1999: 498-502; see also Strawson 2009: 176-81. When I cite a work I give the date of first publication, or occasionally the date of composition, while the page reference is to the edition listed in the bibliography.

¹ See further Strawson 2009: 274, 414.

Some like to think that there can be subjectivity or experience without a subject. That's why it's important to bring out the full import of the notion of subjectivity or experience by stressing the fundamental sense in which it can't exist without a subject. But there's a no less important point in the other direction. If all you need to know, to know that there is a subject, is that there is subjectivity or experience, then you can't build more into the notion of a subject than you can know to exist if subjectivity or experience exists. I think, in fact, that the object/property distinction is metaphysically superficial—that there is no 'real distinction' between (a) the being of an object, considered at a given time, and (b) the being of that object's propertiedness, i.e. its whole actual concrete qualitative being at that time, i.e. everything in which its being the particular way it is at that time consists. But that is a difficult issue for another time.²

2 The thin subject

I propose to take the unchallengeable, ontologically non-committal notion of the subject of experience in a minimal or 'thin' way. By 'subject', then, I don't mean the whole organism (the whole human being, in our own case). I mean the subject considered specifically as something 'inner', something mental, the 'self', if you like, the inner 'locus' of consciousness considered just as such.

One way to think of this inner subject or self is as some complex persisting neural structure or process.³ Another still more minimal way to think of it is this. Consider the neural activity that is the existence of your current experience right now. Imagine that this neural activity somehow exists on its own—nothing else exists. In this case a subject of experience exists. It must exist, because experience exists. This last claim is not just the epistemological claim that we can know that a subject exists because we know that experience exists. It's the metaphysical claim that whatever constitutes the existence of your experience must already suffice to constitute the existence of a subject of experience. Otherwise it couldn't suffice to constitute the existence of your experience, which it does by hypothesis.

The conception of the subject as a persisting neural structure or process is probably the most common materialist conception of the inner subject, but I prefer the more minimal 'thin' conception of the subject. According to the thin conception the presence of experience is not only sufficient for the existence of the subject but also necessary. No experience, no subject of experience. There's a new subject of experience every time there's a break in experience. There's no subject of experience when one is dreamlessly asleep. We already have it as a necessary truth that [existence of experience → existence of subject of experience]. Now we add the converse [existence of subject of experience → existence of experience].

This is the thin subject. According to the present proposal, this isn't just a way of thinking of the subject, a way of isolating an aspect of the subject, where the subject proper must be supposed to be the whole human being, or a persisting neural structure, or some such. Rather, when we consider the subject as defined by the thin conception of the subject we have to do with something that is, whatever its metaphysical category, at least as good or solid a candidate for qualifying as an entity, a thing, an object (a substance, if you like)

² See Strawson 2008d, and references there to Descartes, Nietzsche, Ramsey, and others.

³ Or else, perhaps, as a subject in Dainton's sense, "a collection of experiential powers", a subject-constituting 'C-system' (Dainton 2008: 252).

as the whole human being, or a persisting brain structure.

This is not to say that reality contains anything that actually makes the grade as a thing or object or substance. The Buddhist doctrine of ‘dependent origination’ suggests that nothing does. An alternative view is that only one thing does—the universe. On this view, Parmenides and a number of leading present-day cosmologists are right. There’s really only one A-Grade thing or object or substance—the universe. (Nietzsche and Spinoza agree that nothing smaller will do.)

That’s one important view. The present claim is neutral on this issue. It’s simply the claim that thin subjects are as good, as candidates for thinghood, as anything else. In fact I think they’re better candidates than a persisting brain structure, or any ordinary physical object, and indeed any supposed fundamental particle.⁴ I’m stressing the point to counter the thought that thin subjects are somehow not real things, ontologically worse off than persisting brain-structures, for example. This view isn’t sustainable, I think, when metaphysics gets serious and stops spending its time trying to square ordinary language and ordinary thought categories with reality.

Having said that, I should add that most of the claims I’m going to make will apply to the persisting-brain-structure subject as well as to the thin subject. The difference between these two conceptions of the inner subject isn’t really at issue when it comes to my main present purpose, which is to consider the old claim that the subject can’t in the present moment of awareness take itself as it is in the present moment of awareness as the object of its awareness. The thin subject is my favourite candidate for the title ‘self’, if we’re going to talk of selves at all, but this issue too—the issue between those who agree with me about this and those who feel that any candidate for the title ‘self’ must be something more enduring—may be put aside for the purposes of this paper.

I’m going to use various numbers and letters to set things out, and apologize to those who don’t like this sort of thing. I hope that my approach to the issues I discuss may contrast helpfully with some of the Indian approaches considered in this book precisely because of my ignorance of the Indian approaches.

3 Present-moment self-awareness

Some claim that the subject can no more take itself as the object of its awareness than the eye can see itself, or, putting aside the word ‘taking’, that

(i) the subject can no more be the object of its awareness than the eye can see itself.

Some make the more restricted claim that the subject cannot in the present moment of awareness take itself as it is in the present moment of awareness as the object of its awareness; or, putting aside ‘taking’ again,

(ii) the subject in the present moment of awareness cannot be the object of its awareness in the present moment of awareness,

being, in Ryle’s memorable phrase, forever and “systematically elusive” to itself (1949: 186).

(i) and (ii) express an ancient view. I think it’s mistaken in both forms. A quick if

⁴ I support this claim in Strawson 2009: 294-320, 379-88.

unimportant point against (i) is that subjects that persist for appreciable periods of time can have themselves as object of awareness, in the fullest sense, when they remember themselves experiencing something yesterday, or a moment ago. Against that, it may be said that it's part of the meaning of the word 'aware', used as it is here to denote a state of conscious experience, that 'awareness of x ' can refer only to apprehension of x as it is in the present moment, modulo whatever time lapse is integral to the mode of awareness in question (visual, auditory, inner self-awareness).

However this may be, I'm going to concentrate on (ii), the case of present-moment awareness, and argue that there are two distinct ways in which

[1] the subject of awareness can be aware of itself as it is in the present moment of awareness.⁵

First, less controversially, and in line with Phenomenological orthodoxy, I'll argue that the subject can be present-moment aware of itself in a *non-thetic* way, where to be aware of something x in a non-thetic way is to be aware of x although one isn't specifically attending to x . Secondly, less familiarly, I'll argue that subjects of experience can also (if exceptionally) be present-moment-aware of themselves in a *thetic* or attentive way.⁶ I take this second claim to be a more direct challenge to the ancient view, which seems to rely on the idea that the reason why the subject can never truly grasp itself as it is in the present moment of awareness is that it must in so doing take (have) itself as a thetic object of thought in some way that means that the thing that it is taking (that it has) as object can't really be the thing that is doing the taking, i.e. itself as it is in the present moment of awareness.

I'm going to use 'present-moment' rather than 'immediate', at least for now, because 'immediate' also carries the non-temporal sense 'not mediated'. Temporal immediacy may imply non-mediatedness, but I want to leave the issue open.

