

Basic Intentionality, Primitive Awareness, and Awareness of Oneself  
Martine Nida-Rümelin (Université de Fribourg)

*1. Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

Are all puzzles about consciousness puzzles about phenomenal consciousness and all puzzles about phenomenal consciousness puzzles about what it is like to have experiences of a given kind? In recent years an increasing number of philosophers have started to think that something important has been left out of the picture when the puzzle of consciousness has been approached in this way. The philosophical problem about consciousness is not only a problem about what it is like to have an experience but also, or primarily, about the fact that it is something like *for someone* to have the experience. This is the insight shared by an increasing number of philosophers. When I am visually presented with the blue sky in a perceptual experience, then it is something like *for me* to have that experience. Following Joe Levine, Uriah Kriegel and Terrence Horgan, many philosophers have started to think that it is above all this ‘being-for-me’ that makes consciousness mysterious.

Here is a natural way one might put the insight: the puzzle about consciousness is *not*, or not primarily, about the nature of the content of experiences (about what is phenomenally present to the subject in a given case), nor is it a problem about alleged qualitative properties of those events we call experiences. Rather, the problem about consciousness arises mainly because there is an intriguing sense in which in every single experience there is someone, an experiencing subject, *to whom* something is given in a particular way. This simple and natural way to formulate the insight is, however, almost absent in the relevant texts. The discussion does not focus on the nature of the experiencing subject and its relation to what is phenomenally given as one might have expected. The nature of the individual *to whom* something is given is not addressed and that individual is not explicitly introduced into the theoretical framework. Rather, the philosophers at issue introduce an alleged further *property* of *experiences*, the subjective character, the mine-ness or the for-me-ness of those events we call experiences.

I believe that this framework is ill-founded and leads unavoidably into a number of serious mistakes. Some of those mistakes have a long tradition. They may be found, I think, for instance, in the work of Franz Brentano. I may well be wrong about Brentano, however, and hope that the

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<sup>1</sup> I presented some of the material of this paper in a workshop in Geneva on perception organized by Pascal Engel in November 2009 and in a workshop with Terrence Horgan in Fribourg organized by Emmanuel Baierlé in July 2010. I am indebted to the discussants on these occasions, in particular to Kevin Mulligan and Terrence Horgan. In getting clear about so-called subjective character the discussion in my seminars in 2010 and 2011 were of great help, I would like to thank the participants for the fruitful exchange. Personal discussion and written exchange have helped me a lot in the development of the ideas here presented, in particular I would like to thank Emmanuel Baierlé, Julien Bugnon, Gianfranco Soldati, Max Drömmner and Daniel Stoljar. A lot of what is presented here developed in discussions with Fabrice Theiler about representationalism in the context of his work for the project “First person access, phenomenal reflection and phenomenal concepts” supported by the Swiss Science Foundation (PDFMP1 132455). I would like to thank the Swiss Science Foundation for its support of our research.

philosopher, friend and specialist about Brentano to whom this Festschrift is dedicated will not hesitate to make me aware of my errors in that case.<sup>2</sup>

In an appendix to this paper the reader finds a series of citations from different authors that illustrate the way the term ‘subjective character’ has been introduced and used in recent years. It appears obvious that in these citations the authors ‘point to’ something real. They are trying to capture a ‘phenomenon’, or rather ‘phenomena’ that can hardly be doubted. In what follows I will distinguish three interrelated ‘aspects’ of consciousness these descriptions may be taken to be about. I will thereby start to develop a theoretical description of these ‘aspects’. It is not my purpose, however, to develop any theoretical account of consciousness. My purpose is much more modest. I would like to attract the reader’s attention to three different but interrelated ‘aspects’ or ‘phenomena’ the term “subjective character” might be taken to refer to. In doing so I cannot avoid proposing a language (technical terms). I am however trying to be the least ‘theoretical’ as possible in order to avoid misdescriptions that one might easily be led to when guided by some pre-established theoretical framework. It is sometimes quite obvious that we are at the limits of language when we try to capture the relevant ‘aspects’ of consciousness. It might well be that every attempt at an adequate description is, in a sense, bound to fail.

After having introduced the three different ‘aspects’ the term “subjective character” might be taken to refer to (basic intentionality, primitive awareness, awareness of basic intentionality) I will come back to a few questions that have been raised about ‘subjective character’ in order to see how they can be answered in the light of these distinctions.

## 2. Basic Intentionality

A first thought that appears to be present in some uses of “subjective character”, “mine-ness”, and “for-me-ness” is the observation that any experience requires *a subject to whom something is phenomenally given*. This is, in my view, an observation concerning the metaphysical structure of experiences. Experiences are events that involve a subject which exemplifies a very special kind of properties which I will call *experiential properties*. To have a specific experiential property is for a subject *s* to be such that something is phenomenally given to *s*. The ‘something’ which is phenomenally given may not exist. When one closes one’s eyes one might be visually presented with red points flying around in groups. It is a bizarre idea that these points need to be accepted as existing entities. We ‘refer’ to these points only for the purpose of describing the experiential property of the experiencing subject. Doing so should not be taken to commit us to the ontological claim that these red points have to be taken seriously when we think about ontology, or so I claim. Still, even in such an extreme case, where what is phenomenally presented clearly does not exist, experience has a structure that we might call *basic intentionality*: we can distinguish between the *experience* which is an event involving a subject and *the experienced*, that which is, in that event, *what* is phenomenally present to

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<sup>2</sup> For Kevin Mulligan’s work about Brentano compare K. Mulligan (2004) and K. Mulligan and B. Smith (1985).

the subject. To put it simply, in any experience there is a subject *to whom* something is phenomenally given.<sup>3</sup>

There are a number of important, deep and difficult issues surrounding what I just called primitive intentionality. What is the nature of the subject involved in any such case? What is the nature of the ‘relation’ between that subject to whom something is phenomenally present and the ‘object’ or content of the experience which is in that way phenomenally present? Is it, strictly speaking, a relation? (I think it is not.) These issues cannot be addressed here. What I am trying to do is to express a natural thought about the nature of experience which comes to mind immediately when we think about it for a while. This natural thought clearly appears to be present and is evoked in the reader in some formulations of what so-called ‘subjective character’ or ‘mine-ness’ is about. We thus arrive at a first possible interpretation of what ‘subjective character’ of experience in the sense at issue might consist in:

Definition 1 (*‘subjective character’ in the sense of basic intentionality*)

An experience has subjective character iff the experience is an event which consists in the fact that something is *phenomenally given* to some subject.

It has been claimed that subjective character is what makes an event a conscious event. If subjective character is defined in the sense of basic intentionality this is a quite plausible claim. The claim then amounts to saying that whenever a subject is in a conscious state or undergoes a conscious experience something is phenomenally present *to the subject*. If ‘phenomenal presence’ is understood in a wide sense which does not limit the phenomenal to the sensory but allows for contents of thought, for instance, to be phenomenally present in thinking and which allows, for instance, for ‘my being the author of what happens’ to be phenomenally present in acting, then there is, in my view, no reason to deny the claim.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Primitive Awareness

Here is another thought which is present in common descriptions of what the term “subjective character” is intended to refer to: whenever a subject has an experience of something, the subject is not only aware of that something but also aware of having that particular experience. So, for instance, when I look at a tree in front of the window, I am not only aware of what I see, I am, in some sense, also aware of my being under the impression of seeing a tree in front of the window. Without the latter awareness of my being under that impression I cannot be under that impression and so cannot be

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<sup>3</sup> G.E. Moore (1914) formulates this point very clearly (see § 3). In M. Nida-Rümelin (2011) I argue that phenomenal presence is non-relational across the board (not only in cases like seeing points with one’s eyes closed but also in veridical perception). But this controversial issue is irrelevant here.

<sup>4</sup> The claim I am here agreeing to should not, however, be confused with another: Whenever a subject is consciously aware of x, x is phenomenally present to the subject. This claim, I believe, is mistaken. I will come back to it in section 10.

aware of what I see. This, I think, is a way to express the relevant intuition. The idea then, using the term of ‘phenomenal presence’, can be put like this: whenever something is phenomenally present to a subject S, the subject has a particular kind of awareness of being phenomenally presented with X which is constitutive of the subject’s being phenomenally presented with X. Using the term ‘experiential properties’ introduced above one can express this idea in a simpler way: Whenever a subject has an experiential property E, the subject is aware of having property E in a way which is constitutive of having E. For example, when you are phenomenally presented with a specific pain in your head, then you must, in a sense, *be aware of your being presented with that pain* in order for it to be true that the pain is phenomenally presented to you. I share this intuition.

