

Introspecting in the Twentieth Century

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Introspection in the 20th century is a vast topic. Discussions involving introspection figured in the relatively new discipline of experimental psychology, as well as in various debates in philosophy of mind and epistemology. Introspection has been a focus of interest as a method of investigation and as a psychological and epistemic capacity itself. Over the course of the century, these theoretical interests did not always connect well, although they have intersected and influenced each other at different points. But there is no helpful sense in which one might talk of ‘the history’ of introspection in the 20th century if by that one means a straight line of development across ten or so decades of psychological and philosophical theorizing with, and about, introspection. Instead, there is a criss-crossing pattern of various storylines and what I shall do here is track a couple of different strands in the overall pattern to the exclusion of many others.¹ In particular, I shall concentrate on philosophers’ and psychologists’ *use* of introspection, and the discussions surrounding such use.

A story we are often told is that during the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, experimental psychology was synonymous with introspectionism, exemplified by the work of Wilhelm Wundt and E. B. Titchener. According to the story, these early psychologists took the subject-matter of psychology to be conscious states only and their main method of investigation was introspection. The new experimental science aimed to provide data about consciousness via introspection under scientifically controlled conditions. We are told that this approach, while ground-breaking in its aim to make psychology thus conceived scientific, failed because it imploded from within while at the same time being superseded by a different approach to psychology: behaviourism. Behaviourism rejected not only the idea that introspection could be conducted in scientifically respectable ways, it also rejected the central assumption that the subject-matter of psychology concerned conscious states. According to the story, introspectionism, and with it the use of introspection in theorizing about the mind, was pretty much annihilated after the behaviourists were finished with it (see e.g. (Braisby & Gellatly, 2012)). Behaviourists themselves might not have in the end successfully established their own methodological preferences and choice of the *bona fide* subject-matter of psychology, but they are generally credited with putting an end to introspectionism by the late 1920 or early 1930s.

What is curious, if this story were even half-way true, is that throughout much of the 20th century, within certain philosophical debates (e.g., in philosophy of perception and epistemology) philosophers have been happy to appeal to first-person reflections on sensory

¹ For instance, I will not provide an overview of all the different accounts of the nature of introspection and self-knowledge put forward. For excellent, up-to-date, and comprehensive survey articles covering this material (Gertler, 2008; Kind, April 2015; Schwitzgebel, Summer 2014).

experiences in their theorizing. This raises questions about the relationship between the apparently scorching critique of the use of introspection within psychology during the first part of the century, and the continued and relatively easy-going use of introspection in philosophical theorizing. One suggestion might be that psychologists and philosophers were engaged in something like parallel play, working in relative ignorance of each other's fields. While there is a kernel of truth to this, there is also plenty of evidence of common interests and interaction between philosophers and psychologists. So the question is not really whether philosophers and psychologists talked to each other and read each other's work – they clearly did. The question is how much they talked and in what way this is reflected in theorizing in their own domains. The answer is, predictably, complex. In this paper, I make a start on it by showing some of the persisting influences psychology and philosophy had on each other when it comes to using introspection in theorizing. Equally, I highlight the lack – or loss – of influence in certain cases, resulting in a more rudimentary conception of the use of introspection towards the end of the century than the often quite sophisticated earlier debates about it would warrant. I begin with discussions involving introspection in the philosophy of perception in the first half of the century that reflect certain pressures felt at the time concerning the use of introspection in theorizing about experience. I then turn to relevant developments within psychology during this period and earlier, which show a more sustained engagement with various worries about introspection giving rise to these pressures. I finish by looking briefly at philosophical discussions about perceptual experience late in the century displaying a mix of lessons absorbed and lessons forgotten with respect to their use of introspection.

1. Introspection in the sense-datum theory debate

In this section, I will look at how early 20th century philosophers of perception used introspection in their theorizing. I will focus specifically on proponents and critics of the sense-datum theory of perception. Moore's paper 'The Refutation of Idealism' seems a good starting point because it was published right at the beginning of the century in 1903, and also because it bridges different philosophical epochs. On the one hand, it is engaged in a (from our vantage point) backwards-looking debate with the then still more widely defended idealism; on the other hand it constitutes an early contribution to the ensuing lively focus on sense-datum theories of perception.

In his paper, Moore argues for a distinction between sensory experience and its (mind-independent) object, which he thinks is missing from extant accounts of sensory experience. He is also concerned to explain why his opponents failed to posit such a distinction:

[T]here is a very good reason why they should have supposed so, in the fact that when we refer to introspection and try to discover what the sensation of blue is, it is very easy to suppose that we have before us only a single term. The term "blue" is easy enough to distinguish, but the other element which I have called "consciousness" -- that which sensation of blue has in common with sensation of green -- is extremely difficult to fix. That many people fail to distinguish it at all is sufficiently shown by the fact that there are materialists. And, in general, that which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us: it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent -- we look through it and see nothing but the blue; we may be convinced that there *is something* but *what* it is no philosopher, I think, has yet clearly recognised. (Moore, 1903, p. 446)

Moore suggest here that introspective reflection on experience easily leads philosophers astray on this matter. He points out that introspection does not clearly reveal any conscious element in addition to whatever non-conscious objects experience presents. It is then understandable, according to Moore, that philosophers think that experience is monolithic ('a single term') with no distinctive conscious aspect separable from the objects presented by experience.

Further on, though, he tempers both his claim about what introspection reveals, and about how misleading introspection is concerning the nature of sensory experience. While still insisting

that introspective reflection is likely to mislead, he explains that this occurs because it is not done carefully enough:

[T]he moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see *what*, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous. Yet it *can* be distinguished if we look enough, and if we know that there is something to look for. My main object in this paragraph has been to try to make the reader *see* it; but I fear I shall have succeeded very ill. (...) Whether or not, when I have the sensation of blue, my consciousness or awareness is thus blue, my introspection does not enable me to decide with certainty: I only see no reason for thinking that it is. But whether it is or not, the point is unimportant, for introspection *does* enable me to decide that something else is also true: namely that I am aware *of* blue, and by this I mean, that my awareness has to blue a quite different and distinct relation. (Moore, 1903, pp. 450-451)

Thus, introspection is not a poor guide when done right. Moore is happy to use introspective data in theorizing about the nature of conscious experience, indeed, it forms a central plank in defence of his own view. But he makes clear that since introspection is apt to mislead, using it in theorizing is not easy business. He works hard to get the reader to introspectively attend to experience properly. Moore accepts both that introspection is a major source of *bona fide*, theory-relevant information about the mind, but that significant care must be taken in availing oneself of it.

Versions of Moore's attitude to introspection can be traced through the philosophy of perception in the 20th century. It is common among both sense-datum theorists and their critics dominating discussion in the first half of that century. First and foremost, these philosophers took for granted that in providing an account of conscious perceptual experience one must start with an accurate description of its phenomenal character. Further, they assumed that this description is acquired via first-person access to one's experience. Philosophers talked of, e.g., 'introspecting', 'attending to one's own experience' or 'direct inspection of experience' (see, e.g. (Lewis, 1929, p. 57; Firth, 1949, p. 523)). This basic assumption of first-person access to important data about perceptual consciousness is reflected in the way philosophers typically employ it without much ado, other than occasional emphatic assertions that we have it. It suggests a relatively uncomplicated and natural-seeming first-person way of becoming aware (or being aware) of one's own conscious experience.