I'll begin by considering a popular source of support for the non-thetic case which licenses a much stronger claim than [1]. On this view

[2] the subject of awareness is *always* aware of itself as it is in the present moment of awareness

whenever it's aware in any way at all.⁷ We can rephrase this as

[2] Present-Moment Self-awareness is Universal

and rephrase its weaker sibling as

[1] Present-Moment Self-awareness is Possible.

⁵ I use 'awareness', 'experience', and 'consciousness' interchangeably.

⁶ I use 'thetic' in the Sartrean way to mean simply 'in the focus of attention' rather than in the Husserlian way, in so far as the latter implies belief.

⁷ The thin notion of the subject makes the words 'whenever it's aware in any way at all' redundant; but the thin notion is of course at odds with the standard dispositional use of 'subject of awareness', which allows that a subject of awareness (whole human being, persisting brain structure, whatever) can exist in a state of dreamless sleep.

Taking ‘SA’ to be short for ‘present-moment self-awareness’, we can call [2] the Universal SA thesis, *USA* for short, and we can call [1] the possible SA thesis, *PSA* for short.

According to [2], it isn’t possible for a subject to be aware of anything without being present-moment-aware of itself. This is true of every subject of awareness, however lowly. If sea snails have any sort of awareness, then they’re (necessarily) aware of themselves in the present moment of awareness. I take [2] to be endorsed by many in the Phenomenological tradition. Husserl, for example, writes that ‘to be a subject is to be in the mode of being aware of oneself’.⁸

As it stands, the ancient view rejects both [1] and [2], both *PSA* and *USA*, in both their non-thetic and thetic versions.⁹ I’m going to start by putting the case for non-thetic *USA* and thetic *PSA*, beginning with the former. Since non-thetic *USA* entails non-thetic *PSA*, only thetic *USA* will be unsupported—as it should be.

It may be objected that it’s best to stop now, because it’s obvious that *USA* and *PSA* can’t be true, simply because the neuronal processes that constitute awareness (at least in our own case) take time: there’s an inevitable time-lag that rules out all present-moment self-awareness. I’ll leave this objection until later. It may turn out that rejecting *USA* and *PSA* for this reason is like holding that we never experience pain as it is in the present moment, even if the two cases seem at first disanalogous.

4 The ‘AOI’ thesis (all awareness comports awareness of itself)

Why should anyone assert [2], i.e. *USA*? I’m going to assume the truth of the following two general principles:

[P1] awareness is (necessarily) a property of a subject of awareness,

which has already been argued for (and is in any case evident, given that it is legitimate to talk of properties at all), and

[P2] awareness of a property of *x* is *ipso facto* awareness of *x*.¹⁰

[P1] and [P2] entail

[3] any awareness, *A1*, of any awareness, *A2*, entails awareness of the subject of *A2*

and we can get [2] = *USA* from [3] if we add

[4] all awareness involves awareness of awareness

or rather (the key premiss)

[5] all awareness involves awareness of that very awareness

⁸ 1921–8: 151. See also Zahavi 2006; this vol, 000.

⁹ ‘As it stands’: as far as I know the ancient view isn’t really concerned with the non-thetic versions.

¹⁰ ‘For purposes of argument’: I take it that [P1] and [P2] say something true even if there is in the final metaphysical analysis no fundamental (categorical) ontological division corresponding to the distinction between object and property.

i.e.

[5] all awareness involves awareness of itself,

[5] is in fact the only defensible version of [4]—as Aristotle pointed out—given the threat of an infinite regress of awarenesses of awarenesses that [4] poses as it stands.¹¹ I'll call [5] the AOI thesis, 'AOI' for 'awareness of itself', *AOI* for short.

The claim is, then, that AOI plus the two principles [P1] and [P2] entails USA. More briefly: AOI and [3] entail USA. The argument isn't formally valid as it stands, but the idea is clear.

It may be allowed that [5] all awareness involves awareness of itself, but doubted that

[6] all awareness is or involves *present-moment* awareness of itself

on the grounds that there is always a time-lag, or an episode of what Ryle calls "swift retrospective heed" (1949: 153). But it seems that this is not possible, if [5] is true at all, because the last moment in any episode of awareness couldn't in this case involve awareness of itself (all streams of awareness would have to last for ever).

The substantive premiss is AOI. The question is, why believe AOI? Why—to strengthen it slightly—believe

[7] all awareness essentially involves awareness of that very awareness

or again, more heavily,

[8] all awareness essentially, constitutively, and intrinsically involves awareness of that very awareness

('intrinsically' and 'constitutively' aim to block the possibility, arguably left open by 'involves', that the awareness A1 of the awareness A2 might be something ontologically separate from A2)

or more lightly, to the same effect,

[9] all awareness is at least in part awareness of that very awareness

or, to rephrase [8],

[10] all awareness comports awareness of that very awareness

or, reintroducing the subject of awareness,

[11] all awareness on the part of any subject comports awareness, on the part of that same

¹¹ See Aristotle *De Anima* 3.2. 425b12-17. Compare Reid: "I cannot imagine there is anything more in perceiving that I perceive a star than in perceiving a star simply; otherwise there might be perceptions of perceptions in infinitum" (1748: 317). For an excellent recent discussion of these questions in the context of Indian philosophy, see e.g. Mackenzie 2007. Note that [4] makes no explicit reference to the present moment.

subject, of that very awareness

or again, reintroducing multiply redundant explicit reference to the present moment,

[12] all awareness on the part of any subject at any moment comports awareness, at that moment, on the part of that same subject, of that very awareness at that very moment

or, shortening [10] to what I hereby designate as the canonical version of AOI,

[13] all awareness comports awareness of itself?¹²

Good question, about which there is a lot to say. I think AOI is initially difficult, but compelling on reflection. It's endorsed by many, including Descartes, Arnauld, Locke, Brentano, Husserl, Sartre, and most thinkers in the Phenomenological tradition.¹³ All of them insist that the awareness of awareness that is held to be partly constitutive of all awareness mustn't be thought of as involving some 'higher-order' mental apprehension, A1, say, bearing on an ontically distinct, separate, 'lower-order' mental apprehension A2 (for this triggers an infinite regress). The relevant awareness of awareness is, rather, an intrinsic feature of any episode of awareness considered independently of any other, given which it is correct to say that [13] = AOI is true.¹⁴

One might say that [13] = AOI can be re-expressed by talking of

[14] the self-awareness of awareness

but [14] is paradoxical, at least initially, in a way that [13] isn't, because it seems clear that awareness is, necessarily, a property of a subject of awareness (as [13] still allows, given the word 'comport'), and can't properly—or indeed possibly—be said to be a property of awareness itself. That said, I think that [14] is an acceptable way of putting things. First, it's an acceptable shorthand for [11]: all awareness on the part of any subject comports awareness, on the part of that same subject, of that very awareness. Secondly, and more strongly, the fact that all awareness is, necessarily, awareness on the part of a *subject* of awareness—the fact that reference to a subject must enter into any fully articulated description of what is going on when there is awareness—does not in any way undercut the truth of [14], according to which it is a constitutive feature of the phenomenon of awareness itself that it comports awareness of itself. Thirdly (a much stronger and much more difficult point), I think that there is a metaphysically fundamental conception of the subject given which

[15] the subject of awareness (that which wholly constitutes the existence of the subject of

¹² One can rewrite [13] as [13a] *all awareness comports self-awareness*—so long as one is clear that the occurrence of 'self-' in 'self-awareness' is merely reflexive, so that [13a] means exactly the same as [13], and doesn't imply any awareness of something called a self.