Another way to put the same point is to say this: you cannot have an experience without being conscious of the experience since only conscious experiences are experiences. The problem now is to get a grip on the kind of awareness or consciousness at issue here. Let us suppose that we agree on this: having an experiential property requires being aware of having it; having an experience requires being conscious of having the experience. In this agreement we have a specific kind of awareness or consciousness in mind. But what kind of awareness or consciousness is it? Let me call the kind of awareness we are searching for ‘primitive awareness’. The preceding remarks motivate the following constraint on any account of primitive awareness.

C1: To have an experiential property essentially involves being primitively aware of having that experiential property.

The locution ‘having P essentially involves Q’ means that having Q is constitutive of having P. In other words: having Q belongs to what it *is* for something to have P. C1, I believe, is an insight that helps to resolve certain puzzles about so-called transparency of experience and to avoid related confusions. It has been urged that we cannot get aware of the phenomenal character of our experience because whenever we try to gain this awareness we unavoidably focus on what is given in the experience. When we appreciate C1, we can see in what way this argument goes wrong. To be phenomenally presented with, for instance, a reddish blue, essentially involves being aware of being presented with that color. No wonder then that focusing on the content of the experience *is* a way to focus on what one is aware of in primitive awareness: one’s own having a certain kind of experience. I can focus on my having a specific kind of color experience by focusing on the color given in that experience.<sup>5</sup> C1 helps us to understand how that can be the case

Primitive awareness is ‘primitive’ in the sense that it is not to be confused with other more demanding ways of being aware of ones own experiences. I may for instance look on a particular patch of blue and wonder whether I see a pure blue or whether there is an almost unnoticeable tiny reddishness to be discovered in the blue I am presented with. I may then realize that the blue actually

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<sup>5</sup> This idea is developed in M.Nida-Rümelin, (2007).

has such a tiny reddish component. I then realize that I am having an experience of reddish blue. In this case I apply a concept of a certain type of experiences which I acquired earlier on the basis of other color experiences. Primitive awareness does not involve such a judgment. This follows from the constraint formulated above. Judging that I am presented with a reddish blue is *not* necessary for being presented with reddish blue. (A subject can have that kind of experience before the subject has acquired the conceptual capacities that enable it to judge that it is having an experience of that kind). Furthermore, being presented with reddish blue does not require that I entertain any thought about my having that experience. I may have an experience of a particular kind without thinking about having it. So being primitively aware of having an experiential property is somehow simpler, more primitive, than other forms of awareness one can have of one's own experiential properties. This observation motivates the choice of the term 'primitive awareness' for *the* kind of awareness which renders the constraint C1 true.

What is it to be primitively aware of having a certain experiential property? In other words: which kind of awareness of an experiential property E is essentially involved in having an experiential property E? What is primitive awareness? Here is a proposal: A subject is necessarily aware of being presented with something in the sense that being so presented with something makes a difference for the subject at that moment. This is to say, or so I propose, the following: having the property at issue partially constitutes the overall phenomenology of the subject's present state. There are many properties we have at a given moment which are not constitutive of the phenomenology of our present state. Having a certain weight is one of them. Experiential properties are such that having them does partially constitute the phenomenology of the relevant overall phenomenology. My simple proposal is this: a subject is primitively aware of having E just in case that having E makes a difference for the subject: *having E partially constitutes the subject's overall phenomenology*. Using this notion of primitive awareness one could define a notion of 'subjective character' in this way:

Definition 2 (*subjective character in the sense of primitive awareness*):

An experience has subjective character iff in having the experience the subject is primitively aware of having the experience.

#### *4. A few more remarks about primitive awareness*

It may be objected that the account of primitive awareness just given is unhelpful because it is totally uninformative. To say of an individual that it has a given experiential property (e.g. the property of being visually presented with a tree) already involves that being so presented with a tree partially constitutes how it is for that individual to be in its present state. So if being primitively aware of having that kind of visual experience is nothing but being in a state the phenomenology of which is partially constituted by having that visual experience, then saying that x is primitively aware of having an experience does not add anything to just saying that x has that experience.

It is true that nothing is added when after having said “x is phenomenally presented with y” we add “and, furthermore, x is also primitively aware of being phenomenally presented with y”. But this can hardly be an objection. After all, we were searching for something that cannot possibly lack when someone has an experiential property. So we are surely not searching for a condition which, when added to the claim “x is phenomenally presented with y” expresses any additional information. This is precisely required by the constraint formulated above for any account of what it is to be primitively aware of having an experience. Attributing primitive awareness does not involve attributing any *further* property to the subject, any property that has not already been attributed in attributing the experience itself.

But then, if being aware of having an experience is nothing but having the experience, what is the point of introducing, in addition to our notion of experiences or experiential properties, the notion of being primitively aware of experiences? Do we need such an additional notion? What ‘work’ could it possibly do?

I suggest that the notion of primitive awareness is not needed in the following sense: it is not one of those notions that must be included in the terminology used in any adequate and complete theoretical account of consciousness. The notion of a subject, and the notion of phenomenal presence or of basic intentionality belong to these central notions (I believe); the notion of primitive awareness probably not. But the notion of primitive awareness can nonetheless be useful if it is able to capture a shared intuitive idea and if it can help to see interrelations between different implicit notions we use in our thought about issues surrounding consciousness. It seems to me that, for purposes of this kind, the notion of primitive awareness has a role to play.

The notion of primitive awareness can help understanding the special and puzzling nature of experiential properties. It has been said and written by several philosophers in the context of ‘subjective’ character that experiences are not only ‘in me’ but also ‘for me’. This formulation is a bit puzzling since it is unclear in what sense experiences are ‘in me’. Experiences are, I take it, events involving an experiencing subject. They consist in the fact that something is phenomenally present to someone. Understood in this way, experiences cannot be or happen within a subject’s body (or so I would like to insist). Nonetheless, it is not difficult to see what people have in mind, when they distinguish between an experience being ‘in me’ and ‘for me’. Here is a different way to put it: experiential properties are properties that a person not only simply has (like the property of being in Fribourg) but they are properties such that *having them* is, by itself, something like *for* the person. If this is the thought associated with the kind of awareness we are searching for then awareness is an excellent candidate. Experiential properties have the remarkable feature that having them *is* being aware of having them. And being aware of having them means that having them partially constitutes one’s present phenomenology.

Another objection against my proposal is to doubt that primitive awareness is a kind of awareness. But I do think that talking of awareness here is quite adequate. The locution “x is aware of

y” involves the idea that, in some way y is present to x and that it is present to x in a way which makes it in principle available for x for reflection, conceptualization and judgment. All this, I suggest, applies to primitive awareness. When I am visually presented with a tree then my being visually presented with a tree is itself *present* to me; it is present to me in the most primitive sense: it contributes to how it is for me to be in my present state. Furthermore, my being visually presented with a tree is – under normal circumstances - available to me for reflection and judgment. On the basis of being so visually presented I cannot only judge, under normal circumstances, that there is a tree, I can also judge that I am now having a certain phenomenal kind of experience (the one which is characterized by being visually under the impression that there is a tree). In that sense it is correct to say (in accordance with self-representationalists about consciousness) that the experience has a double function. It makes me aware of the tree and it makes me aware of my having a specific kind of experience: on the basis of the experience I can normally judge that there is a tree *and* that it so appears to me.

One may also see that primitive awareness is a kind of awareness in the following way. It is obvious that a person who is conceptually equipped for the relevant kind of judgments can judge that she is under the impression of there being a tree simply by having the experience (by being under the impression). If this is so, then she must have been aware of being under the impression in having the experience. I here apply a plausible principle: one can judge that p simply by having a particular experience only if in having the experience one is aware of p. But then the question arises: in what sense is the person aware of being under a certain impression by being under that impression? The answer here suggested is: she is aware of being under the impression of there being a tree in the sense of primitive awareness and this grounds her judgment that she is under that impression.

In the debate about so-called transparency it has often been said that when you try to focus on the subjective character of your experience, then you unavoidably find yourself focused on the content of your experience (on what you are presented with in having the experience). For instance, when you try to focus on your being under the visual impression of there being a tree, you focus on the apparent tree ‘out there’. This observation has often been taken to motivate the view that we cannot focus on an experience (in other words: one one’s being under a certain impression). But this is, I think, a mistake. A subject may focus on its being under the impression of there being a certain object with certain properties by focusing on the apparent properties of the apparent object. There is no opposition (or there need not be an opposition) between these ‘two’ acts of attention. It is even inadequate to talk of *two* acts of attention here at all.<sup>6</sup> The proposal just given might be used to explain why there is only one act of attention involved. When I focus on what I am aware of by being visually under the impression of there being a tree, then I focus on the apparent tree; and when I focus on what I am aware of in my primitive awareness of being under that impression, then I focus on how things appear to me, on what it is like for me to be under that impression. How can I do both at once? Here is a

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<sup>6</sup> For discussions of transparency of perceptual experience compare, for instance, Tim Crane (2002), Fabian Dorsch (2011), Amy Kind (2003) and (2010), Mike Martin (2002), Martine Nida-Rümelin (2007), Charles Siewert (2004), Daniel Stoljar (2004) and Michael Tye (2002).

tentative answer: having the experiential property of being under the visual impression that there is a tree involves (a) visual awareness of the apparent tree and (b) primitive awareness of being under that impression. Therefore, focusing on having an experiential property *is* then focusing on two objects one is both aware of in having the experiential property. Focusing one's attention on one's having the experiential property of seeing a tree involves attending to the tree (to what one is perceptually aware of in having the experience) *and* to one's being under the impression of there being a tree (to what one is primitively aware of in having the experience).