C.I. Lewis, for instance, talks about the character of pure sensory experience, i.e. experience which has not had interpretative involvement from thought (Lewis, 1929, pp. 36-66).² According to him, 'the sensuously given' is that which is unalterable by different interests or levels of knowledge and it has a distinctive 'sensuous feel or quality'. As such, Lewis says, it must always be ineffable, because when one tries to articulate it one applies interpretation of one type or another. Nonetheless, he expects us to have a good grasp of the given:

It is that which remains untouched and unaltered, however it is construed by thought. Yet no one but a philosopher could for a moment deny this immediate presence in consciousness of that which no activity of thought can create or alter. (Lewis, 1929, p. 53)

Lewis does not explicitly say how we are aware of the given, but he clearly thinks that it is in some very basic and ordinary way obvious from the first person. It is 'the brute-fact element in perception, illusion and dream' (57), the 'immediate and indubitable' (65).

A similar stress on what seems beyond doubt and obvious from the first-person is evident in others during this era, such as C.D. Broad and H.H. Price. Broad, e.g., observes that

The fundamental fact is that we constantly make such judgements as: 'This *seems to me* elliptical, or red, or hot' as the case may be, and that about the truth of these judgements we do not feel the least doubt. (...) I may

² I am presenting Lewis as a sense-datum theorist here, but see (Crane, 2000, pp. 180-181) for discussion.

be perfectly certain at one and the same time that I have the peculiar experience expressed by the judgement: 'This looks elliptical to me' and that in fact the object is not elliptical but round. (...) I do not suppose that anyone, on reflection, will quarrel with this statement of fact. (Broad, 1923, p. 236)

And Price, too, relies easily on introspection. In his book *Perception* he investigates the nature of perceptual experience and how they can justify our perceptual beliefs. He insists that his enquiry is squarely philosophical: '[w]e must simply examine seeing and touching for ourselves and do the best we can' (Price, 1932, p. 2). Providing an example, Price describes what he can and cannot doubt when reflecting on how things appear to him as he is undergoing a visual experience as of a tomato:

[T]hat something is red and round then and there I cannot doubt. Whether the something persists even for a moment before and after it is present to my consciousness, whether other minds can be conscious of it as well as I, may be doubted. But that it now *exists*, and that *I* am conscious of it – by me at least who am conscious of (?) it this cannot possibility be doubted. (3)

'The something' Price isolates via first-person reflection is a sense-datum. Sense-data differ from other kinds of data present to consciousness on two counts. Firstly, they give rise to belief in external-world objects. Secondly,

it seems plain that there is also another characteristic common and peculiar to them, which may be called 'sensuousness'. This is obvious on inspection, but it cannot be described. (4)

Again, the quote displays the confidence with which Price and others put forward first-person judgements about experience. In sum, early philosophers of perception took the results of first-person inspection to be palpable, unassailable and generalizable. Further, they considered gathering first-person phenomenal descriptions of experience with which to constrain one's account an appropriate method for theorizing about experience.³

Yet, there exists also a different current in these discussions about conscious experience. Philosophers agreed that harnessing first-person access to experience for use in theorizing requires some care. Moore, we saw, introduced this complication because introspection is the source of a mistaken view about experience as well as the source of crucial information supporting the right view. As the debate about perceptual experience and the sense-datum theory gathered speed, similar issues arose. E.g. there were disputes about what sort of qualities are part of what is presented in phenomenal consciousness and what kinds of objects we are immediately phenomenally conscious of, which are the bearers of such qualities. In particular, opponents of sense-datum theorists maintained that experiential character is as of ordinary objects and properties, rather than as of special sensory objects and their relatively sparse properties (e.g. (Barnes, 1944-45; Reichenbach, 1938, pp. 163-169).

These disputes put participating philosophers under pressure concerning their shared assumption about the appropriateness of the introspective method. Many felt the need to balance the claim that the kind of supporting evidence delivered by introspection is tremendously forceful with acknowledgement that there is a genuine debate about the phenomenal character of experience. What had to be reconciled was that certain aspects of experience are 'quite plain', 'indubitable', 'obvious' on the basis of introspection and yet that opponents could be so thoroughly introspectively misled.

The pressure typically was relieved in one of two ways. Just as Moore did, some philosophers attempted to diagnose a problem on the part of the opponent which would explain their failure to introspect adequately, consistent with maintaining that conscious experience was properly introspectively available all along. This style of explanation was preferred by opponents of

³ '[T]he only way to decide a question of this sort is by direct inspection of perceptual consciousness itself.' (Firth, 1949, p. 453)

sense-datum theory who held that the phenomenal character of perceptual experience is as of ordinary objects and properties (as opposed to being as of sense-data with a sparser collection of sensory qualities). When Roderick Firth in 1949 reviews the debate between sense-datum theory and what he calls ‘percept theory’, he notes that sense-datum theorists seem entirely unresponsive to compelling phenomenological criticism from their opponents. But, he adds,

[i]f this indifference [to such criticism] is not to be attributed to ignorance or perversity, it is likely to suggest that there are certain fallacies or prejudices which prevent many people ... from examining perceptual consciousness with complete objectivity. (Firth, 1949, p. 452)

For instance, philosophers might be prevented from introspecting properly if they are in the grip of a particular conception of perceptual experience which weakens their introspective capacity to judge the character of experience.⁴

The second style of explanation involved allowing that there are different ways to access experience via the first person. This tack, which tended to be used by defenders of sense-datum theory, consisted in shifting the goal-posts from thinking of the debate as manifesting straightforwardly conflicting deliverances of introspection to manifesting different ways to introspect. Lewis, Broad and Price, for instance, each concede that there is a sense in which the character of perceptual experience can be described in terms of presenting ordinary objects and properties. Indeed, they all agree that it is how the character of experience would strike the naïve observer: on *casual* inspection we encounter ‘the thick experience of the world of things’ (Lewis, 1929, p. 54), which presents all the rich qualities had by ordinary objects. But these philosophers also insist that in casual inspection we fail to notice something that on *careful* inspection we can become aware of.

One then must make sense of this in terms of an introspective method: what do these different ways of inspecting experience amount to and which one ought we to use in theorizing? To illustrate the general strategy, I focus here on Price’s view.⁵ Ordinary perceptual consciousness, Price agrees, is consciousness as of material objects (objects are *leibhaftig gegeben* in such consciousness, Price remarks using Husserl’s phrase). However, perceptual consciousness in fact involves two different mental events: acquaintance with a sense-datum and an act of perceptual acceptance, i.e. a kind of taking for granted that there is a material object that ‘belongs’ to the sense-datum with which one is acquainted.