¹³ See, e.g., the quotations from Sartre in Zahavi, this volume, p. 000.

¹⁴ Among Descartes's endorsements of AOI are the following: "we cannot have any thought of which we are not aware at the very moment when it is in us" (1641: 2.171) and "the initial thought by means of which we become aware of something does not differ from the second thought by means of which we become aware that we were aware of it, any more than this second thought differs from the third thought by means of which we become aware that we were aware that we were aware" (1641: 2.382).

awareness) isn't ontically distinct from the awareness of which it is the subject

or in other words

[16] the subject of awareness is identical with its awareness.

I'll call [16] the Subject of Awareness/Awareness Identity thesis or S=A thesis, $S=A$ for short.¹⁵ It's endorsed, interestingly, by Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Nietzsche, among others, in the Western tradition,¹⁶ and if one accepts it, then [14], the further proposed version of AOI, can be understood to be fully equivalent to [2] = USA. That is,

[[AOI & S=A] → USA].

If S=A is too strong for you, you may be able to accept the weaker claim that

[[AOI & [P1] & [P2]] → USA].

If you think [P1] & [P2] are trivially true, you can shorten this to

[AOI → USA].

All I've done, in moving from [5] to [13] ± [14], is re-express AOI in a number of different ways, but one might also say that all I've done is re-express USA in a number of different ways. (The AOI thesis is focused on the nature of awareness, whereas the USA thesis is focused on the nature of the self or subject, but they are of course closely connected.)

Arnauld puts AOI well when he writes that 'thought or perception is essentially reflective on itself, or, as it is said more aptly in Latin, *est sui conscia*', is conscious of itself.¹⁷ In endorsing the AOI thesis, as he does here, he also endorses USA, given that he follows Descartes in accepting the S=A thesis.

Ryle also puts it well, although with disparaging intent, when he speaks of the idea that consciousness is "self-intimating" in some constitutive way, or "self-luminous", or "phosphorescent" (1949: 158-9; see also 162-3, 178). Frankfurt is also helpful, although parts of this passage are potentially misleading:

what would it be like to be conscious of something without being aware of this consciousness? It would mean having an experience with no awareness whatever of its occurrence. This would be, precisely, a case of unconscious experience. It appears, then, that being conscious is identical with self-consciousness. Consciousness *is* self-consciousness. The claim that waking consciousness is self-consciousness does not mean that consciousness is invariably dual in the sense that every

¹⁵ I argue for S=A in Strawson 2003b, revised in Strawson 2009: pp. 345-9, 405-19. It entails the 'thin' conception of the subject while making an even stronger claim about the relation between the subject and its experience.

¹⁶ In his famous letter to Herz, Kant writes that "the thinking or the existence of the thought and the existence of my own self are one and the same" (1772: 75). Although Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza often write as if the subject is ontically distinct from its states of experience or awareness, they're all committed to the view that the concrete being of a substance (considered at any given time) is not ontically distinct from the concrete being of its attributes at that time (whatever modes of the attributes are currently instantiated).

¹⁷ 1683: 71; he uses 'thought or perception' to cover all conscious mental goings on.

instance of it involves both a primary awareness and another instance of consciousness which is somehow distinct and separable from the first and which has the first as its object. That would threaten an intolerably infinite proliferation of instances of consciousness. Rather, the self-consciousness in question is a sort of *immanent reflexivity* by virtue of which every instance of being conscious grasps not only that of which it is an awareness but also the awareness of it. It is like a source of light which, in addition to illuminating whatever other things fall within its scope, renders itself visible as well (1987: 162).¹⁸

The claims that are most likely to mislead in Frankfurt's passage are

[a] consciousness *is* self-consciousness

and the immediately preceding

[b] being conscious is identical with self-consciousness,

but [a] doesn't I think say more than [13], the AOI thesis that all awareness comports awareness of itself, and [b], which may presumably be adjusted to (or at least entails) *being conscious is identical with being self-conscious*, may be understood to be the same as [2], USA, the key thesis that the subject of awareness is always present-moment-aware of itself. The—in my opinion correct—suggestion is (once again) that USA falls out of the AOI thesis as a necessary consequence of it, given principles [P1] and [P2] on p. 000 above. If one also accepts [16], the S=A thesis, the ultimate identity of the subject and its awareness, then [a] and [b] come to the same thing.

5 Ground of the AOI thesis

There's a lot to say about the metaphysical grounding of AOI. I take the central metaphysical question to be the following. Given that AOI is true—given that all awareness (necessarily) comports awareness of itself—why is this so? There seem to be two main options.

[O1] AOI is true because it's a necessary *consequence* of the intrinsic nature of awareness; and this intrinsic nature can none the less be specified independently of AOI in such a way that we can see why AOI is true.

[O2] The fact that AOI is true is *constitutive* of the intrinsic nature of awareness in such a way that that intrinsic nature can't be specified independently of the fact that AOI is true.

Locke endorses the second view, when he writes that 'thinking consists in being conscious that one thinks'.¹⁹ Arnauld's position in the quoted passage is I think compatible with [O1], although it doesn't exclude [O2]. Descartes's position (see note 13) seems at first compatible with [O1], but the fact that the necessity of AOI is for him grounded in the *identity* of the awareness with the awareness of the awareness makes this less clear.

¹⁸ On the claim that consciousness is self-consciousness, compare again the quotations from Sartre in Zahavi, this vol. p. 000. Among Indian philosophers, Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Śāṅkara, and others regularly use the trope of the light that illuminates itself. See e.g. Dreyfus and Ram-Prasad, this vol., pp. 000, 000, 000.

¹⁹ 1689: 2.1.19; he uses 'thinking' in the broad Cartesian sense to cover all experiential goings on.

This is a question for another time. My present aim is simply to lay out the way in which the non-thetic version of PSA, i.e.

[1] the subject can be aware of itself as it is in the present moment of awareness

taken in its strong universal form, i.e. as USA that

[2] the subject is always aware of itself as it is in the present moment of awareness

is seen to follow from a substantive thesis, the AOI thesis, which I've put through a series of formulations, beginning with

[4] all awareness involves awareness of awareness,

passing through

[11] all awareness on the part of any subject at any moment, comports awareness, at that moment, on the part of that same subject, of that very awareness at that very moment,

and ending with

[13] all awareness comports awareness of itself.

The move made here, from the claim that the subject is necessarily aware of its awareness to the claim that it is necessarily aware of itself, is guaranteed given [P1] and [P2] (*sc.* [3]). AOI itself may still need defence, and even when its truth is granted questions about its fundamental metaphysics will remain. But these are matters for another occasion.