#### *4. Awareness of basic intentionality*

According to many philosophers belonging to different traditions there is a sense in which consciousness necessarily involves some simple non-conceptual form of self-consciousness which does not require any kind of reflection upon oneself or upon one's own mental states.<sup>7</sup> This is an idea sometimes referred as 'pre-reflexive self-consciousness'. This idea appears to be involved as well when contemporary philosophers use the term 'mine-ness'. To get some clear understanding of this possible further interpretation it is necessary to reflect upon the following questions: *Is it true that we are aware of ourselves in some sense in every experience?* Is there some primitive form of self-awareness which is necessarily involved in any conscious episode? More precisely: is there a sense in which every subject who undergoes a conscious experience is thereby necessarily aware of itself?

According to the view I would like to propose all these questions must be answered in the positive. There is a sense in which one cannot consciously experience anything without thereby being aware of oneself in a non-conceptual and non-reflexive manner. I would now like to propose a way in which one might describe that fundamental and omnipresent kind of self-awareness.

At the beginning of this paper I made the following proposal about the metaphysical structure of experience: every conscious experience exhibits basic intentionality; it consists in there being a subject *to whom* something is phenomenally given. My proposal, now, is this: in having an experience we are necessarily aware of that structure. We are aware of that structure by being the subject involved in the experience, by being the one to whom something is given. Furthermore, by being aware of that structure, by being aware, in every experience, of its basic intentionality, we are aware of ourselves as the one to whom something is phenomenally given. According to this proposal, the relevant kind of awareness of oneself does not give access to some object, oneself, in isolation. To say it in a metaphorical manner: this kind of awareness of oneself does not require turning 'the mind's eye'

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<sup>7</sup> An idea of this kind plays a role, for instance, in Husserl (1900/1901) and Sartre (1936) and, more recently, I believe, also in Cramer (1974), Frank (2011), Henrich (1970) and Pothast (1971). Awareness of basic intentionality (and perhaps sometimes primitive awareness) might be a way to interpret or might at least be helpful to clarify what different authors have in mind when they talk of prereflexive self-consciousness (some consciousness of oneself that is necessarily present in every conscious state and which does not require any kind of reflexion). It would, however, require careful examination to decide to what extent this interpretation can capture what different authors sharing the basic idea of 'pre-reflexive self-consciousness' have in mind. I will leave this question open here. An excellent exposition and discussion of views about pre-reflexive self-consciousness can be found in Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi (2005/2010)

towards oneself or 'back' to oneself. It would be misleading and inadequate to draw a picture here with two arrows, one directed at what is experienced, the other directed back to oneself. One arrow directed towards what is given is sufficient to pictorially represent the real situation. Awareness of basic intentionality, as it is present in every experience, does not require a concept of oneself or a general concept of what it is to be a subject of experience. It is there before we start to reflect upon what is given in the experience or upon the question about who (or what kind of individual) it is to whom something is given. That kind of awareness is there, not on the basis of experiencing, but in the act of experiencing itself.

That there is this awareness of basic intentionality may become more plausible if one reflects upon why and how one comes to agree with the thesis about basic intentionality proposed earlier. Those who agree with the claim are likely to agree, furthermore, that the claim is true in an obvious manner. When one accepts the thesis one will accept it immediately without any cognitive effort. One does not need to carefully examine general features of experience on the basis of memory or imagination. Why is the thesis so obvious? The claim that we are aware in every experience of its basic intentionality provides an answer. We are aware of that fundamental structure all the time in our conscious life; therefore it is so easy to agree that all experiences have that structure once we have formed the relevant notion.

The preceding remark, however, can easily be misunderstood. It might appear as if the proposal here is to infer the existence of some pre-reflexive and non-conceptual awareness of basic intentionality from our intuitive tendency to agree with the relevant theoretical claim. But this is quite contrary to my intention. The thesis that we are aware of basic intentionality would be poorly supported if it were in need of such an indirect and theoretical argument; and such an indirect argument could not help much to improve its plausibility if we did not have a more direct and immediate access to it. The far more important way to come to agree with the present thesis is by reflection upon how it is to experience something. One can realize, on that basis, or so I claim, that there is a sense in which we are unavoidably aware of an experience's basic intentionality in undergoing it. The claim, to say it with respect to a concrete example, is the following. When a tree is phenomenally given to you, you are, in being under that impression, aware of there being something that is phenomenally present to you. This kind of awareness is not something the experience of the tree might have or lack; it is rather part of what it is to have an experience of there being a tree. According to this proposal, having an experience necessarily involves awareness of there being something that is 'given to me'; the structure of the experience, its basic intentionality is evident to the experiencer, or 'reveals itself' to the experiencer in having the experience.

We thus arrive at a further sense in which an experience may be said to have 'subjective character':

Definition 3: (subjective character in the sense of awareness of basic intentionality)

An experience has subjective character iff the experiencer is aware, in undergoing the experience, of its basic intentionality.

*5. A few remarks about awareness of basic intentionality*

Is awareness of basic intentionality itself an experience with the structure of basic intentionality? A positive answer to this would lead into trouble. We then would have to say that in being aware of an experience's basic intentionality we again have an experience with basic intentionality of which we would have to be aware, and so on. This regress problem is a reason to answer the above question in the negative. But it should not be the only reason; otherwise this negative answer would be too *ad hoc*. There should be independent reason to say that awareness of basic intentionality in having an experience is not itself an experience which exhibits basic intentionality.

And there is, or so I propose, independent reason for this claim. If basic intentionality were something we experience then basic intentionality should be phenomenally given in having an experience. This would mean that, when you see a tree, there is a tree phenomenally present to you and, in addition, there is something more phenomenally present to you, namely the metaphysical structure of your experience, its basic intentionality. But this is a misdescription. We are aware of basic intentionality in every experience in a way which does not add anything to the content of the experience, it does not add anything, in other words, to what is 'in front of the mind's eye', to the totality of what is phenomenally present to the subject. The metaphor of the stream of consciousness might help to make this point a bit clearer. The stream of consciousness is the totality of what is phenomenally given, it is an extremely complex and rich totality of what is given to a subject in perception, emotion, bodily feeling, memory, imagination and thought, a totality which is in permanent change from moment to moment. The stream of consciousness, so understood, does not 'contain' the subject, it is rather the totality of what is present to the subject over a stretch of time. To say that basic intentionality is not phenomenally present, or to say that awareness of basic intentionality is not a kind of experiencing is to say – within the metaphor of the stream of consciousness – that basic intentionality does not occur in the stream of consciousness, it is not an element in it among others. Rather, we are permanently aware of the basic intentionality of experience in experiencing, in being presented with the rich totality which makes up the stream of consciousness within a given period of time. We should not think of the necessary relation between phenomenal consciousness and awareness of basic intentionality as relating two phenomena with one another. Rather, awareness of basic intentionality is an aspect of what it is to be phenomenally conscious of something. This is why basic intentionality does not enter the content of the experience. We are not aware of basic intentionality by experiencing it as a further element in what is phenomenally 'there'.

Awareness of basic intentionality is - as mentioned earlier - a form of self-awareness. In being aware of the metaphysical structure of experience in undergoing an experience we are aware of the one to whom something is phenomenally given, we are aware of ourselves, or so I suggest. It has often

been observed that the subject is not given to itself as an object; different versions of that claim and different aspects of the phenomenon it is about have been a central theme of important work within the philosophy of consciousness. I cannot discuss these deep issues here but I would like to add the following observation. If we understand self-awareness – in the fundamental sense in which it is included in every conscious experience – as awareness of basic intentionality, then we can see why and in what way the subject is not given ‘as an object’ in that kind of self-awareness. Basic intentionality is not an element in the stream of conscious, and this is why ‘the self’ does not occur either in the stream of consciousness when a subject is self-aware in being aware of her experience’s basic intentionality.