The two states of mind, the acquaintance with the sense-datum and the perceptual consciousness of [say] the tree, just arise together. The sense-datum is presented to us, and the tree dawns on us, all in one moment. The two modes of ‘presence to the mind’ utterly different though they are, can only be distinguished by subsequent analysis. (Price, 1932, p. 141)

Price holds that while awareness of a sense-datum and awareness of a material object in the same experience arise in unison, they constitute different kinds of cognitive acts. The former is factive, i.e. an acquaintance with something actually existing, which Price calls an ‘intuitive’ cognitive act. The latter is not factive, as experiential awareness as of material objects is consistent with there being no such object present. Perceptual acceptance is not intuitive, then. However, Price says it is ‘pseudo-intuitive’ because just like acquaintance of sense-data it contrasts with deliberative or discursive cognitive acts, such as inferring and surmising: it is not an activity but ‘effortless...undoubting and unquestioning’ (153). Price bases these claims on introspection:

⁴ According to Firth sense-datum theorists might hold an over-intellectualised conception of perceptual experience which ‘could blind [them] to the very phenomenological facts which would correct it’ (455).

⁵ See (Broad, 1923, pp. 247-248; Lewis, 1929, pp. 38-66) different versions of this explanatory strategy. See also (Firth, 1949).

That [perceptual acceptance] has this character is just an introspectible fact, however difficult to describe. (Price, 1932, p. 156)

As Price explains, the source of this character is different for intuitive and pseudo-intuitive acts, constituting their fundamental difference. However, in ordinary perceptual consciousness, we do not seriously reflect on experience and so we miss the difference.

What happens is not that we identify [the sense-datum and the material object in an experience], but that we *fail to distinguish* between them. Our state is, as it were, a dreamy or half-awake state, in which we are unaware of a difference, which if we reflected would be obvious. Now the sense-datum really is intuitive. And since we fail to distinguish it from the remainder of the thing, the whole thing is *as if* it were intuitive, though only the sense datum actually is so. (Price, 1932, p. 168)

Thus, Price can agree that the character of ordinary perceptual experience involves the presentation of material objects and their properties – this is so when we introspect in casual manner. For Price, this does not conflict with the view that introspection reveals distinct sense-data. It would conflict if he were to claim that the very same thing presented in experience which opponents hold to be a material object is really a sense-datum. But this is not so on Price's picture. In the casual case – *everyday introspection* – we are not theorizing about experience and do not attend carefully to it. We do not discriminate between the two kinds of presented objects in such a superficial characterization. When we do introspect perceptual experience with the aim of providing an account of its nature – *in careful introspection* – we make more fine-grained discriminations. We notice that there are distinct kinds of object which are present to the mind very differently, i.e. there are sense-data, which are intuited, and material objects which are pseudo-intuited.

This sort of explanatory approach was challenged in various ways by critics of sense-datum theory. They typically favoured the first type of explanation, insisting that the first-person inspection genuinely relevant to the introspective method is a kind of everyday introspection. Such introspection is immediate, commonplace and non-theoretical and it produces our naive take on experience. Careful inspection, on the other hand, is a more removed, optional take on experience which has no particular claim to priority in an analysis of perceptual consciousness (Firth, 1949, pp. 462-463; Wild, 1940, p. 82). In choosing careful introspection, sense-datum theorists were said to elevate an 'attitude of "doubt" or "questioning"', as Firth puts it, to be the central method in analysing experience without any justification. By contrast, everyday introspection – and with it the introspective datum that experience is as of ordinary objects and properties – is not arbitrary as it is ubiquitous and already in use independently of one's theoretical aims.

A further objection to the method of careful introspection is more fundamental. As we saw, careful introspection aims to expose basic elements of phenomenal character to which we are allegedly insensitive in everyday introspection. Opponents argued that rather than helping to uncover the basic sensory structure of experience, careful introspection leads to a misrepresentation of the character of experience. Once the stance of everyday introspection is abandoned and careful introspection, driven by, say, epistemological concerns, is employed, we are in fact destroying, or at least heavily obscuring, the original target of observation.⁶

Both of these objections – and the wider discussion of which kind of first-person access is appropriate in philosophical theorizing about perceptual experience – echo some of the

⁶See (Firth, 1949, pp. 460-461). In the preface to the 1954 reprint of *Perception*, Price says that while he still thinks that sense-datum terminology is useful for describing how things strictly look, say, from a painter's perspective, it is not useful in accounting for ordinary perceptual experience. He explains that sensing (acquaintance with sense-data) is not as previously argued a core constituent of ordinary experience, but is rather itself a kind of phenomenal inspection. (Price, 1932, p. ix)

dominant concerns shaping the discussion in experimental psychology around that time. Firth, for instance, frequently mentions that psychologists agree with him about what direct inspection of experience reveals. He particularly cites Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler's criticism of introspectionist psychology practiced by Wundt and Titchener as one way to understand what has gone wrong with the sense-datum view (Firth, 1949, p. 461).

Overall, it is evident that philosophers of perception during this period assumed that first-person access to experience makes available an apt description of phenomenal experience. Possession of such access was not a matter of grave concern for any of them, some difficulties and disagreements about the relevant type of access notwithstanding. However, when we look more closely at parallel discussions in psychology around the turn of the century and carrying on into the 1940s, the contrast is stark. For, the basic worries at the centre of analogous debates in psychology threatened the very use of introspection in psychological theorizing.

2. The scientific role of introspection

In 1865, John Stuart Mill, responded to Auguste Comte's criticism of scientific psychology and of its core method, self-observation, as follows:

There is little need for an elaborate refutation of a fallacy respecting which the only wonder is that it should impose upon anyone. (Mill, 1907/1865, p. 63)

Comte had previously argued that scientific psychology is doomed for practical and conceptual reasons.⁷ Self-observation, he said, in the sense of first-person attention to one's own conscious mental states, results in the destruction of the state one seeks to observe. As soon as one attentively reflects on one's conscious visual experience of a horse, say, one ceases to visually attend (at least in the manner one did before) to the horse and this changes one's visual experience. Moreover, the idea of a single self attending to her own attending seems to require that the self splits attention. But such splitting, according to Comte is conceptually suspect.

Mill offers two quick responses. Concerning the conceptual worry, he points out that splitting attention has been demonstrated to be possible. He refers to William Hamilton's experiments showing that subjects can attend to several things at once ('as many as six'): while attention is weakened by such splitting, it is not impossible. Furthermore, Mill suggests that the conceptual point can be side-stepped in any case because scientific psychology can use a form of self-observation which does not involve attending to a *concurrent* act of attention. Rather, good scientific practice would use *immediate retrospection*, a technique of reflecting on a conscious experience just after having it 'when its impression in memory is still fresh' (64). But mainly, concerning both the practical and the conceptual point, Mill simply insists that the assumption that we have introspective knowledge of our own thoughts and experiences is not up for debate. Whatever we say about introspection, on Mill's view, we had better be able to explain how

we could ... have acquired the knowledge, which nobody denies us to have, of what passes in our minds. M. Comte would scarcely have affirmed that we are not aware of our own intellectual operations. We know of our observings and our reasonings, either at the very time, or by memory the moment after; in either case, by direct knowledge, and not ... merely by their results. This simple fact destroys the whole of M. Comte's argument. Whatever we are directly aware of, we can directly observe. (*ibid.* 64)

Thirty-five years on, William James agrees with Mill's assessment on certain points. He attributes to common sense the unshakable belief that we have introspective awareness of our own conscious states and he asserts that this belief is central to psychology ('the most fundamental of all the postulates of Psychology'):

⁷ See the lengthy passage from *Cours de philosophie positive*, cited in (James, 1890/1981, pp. 187-188).