6 Non-thetic present-moment self-awareness

Does the plausibility of USA depend essentially on AOI? I'm not sure, and I'm now going to consider some other ways of expressing non-thetic present-moment awareness of self. According to Louis Sass

the most fundamental sense of selfhood involves the experience of self not as an object of awareness but, in some crucial respects, as an unseen point of origin for action, experience, and thought.... What William James called . . . the 'central nucleus of the Self' is not, in fact, experienced as an entity in the focus of our awareness, but, rather, as a kind of medium of awareness, source of activity, or general directedness towards the world (1998: 562)

Bernard Lonergan remarks that

objects are present by being attended to, but subjects are present [to themselves] as subjects, not by being attended to, but by attending. As the parade of objects marches by, spectators do not have to slip into the parade to be present to themselves (1967: 226).

In Samuel Alexander's words:

in knowing the object I know myself, not in the sense that I contemplate myself, for I do not do so, but in the sense that I live through this experience of myself (1924: 1.xiv)

Arthur Deikman makes the same point: “we know the internal observer not by observing it but by *being* it ... knowing by being that which is known is ... different from perceptual knowledge”.²⁰ This is knowledge ‘by acquaintance’. There’s a narrow, philosophically popular, independent-justification-stressing conception of knowledge that makes it hard for some to see this is really knowledge, but the claim doesn’t really need defence. Rather the reverse: this particular case of knowledge, self-knowledge in non-thetic self-awareness, shows the inadequacy of the narrow conception of knowledge. The general point is backed up, most formidably, by the fact that knowledge of this kind must lie behind all knowledge of the narrower justification-involving sort, as a condition of its possibility. This is because it’s a necessary truth that all justification of knowledge claims is relative to something already taken as given.

Certainly the eye can’t see itself (unless there is a mirror). The knife can’t cut itself (unless it is very flexible), and the fingertip can’t touch itself. The idea that the subject of experience can’t have itself as it is in the present moment as the object of its thought—the idea that ‘my today’s self’, in Ryle’s words, “perpetually slips out of any hold of it that I try to take” (1949: 187)—has many metaphorical expressions. Laycock says that it is part of “perennial Buddhist wisdom” (1998: 142), and so it is, considered as a truth about the limitations of a certain particular sort of thetic, object-posing self-apprehension. But it is, so taken, fully compatible with the claim that there’s another non-thetic form of occurrent self-apprehension in which the subject can be directly aware of itself in the present moment, for example in the way just indicated by Lonergan, Sass, Alexander and Deikman. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti also hold that a cognition cognizes itself, and is in the present terms non-thetically aware of itself, although they don’t in this context distinguish explicitly between thetic and non-thetic awareness.²¹

Does it follow, from the fact that this form of occurrent present-moment self-awareness is *non-thetic*, that it isn’t *explicit* in any way? Is it some sort of *implicit* awareness? No; there’s a key sense in which the implicit/explicit distinction lacks application when ‘awareness’ is used to refer to occurrent conscious experience, as here. ‘Awareness’ also has a dispositional use, as when we say of someone who is dreamlessly asleep that she’s aware of your intentions, and this makes it seem natural enough to contrast implicit awareness with explicit awareness, just as we contrast implicit with explicit understanding, and implicit with explicit belief. The implicit/explicit distinction applies naturally enough in the dispositional realm, as when we say of a dreamless sleeper that she explicitly believes or understands or is aware that *p*, given that she has actually consciously entertained and assented to the thought that *p* at some time, or that she implicitly believes or understands or is aware that *q*, given (say) that she would assent to *q* but hasn’t ever actually consciously thought or realized that *q*. The fact remains that there’s no such thing as implicit occurrent awareness, because ‘awareness’ is currently being used to mean only occurrent (conscious) awareness, which can’t be implicit.²² Non-thetic occurrent awareness can’t be said to be implicit occurrent awareness, then; it’s simply awareness of content that

²⁰ 1996: 355. Plainly ‘knowing by being that which is known’, or rather, perhaps, knowing (oneself) by being that which is knowing, does not require knowing everything there is to know about that which is known. On a standard materialist view, one may grant that that which is known, in this sort of self-presence of mind, has non-experiential being whose nature is not then known at all.

²¹ See e.g. Dreyfus, this vol, 000. On the terms of the thin conception of the subject and the S=A thesis, then, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti can also be said to agree that the subject can be non-thetically aware of itself.

²² This is not to say that one couldn’t give sense to a notion of implicit awareness.

isn't in the focus of attention, or rather, more simply, in attention.²³ We can also call it background awareness, perhaps, for background awareness isn't 'implicit' awareness either, any more than dim or peripheral awareness is.

Another way to put the point, perhaps, is to say that all occurrent awareness is *ipso facto* and *eo ipso* explicit awareness just in being, indeed, awareness, occurrent awareness, genuinely given in awareness, part of the actual content of experience that is experienced by the subject. This is, admittedly, a non-standard use of 'explicit', inasmuch as it allows that explicit awareness can be very dim, but one can use the word 'express' to do most of the work usually done by 'explicit', and the basic distinction is in any case clear: it's the undeniably real if soft-bordered distinction between express, foreground, attentive, thetic awareness, on the one hand, and more or less dim, peripheral, non-attentive, background, non-thetic awareness on the other.²⁴

The distinction can be refined. There's a sense in which self-awareness of the sort described by Sass, Lonergan and Deikman can be said to be *in the foreground* even though it isn't *thetic*. Such self-awareness is or can be a centrally structuring part of experience, in such a way that it's rightly classified as a foreground aspect of experience, even though there's also a respect in which it normally passes unnoticed, being entirely non-thetic. In the penultimate paragraph I suggested that we can equate 'non-thetic' with 'background', but I'm now inclined to overrule this by introducing a wider notion of foreground and claiming that

experiential elements may be constitutive of the nature of the foreground while not being thetic.

At this point we have five distinct expressions, and the terminology is threatening to go out of control. But the idea should be discernible to a sympathetic eye. On the present terms [i] all awareness is indeed *explicit* in the weak sense, since this now simply means is that it is genuine awareness, genuinely given in awareness. [ii] Some explicit awareness is *background*, and not at all thetic or express. [iii] Some explicit awareness is *foreground*, but still not *thetic* or *express*. [iv] Some foreground awareness is in addition thetic or express.

These matters need careful treatment (a careful terminology), and I won't say much more here, except to note a parallel with the case of the qualitative character of the sensation of blue when one looks at the sky. There's a clear respect in which the qualitative character of one's sensation of blue is in the foreground of experience—it floods one's experience—as one looks at the blue sky. But it is at the same time wholly 'diaphanous', in the sense that one sees 'through' it, as it were, in seeing the blue sky, and is to that extent wholly non-thetic: not in the (cognitive) focus of attention in any way, considered specifically as a sensation.²⁵

²³ 'In attention' is often better than 'in the focus of attention', because the notion of focus seems to contain the foreground/background distinction and to exclude the possibility that there may be nothing more to one's experience, when one is attending, than what is in attention.