It is quite common among philosophers to think that ‘the self’, the experiencing subject, somehow comes into existence by gaining self-consciousness. This is, in my view, a mistake. The simplest experience already has the structure of basic intentionality and thereby presupposes for its existence the existence of a subject. The subject of the experience is not created by the acquisition of self-consciousness. Using what has been said about basic intentionality and awareness of it, there is, however, a way to see why this is a mistake one can easily make. The idea that ‘the self’ is created by the subject’s acquisition of self-consciousness has no initial plausibility if ‘self-consciousness’ is understood in a conceptually demanding way. But it may have a *prima facie* plausibility if ‘self-consciousness’ is understood in the sense of pre-reflexive self-awareness which I here call “awareness of basic intentionality”. To think that the subject comes into being due to its acquisition of pre-reflexive self-awareness in this sense is a mistake we can now explain. To do this let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the experiencing subject comes into being when, for the first time, it starts experiencing. If we assume, furthermore, that any experiencing necessarily involves awareness of basic intentionality, then the subject comes into being when it gains, for the first time, this form of self-consciousness (awareness of basic intentionality). If this is so, then, necessarily, a subject comes into being when it acquires, for the first time, this kind of self-awareness. But this kind of self-awareness does not constitute the subject’s existence and it does not bring it about. Given the necessary simultaneity just mentioned one can, however, quite easily be tempted to draw this mistaken conclusion. One can see, however, that the conclusion is mistaken by appreciating that basic intentionality does not come about by the subject’s awareness of it. To think so is to confuse awareness of something with ‘the something’ one is aware of in that awareness.

‘Mine-ness’ or ‘subjective character’ is used, or so I claim, in a systematically ambiguous way, sometimes as referring to basic intentionality (first reading, definition 1), sometimes as referring to primitive awareness (second reading, definition 2) and sometimes as referring to the subject’s awareness of basic intentionality (third reading, definition 3). If one overlooks the ambiguity of ‘subjective character’ between its first and its third reading then one commits exactly the mistake just discussed: one does not realize that basic intentionality cannot be equated with awareness of basic

intentionality and thereby implicitly accepts a view involving the claim that ‘the self’ is constituted by some form of pre-reflexive self-awareness.

I said above that awareness of basic intentionality is not a case of experiencing. In other words: basic intentionality is not among the elements that are, in the experience, phenomenally given to the subject. This claim might easily be confused with a different one: with the claim that awareness of basic intentionality is no part of what it is like to experience. The latter claim, I suggest, is false. It is a *phenomenological* fact about *all* experiences that experiencing necessarily goes along with awareness of basic intentionality. This is, however, a special phenomenological feature: it is not a feature, as in the normal case of phenomenal features, which distinguishes one experience from another. It is rather an aspect of how it is to experience shared by all experiences. With this clarification in mind we can describe the above mistake in yet another way. To confuse basic intentionality (first reading of ‘mine-ness’) with awareness of basic intentionality (third reading of ‘mine-ness’) is to confuse metaphysics with phenomenology. Again, it is easy to make the mistake given this unusual fact about basic intentionality: its occurrence necessarily involves a particular phenomenal feature, awareness of basic intentionality. Furthermore, our best reason to accept that experiences exhibit basic intentionality is this particular phenomenal feature shared by all experiences (our awareness of basic intentionality present in every experience). As mentioned earlier, acceptance of that thesis about the metaphysical structure of experience is based on our omnipresent awareness of that metaphysical structure and it is based on it in an immediate way which does not require any conscious inferences. There is, however, a belief with a different content which is based in a similar direct way on that awareness: the belief that we are so aware of that structure in any experience. Given their quite similar relation to our awareness of basic intentionality involved in any experience one might confuse the two beliefs and thereby fail to distinguish their different contents: the content of the first is a metaphysical fact, the content of the second is an experiential fact. The experiential fact is that, in experiencing, we are aware, in a phenomenally relevant way, of the metaphysical fact at issue (of basic intentionality).

#### 6. *Subjective character and phenomenal character*

It is often said that experiences have qualitative character *and* subjective character. A naïve way to read this which appears to be quite wide-spread is to think of both as parts of what-it-is-like to have an experience. The qualitative character, according to a specific way to understand that naïve reading in the special case of perception, is characterized by how things appear to be in that experience or by how they appear in that experience.<sup>8</sup> The subjective character of the experience then must be a further fact about what it is like to have an experience which is not exhausted by its qualitative character so understood. According to my diagnosis, there are three interpretations of ‘subjective character’. The

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<sup>8</sup> Afterimages appear red but they do not appear to be red, or so one might plausibly say. Compare for this issue Tim Crane (2002) p.8 and Paul Boghossian & David Velleman (1997) pp 91/21.

question about whether subjective character is part of phenomenal character therefore divides into three.

In the preceding section I argued that subjective character in the sense of definition 3 is indeed part of the phenomenal character of experiencing. It is a fact about phenomenology, about what it is like to experience. However, it is not a feature of experiencing that could be absent in any possible experience, or so I claim. Experiencing necessarily goes along with awareness of its basic intentionality. For that reason awareness of basic intentionality can well go unnoticed. We cannot discover that phenomenal feature by contrasting what it is like to have one experience with what it is like to have another experience. In order to discover that feature we have to abstract from all specific features of experiences, we have to abstract from what is phenomenally given in a particular experience. The intellectual activity one has to engage in to discover that feature is therefore quite different from other cases of phenomenological reflection. Nonetheless, or so I would like to insist, a complete description of what it is like to have a particular experience would have to mention pre-reflexive non-conceptual awareness of basic intentionality (which I take to be a form of self-awareness). Presupposing that we know we are talking about an experience, describing it as one that involves awareness of basic intentionality is totally uninformative. It does not add any information under that presupposition since the phenomenal feature described is necessarily shared by all cases of experiencing; the description does not capture any feature distinctive of the particular case at issue. Being aware of basic intentionality characterizes the overall-phenomenology of any experience, - even of the simplest experience lived through by some 'lower' animal. This is so although it would be misleading to say that awareness of basic intentionality *makes a difference* for the subject's overall phenomenological state. That it makes a difference might be read as saying that the overall phenomenological state of the subject *would be* phenomenally different if it lacked that awareness. But this reading makes the claim paradoxical: the subject would not be in any overall phenomenological state at all if it lacked awareness of basic intentionality.

As mentioned before, contrary to subjective character in the sense of definition 3, subjective character in the sense of definition 1 (basic intentionality) is not a phenomenological fact and so is not part of the phenomenal character of the experience, or so I claim. Basic intentionality is a metaphysical fact concerning the nature of experiences. It is not a fact about what it is like to experience; it is not constituted, as motivated above, by any experiential fact. However, subjective character in the sense of basic intentionality is revealed in every case of experiencing to the subject concerned. It is revealed in the sense that the subject is non-conceptually and pre-reflexively aware of that metaphysical structure; it is revealed by how it is to experience. It is, however, revealed in a way which does not include cognitive access to that fact. One has it without attending to it; a subject can have it without ever having formed a belief about the structure of experience; no concept usable in a belief about it or in entertaining a thought about it is required for having that awareness.

The third question to ask is about primitive awareness. Is primitive awareness an instance of phenomenal consciousness? In other words: when you are primitively aware of seeing a tree, are you thereby in a state which is itself part of phenomenal consciousness? In yet other words: should we say that being primitively aware of seeing something is a case of being phenomenally aware of one's own experience? Or one may put the question in this manner: Is one's primitive awareness of having some given experiential property itself an experiential property?

The first two questions may be taken to be synonymous without any danger of confusion, as far as I can see; the third, however, must be distinguished from the former two. The first two questions can be formulated more precisely by explicating a positive answer in this way: being primitively aware of having a certain experience characterizes the overall phenomenology of a subject's experience. In a sense, this affirmation is trivially true. Being primitively aware of having property F means, according to the definition proposed, that F partially constitutes the subject's overall phenomenology. If this is a fact about F (that it partially constitutes the subjects present phenomenology) in a given case, then it is a fact about the subject's overall phenomenology in that case and so to formulate that fact is to characterize the subject's overall phenomenology. However, that this fact partially constitutes the subject's phenomenology does not mean that being primitively aware of having a certain experiential property is itself a further experiential property distinct from the one the subject is primitively aware of. In seeing a tree you have the experiential property of being so 'appeared to'. In seeing the tree you are also primitively aware of seeing the tree: your overall phenomenology is partially constituted by the fact that you are under that visual impression and, in this sense, your perceptual experience is conscious. But this does not mean that you experience your own experience of the tree, in other words: it does not mean that there is any sense in which you experience yourself as being visually presented with a tree. There is no experience having your experience of the tree as its content. Being primitively aware of seeing a tree does not consist in having an experience which is itself the content of the experience. So we must conclude: Being primitively aware of having an experiential property is *not* an experiential property.