Introspective Observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always. The word introspection need hardly be defined – it means, of course, the looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover. (185)

However, James acknowledges concerns about the accuracy of introspective observation. He notes that there are extreme positions on this issue, ranging from Brentano's claim that introspective apprehension of conscious states is infallible, to Comte's rejection of direct introspective knowledge as 'a pure illusion'. James suggests that Mill's view about introspective knowledge by immediate retrospection expresses a 'practical truth about the matter'. He points out that even those who hold that introspective observation is infallible would concede that *in addition* we have access to our conscious states by immediate retrospective reflection, which is fallible due to the involvement of memory.⁸ The question is which of these types of first-person access to the mind can serve as the basis for psychological method. James' answer is that it must be retrospective reflection.

But the psychologist must not only *have* his mental states in their absolute veritableness, he must report them and write about them, name them, classify and compare them and trace their relations to other things. Whilst alive they are their own property; it is only *post-mortem* that they become his prey. (James, 1890/1981, p. 189)

Indeed – here James agreed with Comte – judging, labelling or classifying our own conscious states cannot be done concurrently. We are fallible in making classifications and generalizations whatever the subject matter or area of inquiry. In other words, this kind of fallibility is not merely an aspect of introspective classification and judgement within psychology, but of any scientific or ordinary context where classification, generalization and labelling are at work. Thus, it is also a feature of ordinary situations, concerning everyday judgements such as that I feel tired. It may seem as if at that moment one is merely expressing the very feeling one is experiencing 'and so to be experiencing and observing the same inner fact at a single stroke.' But in fact, says James, the experience one is having at that moment is that of saying-I-feel-tired. Insofar as the latter involves the feeling of tiredness it is very different from the feeling of tiredness felt just a moment before. 'The act of naming [it] has momentarily detracted from their force.'

Thus, both ordinary introspective judgement and introspective observation in psychology involve immediate retrospection. Retrospection is required when we are going beyond merely feeling, to classifying and labelling. The question about accuracy thus is an empirical question and, says James, we do 'find ourselves in continual error and uncertainty' when engaging in introspection of this type.⁹ But equally, for James, that introspection is difficult and fallible is nothing out of the ordinary. All kinds of observation – especially scientific observation – have this feature. We simply have to do the best we can. And, just like in most other areas of investigation by observation, agreement among participating investigators is the ultimate arbiter of adequate theorizing.

The only safeguard is in the final *consensus* of our farther knowledge about the thing in question, later views correcting earlier ones, until at last the harmony of a consistent system is reached. Such a system, gradually worked out, is the best guarantee the psychologist can give for the soundness of any particular psychologic observation which he may report. (191)

In sum, for James, the adequate psychological method is just ordinary introspective reflection, which involves labelling and classifying conscious experiences based on immediate

⁸ James notes Brentano's distinction between 'the immediate *feltness* of a feeling' and our awareness of it via retrospective reflection.

⁹ Especially when introspecting experiences which are complex or not very strong, according to James. See (James, 1890/1981, pp. 190-191) for more discussion.

retrospection. Both the involvement of memory and the activity of classification mean that this kind of introspection is fallible.

James contrasted this method with that employed by his contemporaries in psycho-physics and experimental psychology. He was not a fan of the latter, to put it mildly.¹⁰ His main complaint was that experimental introspection is too restricted in scope, concerning both the conditions under which introspective data can be collected and the kinds of phenomena introspective data can be collected about. For James, this literally takes the life out of the subject-matter, trivializing psychological work. To preserve the lived character of perceptual consciousness – for him so essential to the phenomenon– means using more free-flowing first-person retrospective reflection on ordinary experience, constrained mainly by seeking agreement about its best description with other psychologists and subjects engaged in describing it.

2.1 Wundt and Restricted Introspection

I now turn to the views of these experimentalists, with a less hostile eye than James'.¹¹ I shall concentrate on the key figure of Wilhelm Wundt and then contrast his views briefly with those of his students, Edward Bradford Titchener and Oswald Külpe. Collectively, these psychologists are most often associated with so-called 'classical introspectionist psychology'.

A founding figure in experimentalist psychology as it developed from early psycho-physics in the mid to late nineteenth centuries, Wundt is perhaps the most well-known representative of the German tradition of early experimentalist psychology which gave a key role to introspection. Early on, Wundt distinguished between different kinds of first-person access to conscious experience. He, too, was sensitive to Comte's criticism of introspection as having destructive or distorting effects (see, e.g. (Wundt, 1896, p. 25)).¹² In response, Wundt accepted Brentano's distinction between two kinds of first-person access to one's own conscious states, namely self-observation (*Selbstbeobachtung*) and inner perception (*innere Wahrnehmung*) (Brentano, 1874, pp. 35-42).¹³ According to it, self-observation is an active form of direct deliberative attention to one's conscious experiences; inner perception is the fairly automatic and passive awareness one has of one's own conscious experience, as one goes along in the world in an ordinary manner. Wundt thought that both are real psychological phenomena, but that only inner perception constitutes genuine introspective awareness in the sense of being epistemically successful. For pretty much Comte's reasons, he argued that any attempt at deliberately attending to one's conscious states with the aim of observing them would distort or destroy the latter. So, while this does not mean that self-observing in this manner is impossible *qua* mental activity, it does mean that it cannot yield a scientifically valid form of observation, since the cognitive upshot cannot provide accurate data about the conscious phenomenon putatively attended to (Wundt, 1888, p. 296). Wundt is highly critical of psychologists who use self-

¹⁰ 'This method taxes patience to the utmost, and could hardly have arisen in a country whose natives could be bored. Such Germans as Weber, Fechner, Vierordt and Wundt obviously cannot.... (...) There is little of the grand style about these new prism pendulum, and chronograph-philosophers. They mean business, not chivalry. What generous divination, and that superiority in virtue which was thought by Cicero to give a man the best insights into nature, have failed to do, their spying and scraping, their deadly tenacity and almost diabolic cunning, will doubtless some day bring about.' (192)

¹¹ That hostility is a manifestation of different viewpoints not just about introspection but also about the overarching theoretical conception of psychology, between the British tradition James is ensconced in, and the German experimentalist tradition of Wundt. For the historical origin and background debates surrounding introspectionist psychology, see (Danziger, 1980), also (Boring, 1953) and (Lyons, 1986, p. ch 1).