²⁴ One can even talk of unconscious occurrent awareness when considering things like blindsight; see, e.g., Rosenthal 2005. Note that although 'peripheral awareness' has a good use in describing visual experience, and perhaps experience in other sensory modalities, the spatial metaphor is potentially misleading when giving a general characterization of elements of awareness that are out of (the focus of) attention.

²⁵ This use of 'diaphanous' to characterize sensation is not the same as Moore's famous use to characterize 'bare' consciousness (1903: 450). See e.g. Van Cleve (2005). The place to start, when considering these questions, is with Reid 1785: 193-6 (§2.16); see also Montague 2009: 501-2.

This being so, I'm now tempted to split 'express' from 'thetic', just as I previously split 'foreground' from 'thetic', and to say that the awareness of the sensation of blue is express but not thetic. I'll return to this idea on p. 000 below; I think these distinctions capture real differences although they need careful further work. Experience is an extraordinarily complex part of reality, and this is one dimension of its complexity.

7 Thetic present-moment self-awareness

The form of present-moment self-awareness described by Sass and others is plainly non-thetic. This means that it isn't in conflict with the ancient eye objection, if the eye objection can be expressed as the claim that the subject of experience can't take itself as it is in the present moment of experience as the thetic object of its attention. As already remarked, I think that present-moment (no time lag) self-awareness can also be thetic, so that the eye objection is false even in that formulation, and I will now try to say why.

—This is hopelessly vague. Plus you haven't answered the 'systematic elusiveness' objection. You may think *I'm now thinking a puzzling thought*, or *I'm looking down on India*, or just *Here I am*, in an attempt to apprehend yourself as mental self or subject or thinker in the present moment, but in entertaining these contents you necessarily fail to apprehend the thing that is doing the apprehending—the entertainer of the content, the thinker of the thought, i.e. yourself considered as the mental subject at that moment. Ryle is right. Any mental performance “can be the concern of a higher-order performance”—one can think about any thought that one has—but it “cannot be the concern of itself” (1949: 188-9). When one thinks an I-thought, this performance “is not dealt with in the operation which it itself is. Even if the person is, for special speculative purposes, momentarily concentrating on the Problem of the Self, he has failed and knows that he has failed to catch more than the flying coat-tails of that which he was pursuing. His quarry was the hunter” (1949: 187). William James, whom you favour, quotes Comte's statement of the same point, and agrees with him that “no subjective state, whilst present, is its own object; its object is always something else” (1890: 1.190).

It's arguable, though, that to think *this very thought is puzzling*, or *I'm now thinking a puzzling thought*, is precisely to engage in a performance that is concerned with itself; in which case a certain kind of seemingly immediate self-presence of mind is possible even in an intentional, designedly self-reflexive, and wholly cognitive act—a point quite independent of considerations of the sort adduced by Lonergan, Sass, Alexander, Deikman and many others. On this view, it's *only when one tries to apprehend expressly that one has succeeded* that one triggers the regressive step. Nor is it clear that hunters can't catch the quarry when the quarry is themselves. A detective with partial amnesia, sitting in her chair and reasoning hard, may identify herself as the person who committed the crime she is investigating. Wandering in the dark, I may get increasingly precise readings regarding the location of my quarry from a Global Positioning System, program my noiseless grabber robot to move to the correct spot, press the Grab button—and get grabbed.²⁶

It may be said that concentration on cognitively articulated thoughts like *I'm now thinking a puzzling thought* or *Here I am* can't deliver what is required, or provide a compelling practical route to appreciation of the point that it's possible to have express awareness of oneself apprehended specifically as the mental subject of experience in the present moment of experience. I agree. The best route to this point is much more direct. It

²⁶ There is also the case of Winnie the Pooh, Piglet and the Heffalump (Milne 1928).

doesn't involve any such discursively articulated representations, although it does require being in some sort of meditative condition. Then it's simply a matter of coming to awareness of oneself as a mental presence (or perhaps simply as: mental presence) in a certain sort of alert but essentially unpointed, global way. The case is not like the eye that can't see itself, or the fingertip that can't touch itself. These old images are weak. A mind is rather more than an eye or a finger. If Ryle had perhaps spent a little more time on disciplined, unprejudiced mental self-examination, or had tried meditation, even if only briefly, and in an entirely amateur and unsupervised, Senior Common Room sort of way, he might have found that it's really not very difficult—although it's certainly not easy—for the subject of experience to be aware in the present moment of itself-in-the-present-moment. It's a matter of first focusing on the given fact of consciousness and then letting go in a certain way. As far as the level of difficulty is concerned, it's like maintaining one's balance on a parallel bar or a wire in a let-go manner that is relatively but not extremely hard to attain. One can easily lose one's balance—one can fall out of the state in question—but one can also keep it, and improve with practice.²⁷

The attainment of such self-awareness, for brief periods in the unpractised (and the incompetent, such as myself), seems to involve a state that has no particular content beyond the content that it has in so far as it's correctly described as awareness or consciousness of the awareness or consciousness that it itself is, awareness that includes in itself awareness that it is awareness of the awareness that it itself is, but does so without involving anything remotely propositional (contrary to what the word 'that' suggests to many) or thetic in the narrow and apparently necessarily distance-involving, object-of-attention-posing way. The route to it that I have in mind involves a preparatory focusing on the fact of consciousness that stops the ordinary flow of content; it isn't just a matter of meditative awareness of breathing, say, or of whatever is passing in the mind, although these practices may on occasion precede and facilitate the same result. It may be a route to or form of what people have in mind when they speak of 'pure consciousness experience': consciousness that is consciousness of the consciousness that it itself is and that includes consciousness that it is consciousness of the consciousness that it itself is.²⁸

Something like this is, if only fleetingly, an early and rather routine step in certain meditative practices, and there's a pretty robust consensus about its reality, precise character and (relative) ease of attainment, as there is also about the more often stressed point that it involves an experience of 'selflessness', an experience it's natural to express by saying that it seems that there is just subjectivity, rather than a subject, although there is still—necessarily—a subject in my metaphysically non-committal sense of the term, since all experience is necessarily experience-*for*, and although a subject in my sense of the term is still experienced. One mustn't be misled by the fact that this thetic present-moment self-awareness involves a sense of selflessness, or by the fact that I've characterized it with the impersonal mass terms 'awareness' and 'consciousness', into thinking that it isn't after all a genuine case of the phenomenon whose reality I'm trying to establish: awareness on the part of the subject of experience of itself in the present moment of experience.

The proposal, then, is that

[17] the subject of awareness can be fully thetically aware of itself as it is in the present

²⁷ One such method is Patricia Carrington's *Clinically Standardized Meditation* (1998).