### *7. Peripheral inner awareness*

According to Uriah Kriegel the subjective character of experiences consists in the subject's peripheral inner awareness of the experience at issue.<sup>9</sup> According to this thesis, when you are perceptually aware of a tree, you are thereby, in a peripheral way, also aware of that perceptual experience. This further awareness, your awareness of the experience, is peripheral in a way comparable to the way in which one is only peripherally aware of an object in the periphery of the visual field, or in the way one is only peripherally aware of the melody played by the violas in an orchestra as long as one does not attend to them. I find this way to describe the situation at least misleading. To say why, it will help to address, for all three senses of 'subjective character' distinguished earlier, the following question: Is

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<sup>9</sup> See Kriegel (2005), (2009) and Horgan & Kriegel (2007).

subjective character of an experience a case of peripheral awareness? In other words: Is “the experience E has subjective character” always or sometimes true in virtue of the fact that the experiencing subject at issue is peripherally aware of something?

If subjective character is understood in the sense of basic intentionality (definition 1) then these two questions must be answered in the negative. Basic intentionality is not a fact about phenomenology, it is a fact about the metaphysical structure of experience. Therefore, experiences do not have subjective character in that sense in virtue of the subject’s awareness or peripheral awareness of the experience E or of anything else.

If subjective character is understood in the sense of primitive awareness (definition 2) then these two questions must be answered in the negative too. For any kind of awareness to allow for the distinction between focal and peripheral awareness that kind of awareness must consist in some content being present to the subject such that that content can occupy a more or less central position among all that is given to the subject in the relevant moment. Primitive awareness, in other words, would have to be a case of basic intentionality. In other words, the experience the subject is aware of, would have to occur, among other items, in the stream of consciousness. But primitive awareness is not of that kind. To be primitively aware of one’s own experience is not to have an experience of one’s experience. The experience is not presented to the subject in its primitive awareness of the experience, rather, the subject is primitively aware of experiencing just by experiencing, and just in virtue of the fact that its overall phenomenal state is determined (partially constituted) by its having the experience. Therefore, or so I conclude, primitive awareness does not allow for the distinction between ‘focal’ and ‘peripheral’.

But there certainly is a sense in which a person can be more or less centrally aware of how it is for him or her to have a given experience. A painter may be acutely aware of the color in which something appears to him or her and thereby of the subjective character of his or her experience while another person, exposed to the same scene, might well see the objects in exactly the same colors and yet barely notice their particular quality. It would however be a mistake to think that this is a difference on the level of primitive awareness. It is a difference on the level of reflection upon one’s experience. The painter is interested in how things appear to him and he therefore directs his or her attention correspondingly. His or her reflective awareness of how things appear to him or her plays a central role in his or her overall state. Another person might have no reflective awareness of the colors she is experiencing or she might reflect on these colors but in a much less focused manner while other things, more important ones, pass by ‘in her mind’. The plausible thought that we can be more or less focally aware of our own experience should be understood, or so I propose, as a thought about reflective awareness of one’s own experience. It must not be understood as a thought about primitive awareness.

The remaining question about whether subjective character may consist in some kind of peripheral awareness concerns awareness of basic intentionality (subjective character in the sense of

definition 3). The question to ask then is this: does awareness of basic intentionality allow for the distinction between focal and peripheral awareness? Is this kind of awareness sometimes more focal and sometimes more peripheral? The answer depends, again, on whether or not awareness of basic intentionality has itself the structure of basic intentionality. Awareness of basic intentionality allows for the distinction at issue only if in that awareness something is present to the subject among other objects occurring in the stream of consciousness; but, as noted earlier, this is not so. Awareness of basic intentionality is not experiential in that sense, it is not a case of being phenomenally presented with something. I conclude that the distinction ‘focal’ versus ‘peripheral’ does not apply to awareness of basic intentionality; it does not apply to that kind of pre-reflexive non-conceptual self-awareness.

As before, one might object that there is a sense in which awareness of basic intentionality can be more or less central in the subject’s overall phenomenology. I agree that this is so. When one directs one’s attention in a particular way then that kind of awareness might be very clearly ‘in front of the mind’s eye’ and it may then be central in some sense in one’s overall phenomenology. In this case, however, or so I suggest, one makes one’s own awareness of basic intentionality the object of one’s thought and that thought might be more or less central. So, once again, the conclusion we should draw is this: the distinction ‘focal’ versus ‘peripheral’ applies on the second level, on the level of reflection, it applies to our thoughts about awareness of basic intentionality; but it does not apply on the first level, on the level of awareness of basic intentionality itself. In thinking about one’s awareness of basic intentionality, basic intentionality is present in one’s thought. In that thought, one is also aware of basic intentionality, but this is not awareness of basic intentionality in the sense in which the notion has been introduced here: it is not pre-reflexive non-conceptual awareness of basic intentionality. One’s cognitive awareness of basic intentionality when we reflect upon pre-reflexive non-conceptual awareness of basic intentionality does however allow for the distinction between ‘focal’ and ‘peripheral’.

#### *8. The regress problem*

Proponents of self-representationalism about consciousness claim that every experience has a double function: it makes the subject aware of some object (e.g. a particular visually given scene) and it makes the subject aware of having the experience (or, as they say, of the experience itself). For the representationalist, the following premise is common ground: an experience makes a subject aware of some *x* if and only if it represents *x*; to render the subject concerned aware of *x* is, for an experience, to represent *x*. Contemporary self-representationalists cite Brentano as a traditional source of this idea and they are right in doing so. In various places Brentano clearly expresses the idea that conscious experiences involve a double representation (‘*Vorstellung*’): in hearing a tone the tone is represented but the hearing is represented as well.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Compare citation (12) in the appendix to this paper.

Contemporary self-representationalists share with Brentano an important insight: it would be a mistake to think that the relevant awareness of the awareness of the tone is a further act of consciousness or ‘a further experience’; they are eager to stress that we must describe the situation in a way which avoids the introduction of various levels and they cite two reasons: (a) it would be phenomenologically inadequate to introduce more than one level in that description (a subject is aware of her experience by having the experience and without thereby undergoing a further experience) and (b) the alternative (the introduction of a higher level) leads into a serious regress problem (for the relevant act of consciousness at the second level to be conscious there would have to be an act at the third level directed at the one on the second level, and so on).

Brentano and contemporary self-representationalists try to do duty to phenomenology and try to stop the regress problem by the identification of the act of consciousness or experience in which the act of consciousness (or experience) is represented with that represented act or experience itself. But there is reason to doubt that they thereby solve the regress problem while doing duty to phenomenology. The problem, in my view, is their use of one single notion of awareness (or representation) in that context. This, I believe, leads them into trouble.

Independently of how experiences are counted, the following problem remains. If in every experience the subject must be aware of having the experience and if being aware of having an experience is itself a case of experiencing, then there is an infinite number of ‘being aware of’ involved: the subject is aware of being presented with X, the subject is aware of being aware of being presented with X and the subject is aware of being aware of being aware of.....etc. *This* regress does not stop through the identification of all experiences involved at each level with one another.<sup>11</sup> The regress occurs because awareness is understood – across the board – as experiential awareness. The philosophers at issue seem to believe that we are talking about awareness in the same sense when we say that the subject is aware of the tone and aware of hearing the tone: the tone is given to the subject and, in addition, the experience is given to the subject. If this were so, then the second given-ness for it to be conscious would require, again, a further instance of awareness, and so on. The solution, I suggest is to realize that awareness at the first level *is* a case of basic intentionality which does necessarily involve awareness of experiencing in the sense of definition 1 and 2, but that the latter items of awareness (primitive awareness and awareness of basic intentionality) are *not* cases of basic intentionality and therefore do not necessarily involve any further awareness.

Before I explain how the regress stops in the case of primitive awareness (definition 2) and in the case of awareness of basic intentionality (definition 3), let me briefly come back to ‘subjective character’ in the sense of definition 1 (basic intentionality). Subjective character is commonly explained by the self-representationalist as the property of the experience to represent itself. This is,

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<sup>11</sup> I am indebted to Emmanuel Baierlé for having attracted my attention to this problem in a seminar discussion. According to Zahavi (2006), Aron Gurwitsch was the first author who clearly formulated it as an objection against Brentano in his habilitation which was completed in 1931 and published in 1977 (see Gurwitsch (1977)). Zahavi (2006) attributes the same objection against Brentano to Dieter Henrich (1970), Konrad Cramer (1974) and Ulrich Pothast (1971).

however, trivially, a non-starter if subjective character is understood in the sense of basic intentionality. Basic intentionality is a fact about the metaphysical structure of experiences and it is not constituted by any kind of awareness. Since the experience represents itself, according to the representationalist, if and only if it makes the subject aware of the experience itself, subjective character is reduced by the self-representationalist theory to some kind of awareness. Basic intentionality is not a kind of awareness; therefore it cannot be so reduced. I conclude that self-representationalism fails as a theory about the nature of consciousness since it cannot explain basic intentionality.