¹² Wundt was also reacting to similar criticism of introspective methods in psychology by his teacher, Friedrich Lange (Lange, 1887, pp. 679-690).

¹³ 'Innere Wahrnehmung' is often translated as 'inner perception' and to avoid confusion I will stick with this terminology. But the choice of words is unfortunate in suggesting the perceptual model of introspection, which seems not strictly part of the notion as it was used by Brentano and Wundt.

observation in their work, likening these efforts to Baron Munchhausen's pulling himself out of the bog by his own hair.

Inner perception, on the other hand, was taken to be the source of our firm common sense belief – one that Wundt endorsed – that we can know about our own conscious experiences. In contrast to self-observation, inner perception can supply the essential data for scientific psychology. But it cannot do so on its own, since it is a passive form of introspection not involving a deliberate attempt to attend to one's conscious experiences. Rather, inner perception involves noticing them indirectly, 'out of the corner of one's "mental eye"' (Lyons, 1986, p. 4) as one goes along having them. Inner perception is therefore unsystematic and unpremeditated. The trouble is that if one now tries to directly use inner perception to provide introspective data about conscious experience, one thereby turns passive inner perception into destructive active self-observation.

Our capacity for inner perception therefore has to be carefully exploited so as to yield scientifically respectable data. Wundt's experimental method aims to achieve this by inducing inner perception under tightly controlled circumstances (Danziger, 1980, p. 245). In light of this, he placed severe constraints on using introspection in psychology. They are needed to enable scientific investigation because of the fleetingness of the subject-matter of psychology (i.e. conscious experiential events being very unstable), on the one hand, and the difficulties with our first-person access to this subject-matter, on the other. Given that direct observation is not possible, we have to use objective measures and experiments to observe somewhat indirectly as best as we can. For one thing, we have to ensure that we can get the conscious phenomenon reliably to present in subjects, without the latter attempting to self-observe. Wundt's various experimental set-ups are crucial aids to this (*Hilfsmittel*).¹⁴ For another, Wundt maintained that not all conscious phenomena can be investigated in this manner. Thoughts and emotions, for example, are not reliably correlated with external stimuli to the same extent that basic sensations seem to be. Moreover, concerning sensory experiences themselves, we can only acquire data about elementary features, elicited by simple judgements or behavioural responses. Wundt's experiments shun qualitative reports because for him they are products of active self-observation. He therefore restricted experimental introspective investigation to certain basic aspects of sensory experiences. Other types of conscious and non-conscious mental phenomena, e.g. thought and emotions, were to be investigated by different, non-introspective methods (see (Wundt, 1896, pp. 24-28) and (Wundt, 1888)). Having developed different methods of investigation for different psychological phenomena under the heading of 'social psychology' (*Völkerpsychologie*), he published extensively in this area. Contrary to currently widespread belief, Wundt's conception of psychology thus encompasses vastly more than investigation by introspection (see (Danziger, 1980)).¹⁵

2.2 Titchener, Külpe, and Systematic Introspection

Wundt was gradually superseded by a new generation of introspectionist psychologists within the first decade of the century. Some were students of his, who, although receiving their training in his laboratory, came to reject many of his restrictions on introspection. Two main brands of

¹⁴ Wundt disagreed with James's choice of retrospection as the key introspective method. For Wundt, retrospection isn't scientific observation at all because the latter requires by definition that the target of observation be present while being observed (Wundt, 1888, p. 294). Retrospection involves merely remembering the relevant conscious experience. However, Wundt did think that it *can* be used to good effect. Some of his experiments employed retrospection, mainly to retrospectively access the upshot of inner perception.

¹⁵ For a representative caricature view of Wundt's psychology as confined to investigating conscious experience via introspection, see (Braisby & Gellatly, 2012, p. 9). Also (Davies, 2005), which presents nuanced picture of the complex development of experimental psychology overall, though.

introspectionist psychology emerged directly out of Wundt's laboratory: Titchener's structuralism and Külpe's Würzburg school. These differed significantly, and they were at times bitter critics of one another. However, they both endorsed the scientific legitimacy of qualitative data collected from subjective introspective reports under experimental conditions. This alone constituted a clear break with Wundt.¹⁶

Attitudes to introspection had very much changed among these psychologists. Titchener, for instance, confidently claimed that introspection itself can be a perfectly good source of scientific observation:

But if self-observation means, simply, psychological observation; and if observation in psychology has as its end a knowledge of mind, ... then, just as certainly, introspection may be as impersonal, as objective, as matter-of-fact, as is the observation of the natural sciences. (Titchener, 1912, p. 434)

In response to the kind of worries that had led Wundt to regard inner perception as the only source of legitimate data (which still needed to be manipulated appropriately with the help of various experimental set-ups), Titchener took a more sanguine approach. He argued that these worries concern a former use of introspection in psychology which is 'precritical, pre-comparative and pre-experimental' (435). It involved introspective judgements that were infected by theoretical bias and the aim for metaphysical systematization. However, Titchener maintained, the mature psychology of his day used introspection differently. For example, in the case of introspective disagreement, a regimented and repeated application of the experimental introspective method could be relied upon to eradicate biased and confused reports.

Psychology is not the only science in which the strict application of the best available methods leads to opposite conclusions. But is there the same hope, in psychology, that differences will presently be resolved? I see no reason for any but an affirmative answer. (...) A more methodical series of observations, with variation of conditions, would either bring two observers into agreement or would give us the key to their disagreement. (437)

This echoes James' insistence that introspective observation is just like any other form of scientific observation – fallible and subject to disagreement. Titchener also emphasises the role of agreement about introspective data in ensuring that the introspective data passes scientific muster. More generally, the various ways in which the new generation of introspectionist psychologists conceived of their work constituted a rapprochement of sorts with the non-experimentalist British empiricist tradition and their use of introspection.

One loosening of Wundtian restraint concerned the proper scope of introspective method. Külpe's Würzburg laboratory, for example, specifically aimed to investigate conscious thought, judgement, emotions and thought's relation to action (see the work of e.g. Karl Marbe, Karl Bühler, Otto Selz, and Narziss Kaspar Ach). Titchener, too, endorsed a much larger domain of investigation, including memory and mental processes more generally (Titchener, 1912, pp. 227-8). More importantly, and correlatively, the other substantial loosening of constraint concerned the kind of introspective access harnessed in psychology, i.e. the proper method of investigation. The new generation accepted retrospection as a central introspective method, along the lines of James and Mill (see, e.g., (Bühler, 1908, pp. 100-101; Külpe, 1920; Müller, 1911; Titchener, 1912)). Typically, they accepted both, use of a more direct introspective awareness along the lines of inner perception, as well as immediate retrospective awareness. With that inclusion, the whole nature of the experimental method changed as well. The method of *systematic introspection* (*Ausfrageexperimente*) became dominant. Experiments designed to elicit immediate retrospective judgments about one's conscious

¹⁶ See, e.g., Wundt's detailed criticism of the Würzburg experimental approach (Wundt, 1907).

experiences moved away from use of objective, performance-related measures to a focus on subjective report and on qualitative description of experience. In particular, we see a striking change in how the experimenter is involved in the experiment: eliciting qualitative data requires the experimenter to ask questions to which the subject responds.