²⁸ See for example Forman 1998, Shear 1998. See also Parfit 1998. It may be what Karne Chagme is describing in the passage quoted by Dreyfus (this vol., p. 000).

moment of awareness

which earns the laborious title

[17] the Possible Thetic Present-Moment Self-awareness thesis

—the Thetic PSA thesis, for short. It claims that thetic SA (present-moment self-awareness) is possible. It incorporates the idea that the neural time lag objection mentioned at the end of §3 doesn't apply. In Yogācāra it classifies as a case of 'objectless cognition', a phenomenon whose possibility was much debated in that tradition.

8 Doubts about thetic present-moment self-awareness

Can the claim that present-moment self-awareness (SA) can be fully thetic be maintained? It certainly seems right to say that the awareness of oneself can in this case be fully *express*, no less express than any awareness of anything is when one's awareness of it is thetic, even though there is in this case no sort of posing or positing or positioning of oneself for inspection of the sort that may seem to be built into the meaning of the word 'thetic'. I think, in fact, that it can also be said to be *thetic*, taking the core meaning of 'thetic' to be just: genuinely in attention, and rejecting the idea that attention requires articulation or construction of such a kind that the subject is bound to present to itself in a posed or set-up way given which one can't be said to be aware of it as it is at that moment. On this point I think Ryle and a host of others are simply wrong. Their model of awareness is too rigid, in so far as it pushes the subject—the 'now-subject', one might say—into being necessarily cut off from its (attempted) object—itself. It hasn't been shown that there's an insuperable difficulty in the matter of present-moment or immediate (im-mediate) self-awareness—in apprehending the subject 'live'. This is certainly something special, but it seems that I can engage in it with no flying coat-tails time-lag. The eye can't see itself, but the I isn't much like an eye.

If we take 'thetic' to entail some kind of structured operation of positing or positioning of an object of attention, a focusing that typically requires some sort of effortful maintenance, some sort of intellectual upkeep, then we may do best to distinguish 'thetic' from 'express' and fall back to 'express', leaving 'thetic' to denote an essentially time-lagged and distancing cognitively articulated operation. On this understanding of 'thetic', present-moment self-awareness of the sort I have in mind can still be said to be foreground and express, but can't strictly speaking be said to be thetic. My inclination, however, is to resist this move, on the ground that an adequate and therefore broad understanding of *cognition* needs to allow for—acknowledge—the genuinely cognitive nature of this present-moment self-awareness. We need perhaps to try to wean our understanding of 'thetic' away from too narrow a conception of what cognition is, to allow that one can achieve a fully thetic state of awareness by a certain sort of letting go, and so assert the Thetic PSA thesis outright. I'm prepared to retreat to

[18] the subject of awareness can be fully expressly aware of itself as it is in the present moment of awareness

i.e.

[18] the Possible Express Present-Moment Self-awareness thesis

(the Express PSA thesis, for short) if the word ‘thetic’ is judged to be irretrievably out of bounds. In the rest of this paper, though, I’m going to continue to defend the Thetic PSA thesis: I’m going to take the word ‘thetic’ to be principally tied simply to the idea of attention, attentiveness, full attention, and attempt to cultivate a sense of how attention (and cognition) can have forms that don’t involve anything like discursively structured operations of positing or positioning things as objects of attention.

9 Defence of thetic present-moment self-awareness

The fundamental objection to the Thetic PSA thesis, perhaps, is that thetic awareness is necessarily a *mediated* form of awareness, where this means not only that there is necessarily a time lag, but also that one inevitably has to do with a *representation* of the phenomenon one is aware of which is not the phenomenon itself. Here we come up against some very general questions about knowledge, and I’ll limit myself to a few remarks.

‘Cognitive’ means ‘of or pertaining to ... knowing’. It follows immediately that the standard distinction between cognition and emotion is illegitimate, because our emotions, however fallible, are one of our main sources of knowledge of how things are. Putting that aside, the claim is that we need when thinking about cognition to acknowledge the reality as knowledge or cognition—knowledge or cognition in the fullest sense—of knowledge by direct acquaintance. This is how I know the nature of the pain that I feel now. Such knowledge by direct acquaintance is, one might say, perfect. (Knowledge of *a priori* truths can be no less perfect.) There’s a crucial aspect of reality, one’s experience (= the experiential-qualitative character or what-it’s-likeness of one’s experiences) that one knows as it is in itself, simply because ‘the having is the knowing’, and in such a way that there is no time lag.

—Suppose I accept this as an example of knowledge or cognition by direct acquaintance. It isn’t going to be enough to illustrate what’s supposed to be going on in Thetic SA. There are at least two objections.

[1] The notion of direct acquaintance seems clear enough when we consider sensory or feeling (sense/feeling) aspects of experience, but the direct acquaintance is standardly *non-thetic* in these cases, however express it is—however much it is in the overall experiential foreground. So it provides no model for *thetic* direct acquaintance.

[2] You’ve given us a proposed case of direct acquaintance for *sense/feeling* aspects of experience, but Thetic SA—if it exists at all—is presumably some kind of *non-sense/feeling* or *cognitive* direct acquaintance with oneself as subject; in which case, presumably, it has no experiential-qualitative feeling aspect at all. Even if you could come up with a model of thetic direct acquaintance in the sense/feeling case (which you haven’t yet done), it wouldn’t help with the case you’re aiming at, which is a case of the non-sense/feeling direct acquaintance of the subject with itself.

My first reply is this: I completely reject the equation of experiential-qualitative phenomena with sense/feeling phenomena. There is, in addition to sense/feeling phenomenology, sense/feeling experience, cognitive phenomenology, cognitive experience. Our experience has cognitive experiential-qualitative character in every sense in which it has sense/feeling experiential-qualitative character (for the purposes of argument I take ‘sense/feeling’ and ‘cognitive’, broadly understood as above, to be mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive of the field of experience). I’ve argued for this in other places and will take it for granted

here.²⁹ There is, furthermore, a fundamental sense in which *all* experience as currently defined, i.e. all what-it's-likeness, is a matter of direct acquaintance, be it sense/feeling or cognitive. So far, then, there's no reason to think that the idea of cognitive-experiential direct acquaintance is any more problematic than the idea of sense/feeling direct acquaintance. Some philosophers may find the idea of direct acquaintance with cognitive what-it's-likeness alarming, but it's backed by a point parallel to the point about knowledge made on p. 000: if there is any kind of cognitive experience at all, this kind of direct acquaintance must exist as a condition of its possibility.³⁰

Second: I agree that the direct present-moment acquaintance involved in sense/feeling experience is standardly non-thetic. Sense/feeling experience is a huge part of our overall experience, e.g., when we perceive things, but we very rarely focus on it.³¹ So it's unclear how we can work a passage from the understanding of direct acquaintance given to us by non-thetic sense/feeling cases to Thetic SA, a subject's direct thetic present-moment acquaintance with itself, assuming that this involves some essentially non-sense/feeling and hence cognitive element, some cognitive apprehension of self.