The regress problem does not arise if the way in which, in any experience, we are necessarily aware of experiencing is understood in the sense of primitive awareness. The regress starts only if we must re-apply the principle at issue (any experience involves an awareness of itself) to the relevant awareness of the experience. But the principle does not apply to primitive awareness because primitive awareness, as explained earlier, is not itself an experience. The same remark is true about awareness of basic intentionality. This kind of pre-reflexive non-conceptual self-awareness is not an experience either, it is present in every experience but we do not thereby experience basic intentionality, basic intentionality does not occur among the objects present to the subject in having the experience, or so I claim. Therefore, we need not and should not re-apply the above mentioned principle and therefore no regress problem arises either if subjective character is understood in the sense of awareness of basic intentionality.

### *9. The representationalist mistake*

Primitive awareness and pre-reflexive non-conceptual self-awareness in the sense here proposed (awareness of basic intentionality) are both puzzling kinds of awareness. Language leads us into trouble when we wish to adequately describe their nature. We wish to say and we can hardly avoid saying that cases of primitive awareness are cases where a subject is aware *of* having an experience and we cannot avoid the ‘of-talk’ either when we talk about the aspect of consciousness at issue calling it “awareness *of* basic intentionality”. In the first case we easily slip into saying that the subject is aware *of* the experience. But this sounds as if there is something, the experience, which is, in such a case of primitive awareness, present to the subject or given to the subject as one of many items in the stream of consciousness; but this is, as mentioned earlier, a mistake. The ‘of’-talk leads us into a wrong picture. The way we talk about awareness (there is a subject and then there is something it is aware of) invites the mistaken thought that all cases of conscious awareness exhibit the structure of basic intentionality. There is an object of awareness in the case of primitive awareness too, but that ‘object’ is not given as any content in the stream of consciousness. The analogous observation applies to awareness of basic intentionality. Basic intentionality is the object of that conscious awareness but basic intentionality does not occur among other objects in what is present to the subject in that kind of awareness. One might have thought that, trivially, any object of any episode of conscious awareness

must be an item within the totality of what is given to the subject (that the object at issue must occur as one object among others in the stream of consciousness). To think so is to believe that all kinds of conscious awareness are to be understood as episodes of phenomenal consciousness or, in other words, as cases of experiencing. It might be hard to agree that this is not so. Only by careful reflection upon primitive awareness and upon awareness of basic intentionality one may come to see that this apparently unproblematic assumption should be abandoned.

The fundamental mistake of the representationalist can be found in the work of Brentano. It may now be described as follows: the idea that all cases of awareness of something are cases where an experience represents something quite clearly presupposes that conscious awareness is always a matter of being somehow phenomenally presented with something. It quite clearly incorporates the intuition that all cases of conscious awareness have the structure of basic intentionality. But if the ideas here presented about primitive awareness and about awareness of basic intentionality are right, then the fact that representationalism incorporates this mistaken assumption explains why the representationalist does not have the conceptual resources to successfully tackle the problem recently rediscovered by self-representationalists: the problem about the way in which experiencing necessarily involves conscious awareness of experiencing and about the way in which it necessarily involves some kind of self-awareness. Since these are the fundamental problems about the nature of consciousness this remark amounts to the following diagnosis: representationalist theories about the nature of consciousness are bound to fail.

### *11. Subjective character – a misleading term*

According to a widespread terminology that is rarely if ever put into question, qualitative character as well as so-called subjective character are properties of experiences. A majority of philosopher presupposes furthermore and often without explicitly mentioning this presupposition that experiences are brain events. Presupposing the view here proposed we can now see in what way this terminology (the experience property framework) in particular when combined with the ontological assumption just mentioned leads astray. To see this let us have a further look at each definition of subjective character proposed in this paper.

According to the first definition an experience has subjective character if and only if it is an event which consists in the fact that something specific is phenomenally given to the relevant subject. For an event to have subjective character is to fall into a specific metaphysical category, namely into the category of experiences, into the category of events involving an experiencing subject which has, in that event, changing experiential properties (something is phenomenally given to it). Subjective character in that sense raises deep problems about the nature of experiencing subjects and the nature of phenomenal presence. Introducing subjective character as properties of brain processes hides this fundamental insight. It is then easy to think that we are just searching for a certain special property and to overlook that we are addressing the deep and difficult question about the nature of certain kinds of

individuals, experiencing subjects. Obviously, no philosophical account of subjective character in this first sense can be given without addressing these questions about the nature of these special individuals. The experience property framework makes it easy to overlook that platitude. It makes it easy to believe, as many contemporary philosophers apparently do, that we can seriously try to develop a philosophical account of consciousness leaving the experiencing subject out of the picture. Talking of basic intentionality in terms of subjective character understood as a property of experiences (brain events) makes it appear – on the surface – as if we were indeed able to talk about an interesting and fundamental feature of consciousness here, remaining completely silent about the one who has the experience, the experiencing subject. In reality this is an illusion. If we use the term subjective character in the sense of definition 1 then we are in fact talking about the experiencing subject (the ‘property of experiences’ at issue is defined by reference to it) but we do so in a hidden and implicit manner as if we were talking in a secret code in order to hide our real communicative intentions. This way to proceed is obviously undesirable. Progress in philosophy is more likely if the participants are as open and clear as possible about what they actually mean.

A related point concerns the choice of basic terms. A developed precise philosophical theory about consciousness would have to include a proposal with respect to the language in which it is couched. This proposal would have to make it clear what terms are used as basic and what terms are introduced by definition. It would be supplemented by a careful explanation (using examples and theoretical assumptions) of its basic terms. Obviously, it is very unlikely that we will ever reach, in philosophy, the state where the ideal of such a precisely formulated theory will be attained. But still, this ideal should guide the way we proceed. If we use ‘subjective character’ in the sense of definition 1, then we should make it explicit that the term is a defined term and that its definition *requires* talking of experiencing subjects and phenomenal presence. It then would be obvious that these more fundamental terms need to be in the center of the inquiry and that it is a mistake to try to remain silent about what they refer to. A different way to proceed is to introduce subjective character (in the sense of definition 1) as a fundamental term and to mention what occurs in definition 1 as the definiens only in passing by way of intuitive comments about what it is supposed to capture. But this way to proceed is not recommendable. It distracts attention from what should be in the center of the philosophical enterprise.

In the sense of definition 2, the subjective character of an experience is for it to be such that the subject concerned is primitively aware of undergoing the experience. Here again, the property of the experience is introduced by reference to the experiencing being at issue and what has been said in the preceding paragraph reapplies. The fact that we cannot understand what subjective character in that second sense amounts to without reference to the experiencing subject should better not be hidden by the chosen terminology; it should rather be made explicit so that it is clear to everybody involved in the discussion that the old question about the bearer of experiential properties has reoccurred.

Finally, to talk of subjective character as a property of experiences having the sense explicated by definition 3 in mind, contains a double implicit reference to the experiencing subject and so hides reference to the subject twice: an experience has subjective character in this third sense if *the subject concerned* is aware of the metaphysical structure of the experience in which it is involved (first reference to the experiencing subject) and in being so aware of basic intentionality the subject is aware of *itself* (second reference to the experiencing subject concerned).

When the experience property framework is combined with the presupposition that experiences are brain events then it is likely to mislead in yet another way. The risk is that those reflecting upon philosophical issues surrounding the topic ‘subjective character’ think of awareness of one’s own experiences as a case of looking inside and discovering inner events with specific properties. The problem is that the framework invites the mistaken perceptual metaphor of ‘inner awareness’. It should be clear that neither primitive awareness of one’s own properties nor pre-reflexive non-conceptual awareness of basic intentionality is the result of some kind of ‘looking inwards’. And it should be clear (as pointed out earlier) that none of these two cases of awareness involve that some item is phenomenally present to the subject or given – so to speak – ‘as an object’ to the experiencer. Being primitively aware of one’s own experiencing is not a matter of being presented with experiences as a result of looking inside. Nor is awareness of basic intentionality a matter of discovering, inside oneself, things with a certain structure. Talking of properties of brain events in this context invites, however, this mistaken picture. In other words the framework makes it easy to overlook that these two kinds of awareness do not have the structure of basic intentionality, that they are no cases of experiencing something.