One consequence was that certain theoretical differences were prone to show up in the introspective data itself, rather than in what was taken to be the scientific interpretation of the introspective data (Danziger, 1980, p. 253). The infamous ‘imageless thought controversy’ between Titchener and the Würzburg school is a case in point. Würzburgers like Külpe claimed that they could introspect non-imagistic and non-sensational awarenesses (*unanschauliche Bewusstheiten*) reflecting higher cognitive activity. Titchener, on the other hand, argued that introspection did not reveal anything non-imagistic or non-sensational and hence that his opponents were simply confused in various ways, either mistaking sensational composites for putatively non-sensational elements of experience or letting their theoretical preferences infect their introspective data.

This episode thus also reflects another aspect of the state of play among experimental introspectionists in the early decades of the 1900s. The debate had become one about competing pictures of the metaphysics of conscious experience, with Titchener defending a structuralist, bottom-up picture, and the Würzburg school defending a richer conception of conscious experience including complex and higher-level cognitive elements. Titchener adhered to the doctrine of sensationalism, the view that conscious experience is composed of sensory elements that combine to produce the overall experience. Sensationalism, endorsed already by Mill and earlier British empiricists (Mill, 1843, p. ch 4), gives introspection a key role in analysing experience into its basic components and in discovering the rules of combination in terms of which complex conscious contents of ordinary experience can be explained. In this capacity the role of introspection was to overcome the naïve but misleading take on experience, and to discern the real conscious character with its basic sensational structure. In Titchener’s hands, then, introspective investigation of conscious experience is a form of analysis, or, as it was sometimes called ‘reduction’, of experience into its basic sensory components (Titchener, 1912). Külpe and the Würzburgers endorsed a rather different picture of conscious experience. Specifically, they held that in addition to sensory aspects, conscious experiences included other fundamental aspects, in the form of mental activity. The latter could not be analysed into combinations of the former. This basic outlook drew on Brentano’s act psychology and Husserl’s phenomenological approach to investigating experience. The Würzburg emphasis on investigating conscious thinking and activity in experience derived from these very different interests.

Both sides of the debate practiced systematic introspection, however. Yet, systematic introspection presented several methodological problems (some old, some new) none of which were particularly hidden from practitioners. Central use of immediate retrospection meant that the concern about memory as a potential source of distortions and gaps resurfaced. The reliance on verbal articulation and report of qualitative data about subjects’ conscious experience introduced worries about scientific validity of the data, given the inability to independently check for the presence of the experiences in question. In addition, the experiments of systematic introspection, with their active involvement of the experimenter, have a strong demand character, which presents its own danger for infecting the data collected (Müller, 1911). Part of the explanation of why systematic introspection was attractive to its proponents despite all these known problems is the pervasive influence of phenomenism in science and philosophy at that time.¹⁷ Phenomenism is the view that theories and explanatory terms must be

¹⁷ For detailed accounts of these background influences see (Boring, 1953), (Danziger, 1980), (Hatfield, 2005).

epistemically grounded in what is directly given in experience. It takes for granted that we have access to what we are experientially given. Access to experience is, of course, the bone of contention in the discussions concerning introspective methodology. However, specific worries concerning introspective method might not have appeared fundamentally threatening but just something to be worked around, in light of the truly dominant position of phenomenism at the time.

The background influence of phenomenism also sheds light on the two basic pictures of the nature of experience separating the two camps (see (Danziger, 1980), (Boring, 1953) and (Hatfield, 2005) for more details). Titchener was heavily influenced by the positivism of Ernst Mach, which reinforced the atomistic-sensational conception of conscious experience found in the sensationalism inherited from the British empiricists. As mentioned above, Külpe and the Würzburg school, by contrast, were guided by Brentano's act psychology and Husserl's phenomenological approach and they held a far less constructivist view of conscious experience.

By the 1920s, the method of systematic introspection had more or less run its course. In Germany, Gestalt psychology had taken hold, which although continuing with some of the basic ideas of the Würzburg school, constituted another important shift in methodological outlook. In the US, among other things, the gradual rise of behaviourist psychology, encompassing an outright rejection of the conception of psychology concerned with inner conscious states, led to a fizzling out of Titchener's programme by the time of his death in 1927.¹⁸

2.3 Gestalt Psychology and Phenomenological Method

Gestalt psychology is said to have been founded by Max Wertheimer, who argued that movement – independently of an object which moves - could be shown to be literally seen. Perceived movement was to be neither reduced to more constituent sensational elements, nor explained in terms of further judgement (Wertheimer, 1912). The recognition of perceived movement as an unreducible feature of conscious experience, was followed by recognition of other features, providing a very different conceptual framework of the basic organization of experience. Describing experience in terms of fundamental organizational features, such as object constancy, was a far cry from the sparse features figuring in Wundt's constrained introspective investigation or Titchener's unconstrained systematic introspective analysis.

Two specific changes are relevant from our point of view. The first is a deliberate return to a less liberal introspective experimental method. Gestalt psychologists attempted to avoid or minimize problems associated with the demand character of systematic introspection and the involvement of memory by including checks of overt behaviour in their experimental techniques (Danziger, 1980). The second is a full-throated endorsement of the need for a phenomenological description of experience which is naïve or pre-theoretical. In doing this they rejected both, Titchener's introspective analysis and Wundt's restriction on the scope of introspective investigation. Gestalt psychologists thereby manifested their affinity with the Würzburg school and Husserl's work on phenomenology (Koffka, 1924, p. 150). As Kurt Koffka emphasises, at the centre of their approach to psychology is the 'phenomenological method':

¹⁸ For space reasons I will concentrate on Gestalt psychology in this paper. But the relationship between behaviourist psychology and introspection is fascinating in its own right (Boring, 1953; Lyons, 1986, pp. 23-44). For classic papers by early behaviourists critiquing introspectionist psychology see, e.g. (Watson, 1913; Dunlap, 1912). For attempts to account for introspective belief in behaviourist terms see, e.g. (Lashley, 1923)

In reality experimenting and observing must go hand in hand. A good description of a phenomenon may by itself rule out a number of theories and indicate definite features which a true theory must possess. We call this kind of observation 'phenomenology,' a word which has several other meanings which must not be confused with ours. For us phenomenology means as naïve and full a description of direct experience as possible. In America 'introspection' is the only one used for what we mean, but this word has also a very different meaning in that it refers to a special kind of such description, namely the one which analyses direct experience into sensations of attributes, or some other systematic but not experiential ultimates. (Koffka, 1935, p. 73)

Indeed, Gestalt psychologists saw themselves in a kind of Goldilocks position between (systematic and analytical) introspectionism and behaviourism. Koffka and Köhler took great pains to explain how their approach differed from, overlapped with – and, of course, improved upon – introspectionism, as well as behaviourism (Koffka, 1924; Köhler, 1930, pp. 1-77). Both types of experimental psychology were accused of 'remoteness from life'. Behaviourism is criticised for leaving our experience altogether:

In their justified criticism they threw out the baby with the bath, substituting pure achievement experiments and tending to leave out phenomenology altogether. (...)Without describing the [conscious character of experience] we should not know what we had to explain. (73)

Introspectionism was criticised for using a procedure to isolate certain features of experience (local size, form and brightness) from their ordinary experiential contexts. The result is that

of all objective experience, as both layman and psychologist enjoy it in the visual field of everyday life, very little is left as pure and genuine sensory fact (...) As long as the introspectionists' attitude prevails, however, psychology will never seriously study those experiences which form the matrix of our whole life. Instead it will observe and discuss the properties of rare and unusual experience which, though they are supposed to be continually present beneath our naïve experiences, seem to be so well hidden most of the time that their existence has nothing to do with life as we actually experience it. (Köhler, 1930, pp. 64-65)

Gestalt psychologists accepted that the introspectionists' data about experiences is genuine in that there really are such pure sensory experiences, discoverable by the introspective methods in question. But they also held that these experiences do not represent mainstream types of perceptual experience that form the starting point of any psychological inquiry. Gestalt psychologists argued that the central focus of psychology is the description and explanation of direct (naïve, immediate, uncritical) experience, i.e. of everyone's normal experiential awareness when they, say, open their eyes and look around. Ordinary experience is typically *of the world*, of objects such as chairs, tables and trees and their ordinary properties. The character is *objective* in that it is as of external-world, mind-independent stuff (Köhler, 1930, pp. 1-25).

According to Gestalt psychologists, the most apt characterization of experience is obtained by just describing one's surroundings in as naïve a manner as possible: '[a]ny description I can give of my surroundings, of this room, the people in it, and so on, are facts for psychology to start from' (Koffka, 1924, p. 153). Koffka's phenomenological method has its origin in Husserl's work and I provide no more than the briefest gloss on it here.¹⁹ The key thought is that we can gain knowledge of experience by directing our attention outwards into the world first and then shifting our attitude from experiencing the world to considering the character of such experiencing. The shift in attitude is something intellectual we do – Husserl calls it 'bracketing' – where we withhold certain kinds of commitment that come with normal experiencing the world. Such bracketing, according to Husserl, does not distort the experience itself but merely disconnects it from performing its normal function, thereby transforming our experiential knowledge of the world into knowledge of the experiential character of the former.

¹⁹ My (rudimentary) understanding of Husserl's approach is due to (Thomasson, 2005). See Walsh and Yoshimi's chapter on the phenomenological tradition in this volume.

Much more would need to be said to adequately present and elucidate Husserl's view and its influence on Gestalt psychologists, among others. But it should be clear already that the phenomenological method differs not only from systematic introspection, it differs from all the other introspective methods discussed so far. The latter all involve kinds of first-person access to experience via fairly basic psychological kinds (observation, memory, attention, feeling). The former does not; the sense in which it constitutes first-person access to experience is quite different since the route to first-person awareness of experience is via outward experiential attention together with further deliberate and complex intellectual efforts.

Koffka further explains that one can also take an investigative, first-person ('analytic') attitude to experience, i.e. one can introspect one's experience in the more traditional sense. However, taking *that* attitude to one's experience changes one's mental situation, namely the 'subjective conditions' under which the organism is reacting to the environment. Consequently, it is no surprise that there are different experiences ('reactions') in these cases. 'You were looking at this room and were interested in it at the beginning, you were introspecting and interested in psychology afterward' (154). Thus, introspecting involves changing the experience one is having in a way the phenomenological method does not. In light of this, Koffka argues that while psychology can and does usefully engage in introspective investigation of conscious experience, it has to do so very carefully. Sometimes the changes brought about in the target experience are not destructive, but are in keeping with the dynamic organization of the target experience's content. In that case, the introspectively changed experience amounts to 'a development' of the former. But sometimes the changes result in an entirely different experience altogether.

This is why it is wrong to attempt to maintain an analytical attitude at all costs as *the* method of psychology. In most cases such an attitude does not develop the [original experience], but destroys many of its original tendencies. The attitude which is legitimate has to be determined by the nature of each separate whole dealt with, and in this appears the art of introspection. Introspection, like every other kind of observation, is an art, and it is not an easy one. (158)

The criticism here not that analytic introspectionism *uses* introspection to investigate conscious experience – Gestalt psychology does so, too. Rather, introspectionism uses it irresponsibly and exclusively. Because of this, the fact that introspection inevitably changes the target experience becomes too destructive. The root problem is that introspectionists use introspective data so acquired as the starting point for theorizing, assuming that it offers the most basic and accurate description of conscious sensory experience. But, as we saw, Gestalt psychologists hold that the latter and hence the starting point for psychology is based on the naïve and uncritical take on it derived from simply describing the scene around one, i.e. describing 'the world, as we have it'.

2.4 Varieties of first-person access

In sum, psychologists of this era tended to accept that introspection delivers useful and important data about the conscious mind, but also that there are different kinds of introspection, i.e. different kinds of first-person access and that not all are equally suitable to the task. Moreover, even if suitable such access must be employed carefully because getting scientifically respectable introspective data is difficult under the best circumstances. They agreed that the central difficulty comes from the potentially distorting and destructive effects of deliberate introspective reflection but they disagreed about what to do about this. Their disagreement has many sources, and I have been able to convey only a small part of the overall story. Among the experimental psychologists, the Gestalt psychologists emphasized further that the first point of departure for the scientist must be a description of 'direct experience', by which they meant ordinary, lived experience from the point of view of the naïve experienter.

As we saw, this description is obtained by describing, as uncritically as possible, the world around one as one is experiencing it. Insofar as this method owes to Husserl's phenomenological method, and by the Gestalt psychologists' own insistence, this way of acquiring first-person data about experience is significantly different from any of the other kinds of first-person access classified as introspection.

In section 1, I said that Firth refers to the Gestalt psychologists' naïve take on experience to explain what he means by direct inspection of experience. Moreover, his critique of sense-datum theory mentions the Gestalt psychologists' rejection of Titchener's systematic introspective method. This clearly shows the influence psychological discussion of introspection had on philosophy of perception at that time. This impact was long-lasting. Thirty years later, P.F. Strawson, in critiquing A.J. Ayer's sense-datum view, insisted that when we ask 'a non-philosophical observer gazing idly through a window' to describe his experience to us '[h]e does not start talking about lights and colours, patches and patterns (Strawson, 1979, p. 43)'. Instead, Strawson claims, the world is objectively 'given with the given' (47).

However, just like in the case of the Gestalt psychologists' view about the naïve description of experience, it is not entirely clear what the nature of the first-person access involved is. According to Strawson,

[the observer will] *use* the perceptual claim – the claim it was natural to make in the circumstance – in order to characterise [his] experience, without actually making the claim. [He] renders the perceptual judgement internal to the characterization of the experience without actually asserting the content of the judgement. And this is really the best possible way of characterising the experience. (Strawson, 1979, p. 44)

The Husserlian heritage seems plain in this passage. Against the background of the developments in psychology just discussed, this raises interesting questions about whether – and if so in what sense – the method employed counts as a first-person access we recognise as a kind of introspection at all.