Let me try to take an intermediate step. My having-is-the-knowing direct acquaintance with my headache is usually non-thetic—even when I'm painfully aware of it, so that it's in the overall experiential foreground. I find, though, that I can bring it about that I have it as thetic object of attention and *also* have having-is-the-knowing direct acquaintance with it. At the least, I can bring the pain sensation to (thetic) attention, and then, having done so, fall into experiencing it in the direct way in which I ordinarily take myself to experience objects in the world. And because what I am experiencing in this case is in fact my own sensation, this way of experiencing it can be having-is-the-knowing direct acquaintance.

This 'falling' is a relatively delicate operation, relative to ordinary everyday full-on thetic attention. For in everyday full-on thetic attention, I take it, the fact that the object of attention is being taken as object of attention is part of what is given in the overall character of the experience. But it is—I propose—precisely this aspect of everyday full-on thetic attention that can lapse, leaving the pain *in full attention* without there being any awareness of oneself as taking it as object of attention. When this happens, the fact that the object of attention is being taken as object of attention is no longer part of what is given in the overall character of the experience. Only the pain is. This can also occur more naturally, without being engineered for purposes of philosophical research, as it is here. It can happen in cases when one passes from willed thetic concentration on something to a state of absorption in it, artistic or otherwise.

One can do the same with the sensation of blue that one has when one looks at the blue sky. One can take the sensation of blue as thetic object of attention even as one continues to look at the sky (Reid and Moore make related but different points).³² When one does this in a standard way, as a philosophical exercise of the sort prescribed by Reid, one's awareness

²⁹ See, e.g., Strawson 1994: 5-13, Strawson 2011.

³⁰ There is I think a connection here with Searle's notion of the Background. See Searle 1983.

³¹ This is the truth in the 'transparency thesis', which is often inflated into a larger and false thesis.

³² It's not easy; it requires practice, as Reid pointed out: "it is indeed difficult, at first, to disjoin things in our attention which have always been conjoined, and to make that an object of reflection which never was before, but some pains and practice will overcome this difficulty in those who have got into the habit of reflecting on the operations of their own minds" (1785: 196). See also James: when we consider perception, we see "how inveterate is our habit of not attending to sensations as subjective facts, but of simply using them as stepping-stones to pass over to the recognition of the realities whose presence they reveal" (1890: 1.231). [xxx] Some philosophers of perception mistakenly think that it is a mark of philosophical sophistication to hold that this can't be done.

of the sensation of blue will comport some sort of awareness of the fact that the sensation of blue is being taken as object of attention. But one can also go beyond this, I propose, into a state of direct thetic having-is-the-knowing acquaintance, a state of holding the sensation of blue in full attention in which one's experience ceases to have, as any part of its content, the structure of subject-attending-to-something.³³

If this is right, we now have a model of thetic direct acquaintance in the sense/feeling cases, and it's not clear why we should suppose that some huge further gulf must appear when we turn from such cases—pain, or blue-experience—to the case of the subject. In fact, if the S=A thesis is correct, as I think it is, then direct thetic acquaintance with pain or blue-experience is already direct thetic acquaintance with the subject. Relative to such cases, the special, alert, unpointed way of coming to awareness of oneself as a mental presence (or as mental presence) described in §8 is special only in that it doesn't involve any particular content like pain or blue-experience, and is therefore a candidate for the title 'pure consciousness experience'.³⁴

—Even if you've now secured a case of thetic present-moment direct acquaintance, you've done it only for the sense/feeling case. You still need to show how there can be *non-sense/feeling* present-moment direct acquaintance.

Well, again it's not clear that we need to build a bridge from the proposed cases of direct and thetic present-moment acquaintance with sense/feeling content in order to understand, or at least acknowledge the possibility or reality of, Thetic SA: direct, present-moment acquaintance of the subject with itself. Thetic SA must presumably be a non-sense/feeling matter, hence a cognitive matter, in some sense of cognitive; at least in part. But we already have it that there is such a thing as cognitive experience (it pervades every moment of our lives), and there is as observed a fundamental sense in which it's essentially constitutive of something's being experiential content at all that its subject or haver is in a relation of direct acquaintance with it—whether it be sense/feeling content or cognitive-experiential content.³⁵

I've claimed that Thetic SA must be an essentially non-sense/feeling matter, at least in part, but I'm not sure quite what this amounts to, if only because currently standard classifications of what one may call the *experiential modalities* are extremely crude. Many assume that all experiential modalities are sensory or sense/feeling modalities; they exclude the idea that there are cognitive experiential modalities from the start. And even those who admit that there is a distinctively cognitive experiential modality may wish to exclude the idea that there may be a *non-propositional* or *non-discursive* experiential modality which is none the less a non-sense/feeling experiential modality, and indeed a genuinely cognitive experiential modality. They're also likely to assume that the division between sense/feeling content and cognitive experiential content is absolute, as I have done for purposes of

³³ This isn't possible in Reid's model of attention to sensation, in fact, in which attention can only be paid to sensation that is—however fractionally—already past. See Yaffe 2009.

³⁴ It's still pretty special. Hume gives a correct (if widely misunderstood) report of the results of ordinary reflective mental self-examination when he denies that he ever has any such experience: "when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception" (1739/40: 252).

³⁵ Cognitive-experiential content is content wholly internalistically understood. It's what you have wholly in common with your philosophical Twins, whether they're on Twin Earth, or in a vat, or have just popped miraculously into existence. See Strawson 2008c: 294-5, 2011.

argument (without committing myself to the view that either can occur wholly without the other).

These are difficult issues, about which I feel unsure. I do, however, feel sure about the Thetic PSA thesis, the possibility of having direct thetic (in the wider sense) awareness of oneself as subject in the present moment of awareness. And I'm strongly inclined to think that this is, precisely, a non-propositional, non-discursive form of awareness which is none the less properly said to be a matter of cognition.

10 Can the subject know its nature as it is in itself?

In the last section I shifted from talking about present-moment *awareness* to talking about present-moment *direct acquaintance* without explicitly acknowledging that this is a substantive move. As it stands, the Thetic PSA thesis doesn't in speaking of awareness make any claim about *knowledge* of the nature of the subject as it is in itself, still less about complete knowledge of the nature of the subject as it is in itself, of a sort that may seem built into the idea of direct acquaintance. And this, so far, may seem agreeable, because the picture of the subject as some kind of active principle lying behind all its experience, in such a way that one can't know its essential nature, even if one can be present-moment-aware of it as existing, remains beguiling. And given that it's beguiling, it seems good that it should be, so far, compatible with the Thetic PSA thesis.

I think, though, that the Thetic PSA thesis must accept its responsibilities; it must square up and take on the burden of implying that the subject have at least some acquaintance with itself as it is in itself. Supporters of the Thetic PSA thesis like myself should in other words accept that any argument that as-it-is-in-itself self-awareness is impossible is an argument against the Thetic PSA thesis.