Furthermore, the framework is likely to lead into even deeper confusion. Suppose that we take subjective character (a) to consist in some kind of ‘inner’ awareness of the experiencer of his or her own experience (it consists in the fact that the experiencer encounters that experience by ‘looking inside’) and that (b) we take subjective character to be a property of the event discovered inside via that ‘inner look’. The second part (b) is likely to lead us to the idea that the experiencer who is aware of his or her experience via ‘inner awareness’ is then aware of an event with an interesting property: subjective character. It then looks as if subjective character is one of those properties the event discovered inside appears to have when one is aware of it via ‘the inner look’ at issue. It then looks as if the experiencer, in being ‘inwardly aware’ of his or her own experience, discovers an event which appears to have subjective character. All this is already completely misguided but let us stay within this bad perceptual metaphor of inner awareness and see what happens when it is taken seriously. The experiencer then discovers an event which appears to have subjective character but that apparent property consists, according to (a), in the fact that the experiencer managed singling out that event via inner awareness. It follows that the inner event ‘appears to the experiencer’ in a particular way in virtue of the fact that he or she is ‘looking at it’ via inner awareness. This thought is confusing or rather confused and we should not try to make sense of it. The whole picture of inner awareness as

awareness of inner processes should, of course, be abandoned. This has been pointed out repeatedly by a number of philosophers.<sup>12</sup> The perceptual metaphor of inner awareness is, however, still at work, or so it seems obvious to me, in contemporary thinking about consciousness and it is, once again, an obstacle in the ongoing debate about so-called subjective character: talking of subjective character in terms of properties of inner processes is likely to reactivate that bad metaphor in the thinking of many.

According to what has been said in this paper the term ‘subjective character’ is used to attract the attention of contemporary philosophers to fundamental issues about consciousness which have long been neglected within the analytical tradition. The term is however used in a systematically ambiguous manner. Furthermore it is part of a conceptual framework (the experience property account) which is in various ways seriously misleading. For these reasons, although the themes raised by the discussion about subjective character deserve close attention and careful examination, the term itself should rather be abandoned and replaced by a series of different concepts that remain to be developed.

#### Appendix: Citations with comments

(1)

„Now there are two features of conscious sensory states that require theoretical elucidation: “qualitative character” and “subjectivity”. . . . In the case at hand, seeing a ripe tomato, there is both a distinctive qualitative character to be reckoned with and also the fact that the state is conscious - “for the subject”, in a way that unconscious states are not.“ Levine, J. (2006), section 2, § 2.

##### Comment:

We can read this passage as follows: the difference between conscious and unconscious sensory experiences lies in the fact that the former but not the latter are in an important sense ‘for the subject’. This may be taken to mean that being in the state makes a difference for the subject (primitive awareness); or it may be taken to mean that in a conscious state, contrary to an unconscious state, there is a subject to whom something is phenomenally present (basic intentionality). Both interpretations appear plausible and both interpretations are well compatible with the claim that being ‘for the subject’ marks the difference between conscious and un-conscious sensory experiences.

(2)

„I consciously see a ripe tomato on the kitchen counter. Clearly the primary object of my conscious state is what I’m seeing, the scene on the counter. But it also seems to be the case that my very awareness of the tomato on the counter includes within it somehow an apprehension that I am seeing what I’m seeing.“ Levine, J., (2006), section 2, § 8

##### Comment:

‘Apprehension that I’m seeing what I’m seeing’ in the sense Levine has in mind in this passage is not the result of reflection upon one’s experience. It is the awareness of seeing something which the subject has, necessarily, in seeing something. ‘Apprehension’ in this passage, I suggest, is best understood in the sense of primitive awareness.

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<sup>12</sup> Compare, e.g., Sidney Shoemaker (1994) and the discussion of his views in Cynthia MacDonald (1999). In M. Nida-Rümelin (2007) I argue that the perceptual model is responsible for a number of fallacies in the philosophical debate about representationalism and qualia.

(3)

„To a first approximation, the experience’s bluish qualitative character is what makes it the experience it is, but its for-me-ness is what makes it an experience at all. A better, if initially less clear, approximation is this: my experience is the experience it is because it is bluish-for-me, and is an experience at all because it is somehow-for-me (or qualitatively-for-me). Thus qualitative character is what varies among conscious experiences, while subjective character is what is common to them.“ U. Kriegel, forthcoming in Lui & Perry (eds.), section 2, § 2.

Comment: ‘bluish character’ here is used as if it referred to a qualitative property of the experience (the relevant event). This technical expression, in order to be given a sense, must be translated into talk about experiencing subjects and what they are presented with or what they are aware of. The only way, or so I claim, to understand what it is for an experience to be bluish (or to have a bluish character) is to say this: an experience has that property iff the subject involved in the event is phenomenally presented with blue. (It is common, following Levine (2001), to reserve the term ‘bluish’ for the property of an experience corresponding to ‘blue’. Where ‘blue’ is the property things appear to have in the relevant color perceptions and ‘bluish’ is the alleged property of experiences shared by those experiences where the color blue is phenomenally present. This sense of bluish must not be confused with its normal sense where it characterizes the commonality between e.g. violet and turquoise). Since ‘for-me-ness’ is introduced, just like bluishness, as a property of the experience, one might try using the same schema for a translation into a less technical and more accessible language: an experience has that property iff in having the experience the subject is phenomenally presented with ‘being for me’. What could it be, however, to be phenomenally presented with ‘being for me’? In the case of ‘bluish’, we have an understanding of the corresponding property (blue) which can be given in an experience (normally as a property something appears to have) and we have a clear understanding of what it is to be phenomenally presented with that property. Therefore, the technical talk of bluishness can be eliminated and replaced by unproblematic terminology. It is not possible to proceed in the same way for ‘for-me-ness’. Contrary to the color case, for-me-ness is not a candidate for a property something appears to have in an experience; and there is no candidates for objects either that might appear to have for-me-ness; we are not presented with an experience which appears to have for-me-ness (see section 10. and 11. of the present paper).

In the above citation an experience’s having subjective character is said to consist in the fact that having the experience is somehow for the subject. It is plausible and natural to understand this as the claim that having the experience makes a difference for the subject and so it is natural to interpret ‘for-me-ness’ in this passage in the sense of primitive awareness.

(4)

„According to Levine and me, the deeply mystifying feature of phenomenal consciousness is that when I have a conscious experience, the experience does not occur only *in me*, but also *for me*. There is some sort of direct presence, a subjective significance, of the experience to the subject.“ U. Kriegel, forthcoming in Lui & Perry (eds.), Section 2, §3

Comment: I propose to interpret this talk of being ‘for me’ as primitive awareness.

(5) „.....for a conscious experience to be not only *in me*, but also *for me*, I would have to be *aware* of it.“ U. Kriegel, forthcoming in Lui & Perry (eds.), Section 2, § 5

Comment: In my view, the only way to interpret ‘awareness’ here is to read it in the sense of primitive awareness. But then it is a mistake to go on and say that, therefore, the experience is itself represented in some state of the subject (as Kriegel does in the text which follows the cited passage). Primitive awareness of an experience is not a matter of representing the experience. (Compare section 9 of the present paper).

(6)

“Not only *is* the experience bluish, but I am also *aware* of its being bluish. Its *being* bluish constitutes its qualitative character, while my *awareness* of it constitutes its subjective character.” U. Kriegel, 2005, p. 27

Comment: the last occurrence of “it” in this passage is puzzling. Does it refer to “the experience’s being bluish” (as the preceding sentence appears to suggest) or does it refer to the experience itself (as grammar appears to suggest)? But translating technical terminology in a more explicit language we can see that the difference does not matter. Being bluish (for an experience) means that the subject involved in the experience is phenomenally presented with blue. Being aware of the bluishness of an experience then must mean: being aware of being phenomenally presented with blue. And if the experience at issue consists in the subject’s being phenomenally presented with blue, then being aware of the experience means, once again, being aware of being phenomenally presented with blue. I conclude that, subjective character, as the term is used in this passage, should be interpreted in the sense of primitive awareness.

The language chosen to express primitive awareness is, however, misleading. To say that I am aware of my experience’s being bluish clearly invites the perceptual metaphor discussed earlier (compare section 11). One is invited to think of the experience as something phenomenally given in the experience (perhaps upon ‘looking inside’) as having the property of being bluish, - which is, of course, false. No experience is phenomenally given; and no experience is phenomenally given as having certain properties. Being primitively aware of being presented with blue does not involve anything like that.

(7)

„When a phenomenally conscious state represents something, it makes the subject aware of what it represents. To say that your perceptual experience represents both the page and itself is therefore to say that it makes you aware not only of the page, but also of your experience of the page. Let us call your awareness of the page *outer awareness* and your awareness of the experience *inner awareness*.“  
T. Horgan & U. Kriegel, 2007, section 2.1., § 2

Comment: This passage can be read as a short and apparently obvious argument for a representationalist account of the way in which we are necessarily aware of undergoing an experience in undergoing the experience. It presupposes that awareness of something is, in every case, a matter of representation. We should however, or so I claim, abandon this representationalist dogma. (Compare section 9. of this paper). The term ‘inner awareness’ introduced here is likely to evoke the bad perceptual metaphor mentioned in section 11.