3. Transparency and introspecting at the end of the 20th century

While earlier philosophical discussions surrounding perception were typically motivated by epistemological concerns, late-20th century focus shifted to philosophy of mind topics such as physicalism and the mind-body problem. There was an active debate about perceptual experience between representationalism, qualia theories and disjunctivism. Sense-datum theory had largely dropped out of the picture by then. Some of the main reasons for this connect smoothly with the critique Firth made against Price: the view that sense-datum theory severely distorts the character of experience and that a correct description of the latter involves reference to ordinary objects and properties. It is fair to say that the claim that the phenomenal character of experience is as of the objective world was broadly taken as common ground in the 1980s and 1990s and many disputes about the correct description of phenomenal character concerned certain further details.²⁰ The details of these views are not important here, rather, it's the way in which such descriptions were typically put forward in those discussions. Specifically, the claim that phenomenal character is as of the objective world was often affirmed in the context of the thesis that experience is transparent to first-person reflection. The transparency thesis has played a powerful role in the philosophy of perception at the end of the century, providing a major source of support for arguments in favour of representationalist and disjunctivist views

²⁰ One key issue concerned whether one needs to appeal to additional non-objective, qualitative properties to adequately describe phenomenal character (e.g. (Harman, 1990; Tye, 1992; Tye, 1995; Tye, 2000; Searle, 1983; Peacocke, 1983; Levin, 1995; Block, 1980, p. 278). Another issue, e.g., concerned the precise manner of objective givenness, that is, whether it involves particular objects or merely generalized existential reference to them (e.g. (Soteriou, 2000; Martin, 1997; Davies, 1992).

of perceptual experience. Roughly, it says that when one reflects on what (e.g.) visual experience is like for one – when one reflects on the phenomenal character of one’s visual experience – one looks through the experience to what it is about, namely to the ordinary objects and their sensible properties presented in experience. As Tye puts it:

Why is it that perceptual experiences are transparent? When you turn your gaze inward and try to focus your attention on intrinsic features of these experiences, why do you always seem to end up attending what the experiences are of? (...) In turning one’s mind inward to attend to the experience, one seems to end up scrutinizing external features or properties. (Tye, 1995, pp. 135-136)

Proponents of the transparency thesis thus maintain that first-person reflection on phenomenal character does not lead to awareness of any special experiential object or properties, distinct from those we would refer to in describing the world as we experience it (see also, e.g. (Shoemaker, 1996, pp. 100-101; Dretske, 1995, p. 62)). The most apt description of phenomenal character is in terms of ordinary objects and properties.

Interesting for our purposes is what kind of reflection is supposed to be involved in the transparency thesis. The blunt assumption by philosophers in these debates was that it is introspection (see, e.g. (Loar, 1997, p. 597; Lycan, 1995, p. 82; Tye, 2000, p. 51)). They tended to identify what they (and others) are doing when they reflect on phenomenal character as introspecting and often called the data about experience thus collected ‘introspective evidence’ (e.g. (Martin, 2000, p. 219; Crane, 2000, p. 50)). Other phrases are also used, such as ‘turning one’s attention inwards’, or ‘attending to one’s experience’, or ‘reflecting on what experience is like’ and so forth. The impression one forms on the basis of this literature is that there is a fairly straightforward first-person access to one’s own conscious states. It was taken for granted that we have introspective access to our experiences and that such access yields appropriate descriptions of phenomenal character for use in theorizing. However, not much is said about what kind of access it is.

Thus, philosophers of perception towards the end of the 20th century took seriously phenomenal adequacy constraints on their theories and they did not consider them difficult to come by via introspection. This contrasts with both debates discussed previously. The early sense-datum discussion held that introspecting phenomenal character is possible as well as knowledge-conducive, but they also recognized that it must be done with great care. Moreover, we saw that the fact that opponents accepted different introspective verdicts raised a serious question for them about the kind of first-person access at work in their respective theorizing. Firth argued that direct inspection of experience reveals that phenomenal character is best described objectively, but he also acknowledged different kinds of first-person attitudes one might take to one’s conscious experiences and that they might be responsible for the different verdicts. In the case of experimental psychology, we saw that psychologists were much preoccupied with the question of which kind of first-person or introspective access was suitable for gathering accurate descriptions of the target experiences. Much of their discussion was driven by worries over the potential of various kinds of introspection to distort or destruct the target experience and this worry was crucial to their choice of introspective method.

In the last two decades of the 20th century, philosophers of perception in the debates mentioned above were not concerned about these issues. They put forward claims about phenomenal character, where these claims were meant to be obvious upon introspection. Insofar as there was sensitivity to the issue of diverging introspective claims about phenomenal character, this is not taken to impugn the first-person access to conscious experience as such in a serious way. For instance, Michael Martin explains the differences between the descriptions of phenomenal character by sense-datum theorists and representationalists as resulting from prioritizing different elements of the naïve introspective description of phenomenal character which forms common ground between them.

From this perspective, what is notable about each of the main traditions is not what they seek to defend by reference to introspection, but what they are prepared to reject in the face of introspective support. The sense-datum tradition denies the manifest fact that it seems to us as if we are presented in experience with mind-independent objects and states of affairs in the world around us. The intentional tradition denies the introspective evidence that things apparently sensed must actually be before the mind for one to experience so. (Martin, 2000, p. 219)

Most surprisingly, though, is the seeming lack of awareness of any connection between the transparency thesis and Husserlian phenomenological method among many mainstream proponents of the transparency thesis. In their hands, the latter tends to be taken to articulate that which is introspectible, namely the thoroughly objective character of experience. But when one looks at accounts of the process involved, they bear significant resemblance to those put forward by psychologists and philosophers more directly inspired by Husserl.²¹ The reason why this is important here is that, as we saw above, whether the phenomenological method counts as a kind of introspection at all is a genuine question.

Late-20th century discussions involving transparency thus display a kind of selective forgetfulness with respect to introspection. On the one hand, there is a clear line running from early critics of sense-datum theory and the experimental psychologists who influenced them, to later proponents of representationalism and disjunctivism endorsing the thought that naïve reflection on experience reveals its character to be objective. On the other hand, though, the earlier long-standing and sophisticated discussions in which this thought was typically embedded – in particular the distinction between types of first-person access at work in theorizing about conscious experience – has almost entirely washed out.

²¹ The issue plays out in different ways in some later discussions concerning the nature of introspection, see, e.g. (Sellars, 1956/1997; Drestke, 1999; Byrne, 2005; Tye, 2000). The Husserlian origin is hardly ever acknowledged, much less discussed in any detail. See, though, (Thomasson, 2005) for an excellent discussion of Husserl's view of self-knowledge and his influence on Sellars' view in particular.

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