The first thing to do, perhaps, is to ask why the picture of the subject as some kind of active principle lying behind all its experience is beguiling. Part of the explanation is that the metaphysics of subject and predicate forces itself on us almost irresistibly, demanding that we distinguish between the subject of awareness and its various states of awareness in a way that I believe we must ultimately reject (quite independently of any commitment to the S=A thesis), and opening the way to the idea that we are at best aware of its states and so not of itself as it is in itself.³⁶ More respectably, our sceptical instincts are active, as they should always be, and they too invite us to acknowledge that we could perhaps be present-moment-aware of something and yet not know anything of its essential nature. They then suggest that absolutely all awareness of anything, other than the what-it's-likeness of experience, is *mediated* by a *representation* of that thing. So if the subject is aware of anything other than the what-it's-likeness of experience, then even if that other thing is itself, itself considered specifically as subject, still there is an affecting relation, albeit a self-affecting relation. The Kantian conclusion is then triggered: "nothing which emerges from *any* affecting relation can count as knowledge or awareness of the affecting thing as it is in itself".³⁷

Kant famously takes the subject itself to be for this reason unknowable by itself as it is in itself, to be knowable only as it appears to itself (if only because it can only be

³⁶ On this, and the dubiousness of the 'so', see e.g. Strawson 2008d.

³⁷ P. F. Strawson (1966: 238), summarizing Kant. See also Langton 1998.

encountered in the spatiotemporal—in particular temporal—form of sensibility).³⁸ The present suggestion is precisely that this isn't so—that it's possible to be aware of the subject of awareness in an immediate but none the less express and indeed thetic (in-full-attention) way that is parallel, at least in respect of immediacy, to the immediate (immediate) awareness we have of experiential what-it's-likeness. Usually, representation/mediation gets in the way, leaving us with 'mere appearance'; but not in this case. On this view Fichte's principal objection to Kant, which he expressed by saying that the subject can apprehend itself as subject in 'intellectual intuition', is quite correct, even if he has quite different reasons for it.³⁹

Here, then, I boost the Thetic PSA thesis into being committed to the thesis that present-moment self-awareness is and must involve some sort of awareness of the nature of the subject as it is in itself, a step I'm happy to take for other Cartesian-Kantian-Jamesian reasons (the S=A thesis, the ultimate identity of subject and experience, experiencer and experiencing). Note, as a final reflection, that phrases like 'the subject's awareness of itself considered specifically as subject' can be taken in a stronger and a weaker sense. The stronger sense takes 'as subject' to mean that the subject's awareness of itself involves its bringing itself under the concept SUBJECT. The weaker sense requires only that what the subject is in fact concerned with is itself in so far as it is a subject, and allows that it may not in being so concerned be deploying anything recognizable as a concept of itself as subject. Here I have the weaker sense in mind. It allows for the idea, which seems necessary, that although all ordinary adult human beings possess the concept SUBJECT, it simply lapses—is not deployed in any way—in immediate thetic self-awareness. It also allows also that children may be capable of immediate thetic self-awareness prior to possessing anything that can be dignified by the name 'concept'.⁴⁰

11 Conclusion

I've proposed that the mental subject can be immediately relationally aware of itself, both in the non-thetic, everyday Sass-Lonergan-Deikman way, and also, exceptionally, in the express, thetic 'pure consciousness experience' way.⁴¹ Evidence? Each must acquire it for himself or herself *in foro interno*. This doesn't mean it isn't empirical; it's wholly empirical. It does mean that it isn't publicly checkable, and it will always be possible for someone to object that the experience of truly present self-awareness is an illusion produced—say—by Rylean flashes of "swift retrospective heed" (1949: 153). I think, though, that this notion of heed has the flying coat-tails error built into it, and there is another larger mistake that can I think be decisively blocked.

³⁸ Consider for example his remark that "I do not know myself through being conscious of myself as experiencing/thinking, but only when I am conscious of the intuition of myself as determined with respect to the function of experiencing/thinking" (1781/7: B406).

³⁹ Fichte 1794-1802. The notion of 'intellectual intuition' is precisely an attempt to characterize a kind of knowledge-of-*x*-involving *relation* with *x* that does not involve being *affected* by *x* in a way that inevitably limits one to knowledge of an *appearance* of *x*. Note that if one goes into a state of Thetic SA, one's awareness is bound to be genuinely awareness of oneself, the subject that one is—by the nature of the case.

⁴⁰ Is one present-moment aware of oneself as being *oneself*, in immediate thetic self-awareness? One might think 'Yes, but in some non-conceptual way', or 'No, inasmuch as nothing that really qualifies as a sense of individuality remains'.

⁴¹ According to Fasching, Indian soteriological traditions such as Advaita Vedānta and Sāṃkhya-Yoga equate this with realization of the 'self' —"which is nothing other than becoming aware of experiential presence (consciousness) as such" (Fasching, this vol., p. 000).

Suppose that it's in the nature of all naturally evolved forms of experience/consciousness that they are in the usual course of things incessantly and seemingly constitutively in the service of the perceptual and agentive survival needs of organisms. It doesn't follow that this is essential to the nature of consciousness, that experience/consciousness must be defined in terms of adaptive function or perceptual content, even in part. The notion of pure consciousness experience is incompatible with any such conception of the nature of experience, but it's certainly not in tension with naturalism, properly understood, or with anything in the theory of evolution by natural selection.⁴²

This is another topic that needs separate discussion. Here I simply want to note that even if experience isn't a primordial property of the universe,⁴³ and even if it came on the scene relatively late, there's no good reason—in fact it doesn't even make sense—to think that it first came on the scene because it had survival value. Natural selection needs something to work on and can only work on what it finds. Experience/consciousness had to exist before it could be exploited and shaped, just as non-experiential matter did. The task of giving an evolutionary explanation of the existence of consciousness is exactly like the task of giving an evolutionary explanation of the existence of matter: there is no such task. Natural selection moulds the phenomena of experience it finds in nature into highly specific adaptive forms in exactly the same general way as the way in which it moulds the phenomena of non-experiential matter into highly specific adaptive forms.⁴⁴ The evolution by natural selection of various very finely developed and specialized forms of experience (visual, olfactory, etc.) is no more surprising than the evolution by natural selection of various finely developed and specialized types of bodily organization.⁴⁵ Even if (even though) evolved forms of experience have come to be what they are because they have certain kinds of content that give them survival value, kinds of content which are (therefore) essentially other than whatever content is involved in pure consciousness experience, it doesn't follow that pure consciousness experience is some sort of illusion. On the contrary: evolution gives us an explanation of how anything other than pure consciousness ever came to exist. Pure consciousness experience as we can know it may become possible only after millions of years of EEE-practical forms of consciousness, but it may for all that be uniquely revelatory of the fundamental nature of experience.⁴⁶

⁴² Naturalism, by which I mean real naturalism, acknowledges experience or consciousness as the most certainly known natural fact.

⁴³ I think it must be; see, e.g., Strawson 2006a.

⁴⁴ It may be that everything physical is experiential in some way, but I'll put this point aside.

⁴⁵ To speak of such forms of consciousness is not to reject the possibility that functional equivalents of, e.g., visual and auditory experience could exist in the complete absence of consciousness.

⁴⁶ My thanks to Mark Siderits for his very helpful comments.

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