(8)

”In the ordinary go of things, one does not become aware of one’s ongoing experience through an extra mental step that results in the formation of a numerically distinct state of awareness. Rather, the awareness of the experience is a component of the experience itself, not a further mental event or state.“ T. Horgan & U. Kriegel, 2007, section 2.1., § 3

Comment: This passage is an example of a wide-spread habit to discuss phenomenological issues about the correct description of experience in terms of questions about counting experiences and in terms of parts or components of experiences. But how do we have to count experiences and what depends on how many experiences are involved in a given case? Do we have any clear understanding of what it is for experiences to be numerically identical or distinct? Does it make sense to ask, for instance, how many experiences you had in the last five minutes? Talking in this way presupposes, in my opinion, a problematic reification of experiences. Furthermore, talking of parts or components of experiences in this context is just a metaphor. Both ways of talking can serve their purpose only because we have, implicitly, some translation into a more accessible language in mind. An adequate translation, I propose, can be formulated like this: when a subject undergoes an experience, then, in having the experience, the subject is necessarily aware of having it. Using the notion of phenomenal presence (and presupposing that every experience is a matter of being phenomenally presented with something) we get an even simpler claim: in being phenomenally presented with something the subject is necessarily aware of being phenomenally presented with that something. This simpler affirmation is more easily accessible for intuitive testing on the basis of phenomenological reflection. Nothing appears to be lost if we abandon the technicalities present in the above citation in favor of the proposed simpler language and a lot is gained: the intuitive content becomes clearly visible.

(9)

“Consider your perceptual experience of this page. It makes you aware primarily of the page, not of itself. This is because your attention is absorbed with the page. Yet, we maintain, you are also aware, though much more dimly, of having that very experience.” T. Horgan & U. Kriegel, 2007, 2.1., § 7.

(10)

„Thus it seems all but incoherent to suppose that one could have a phenomenal experience which was greenish, but of which one was aware as reddish. For, what it is like *for the subject* to have the experience is determined by the way the subject is aware of her experience. If the subject is aware of the experience as reddish, then what the experience is like *for the subject* is reddish. (In the ordinary case, the subject is focally aware of an external object as red, via an experience deploying a reddish mode of representation of that red object; the subject thereby is peripherally aware of the experience itself as reddish, since the reddish experience represents both the red external object and itself.)“ T. Horgan & U. Kriegel, 2007, 2.1., § 11

Comment: The above two citations contain the idea that the kind of awareness at issue is peripheral, an idea criticized in section 7 of the present paper. Neither basic intentionality, nor primitive awareness, nor awareness of basic intentionality allow for any distinction between being more or less peripheral. To be aware of an experience as reddish can be translated in a simpler and less problematic language: it is to be aware of being phenomenally presented with red. To say then that one cannot have a greenish experience and be aware of it as reddish means, quite simply, this: you cannot be phenomenally presented with green and, in being so presented with green, be aware of being phenomenally presented with red.

(11) “On my view, however, there is more to be said about phenomenal character – there is more structure to it than is typically recognized. In particular, I distinguish two components of the ‘bluish way it is like for me’ to have the experience: the bluish component, which I call *qualitative character*, and the for-me component, which I call *subjective character*. To make a conceptual separation between qualitative and subjective character is not to imply that they can occur apart from one another. My view is that there are many determinate phenomenal characters – bluish-for-me-ness, greenish-for-me-ness, bitterish-for-me-ness, trumpet-for-me-ness, etc. – and the determinable of all of them is for-me-ness as such. We grasp what subjective character is by fixing on what is common to all phenomenally conscious states, and grasp what qualitative character is by fixing on what varies among them.” U. Kriegel, forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*, first page.

Comment: For an experience to be ‘bluish’ means that the subject involved is phenomenally presented with blue. For a ‘bluish’ experience to have ‘for-me-ness’ is for the subject to be aware of being presented with blue. To pack both parts in one alleged property of an experience is confusing. It masks the fact that its first part and its second part must be translated into the language of ordinary thought in quite different ways. Talking of “bluish-for-me-ness” invites the idea that there is one single property such that for an experience to have bluish-for-me-ness is for the subject to be phenomenally presented with that property. But there is no such property. The subject is only presented with blue and there is no phenomenally presented property corresponding to the “bluish-for-me-ness” as a whole or to the “for-me-ness”-part alone.

Using the terminology introduced in the present paper we can say what all phenomenally conscious states have in common: (a) they exhibit basic intentionality (there is a subject to whom something is phenomenally given), (b) the subject is primitively aware of being in that state and (c) the subject is, in having the experience, aware of its basic intentionality. According to the view presented, (a), (b) and (c) are all necessarily fulfilled in each phenomenally conscious state. Furthermore, each of them necessarily implies the two others. Therefore, we can use each of them as the mark of the phenomenal. So each of the three interpretations of subjective character proposed in the present paper is perfectly compatible with Kriegel’s claim that subjective character is what all phenomenally conscious states have in common.

In my interpretation, qualitative character is characterized by what is phenomenally present to the experiencing subject. This interpretation too complies with Kriegel's claim that we grasp qualitative character when we focus on what distinguishes different phenomenally conscious states: two phenomenally conscious states differ in virtue of differences in what is phenomenally present to the experiencing subject.

(12)

“In demselben psychischen Phänomen, in welchem der Ton vorgestellt wird, erfassen wir zugleich das psychische Phänomen selbst, und zwar nach seiner doppelten Eigentümlichkeit, insofern es als Inhalt den Ton in sich hat, und insofern es zugleich sich selbst als Inhalt gegenwärtig ist.

Wir können *den Ton das primäre*, das Hören selbst das *sekundäre Objekt* des Hörens nennen.”  
Franz Brentano, 1874, 179/180.

English translation: “In the same mental phenomenon in which the sound is present to our minds we simultaneously apprehend the mental phenomenon itself. What is more, we apprehend it in accordance with its dual nature insofar as it has the sound as content within it, and insofar as it has itself as content at the same time.

We can say that the sound is the *primary object* of the *act* of hearing, and that the act of hearing itself is the *secondary object* “(cited from the translation by L. L. McAlister. *Psychthology from an Empirical Standpoint*, London: Routledge, 1973).

Comment: Like contemporary authors, Brentano does not explicitly talk of the subject to whom something is presented; he says that the experience (“das psychische Phänomen”/ “the mental phenomenon”) is presented to itself as a content and that it is as an object (a secondary object) of the experience. We may say then, or so it appears plausible to me, that Brentano attributes basic intentionality to the subject's relevant kind of awareness of hearing a tone (to the kind of awareness included in the hearing itself). He appears to think that the relation involved here of being presented (“vorgestellt” or “gegenwärtig als Inhalt”) is not at all fundamentally different in the case of the awareness of the tone while hearing the tone and in the case of the awareness of hearing the tone while hearing the tone. We thus might translate him as saying that both, the tone and the hearing of the tone, are phenomenally present to the subject in hearing the tone. So Brentano appears to commit the representationalist mistake described in section 9.

The representationalist mistake as I have been trying to describe it in section 9 of the present paper might be summarized saying something like this: the representationalist mistakenly assumes that when a subject is aware of its experience in having the experience, the experience itself is a further object of this awareness. An alternative to the representationalist view is to say that this particular kind of awareness, although it is ‘of something’ in a certain sense, nonetheless does not have an object. Zahavi (2006) ascribes this object-less view to Husserl, Sartre and Heidegger and he describes it as follows:

“Thus, not only does it [the Husserlian account] reject the view that a mental state becomes conscious by being taken as an object by a higher-order state, it also rejects the view espoused by Brentano according to which a mental state becomes conscious by taking itself as an object. Brentano and Husserl both share the view that self-consciousness (or to use Brentano's terminology “inner consciousness”) differs from ordinary object-consciousness. The issue of controversy is over whether selfconsciousness is (i) merely an extraordinary object-consciousness or (ii) not an object consciousness at all. In contrast to Brentano, Husserl thinks the latter, more radical, move is required.“ Zahavi, 2006, p. 5

According to the view proposed in the present paper neither primitive awareness nor awareness of basic intentionality have the structure of basic intentionality. If this is correct, then primitive awareness and awareness of basic intentionality are to be seen in a way similar to Husserl's view about prereflexive consciousness. Here is another passage in which Zahavi describes the relevant aspect of Husserl's view:

“This might come as a slight surprise to those who thought that one of the central doctrines in phenomenology is the doctrine of intentionality – i.e., the claim that all consciousness is intentional, that all consciousness is objectconsciousness— but Husserl (as well as later phenomenologists) would explicitly deny that pre-reflective self-consciousness involves a subject-object relation. In his view, when one is pre-reflectively conscious of one’s own experiences, one is not aware of them as objects. My pre-reflective access to my own mental life in first-personal experience is immediate, non-observational and non-objectifying. It is non-objectifying in the sense that I do not occupy the position or perspective of a spectator or in(tro) spectator on it.“ Zahavi, 2006, p. 6

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